

BRUM GROUP NEWS

October 1995

Issue 289

*The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss, Harry Harrison & Bob Shaw)*

GROUP CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON, SECRETARY - ANNE WOODFORD, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR, TREASURER - STEVE JONES, PUBLICITY OFFICER - SARAH FREAKLEY, ORDINARY MEMBER - ALAN WOODFORD, NOVAACON 25 CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON, NOVAACON 26 CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON.

This month's speaker is **ROBERT RANKIN**

who will address the Group on
on Friday 20th October 1995,

**7.45 for 8.00pm. Admittance: Members £2.50; Visitors £3.75,
(half-price for 14-18 year olds on production of proof of age).**

ROBERT FLEMING RANKIN, born 1949, burst upon the British publishing scene (like a boil, some have said) in 1981 with the first of his "highly idiosyncratic" sf novels in the "Brentford" sequence, *THE ANTIPOPE*. This was followed in 1983 by *THE BRENTFORD TRIANGLE* and in 1984 by *EAST OF EALING*, with the much-heralded "fourth volume of the trilogy", *THE SPROUTS OF WRATH*, appearing in 1988. This fourth book marked a change in the emphasis of Rankin's work from his initial concentration on the drunken adventures of two layabouts (as they and their friends challenged Dark Forces from the Beyond in increasingly desperate efforts to protect Brentford, in particular their local hostelry, from destruction) to a new obsession with sprouts. This obsession reaches insane proportions in his "Armageddon" series (which also revealed a new obsession with colons): *ARMAGEDDON: THE MUSICAL* (1990), *THEY CAME AND ATE US: ARMAGEDDON II: THE B-MOVIE* (1991) and *THE SUBURBAN BOOK OF THE DEAD: ARMAGEDDON III: THE REMAKE* (1992). The "Armageddon" series features the adventures of a time-travelling, talking sprout and Elvis Presley; and is based on the (fairly likely, I'd say) premise that the whole of human history has been stage-managed for transmission as an extra-terrestrial soap opera. His two most recent works are *THE MOST AMAZING MAN WHO EVER LIVED* (Corgi, £4.99) and *THE GARDEN OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS* (Doubleday, £14.99). [*Many thanks to THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SF by Clute and Nicholls for much of the above information.*]

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs Function Room of the Australian Bar, corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street in Birmingham city centre. The annual subscription rates (which include twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are £10.00 per person, or £13.50 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to the Treasurer, Steve Jones, c/o 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Mids., B66 4SH. Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, Newsletter Editor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

COLOPHON

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Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

UNTIL 25 JANUARY 1996: *THE DEVIL IS AN ASS*, Ben Jonson's tale of devil worship, wife stealing, major business frauds and the strange appearance of a Spanish lady, as Hell is transported to seventeenth century London. At the Swan Theatre Stratford-upon-Avon. Call 01789-295623 for further details.

UNTIL 27 JANUARY 1996: *FAUST PARTS I AND II*, Swan Theatre Stratford-upon-Avon. Call 01789-295623 for further details.

19 OCTOBER 1995: INTO THE FUTURE - EDUCATION IN THE INFORMATION AGE forum discussing the role of emergent technologies in education. Invited speakers include: David Taylor (Director of Multimedia at Yorkshire Television Interactive Learning), Professor Stephen Heppell (Director of Ultralab, Anglia Polytechnic University), Mike Kendall (IT Project Manager at BCC Education Department), Jason Griffiths (Centre for Multimedia Interactive Technologies), Lola Young, Frank Boyd (Artec) and many others. 3.30pm at the

Midlands Arts Centre, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Call 0121 440 3838 for details.

19 OCTOBER 1995: *THE INNOCENTS*, a new print of 1964 supernatural melodrama will be screened at 6.30pm at the Midlands Arts Centre Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Call 0121 440 3838 for details.

20 OCTOBER 1995: *THE ELEPHANT MAN*, a new print of David Lynch's classic biopic of John Merrick will be screened at 6.30pm at the Midlands Arts Centre Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Call 0121 440 3838 for details.

20 OCTOBER 1995: ROBERT RANKIN author of the humorous Brentford Triangle and Armageddon series will speak to the Brum Group in the upstairs room at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham, 7.45pm for 8.00pm.

21 OCTOBER 1995: ROBERT RANKIN will be signing copies of *THE MOST AMAZING MAN THAT EVER LIVED* (Corgi, £4.99) and *THE GARDEN OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS* (Doubleday, £14.99) at Andromeda Book Shop, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from 12.00. Call 0121 643 1999 for details of this and other signings or to order signed copies.

21 OCTOBER 1995: SONIC OUTLAWS, Craig Baldwin's film-and-video documentary on the activities of a cross-section of US "media hackers" whose sophisticated re-working of intercepted or otherwise sampled material has generated considerable controversy. At the Ikon Gallery, John Bright Street, Birmingham, from 2pm. Call 0121 643 0708 for details.

22 OCTOBER 1995: FILM & TV CENSORSHIP the spectre of Virginia Bottomley, 4pm at the Angle Gallery, 3-4 Dakota Buildings, Birmingham. Call 0121 233 9260 for details.

23-28 OCTOBER 1995: *RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET* winner of the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Musical returns to the Birmingham Hippodrome. Call the box office on 0121-622-7486 for further details.

28 OCTOBER 1995: COMIC MART at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham. Opens noon. Contact: Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW.

31 OCTOBER - 11 NOVEMBER 1995: *JESUS MY BOY* Michael Schneider (Yude Dresner in *SCHINDLER'S LIST*) performs this hilarious one man show written by John Dowie, concerning the trials

and tribulations of parenthood 2,000 years ago. This is the biblical story seen through the eyes of Jesus's long suffering father, Joseph. Tickets £6.50 (concessions £4.50). The Studio, Birmingham Rep, Centenary Square, Birmingham. Box Office 0121 236 4455.

**Wednesday 25th October
RETURN TO THE
FORBIDDEN PLANET**

at the Birmingham Hippodrome, Hurst Street. ANNE WOODFORD has organised a block-booking for this performance (curtains open 7.30pm). Block-bookings receive a £3.00 reduction per ticket. There MIGHT still be places left; either speak to her at this month's meeting or call her on 0121-532-1110 for further details.

17 NOVEMBER 1995: UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE featuring the BSFG versus THE BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY. In the upstairs room at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham, 7.45pm for 8.00pm. (NB: TO BE CONFIRMED.)

29 NOVEMBER 1995 - 20 JANUARY 1996: TOAD OF TOAD HALL A A Milne's version of Kenneth Grahame's children's story THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS. Tickets from £7.00. The Mainhouse Birmingham Rep, Centenary Square, Birmingham. Box Office 0121 236 4455.

30 NOVEMBER - 2 DECEMBER: ARTHUR KING an original musical comedy by Sculpture Theatre Company, produced in conjunction with Solihull Arts Complex. "The days of chivalry are not lost to us, they live on in the heart of a small boy - Arthur King. He believes it is his destiny to be King of the Britons but first he must become King of 4B and the school playground. Assisted by his knights Gavin and Lance and the mysterious caretaker Mervin he embarks on his quest. Performances 2.30pm and 7.30pm in the Library Theatre. Call the Solihull Arts Complex Box Office on 0121 704 6962 for further details.

5 DECEMBER 1995: THE BLACK LODGE, Birmingham's informal gathering of horror and dark fantasy fans meet in the bar of the Australian Bar, Hurst Street, Birmingham, from 8.30pm. Copies of their newsletter, THE REGISTER, are available a ssaefrom: 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 7LQ.

6 DECEMBER 1995: WILLIAM HORWOOD author of the DUNCTON WOOD Books and THE WILLOWS IN WINTER, the sequel to Kenneth Grahame's THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS, will be speaking and signing copies of TOAD TRIUMPHANT at Waterstones, 24/26 High Street, Birmingham, from 7pm. Refreshments will be served, tickets £1.50. Call 0121 633 4353 for further details.

15 DECEMBER 1995: BSFG CHRISTMAS MEETING - BEER & SKITTLES. Bookings now being taken, see below for details.

16 DECEMBER 1995: COMIC MART at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham. Opens noon. Contact: Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW.

8-30 March 1996: DIVINE RIGHT in the corridors of political power left and right are combining to form an influential republican movement. Meanwhile, the heir to

3-5 NOVEMBER 1995: NOVACON 25 the Brum Group's own science fiction convention at a new venue - the Chamberlain Hotel, Alcester Street, Birmingham. Guests of Honour: Brian W Aldiss, Harry Harrison and Bob Shaw, with Special Guest Iain Banks. Attending membership is £30.00 on the door. Supporting membership costs £8.50. Progress Report #4 and hotel booking forms are available. Contact CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, cheques should be made payable to "Novacon 25". Room rates are now only £17.50 per person per night in twin/double and £35.00 pppn in a single, prices include full English breakfast.

3-5 NOVEMBER 1995: ReContaniméTed 1995, animé convention at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. Attending £26.00. Contact: Martin Pay, 29 Langton Avenue, Chelmsford, CM1 2BW.

7 NOVEMBER 1995: THE BLACK LODGE, Birmingham's informal gathering of horror and dark fantasy fans meet in the bar of the Australian Bar, Hurst Street, Birmingham, from 8.30pm. Copies of the group's newsletter, THE REGISTER, are available for a reply-paid envelope from: 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 7LQ.

the throne takes a radical decision, throwing the spotlight onto his son. It is the beginning of a new millennium and the young prince finds an unknown world as he goes to discover his country. Peter Whelan's play asks the question for how much longer will Britain remain a monarchy? Tickets £6.50-£15.50 (concessions available). The Mainhouse Birmingham Rep, Centenary Square, Birmingham. Box Office 0121 236 4455.

5-8 APRIL 1996: EVOLUTION 47th UK National Convention, the Radisson Edwardian Hotel at Heathrow. Guests of honour: Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot, Jack Cohen. Attending £24.00, supporting £14.00. Contact: 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX.

29 AUGUST - 2 SEPTEMBER 1996: LACON III 54th World SF Convention, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim Hilton and Towers and Anaheim Marriott, California, USA. Guests: James White, Roger Corman, Elsie Wollheim, Connie Willis (Toastmaster), Takumi and Sachiko Shibano (Fan Guests of Honour). Attending \$110.00, Supporting \$35.00. Contact: c/o SCIFI, PO Box 8442, Van Nuys, CA 91409, USA.

28-31 MARCH 1997: INTERVENTION the 48th UK National SF Convention, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Theme "communication". Guests Brian W Aldiss, David Langford, Jon Berg and Octavia Butler (NOT Robert Silverberg as previously announced). Attending £20.00, supporting £10.00, cheques (payable to "Intervention") should be sent to: 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants., PO10 7TS.

3-5 SEPTEMBER 1997: LONESTARCON 55th World SF Convention, San Antonio, Texas, USA. Attending was \$65.00. Contact: PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755-2277, USA.

27 DECEMBER 1999 - 2 JANUARY 2000: MILLENNIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (f10.00) per year, to be deducted from eventual membership fee (to be announced before 1997). Contact: Malcolm Reid, 186 Casewick Road, West Norwood, London, SE27 0SZ.

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Although details are correct to the best of my knowledge, I advise readers to contact organizers prior to travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses. Please mention the BRUM GROUP

NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.

If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor.

If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them of) please feel free to write a report/review and send it to the editorial address.

BY POPULAR DEMAND!
THE BRUM GROUP'S
CHRISTMAS MEETING
will again be a
BEER & SKITTLES
evening at
the Samson & Lion,
Wordsley on
Friday 15 December.
CAROL MORTON is now taking
bookings for this popular
event. Deposit £5.00 per
person. Food, transport,
prizes and skittles will
be included in the final
price. (Last year it was
£10.00 per person, we will
announce the price for
this year as soon as
possible.) Book early as
places are limited.

LETTERS

BOB SHAW,
98 London Road, Stockton Heath,
Warrington, Cheshire, WA4 6LE.
18th September 1995.

This is a weird kind of letter for you to receive, but I'm asking a favour - and not for myself. It is for a bloke in Vladivostok with whom I have developed a postal friendship.

Yuri Mironets is a dedicated science fiction fan. He is also a professor of English at Vladivostok University, and he uses science fiction books as texts for his students. He has a huge problem in that it is *impossible* to buy English-language science fiction in Vladivostok. We, in this country, probably can't imagine the difficulties he has. In the winter, although he is a full professor, he has to use his overcoat in bed at night in place of a quilt.

I have come to like and respect this guy, so here is the favour I'm asking of you. If you ever have any sf magazines or books that you are thinking of throwing in the bin, *please*, instead, wrap a manila cover around them and send them to Yuri. I know it will cost you a few bob in postage, but you would be doing a big favour to me, to Yuri, and to the international sf brotherhood which believes that we are all citizens of Earth and that war is the ultimate obscenity. You don't even have to write a letter, unless you feel like it, because I've told him what I'm doing. Just help out a fellow sf fan in a troubled country.

Yuri's address is: Yuri A Mironets, Oktyabrskaya St. 2, apt. 15, Vladivostok, 690 000, Russia.

I thank you in advance and will, of course, buy you a lemonade the next time I see you.

JOPHAN REPORT #88

Octavia Butler has joined the guest line-up for Intervention, the 1997 British national sf convention, following original US guest Robert Silverberg's discovery of a prior commitment. The other guests are Brian W

Aldiss, David Langford and the Norwegian linguist Jon Bing.

Manchester's Savoy Books has lost the latest stage in its campaign to overturn obscenity findings against 10 of its controversial comics, MENG & ECKER #1-3, HARD CORE HORROR #1-5 and LORD HORROR #1-5. A five-day hearing before stipendary magistrate Janet Hayward ended on 19 July with her backing the seizure by police of 4000 comics. Savoy is backed by Article 19, the international freedom group which also supports Salman Rushdie, and plans an appeal.

THE BIRDS OF THE MOON, a novelette by Michael Moorcock, was published as a 24-page chapbook by Jayde Design on 19 July, cover-priced £2.50; for details, contact John or Maureen Davey at 45 St Mary's Mansions, St Mary's Terrace, London, W2 1SH.

Atro Lahtela's short story "Poimu (2 piste 2 piste viiva 2 piste 8)" ("Warp (2 stop 2 dash 2 stop 8)") won the 1995 Atorox Award, presented annually for Finnish sf, fantasy, horror fiction; his third published story, it originally appeared in TÄHTIVAELTAJA #2/94. Johanna Sinisalo, winner on five previous occasions, came second with "Kädettömät Kuninkaat" ("Headless Kings"), from TÄHTIVAELTAJA #3/94.

Iain M Banks, meanwhile, received the tenth TÄHTIVAELTAJA Award for the year's best sf novel in Finnish with PELAAJA (THE PLAYER OF GAMES). The book was released in Finland by Loki, which also published last year's winner, Simon Ings' KUUMA PÄÄ (HOT HEAD).

Finncon '95, held in the university town of Jyväskylä over 16-18 June (its first move outside Helsinki), attracted 2000 members and hosted three guests of honour, Britain's Storm Constantine and American authors Bruce Sterling and Vonda McIntyre. Programme items included a Finnish version of John Dowle's stage tribute to Philip K Dick, TAKE THEM TO THE GARDEN.

The evolution of STAR TREK, from the original 1960s show through its animated sequel to the movie series, is charted in Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens' THE ART OF STAR TREK, due from Pocket Books in November. As well as the tv shows and films, the 320-page hardback explores the theme park spin-offs and planned virtual reality projects.

John Clute's SCIENCE FICTION: THE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA was published as a

£25.00 hardback by Dorling Kindersley on 5 October. Chapter headings include "Historical Context", "Genre Cinema", "Major Authors" and "Classic Titles".

Ridley Scott is reportedly in pre-production on a sequel to *BLADE RUNNER*, the 1982 adaptation of Philip K Dick's novel *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?* Filming is likely to be based at Shepperton, the studio acquired by Ridley and Tony Scott for £12 million earlier this year; a further £10 million investment is anticipated shortly.

The 1995 Australian Science Fiction Achievement Award (Ottar) for long fiction was presented at Thylacon '95 to Greg Egan's *PERMUTATION CITY*. Terry Frost was named best fan writer, Ian Gunn best fan artist and Alan Stewart's *THYME* best fanzine. A special committee award was made to Peter Nicholls.

The A Bertram Chandler Memorial Award was presented to Wynne Whiteford by Donna Heenan, president of the Australian Science Fiction Foundation.

American networks have renewed *BABYLON 5*, *STAR TREK: VOYAGER*, *STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE*, *DUCKMAN*, *THE X-FILES*, *SLIDERS*, *HIGHLANDER*, *LOIS AND CLARK* (aka *THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN*), *OUTER LIMITS* and *SEAQUEST DSV*.

ROBOCOP, *TIME TRAX*, *EARTH 2* (the Spielberg studio's homage to *LOST IN SPACE*) and *TEKWAR* have been cancelled, whilst new shows include *THIRD ROCK FROM THE SUN* (with John Lithgow), *STRANGE LUCK* and *AMERICAN GOTHIC*.

Fantasy author David Eddings has revealed "one of the worst kept secrets in contemporary fiction" - that his novels are collaborations with wife Leigh Eddings. *BELGARATH THE SORCERER*, just out from HarperCollins, bears a joint byline.

Less clear is the authorship of *THE ASHES OF EDEN*, the latest *STAR TREK* audiotape from Simon & Schuster. Although William Shatner's name appears on the cover and spine, with the tag "Read by the Author", closer examination reveals the involvement of Garfield and Judith Reeves-Stevens. At least they received more than the cursory "thank you" Shatner afforded Ron Goulart on "his" *TEK* novels.

David Lunde's "Pilot, Pilot" and Dan Raphael's "Skin of Glass" won the 1995 Rhysling Awards for poetry, in the "long" and "short poem" categories respectively.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE MOST AMAZING MAN THAT EVER LIVED

by Robert Rankin,
Corgi, £4.99, 318pp, p/b,

THE GARDEN OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS

by Robert Rankin,
Doubleday, £14.99, 253pp, h/b,

Reviewed by Sarah Freakley.

I am not going to compare Robert Rankin to Pratchett, or Adams, or Holt, because he's not like any of them. He does make you laugh, well he made me laugh. If you like toilet humour, mammary gags, corny jokes, and surreal and highly unlikely solutions to even more unlikely situations. You should enjoy these.

To set the scene for the first book - Hugo Rune is one of five of the most amazing men, he is also the other four (strange but true) and one of them is dead. Unfortunately for humanity he is also a bit of an evil genius of the cunning-plan-to-get-rich-quick-and-rule-the-world-and-oops-all-these-millions-of-people-will-have-to-die-to-accomplish-this variety. All that stands in his way is a group of people led by his son, Cornelius, and comprising of his son's diminutive friend Tuppe, Boris (a not exactly alien, aquatic type dressed as a sheep), two girls they picked upon the way (Thelma and Louise - no really) of ample dimensions, and a dead boy called Norman.

This book does have larger than life characters that dominate the page they are written on, and even dominate the author. It does have little asides where the author takes the piss out of his own feeble plot devices. It's light reading, it's really silly, it's a lot of fun. I am never sure whether he completely makes the plot up as he goes along, and as his characters get themselves into sticky situations suddenly has to think something up to get them unstuck (at times it is almost as if he is telling you a story directly to your face, with no pre-planning, just a vague idea, of what is going to happen at the beginning, and what will happen in the end but no idea of how to get from A to B, it is all off the top of his head, the first thing he thinks of, no matter how unlikely, or unbelievable and somehow he has to work that in... truly spontaneous and absolutely great), or whether he has the whole book mapped out before hand. Either way he's a damn fine storyteller.

Okay second book — more surreal, and blacker than the first. It concerns a certain Maxwell Karrien, otherwise known as Max Carrion — Imagineer. Maxwell is from our time The Age of Technology, and he is thrust most reluctantly into an age of unreality, of myth and legend, one hundred years into the future, where a religion has formed from waiting for buses, and the news that is broadcast is the same news: the last news that was ever broadcast.

This is a very clever book, not only because it shows how folk lore grows up and superstitions start, but because it uses things we do as routine today (such as waiting for a bus) as the basis for these beliefs. Unlike THE MOST AMAZING MAN THAT EVER LIVED, THE GARDEN OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS does seem to have been carefully thought out, both in terms of plot and character development, whilst still maintaining the tit jokes and general high giggle factor at the exploits of the well intentioned, but sadly doomed Max. If you fancy a nice light read, with enough clever, thought provoking ideas to keep you interested and a good laugh (of course) you really should read either these, or any other of Robert Rankin's books.

MIRROR DANCE by Lois McMaster Bujold
Pan, £5.99, 610pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is sf at its best, a fact acknowledged by the presentation of a Hugo for it. MIRROR DANCE is the latest in the Vorkosigan saga. Mark, Miles Vorkosigan's clone-brother, is determined to make a name for himself so impersonates Miles (in his persona of Admiral Naismith of the Dendarii mercenary fleet) to requisition a ship and carry out a raid on the planet of Jackson's Whole (and in particular the clone nursery where he was brought up. His intention is to free the clones destined to be the new bodies of their progenitors. The raid nearly succeeds, but in an attempt to pull Mark out of the mess, Miles is killed and his body frozen. But the corpse goes missing before it can be revived.

The rest of the novel encompasses the search for Miles and the emergence of Mark as a person in his own right. Bujold does a number of things extremely well starting with the ability to tell a cracking story. Her characters all have lives of their own, even the minor ones and she is very good at the interactions between them. Action sequences are tense and well paced, both in their

execution and in the placings within the structure of the plot. In many ways, this series is sheer space opera but from a craftsman. It is set at the frontiers of science and the overall feeling is that this is what the future could look like. Bujold should be compulsory reading for every sf fan.

COLURASTES by Storm Constantine
Inception Press, £3.50 (including p&p),
Reviewed by Steve Sneyd.

The 20 poems in this collection will be of interest, not just to enthusiasts for the author's novels, intrigued to see how she expresses her ideas, feelings and themes in a very different medium, but to those fascinated by the survival, indeed rebirth, of the Gothic tradition in poetry that flowered so richly in the 19th Century.

K V Bailey's thoughtful analysis in his introduction examines the motifs and archetypes which echo and re-echo here, and contexts them in the wider matrix of Constantine's work overall. Six different illustrators are involved, which makes for some visual inconsistency, though the general approach to the art — lightness rather than gloom, subtlety and mythicity rather than doom and gloom — echoes the way in which the poems themselves, even when dealing with the monstrous, horrific fruits of intermingling human life with the forbidden, do so in ways that emphasise the sensuous excitement generated — the inescapable appeal, as it were — of coupling with chaos and its begettings.

Although the poetic approach can seem simplistic and open to jangliness of rhyme, particularly in "The Serpent in the Sand-Desert Hara" and its long and otherwise vivid account of a lover's elopement to some deadly half-serpent being, with its intriguingly deliberate sexual ambiguities, or in "Lament of the Last Queen". Anyway, variability is to be expected in work produced over an 11-year span (1977-88), but at its best there is a wry skill in handling character and relationships, even in the near-supernatural context of the Gothic universe.

"An imaginary Pre-Raphaelite Painting" vividly evokes the mood of vain pursuits of the desired, where all nature seems to conspire against fulfilment, and the archaisms of which the poet is fond here ring true to their usage. The title work, "The Lamia — Colurastes", is colourful in its sensuality;

this, one of several poems concerning half-serpent/half-human lovers, is the strongest of them in its evocation of the lure involved in this particular miscegenation, so abiding a mythological-cum-psychological theme in art and literature through the ages. "The Particulars of Indulgence" and (despite its Tarot-reading setting) "The Divining" are a step aside from the Gothic into sardonic analysis of misunderstanding within relationships, almost early-Poundian in approach. "He is a Dark Shadow" brings together that same clear-eyed grasp of the bitter-sweetness of human relations with the imagery of the Gothic landscape as, in some lost place, a shadow stallion causes the poet to reflect upon the past, the creature's incomprehensible pain and isolation apprehended in human terms and applied to the protagonist, to come to terms with memory itself.

The possibilities of such a tightrope balance between the arcane, archaic and outre in content, and the search for the truth of human psychology, are fulfilled with almost gemlike restraint in the union of form and content achieved in perhaps the collection's finest poem, "The Misunderstood: Having Befriended the Dancing Boy, the Old Man's Friendship is Severed". The opening lines, "The shadow of the obelisk fishes the dark / Waters of the river with a finger of slime", set a scene worthy of Poe for the unveiling, indeed unravelling, of an inherently doomed relationship which is conveyed in all its painful pleasure: the very essence of Gothic mood, and perhaps the essence of Storm Constantine's Faustian bargain with writing and life, as she reveals it at least in part in this intriguing collection.

[Contact: The Storm Constantine Information Service, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA.]

TO BUILD JERUSALEM by John Whitbourn
Gollancz, £5.99, 311pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Whitbourn has created an alternate world in which the Protestant reformation did not occur. This was partly because of the discovery of magic and the fact that its practise is tightly controlled by the Catholic Church. There are also elves around but they play very little part in this particular volume. The time is 1995, the technology level is mid-Victorian. There is trouble in England - the king and his court (along with the bishop and most of Guildford's cathedral steps) has vanished in the middle of a public

ceremony. Adam, one of the Pope's military elite, is sent to investigate.

Part of the problem with England is the Levellers. These are a Protestant sect which hasn't quite been eradicated. One of them, Jonah Ransom opens his stock cupboard to find a ravishing demon inside who apparently finds this middle-aged man fascinating. She causes the disappearances in Guildford as his (and the Levellers') request. Adam, once he has found the portal in the cupboard enters her world in order to rescue the king and put a stop to her actions.

This is the same world Whitbourn's previous two novels have been set but because it considers the events over a much smaller period of time (the others were complete biographies) there is a much greater narrative drive. The plot has fascinating elements which are completely negated by the *deus ex machina* denouement. This writer still finds it difficult to stick to one point of view in a scene and will insist on inserting potted histories at intervals, just so we can be sure of why events are taking this particular course at this particular time. Either he wishes to indicate how well he has visualised his background or he underestimates the intelligence of the reader. In either case, they intrude and would be better as appendices. On the whole, TO BUILD JERUSALEM is interesting but not extraordinary, flawed but not quite fatally.

BIGOT HALL by Steve Aylett
Serif, £8.99, 'c' format p/b
Reviewed by Steve Green.

Aylett's second novel staggers off its mortuary slab with the hideous determination of Frankenstein's progeny, its hardwiring a collaboration between Charles Addams and Viv Stanshall after a particularly heavy session in the pub with Hieronymus Bosch pulling the pints. As pyrotechnically inventive with its plot as its dialogue ("Strange chap. Eyebrows met in the middle of someone else's face."), this is without doubt the most striking genre debut since Iain Banks' THE WASP FACTORY.

Constructed as a series of connected vignettes, BIGOT HALL charts the rise, fall and dimensional evacuation of the eponymous manse, narrated by the otherwise unnamed "Laughing Boy"; hounded by his gun-happy uncle, mentored by a supernatural enigma ("In fact there was a real bogeyman which my family had been seeing for generations") and seduced by his vivid-dreaming sister, he simultaneously provides the book's narrative

thread and anti-heroic central protagonist.

By turns farce and fantasy, this darkly comic odyssey actually managed to reduce me to tears at one point (a courtroom drama which reads like *Tex Avery on acid*) and stands as one of the weirdest satires to emerge in many a year. Plaudits sometimes drip from a critic's fingertips like oil from a gasket, but this one is truly recommended to you all.

PASQUALES ANGEL by Paul J McAuley
Gollancz, £5.99, 384pp; p/b
Reviewed by Michael Jones.

In a change from the space-faring far future which has informed most, if not all, of his previous writing, McAuley sets his new book in the city of Florence in the year 1518. It is however an alternative Florence to which the Industrial Revolution has come early, brought about by the successful application of the inventions of the one and only Leonardo Da Vinci. Against this background, and a turbulent atmosphere of religious fervour and international politics, apprentice artist Pasquale has a vision of capturing in paint a true representation of the face of one of God's angels. Instead, he finds himself caught up in murder and espionage and the book ends with him no nearer to realising his life's ambition, although able, perhaps, to see his way toward it a little more clearly.

As was the case in real-life Victorian or pre-Victorian England, the early stages of this industrialisation have affected the lives of the very rich and the very poor without yet creating a middle-class to which Pasquale might belong. Consequently, we see the changes only as a lightly sketched background which seems to impinge but little on his lifestyle - until, that is, the story starts. The plot involves a couple of Leonardo's inventions, but lacking our scientific education Pasquale is unable to comprehend their significance as well as do we the readers. In fact, things seem to happen to him without him being able to do much to influence events and it is only the introduction by the author of somebody cleverer to act as his guide and mentor which creates any sort of chance for him to contribute to resolving matters.

In one sense therefore, the book works by showing how technological development means little to those who lack the experimental background to enable them fully to understand it. It also works as an adventure story, well-plotted and fast-paced.

Nevertheless, as a result of the author's choice of protagonist, it is only a fragment, a kind of cameo, when it could have been much more. I would have preferred a story about a character who could be more involved with the changes being wrought in the society of medieval Italy and would be able both to influence those changes and help himself to benefit from them. As it was, I found it disappointing.

AXIOMATIC by Greg Egan
Millennium, £15.99, 289pp, h/b
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A new name for me - though on reading I realised I had caught one of the stories, "The Cutie", in *INTERZONE* and quite liked it. However, this doesn't prepare you for the shock of the writing. This is it. Hard-hitting, cutting-edge sf where the ideas roll off the page and grab you. The first couple of stories; "The Infinite Assassin", a parallel universe/drug abuse/detective yarn and "The Hundred-Light-Year Diary" (as it suggests the ability to write your diary *and send it back into the past* for you to read earlier), are of such staggering eloquence, passion and so bloody brilliantly written, I was awe struck and thought "surely it can't all be of this quality... what is?" But I wasn't disappointed, the initial impact wore off as I read, but the remaining stories are all good - it's just that those first two are so exceptional. The topics in this book alone give it such diversity that would keep a lot of authors in work for years. In "Eugene" choosing a genius child before conception - this has a wonderful twist; "Blood Sisters" deals with identical twins but one dies from a virus while the other doesn't and wants to know why; "Safe-Deposit Box" deals with an entity without a body, awaking each morning as someone else. "The Kidnapping" touches on the sensitivity of that topic from an unusual angle (superbly); "The Moral Virologist" opens up a real can of worms on evangelism and morals. I could go on to name all the other stories, but honestly, each story has its own individual merit and style. Is Greg Egan only one person or a conglomerate to write such diverse and differing viewpoint stories (I jest). Whatever, it all works out wonderfully well and he is now a name I'll look out for in future.

THE MAKING OF TERRY NATION'S BLAKE'S 7
by Adrian Rigelsford

Boxtree, £9.99, 95pp, 'c' format p/b
Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Running for 52 episodes between January 1978 and September 1981, BLAKE'S 7 was one of the most successful and popular home-grown sf series on British tv. It still has quite a following and as well as being re-broadcast on Cable tv, the entire series is available on video - or soon will be....

This nicely-presented volume runs briefly yet comprehensively through the history of the series, dealing separately with the four seasons of 13 episodes each. There are plenty of photographs, including publicity shots, programme stills and more, and brief episode summaries with details of cast, writer, producer, etc. All in all, it gives quite a useful overview, including fascinating insights into why some things happened the way they did - especially why certain characters were written out.

However, having meticulously researched every detail the author devotes altogether too much time to an account of exactly when and where each episode was filmed, explaining how certain dates were spent on location work for particular episodes before the crew moved into the studio to shoot the interiors and then started on - etc, etc, etc. Although this kind of information may be of surpassing interest to a very few, I am sure I speak for the majority if I say I found it rather tedious. It could have been done in a much more generally interesting way, perhaps with more about the stories and characters and less about the nuts-and-bolts process of making the programmes - even if this would have meant changing the title.

In short then, this is a useful reference work for those who may need it, but it is less successful as a book with which to entertain oneself by trying to recall the fun of watching the original broadcasts.

DEAD OF LIGHT by Chaz Brenchley
Hodder & Stoughton, £8.99,
330pp, 'c' format p/b,
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

There's a large town in the north of England, up near the Scottish border, which is being run (in the present day) by a family called Macallan. Not only that, but most of the Macallans possess superhuman powers: using only their minds they are able to smash things, to control the minds and bodies of others, and to kill people in several extremely unpleasant ways. Not very plausible

so far, is it?

It's a pity that Brenchley's central premise is lacking in credibility, since he's a capable writer and the novel has much in it to admire. It is narrated by Ben Macallan, a student in his early twenties, the only member of the family to dare to try and escape their clutches. But the family is too powerful, too all-embracing and, when somebody starts killing family members by nasty supernatural means, Ben is drawn into the mystery.

There are elements of horror, fantasy and detective story here (as elsewhere in Brenchley's novels). The telling is cleverly impressionistic, with lots of impressive wordplay (don't miss the wonderful chapter titles, for example) and some first-rate surprises. Try it; you may not be disappointed.

A DANCE IN BLOOD VELVET by Freda Warrington
Pan, £5.99, 584pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the second novel in Freda's vampire series (after A TASTE OF BLOOD WINE). Charlotte has only been a vampire for a short time and is still coming to terms with what that means and as yet cannot understand all her desires. She develops an obsession for a dancer, Violette Lenoir, which estranges her from Karl, the lover for whom she chose this existence. Complicating matters is the reappearance of Katrina, who, due to Kristian's death at the end of the previous volume, has been released from the cold death-sleep of the Weisskalt. She was once Karl's lover. Then there is the problem of the newly awoken vampires who find themselves in the attic room of occultist Benedict Grey.

Freda has tried, and largely succeeded, to make her vampires unique. They don't obey many of the strictures tradition lays upon their kind - they wander abroad during daylight hours and have no fear of garlic, crosses, mirrors or running water and coffins are not in their vocabulary. They do not sleep, taking what rest they need in the Crystal Ring. This is an astral realm from which they gain their strength and through which they can travel from place to place on Earth faster than by conventional means.

During the novel we discover more about the nature of these vampires as Charlotte discovers more about herself. They have emotional needs, like normal human beings but they are intensified so their lives run at a higher pitch, prepared to go to greater

lengths to satisfy their needs whether they are love, hunger or jealousy. Another strand that runs through this book is the origin of vampires, whether they are a projection of the human psyche or one of God's creations. The Hebrew tale of Lilith is wound through the narrative.

Generally, this is a good read and contains more of interest than the first volume.

KALEIDOSCOPE CENTURY by John Barnes
Millennium, £15.99, 252pp, h/b
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

I initially chose this because I thought I recognised the name. Barnes? Mmm - didn't he write with Niven and Pournelle? No, that was Steven Barnes. John Barnes - surely not the Liverpool forward who makes up the numbers in an England shirt? Again, no (thank heavens). This John Barnes is American and wrote MOTHER OF STORMS and A MILLION OPEN DOORS, aahh, him! I read A MILLION OPEN DOORS and quite liked it, so is this better?

What KALEIDOSCOPE CENTURY is is different. Presented as a "panoramic history of the 21st century" told in the first person by "the man at the centre of it all" sort of gives you an inkling of what to expect. Yet it is not as simple as that. Barnes creates a background and scenario for his future that left me looking over my shoulder for the assassin to prevent his knowledge being spread.

It's very real. Imagine, the KGB have secretly been financing experiments that prove successful at prolonging life. On the collapse of the Soviet Union, this KGB caucus becomes the "Organization" and widen their base of operations. The storyteller, Joshua Ali Quare, is recruited and eventually becomes an assassin, then a mercenary. Strange things are afoot, and a spin-off from a computer virus becomes a human viral infection until most of humanity is affected and falls under the influence of one mind - all thinking alike to further this end. "Free" humans escape into space setting up separate habitats, the Organization begins to peter out which gives Quare the final revelation and answers.

All well told and balanced into one novel. Realistic, and frighteningly so, Barnes takes a number of possible scenarios and melds into an all to possible future. Excellent story.

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Dave Cox: HOT SKY AT MIDNIGHT by Robert Silverberg (May).

Bernie Evans: THE DEUS MACHINE by Pierre Ouellette (February); NIMBUS by Alexander Jablovok (March).

Dave Hardy: SAILING BRIGHT ETERNITY by Gregory Benford (July); BORIS VALLEJOS'S 3D MAGIC (August).

John Howcs: THE WAR OF THE LORD'S VEIL by Adam Nichols (August).

Robert Jones: ANTICIPATIONS ed David Seed (July); THE BIRDS OF THE MOON by Michael Moorcock (August); BEGGARS IN SPAIN by Nancy Kress (August).

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