

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chair-Yvonne Rowse, Secretary-Martin Tudor, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-William McCabe, Ordinary Member-Anne Woodford, Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 29 Chair-Carol Morton, Novacon 30 Chair-Tony Berry.

GEOFF RYMAN**will talk to the BSFG on****Friday 12th November 1999, *****from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge, second floor,
Britannia Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union
Passageway).****Drinks may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine level
and taken up to the Lichfield on the second floor.****Admittance: Members £3.00 (£2.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £4.00
(£3.00 Unwaged). (*Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the
Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being
produced.*) (*VB: the second Friday of the month.)*****Forthcoming Meetings:******10th December BEER & SKITTLES at the
Samson & Lion******14th January AGM at the Britannia***

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified).

The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £15.00 per person, or £20.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Mids, B65 0RL, (e-mail enquiries via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk).

Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum

Group News to: Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

Geoff Ryman
By Colin Greenland

The bad news is, Geoff Ryman loathes writing. The good news is, he can't stop doing it.

For Ryman, the writing is the real thing, or nothing at all. 'It would be just as much work, if not more,' he reflects, 'to write badly as to write well.' What he means by writing well is telling the truth, an obligation of all writers, if they're not just wasting time and trees.

It's all there in his first published story, 'The Diary of the Translator' It appeared in 1976, in Hilary Bailey's *New Worlds Ten*, and tells of a far future, post-verbal world where everything is immediately available and nothing is authentic. The narrator, whose job it is to make glib, superficial thought-tape transcriptions of approved ancient novels, gets too involved with Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and incurs the disapproval of the authorities for reinventing the obsolete practice of literary creation.

If on one level 'The Diary of the Translator' was a young writer's plea for autonomy from publishers and other benevolent dictators, it was not a callow one. Ryman is one of the minority of established authors that have day jobs. He works for the Central Office of Information: 'copywriting for the state, which is *not* to say the government. I have doubts about the profession of being an author. It creates all those expectations, this thing that gets milked. People expect something new every eighteen months, and so your work gets all caught up in these anxieties and considerations of the ego, while the real self that really writes the book goes on taking its own sweet time.' So there was an eight-year gap before Ryman's fiction next saw print. In that time he produced two pieces of work as powerful and moving as they are different and distinctive.

A manuscript copy of Ryman's first novel, *The Warrior Who Carried Life*, was circulating in fandom in 1982, if not before, but it wasn't published until 1985, in Allen & Unwin's Unicorn line. The nearest Ryman has ever, or, one suspects, could ever come to a generic commercial fantasy, *Warrior* is the story of a young woman who acquires magical powers and goes on an arduous quest into the underworld, initially for vengeance against the evil overlords who have disfigured her and maimed her family, but eventually to redeem their souls and the world.

The Warrior is radiant proof of something Michael Moorcock's always saying, that there is no virtue (or lack of it) in any particular fictional form; every form is only as good as the writer using it. Even the poor old cosmic quest novel can be re-invigorated, and Ryman does it here: firstly by rejecting the usual third-hand pseudo-medievalism in



Geoff Ryman in 1989, artist Iain Byers

favour of elements from other cultures, other myths; and secondly by a resolute and compassionate attention to the truth of human pain, so often glamorised or simply, squeamishly, avoided by fantasy writers.

The Warrior also introduces us to Ryman's admirable calm, objective style, which has the ease and authority of the fireside teller of tales, rehearsing everyday wisdom for the village, the tribe, the family. Characteristically, Ryman disclaims any technique. 'I believe,' he says, 'that when you write a sentence that is true, it will automatically be a very simple, obvious sentence. It just happens to be very difficult to write a sentence that is true.'

All the principles that made *The Warrior* so vivid and penetrating are just as active in the story which preceded it into print, announcing the arrival of Geoff Ryman to the fiction-reading public, or at least to those members of it discerning enough to be reading *Interzone* in 1984. Before *Warrior* was even accepted for publication, Ryman was at work on an outline for a novel set in Cambodia. But never having been there, or anywhere near, and with his dedication to truthfulness above all else, he despaired of his ability, even of his right, to write it.

Eventually, after prolonged conversations with a friend and neighbour who had lived in Canada, and in Thailand, 'researching', as he puts it, 'the content of the delusions of the insane', Ryman realised that he could write his story, of an ordinary courageous oppressed woman who loses her husband, her home and her entire way of life, in the form of a fantasy tale, in which death talks and sings, sharks breathe havoc from the sky, the houses creep into heaps for company. Just because of and fantasy traffic in the unreal, says Ryman, that doesn't mean they're exempt from the duty to tell the truth. If anything, the opposite: fantasy, he believes, is a way of engaging the logic of dreams. 'Dreams show us reality undisguised, with all our real feelings about things.'

So he wrote his story, bringing to it not just his friend's experience of the Far East, but his own of living in Canada and California and Britain, all places where he has witnessed, in his own lifetime, the destruction and replacement of cultures. When the story (originally called 'The Crow that Warbled') was finished, Ryman recalls, 'I wasn't going to send it out anywhere. I didn't know if it was good or bad, but I assumed it was unsaleable.' Mike Dickinson and Tom Shippey were among those who lent their weight to persuading him he was wrong, and the editors of *Interzone* agreed. They published it as 'The Unconquered Country'; it won the 1985 World Fantasy Award for best novella, and later that year appeared, sensitively and strikingly illustrated by Sacha Ackerman, as a book from Allen & Unwin.

Also published that year was *Interzone: The First Anthology*, for which 'The Unconquered Country' would have been top of the list for inclusion if it hadn't turned out to be just-about-contracted to Unwin. Meanwhile, the author had written, directed and performed in an acclaimed dramatisation of Philip K Dick's *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* at the first Mexican, and was now extending 'The Unconquered Country'. Apologetically, he mentioned that he had got something else they *might* want to look at. This turned out to be 'O Happy Day!' one of the fiercest and most direct stories ever published under the auspices of *Interzone*. Sparked off by the cause of a friend ostracised by her women's group, it's an account of what happens after a successful totalitarian feminist revolution, in an extermination camp staffed by homosexual men.

Sexual politics might have been a new topic for Ryman in 'O Happy Day!' but it was not a new concern. Sex roles and the way we inhabit them are very much a part of 'The Unconquered Country'; and the titular character in *The Warrior Who Carried Life* magically assumes a male body to carry out her schemes of vengeance, thus providing the book with a cheering image of male power and female perception working together for once.

Fiction, which Ryman has called 'history's bastard child', must be answerable to the issues of its day. It's a social function; which is why it's so important to have an audience in mind. Ryman, like all responsive sf writers, is grateful for the existence of fandom. 'The marvellous thing about fandom is, it's given me a context,' he says. 'I know who I'm writing for.'

Writing, he argues, is a public act. It's quite independent of the publishing business, of what people are selling and buying at any one time; but it's also independent of the author's individual ego, of the private toil to do the work and do it well. 'A book doesn't care who writes it', he says. 'When it's time for a book to be written, it'll be written. It's a modern myth that a book needs an author. *Gilgamesh* didn't have an author, and that's a book that's a real power in the world.' *History*, Ryman's novel based on the *Gilgamesh* story, is currently shelved, this particular author having found the demands of his ancient, mysterious, sacred, composite source text more than he could meet yet, whatever it said on the contract.

Instead, he has written a great big science fiction novel called *The Child Garden*. Set in a future semi-tropical London, it's a rich, tasty, amazing comedy about love, art and the culture of viruses, whose own germ was the novella 'Love Sickness', serialised in *Interzone* in 1987. Also in *The Child Garden* is a motif that echoes all the way back to 'The

Diary of the Translator', of people who read books to turn them into an instantly assimilable form for other people who think they're beyond reading. Geoff Ryman thinks these other people are wrong. If I've talked here about the incidentals of Geoff Ryman's career and opinions, and deliberately avoided saying much about what's actually in his wonderful, warm, quizzical, infinitely generous and conscientious stories, it's because I agree with him.

The piece above was written for the Novacon 19 Programme Book. Since then Geoff has written Was (reviewed this issue) and the widely (and deservedly) acclaimed 253 (which has encouraged me to start reading footnotes again). Unconquered Countries, a collection of four novellas, is reissued on 1st November.

Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

5 Nov, noon (at Andromeda): **Josh Kirby**, Discworld cover artist, will be signing copies of his new book of fantasy art *A Cosmic Cornucopia* and the new Discworld hardcover *The Fifth Elephant* (already signed by) Terry Pratchett.

5 Nov: **Brian Aldiss** will be signing *WHITE MARS* in the evening at Novacon. *THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE* will also be available in paperback.

13 Nov: **Geoff Ryman** will be in Andromeda for a signing session at noon.

3 Dec: **Tom Holt** will be signing his new hardback, *Snow White and the Seven Samuri* (Orbit £16.99). **Robert Rankin** will be signing *Sex, Drugs and Sausage Rolls* (Doubleday £16.99).

Rog is still waiting for confirmation of the signing date for Robert Rankin. Please phone Andromeda for up-to-date information. Signed copies of Terry Pratchett's THE FIFTH ELEPHANT can be ordered from Andromeda.

Forthcoming Events

5-7 NOVEMBER 1999: NOVACON 29, at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Ian Stewart. Attending membership £35.00 on the door.

6-7 November 1999: Memorabilia Europe's largest science fiction, film, cult tv, pop and collectors' fair. Hall 17, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Booking Office 0121 767 4555.

12 NOVEMBER 1999: Geoff Ryman will talk to the Brum Group from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

18 November 1999: Schrodinger's Box. Quantum physicist, Erwin Schrodinger, changed forever the way we look at the world and made it possible for the strangest things to happen. Reckless Sleepers explore this new physics armed only with their bodies, an experimental chamber they have constructed in the shape of a box and their wits. The Studio, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry. Box Office 0247 652 4524.

27 November 1999: Dracula by Bram Stoker, a musical performed by Katch 22 at Chelmsley Wood Library Theatre from 2.30pm and at the Solihull Arts Complex Exhibition Hall from 7pm. Call 0121 704 6962 for further details.

29 November - 4 December 1999: Return To The Forbidden Planet performed by St Augustine's Musical Theatre Company from 7.30pm in the Solihull Arts Complex. Call the Box Office on 0121 704 6962, tickets £5-£10.

10 DECEMBER 1999: BSG BEER & SKITTLES Christmas Meeting at the Samson and Lion, Wordsley.

25-26 March 2000: Memorabilia Europe's largest science fiction, film, cult tv, pop and collectors' fair. Hall 9, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Booking Office 0121 767 4555.

21-24 April: 2Kon, Eastercon at the Central Hotel, Glasgow with guests Guy Gavriel Kay, Deborah Turner Harris and Katherine Kutz. Reg £25, £20 unwaged; supp. £15. Contact 2Kon, 30 Wodburn Terrace, St Andrews, KY16 8BA. E-mail: 2kon@dcs.st-and.ac.uk

<http://www.theory.cs.st-and.ac.uk/2Kon>

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVACON 30 at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Chris Priest, Special Guest Rog Peyton. Attending membership costs £23.00 until 8th November 1999, then £28.00 until Easter 2000, after which it may rise again. Contact: Steve Lawson, Registrations, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

13-16 April 2001: Paragon, Eastercon at the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool with guests Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lianne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership currently £25 Attending, £15 Supporting, £12.50 Junior and £5 Child. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114 281 1572. e-mail steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk

Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise readers to contact organisers 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 (e-mail yvonne@hallsfarm.sofinet.co.uk).

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

Announcements

If anyone is interested in going out for a meal as a group before the meeting please meet at Andromeda at 5.50pm on Friday 12th. It would be worth giving me a call on the Thursday if you're interested so I know roughly how many people want to go and what sort of food they would like to eat. My phone number is 01299 400750.

I haven't heard from anyone wanting to write up previous meetings for the newsletter. You don't have to be lumbered with it if you do it once. See me at the meeting to volunteer. Please.

The Beer and Skittles evening has been booked. I have also booked a

sixteen seat minibus which will, as usual, pick up at the Rotunda, Bearwood and Lye. We will not know the exact cost until we have numbers confirmed – the more people attending the cheaper it will be per head. The cost of transport and a meal will be included in the price. The landlady tells me there is now a bar in the skittles room so service will be quicker. If you are interested please give a £5 deposit to Alan on the door at the next meeting. Bring spouses, bring friends; the more the merrier.

Eddie Jones
By Roger Peyton

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of Eddie Jones. Eddie suffered a heart attack/stroke several weeks ago and spent the remaining time hospitalised where he arrested during a blood transfusion in the early hours of Friday, 15th October. He was 64.

The only visitors he had in hospital – and the only people who knew he was ill – were his landlords and friends, Barbara and Colin O'Loughlin. There were no known relatives and Barbara and Colin were not aware of any of his friends or contacts. Somehow they found reference to Ron Bennett and managed to contact him. Ron rang me and I am trying to notify as many people as possible.

Sadly, there were no funds for any funeral but after notifying his German agent, Thomas Schluck, Tom phoned and has offered to pay funeral expenses.

Eddie was one of the most prolific – and in my opinion one of the very best – SF artists in the 1970s. His first book covers were for the notorious Badger Books, starting with *Space Borne* by R L Fanthorpe (1959). By the early 70s he was having work published in the US, the UK and in Germany. At his most prolific he was painting eight commissions per month – mainly for Sphere, Futura and Pan here in the UK, DAW and Bantam (including the James Blish *Star Trek* series as 'S Fantoni') in the US and Bastei and Fischer Orbit in Germany where he also painted the covers for approximately 850 issues of *Terra Astra* magazine. In the 80s I used Eddie's work on all 25 of the Venture SF series from Hamlyn/Arrow using a mixture of reprints from the German paperbacks and originals painted for friends/conventions/etc.

For the last 10 to 15 years he had moved out of the SF field and spent his time painting military figures for a model shop in Liverpool. A regular convention attendee from the mid-50s through to the 80s – I think his last convention was Novacon 12 in 1982 – he made an unexpected appearance at this year's Eastercon in Liverpool, where he was surprised that anyone in SF remembered his artwork or his name

Tom Schluck has expressed a wish that a memorial fund be started to keep Eddie's name and work alive. He was the only great name of the 70s never to have had a book devoted to his work – although many pieces of his work appeared in general books on SF art, and one illustrated novel produced in large format – *The Space Warriors* by Stewart Cowley – used more than 50 of Eddie's paintings. Perhaps that omission can now be corrected.

Tom has asked me if I will oversee the fund. I'll be happy to do that. Anyone wishing to send donations should send them to my home address or c/o Andromeda Bookshop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1LT. Cheques, etc, should be made out to 'The Eddie Jones Memorial Fund'.

Jophan Report #126

By Martin Tudor

Carol Morton, Chair of Novacon 29, reports that Andromeda will be hosting a multi-signing at Novacon 29 the Friday 5th November from 9.30pm. This should feature such authors as Brian W Aldiss who will be signing copies of *WHITE MARS* and the paperback edition of *THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE*.

Meanwhile, not to be out-done Waterstones have announced that they will be featuring two genre-related signings at their new store at 128 New Street (previously Dillons). Thursday 4th November from 1pm-2pm one-time TimeLord TOM BAKER will be signing copies of his new book *THE BOY WHO KICKED PIGS* and on Friday 5th November from 4.30-6.30pm TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing copies of *THE FIFTH ELEPHANT*.

Orbit are running an Iain M Banks competition:

"Iain's new sf book, which he is writing at the moment, is going to be a Culture novel. Which means that he'll be coming up with a whole new batch of names for Culture ships. If you've ever fancied naming your own Culture ship, e-mail us with your suggestion before November 15, and Iain will pick his favourite. We'll send any three Iain Banks paperbacks (or, if you prefer, a signed first edition hardback of the new book when it's published next summer) to the winner. And you never know, Iain may even want to use the winning entry in the new book."

Check out their Web site at www.orbitbooks.co.uk for further details.

Forthcoming books from Orbit include: ENDER'S SHADOW by Orson Scott Card - December 1999 hardback; CHILDREN OF THE MIND by Orson Scott Card - December 1999 paperback; A CAVERN OF BLACK ICE by J.V. Jones - January 2000 paperback; THE BURNING STONE by Kate Elliott - February 2000 paperback. THE BELLY OF THE BOW by K.J. Parker - March 2000 paperback; THE PROOF HOUSE by K.J. Parker - April 2000 large-format paperback; THE SKY ROAD by Ken MacLeod - May 2000 paperback; "A NEW CULTURE NOVEL" by Iain M Banks - June 2000 hardback; THE HEART OF MYRIAL by Maggie Furey - July 2000 paperback; BOOK NINE OF THE WHEEL OF TIME by Robert Jordan - autumn 2000 hardback.

In other news from Orbit they announce that following a number of recent deals they can announce the following: Spring 2000: THE BURNING CITY by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle; Autumn 2000: DARKSONG RISING by L.E. Modesitt, Jr. - the third and final book in the Spellsong Cycle.

Nominations have opened for the 2000 TAFF race from Europe to North America, Ulrika O'Brien, North American TAFF Administrator, reports as follows:

"Nominations are now open for the year 2000, Westbound (Europe to North America) TAFF Race. The winner will attend Chicon 2000, the 58th World SF Convention, in Chicago, August 31 - September 4, 2000. Prospective candidates should ensure that signed nominations (two from North America and three from Europe) reach the Administrators by midnight on December 1, 1999, along with their 100-word platform and a bond in the amount of £10 Sterling or \$20 U.S. made out to the administrator.

"TAFF gratefully accepts your freely-given money and material for auction; such generosity has sustained the Fund for over 40 years. TAFF is fandom's oldest travel fund, and one of its worthiest causes -- give early and often! Please contact your nearest administrator for details

Maureen Kincaid Speller, the European Administrator, followed with:

"I'm happy to announce that the TAFF 2000 race has begun, with the traditional request for candidates to make themselves known to the administrator. The winner of this TAFF race will travel to Chicago next August, to attend Chicon Anyone wishing to stand for TAFF needs to find five nominators, two from America, three from Europe; needs to write a 100-word platform for the ballot paper, and to post a £10 bond, promising - barring Acts of God - to travel to Chicon.

“Your platform, bond and the five signed nominations need to be with the administrator by 1st December, 1999 ... and we're talking paper here, not email.

“The race itself will run until 6th May, 2000. Please disseminate this wherever seems appropriate.

For further details about TAFF, contact Maureen Kincaid Speller at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, UK or email her at taff@acnestis.demon.co.uk.

So far PLOKTA has launched a campaign in support of Sue Mason and rumour has it that Tommy Ferguson will also run.

Garth Spencer reports that he has won the Canadian Unity Fan Fund, the fund that sends a fannish ambassador from Canada to, well, Canada. Garth will thus attend the Candian national convention in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Forthcoming books from Earthlight include: November 1999 -- THE KEEP OF FIRE MARK ANTHONY pb/C 0 684 86041 4 £9.99; BEYOND THE PALE MARK ANTHONY pb/A 0 671 02191 5 £5.99. December 1999 -- DRAGON AND PHOENIX JOANNE BERTIN pb/C 0 684 £9.99; THE LAST DRAGON-LORD JOANNE BERTIN pb/A 0 671 02192 3 £5.99. January 2000 -- GREEN RIDER KRISTEN BRITAIN pb/A 0 671 03303 4 £5.99. March 2000 -- SARANTIUM 2 GUY GAVRIEL KAY hb 0 684 £16.99; THE MERLIN CODEX ROBERT HOLDSTOCK hb 0 684 86036 8 £16.99.

J K Rowling's popular Harry Potter books are in danger of disappearing from classrooms in South Carolina because parents are worried about the “sheer evil” tone of the books, reported the EXPRESS & STAR on 14th October. Parents have persuaded the state's Board of Education to review whether the books by Scottish author J K Rowling are read by pupils.

“The books have a serious tone of death, hate, lack of respect and sheer evil,” said parent Elizabeth Mounce. The state board have said that it is up to local school boards to decide if the books are appropriate but agreed that it would review them.

The best-selling novels HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE, HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS and HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN have sold more than five million hardback copies in America, with millions more selling in paperback.

The LOCUS Web site reports that the Harry Potter 'controversy'

reached the front page of the LOS ANGELES TIMES a week later (22nd October) when it was reported that a conservative watchdog group in Virginia had posted a Web site decrying Harry Potter, and it cites an interview with the editor of THE HORN BOOK, a children's literary digest, who dismissed the books as "likeable but critically insignificant".

At the same time CNN summarised the author's success and asked what of the controversy raised by some parents who worry the tale of a young wizard promotes witchcraft and the occult? [Rowling's] answer is direct and unforgiving. "I absolutely did not start writing these books to encourage any child into witchcraft," she says with an uncomfortable chuckle. "I'm laughing slightly because to me, the idea is absurd."

"I have met thousands of children now, and not even one time has a child come up to me and said, 'Ms. Rowling, I'm so glad I've read these books because now I want to be a witch.' They see it for what it is," she emphasised. "It is a fantasy world and they understand that completely.

"I don't believe in magic, either," she said.

Forthcoming books from Del Rey include --

NOVEMBER 1999: DRAGONHOLDER by Todd McCaffrey (Biography) 345-42217-1 Hardcover, 128 pp, cover art by Rowena; THE TERMINATION NODE by Robert Weinberg & Lois Gresh (SF) Mass market edition of their 1/99 hardcover; 345-41246-X Paperback, 320 pp, cover design by David Stevenson. Features an interview with the authors; THE RIVAN CODEX by David & Leigh Eddings (F) Mass market edition of their 10/98 hardcover; 345-43586-9 Paperback, 480 pp, cover illustration by Geoff Taylor, jacket design by Cathy Colbert; THE DRAWING OF THE DARK by Tim Powers (SF) Del Rey Impact title; 345-43081-6 Trade paperback, 336 pp, cover design by David Stevenson.

DECEMBER 1999: STARFIST: BLOOD CONTACT by David Shermann and Dan Cragg (SF) 345-42527-8 Paperback, 352 pp, cover art by Jean Targete; THE SEA IS FULL OF STARS by Jack L. Chalker (SF) 345-39486-0 Paperback, 352 pp, cover art by Min Choi; THE GOLDEN CAT by Gabriel King (F) Mass market edition of their 5/99 hardcover; 345-42305-4 Paperback, 368 pp, cover art by Donna Diamond; BABYLON 5: LEGIONS OF FIRE: THE LONG NIGHT OF CENTAURI PRIME by Peter David (SF) 345-42718-1 Paperback, 288 pp, cover art by Eric Peterson. Features an excerpt from next book in series; THE PRINCESS BRIDE by William Goldman Reissue of their 12/98 hardcover, 345-43014-X Hardcover, 399 pp, cover design by Ruth Ross.

JANUARY 2000: MANIFOLD: TIME by Stephen Baxter (SF) 345-43075-1 Hardcover, 528 pp, cover design by David Stevenson;

NIMISHA'S SHIP by Anne McCaffrey (SF) 345-43425-0 Paperback, 384 pp, cover design by Min Choi; THE HAUNTED WIZARD by Christopher Stasheff (F) 345-39248-5 Paperback, 384 pp, cover art by Allan Pollack; DRAGONSHADOW by Barbara Hambly (F) 345-42188-4 Paperback, 320 pp, cover art by Donato.

FEBRUARY 2000: COLONIZATION: DOWN TO EARTH by Harry Turtledove (AH) 345-43020-4, Hardcover, 446 pp, KNIGHT OF THE DEMON QUEEN by Barbara Hambly (F) 345-42189-2 Hardcover, 304 pp; COLONIZATION: SECOND CONTACT by Harry Turtledove (AH) Mass market edition of their 2/99 hardcover; 345-43022-0 Paperback, 608 pp; THE TENTH PLANET: OBLIVION by Dean Wesley Smith & Kristine Kathryn Rusch (SF) 345-42141-8 Paperback, 272 pp; STAR WARS: THE NEW JEDI ORDER: DARK TIDE: ONSLAUGHT by Michael Stackpole (SF) 345-42854-4 Paperback, 304 pp; cover art courtesy of Lucasfilm Ltd; STAR WARS: EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE SCRIPT FACSIMILE by George Lucas (SF) 345-43123-5 Trade paperback, 144 pp, cover art courtesy of Lucasfilm Ltd.

Peter Hamilton reports in a recent interview at Amazon.com that he is "working on a singleton, set in a wholly different universe. Fallen Dragon is about a war-weary platoon towards the end of a pointless company war, who find something alien -- and SF kicks in."

But apart from that he has no firm plans but is "thinking of writing another sf detective series about a world a bit like Clarke's The City and the Stars, where you are periodically reborn, but someone could kill you and you would lose those experiences ... And detectives would have to work back from motive and opportunity because the killer would have edited out his memories of murder."

Paper Tiger have announced that as from 1st January 2000 Paper Tiger books are going to be published in the USA simultaneously with their UK publication.

"For the first twelve months or so that simultaneity is going to be approximate, as our US distributors Sterling cope with fitting in a backlog of title published in the UK in Fall 1999, but thereafter the publication dates should be as near as dammit the same."

Titles that they'll be releasing through Sterling during Spring 2000 in one of two publication periods, March/April and May/July, are: A COSMIC CORNUCOPIA by Josh Kirby, text by David Langford; DARKWERKS: The Art of Brom (republication by demand of the FPG book); ENCHANTED WORLD by Anne Sudworth, text by John Grant;

THE FRANK COLLECTION by Jane Frank and Howard Frank;
GREETINGS FROM EARTH by Bob Eggleton, text by Nigel Suckling;
INNER VISIONS by Ron Walotsky; TRANSLUMINAL by Jim Burns.

In addition to new books, they are using the opportunity of the US launch to publish a series of reissues of some classic Paper Tiger titles:

THE BORIS VALLEJO PORTFOLIO; THE FANTASY ART TECHNIQUES OF TIM HILDEBRANDT, text by Jack E. Norton; IN THE GARDEN OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS by Josh Kirby, text by Nigel Suckling; LAST SHIP HOME by Rodney Matthews, text by Nigel Suckling; THE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY WORLD OF TIM WHITE.

Check out the Paper Tiger Web site at www.papertiger.co.uk for further details.

Stephen King released the following statement on 30th September regarding the grand jury indictment of Bryan Smith, the operator of the van which struck him on June 19, 1999:

"I believe that by indicting Bryan Smith, the grand jury did the right thing, and I am very grateful to them for doing it--not only as the injured party, but as a citizen of the State of Maine. The indictments send a powerful message: when we slide behind the wheel of our vehicles, we are responsible for the lives of others and must be held accountable when we fail in that responsibility."

On a lighter note several tabloids have run the story that King has bought the van which hit him - and intends to sort it out with a sledgehammer....

(Many thanks to the following for the above news: FTL <http://ftlmagazine.com/>; BFS News <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/index.htm>; PNN <http://www.plokta.com/pnn/>; LINE ONE <http://www.lineone.net/entertainment/index.html>; BBC News Online; NASA <http://www.nasa.gov/today/index.html>; EXPRESS & STAR <http://www.westmidlands.com/>; BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL: WHAT'S ON; VARIETY <http://www.variety.com/index.asp>; Steve Green.)

Book Reviews

LORD PRESTIMION by Robert Silverberg; Voyager; pbk. 434 pages, £6.99 Star Rating ***

Reviewed by Peter J B Day

Here we have the latest book in the Majipoor series, arguably the

slightest so far (though not in bulk). It opens just after Lord Prestimion's coronation, about a thousand years or so before the events in *Lord Valentine's Castle*, and once again we are confronted with a Coronal who has to fight a civil war against a usurper. Having secured his rightful throne, Prestimion has tried to restore stability by ordering his magicians to erase everyone's memories of the entire affair.

All this takes place before the book begins. Now, a plague of madness is spreading everywhere as people try to reconcile their memories with the realities that face them. And Lord Prestimion has to decide what to do about the powerful and dangerous Procurator of Zimroel, Datirya Sambail, the usurper's chief follower – imprisoned for crimes no-one can now remember him committing. What follows, however, does not altogether live up to this promising start.

Needless to say, the prisoner escapes and sets out to raise an army of rebellion. Prestimion is forced to pursue him, which entails his travelling to various places not dealt with in the previous books, and with each of his arrivals at some new location the action grinds to a halt while we're treated to a lengthy descriptive passage. The result is that the book reads, for too much of its length, more like a travelogue than a novel while the rather run-of-the-mill plot is relegated to the back burner.

I suspect that the truth of the matter is that Silverberg has finally run out of steam on the subject of Majipoor. He seems to have exhausted his powers to invent fresh wonders for this world, and perhaps it's time for him to move on. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of good moments in the book and this is always a fascinating world to visit. If you've enjoyed the previous volumes you'll probably enjoy this one too.

DAWNTHIEF by James Barclay; Victor Gollancz; 416 pages, £9.99

Star Rating *****

Reviewed by Dan Waters

The Raven, a troop of seven mercenaries in a land called Balaia. The land is at permanent war and mercenary bands roam the land making profits from the wars. When one of the members of the Raven, Ras, is killed in battle due to the workings of a Xeteskian Mage, Hirad, the Barbarian chases the mage and ends up facing a dragon. The mage befriends the mercenaries, and reveals to them that he needs their help to find a spell, the Dawnthief. The spell has the power to destroy the world but is needed to defeat the Wesmen hordes invading from the west, led by their shaman. That, argues Denser, the Xeteskian Mage, points to a return of the dreaded Wytch Lords, powerful undead mages who were believed destroyed centuries before.

The story roams the whole land searching for pieces of the spell that could mean the destruction or salvation of the Balaian people. Members of the Raven die along the way including some of the favourite characters. Nowhere in the story do any of the characters escape a battle without a scratch, a refreshing change from some authors I have read recently.

James Barclay takes a very well thought out story and weaves it to perfection. The characters are tangible and I found that I liked even the most evil of them. The story is balanced extremely well and at no point do any of the characters become unbelievable. In short this story is a fantastic start to what looks like it could be an excellent series written by a brilliant writer. Keep your eyes open. James Barclay is going to get better and better.

SOLSTICE by David Hewson, Harper Collins, pbk, 488pp, £6.99.

Star Rating: as a thriller****, as SF ***.

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse.

A pretty good thriller, this. Characters to care about, a possible world-wide disaster, an eco-terrorist (are these flavour of the month or is it just my misperception?) dying of cancer and able to turn America's secret weapon back on its builders (in order to save Gaia of course) and all very readable.

Even better than that it was believable. I loved the black president who got the job by 'mistake' (political manoeuvring, corruption in the other party etc) and rose to the job magnificently. I liked that the morality of it all was in shades of grey, that the science seemed plausible, that the dialogue was believable and that the women were brilliant!

I made the mistake of just reading one chapter before going to sleep and had to stay up until 2am to finish reading. Altogether, very satisfactory.

QUARANTINE by Greg Egan. Millennium, pbk, 248pp, £5.99.

Star rating ****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Greg Egan is yet another of those well-known SF authors that I'd never got round to reading before. I had the impression that he wrote hard SF books that would be too difficult for me to enjoy. Wrong again! (It just keeps happening.) This is a marvellous book, based on quantum physics but so accessible and entertaining that concepts that I would normally slip into sleep rather than face could be embraced with ease.

The main character makes use of a wide range of brain modifications, from **CyberClerk** (Neurocomm, \$5,999) to decode scrambled radio signals through **Déjà vu** (Global Visage, \$750) containing an up-to-date street map and information package to **Karen**, a virtual wife to replace his wife killed when he was a cop. When he's working as a private investigator he often uses **P3**, one of the six 'priming mods' which impose the 'mental state appropriate for active duty'.

The background is as fascinating as the main story. Thirty three years ago the stars went out. 'The Bubble' isolated the solar system from the rest of the universe. Incidentally, here's another grand example of the blurb writer not reading the book before putting finger to keyboard. How could a perfect sphere, centred on the sun, isolate the earth from the solar system? Sheesh!

In the course of the book we discover why humanity had to be quarantined. Egan has found a way for the impossible to happen and for the novel to remain SF, not fantasy. His writing is wonderful. Here's his description of the breakdown of order:

The terminal's image flickers and dies. I thump it, and it comes back to life – but then the text wavers and disintegrates into individual letters, which slowly drift apart like flotsam, or space debris, the leave the surface of the screen itself and float out into the room. I reach out and sweep up a handful; they melt on my palm like snowflakes.'

Do yourself a favour. Read this book.

CORRUPTING DOCTOR NICE by John Kessel, Millennium, 286pp,
£6.99 Star Rating ****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Goodness, another book to be enthusiastic about! This is a time travel book; as Ursula LeGuin says on the cover, it's 'Brilliantly intelligent, light-handed and warm hearted'.

It's about Genevieve Faison, a time-travelling swindler who, with her father, robs those who richly deserve to be relieved of their money. It's about Dr Owen Vannice, naïve and awkward heir to billions whose only desire is to receive academic recognition and who, to prove a theory, brings a diplodocus (I think) back to the 'present'.

It's about Genevieve and Owen's romance (which doesn't, of course, run smoothly). It's about Simon the Zealot's attempt to drive the invading tourists out of his time (for which crime he is defended at his trial by Jesus, now living in luxury in the future). It's about love and expectations, justice and growing up and it's very funny. It's about time you went out and bought *this* book as well.

WAS by Geoff Ryman. Flamingo (Harper Collins), 455pp, £6.99

Star Rating *****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

This is the fourth review I've written tonight and I'm going to be wildly enthusiastic about this book as well.

Was revolves around *The Wizard of Oz*. It features Dorothy Gael, possibly the original for L Frank Baum's Dorothy, and her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry; people who live bleak, blighted, deprived lives in Kansas. Judy Garland stars in her own wretched life. Jonathon, dying of AIDS, is trying to find Oz, looking for Dorothy. Jonathon, in more affluent, kinder conditions than Dorothy, also lost something precious in his childhood.

An outline of the book could sound depressing; the miserable life of an orphan, abused and eventually abandoned, but it is not. It's sad and deeply moving. It made me cry. But it's shot through with bright threads of joy and kindness. The characters are beautiful; you can see each gross deformation of their souls and yet you can love and understand each one.

This is a splendid book. The reviews on the back repeat words like extraordinary, powerful, original and it is all these things. I highly recommend it.

Colophon

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