



# THE INSTRUMENTALITY

*of the Australian Science Fiction Foundation*

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ASFF

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AUSTRALIA

## Foundation On A Spending Spree

### *'Kilobucks Like Grains of Sand'*

It must be the season. After years of practically running after people and begging them to take money from it, the Foundation has recently been inundated with requests for funding. The figures asked for speak for themselves — SynCon 92, \$1000 for hotel (approved), \$500 competition prizes (\$300 approved); SwanCon 18, \$1000 seed money (approved); Constantinople, \$500 seed money (approved); another group \$1000 for debts (declined).

These requests, while well within the Foundation's means, do tie up a significant minority of the Foundation's resources for the next year or so. More importantly, their magnitude is such that the Foundation cannot pay them out of income but must use some capital. This means that the Foundation loses the interest that would have been earned by this portion of its capital. Since interest is the Foundation's main source of income, this means less money available for future lending. In the past, major borrowers have usually paid back more than was lent — HuttCon (\$500 lent, \$600 paid back) being one example. We anticipate that this will continue. While we do not demand the extra, it is one factor we consider when discussing a loan request. However, it cannot be depended on and so the Foundation has begun considering ways to increase its income and get more for its lending dollar. ASFF Treasurer Carey Handfield is now looking for a higher-interest-earning location for the Foundation's main capital, for example.

Few of the groups and conventions approaching the Foundation for money have had anything to do with the Foundation in the past. This prompted ASFF President Cath Ortlieb to address a recent Committee of Management meeting on the subject of gaining more active support for the Foundation. Suggestions for consideration included requesting that a small article about the Foundation be included in the Convention Handbook of conventions using Foundation funding; organising ASFF fund-raising activities; an ASFF auction at conventions; and so on.

This is where *you*, dear Reader, come in. We've shown what the Foundation can do for you. Now is the time to ask: what can you do for the Foundation? We're not talking about money — we have that, though donations are always welcome. What we want are those little things that cost you little or nothing but which can enhance the Foundation's value to Australian SF enormously. Offer us a small free bit of advertising space in your magazine; ask us for a poster that you can put on a wall somewhere; join the Foundation, and encourage others to join; ask for extra copies of *THE INSTRUMENTALITY* to distribute to friends who don't already get it; offer to help organise fundraising activities. The Foundation's biggest handicap is, and always has been, a shortage of fanpower.

*The Foundation needs . . . YOU!*

*[Local distributors keep sending the Foundation books for review. Although we would prefer to accent Australian sf, we are willing to discuss foreign imports. After a few early bobbles, we have evolved a workable system for assigning books to reviewers. If any Foundation member is interested in reviewing books for the Foundation, please contact the Publicity Officer. Note: since the Foundation is not organised to maintain a collection of books, we permit the reviewer to keep the review copy once they have submitted a satisfactory review to THE INSTRUMENTALITY. — Ed.]*

## GRASS

by Sheri S Tepper

*Reviewed by 'Trevor Gudsell'*<sup>1</sup>

Corgi pb 1991, 540pp, \$A11.95, ISBN 0-552-13540-2

A viral plague is killing people on every world bar one in the known galaxy. That world is known as Grass, and it lives up to its name. It is a world of vast open prairies dotted with small copses of trees. Apart from the human colonists, there is one intelligent alien species known as the 'hippae' and traces of another, extinct space-going species. The two surviving species have little to do with one another except through the 'hunt', in which humans riding hippae (known as 'mounts' in this connection) and accompanied by enigmatic 'hounds', pursue monsters known as 'foxen' across the grassy fields. The humans are rewarded by orgasmic stimulation from the hippae at the kill. The hippae are rid of an enemy.

Thus the surface. In fact, as it develops, the hunt is not quite the symbiosis it seems. In fact, the hippae are the dominant partners. Worse, the foxen are not what they seem. Hippae develop from eggs through several stages, of which the 'hounds' are one. But the egg-laying hippae are a recent mutation in a juvenile form of the species in which the foxen are the adults.

On top of which, the hippae are attempting to spread the plague, which originated on Grass, throughout the galaxy.

Although the book jumps from viewpoint to viewpoint, Marjorie Westriding-Yrarier is the central character. She is attempting to unravel the riddle before the plague destroys mankind. Her job is unenviable, since she must fight not only the hippae but their human slaves.

I found the book to be too long for its substance. The central puzzles are unravelled in fragments, losing any dramatic impact they might have by the time any character puts the pieces together. The reader must wade through pages and pages of waffle and routine,

thinking the while 'say it! Say it! Just come out and state what I already know!' before, almost offhandedly, Tepper states explicitly what has been implicitly obvious for so long. Given that most of her future society is a somewhat veiled steal from romanticised versions of middle-ages Europe, and is lacking in true freshness or vitality, more attention should have been paid to the mystery and less to the background.

Black-and-white characterisation is a problem, particularly for the aliens. The hippae are nasty. The foxen, once the characters meet them, are nice. Given that the foxen are adult hippae, this is an extraordinary discontinuity in individual personality.

Nor does the background hang together. There seem to be few intelligent alien species in known space. Given that Grass has one living and the ruins of one extinct alien species, it should have been crawling with investigators. Technological humanity does *not* have a record of ignoring the unknown. The early explorers would have tested every salient feature of the new world. The revelations about the extinct 'Arbai' and the all-too-alive hippae would have been discovered long since. The explanation for the plague on pages 524/5 lacks conviction, since the only reason the plague 'was slow to start elsewhere' is that Tepper says so: her argument is false. False too is her reasoning that when the plague virus converts L-alanine to D-alanine (the first half of a cycle) the infected individual dies because 'when L was reversed, only D was left, and the cells couldn't use it.' Since the virus supposedly converts L-to-D and D-to-L very rapidly, there would be no time for the D-alanine to leave the cell before being grabbed by the virus for the reverse procedure. An intracellular balance would quickly occur, with both forms of alanine available in roughly equal quantities. The infected individual would be briefly ill and might suffer permanent malaise, but Tepper's description is not that of a fatal disease.

The book includes a list of other books by Tepper. I have not read any of them. While I am reluctant to turn a thumbs-down to a book supplied free for review, I must say that GRASS does not encourage me to seek out and buy the other books.

— Trevor Gudsell'

# SEERESS OF KELL

by David Eddings

*Reviewed by Alan Stewart*

Bantam hc 7/91, 431pp, \$A29.95, ISBN 0-593-01207-0

In this fifth volume of his Mallorean fantasy series, or tenth instalment of the Belgariad saga, depending on how you count connected epics, David Eddings concludes with "And so, my children, the time has come to close the book. There will be other days and other stories, but this tale is finished." Unfortunately recent publicity concerning multimillion dollar contracts, for among other things prequels to the Belgariad, means this is not really the last we'll see of the kingdoms of the Alorns and the Angaraks. SEERESS cannot be reviewed except in the light of such developments, just as it must be concerned with and reflect the earlier volumes.

The group of travellers, doomed to repeat their adventures before the next final confrontation between

the Child of Dark and the Child of Light, reach the last unexplored island on the map and find the secret to The Place Which Is No More, a misnamed reef. Thus they have completely covered Eddings world in their wanderings, and the series can be finished. In the end the Confrontation is pretty much a damp squib and the main concerns are who is going to marry whom, who's pregnant and the reuniting of friends thought lost but nearby all the time. This tale lost its epic status somewhere, except for length, and became caught up in the problems of prophecy. After all, if the two Children were going to meet at a preordained time and place it really didn't matter what they did, they'd end up there anyway.

Compared to the earlier volumes Eddings lightens up a bit, there's not as much killing, and the new God is a really nice guy. This whole novel feels, well, trivial. Perhaps it's that things like dusting, blisters and morning sickness seem to be more important than repairing the Universe. Maybe they are to the characters, but that's not what epic fantasy readers want. Eddings seems to have copped out of the great story game, and winds up with almost Mills-and-Boonish homecomings and living happily ever afters.

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Post completed form to: ASFF Memberships, PO Box 428, Richmond 3121.

\* Annual membership is \$5.00. New members pay annual membership plus \$5.00 joining fee, i.e. \$10.00. Victorian regulations for incorporated societies require that new memberships be approved by Committee of Management before taking effect.

SEERESS OF KELL was disappointing, coming across as lightweight as it did, and really only worth skimming to find out what eventually happened at the confrontation. The usual travelogue in new lands at the beginning, and familiar lands in the end, could be dropped without great effect. Basically it's more of the same if you're familiar with the earlier books, and virtually impossible to understand if this is your first Eddings novel. Recommended only to Eddings completists, and those who have to finish a novel, or in this case a fantasy series, once they start it.

— Alan Stewart

## ARMAGEDDON: The Musical by Robert Rankin

Reviewed by Greg Hills

Corgi pb 1991, 331pp, \$A10.95, ISBN 0-552-13681-6

Light-hearted fun or a load of old cobblers? This is the question I was asked by none other than that relentless spoiler of leisure-time reading, critical Piers Pective, when I finished reading ARMAGEDDON: THE MUSICAL — which title, should I again have cause to refer to it here, shall be reduced to ATM.

Rankin has four other novels to his credit: THE ANTIPOPE, THE BRENTFORD TRIANGLE, EAST OF EALING, and THE SPROUTS OF WRATH. I have read none of them. Their titles, however, suggest that they contain much the same sort of material as (hold your breath) ATM. The material? A bizarre cross between Douglas HHGTG Adams and Harry BILL THE GALACTIC HERO / STAR SMASHERS OF THE GALAXY RANGERS / MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! (SOYLENT GREEN) Harrison.

The book opens with a few pages of unashamed scene-setting before the hero, Rex Mundi, literally lurches into action on page 14. The opening chapters are probably the most polished in the book, and the closest to the Adams style, though Rankin appears to lack Adams' ability to get the action started on page 1. But Rankin, once the action starts, effortlessly maintains a berserk pace throughout the book's remaining length, in a style that more and more resembles that of Harrison.

I have started this review with this aspect of the book rather than the usual synopsis, because as with two

of the three Harrison novels listed above, the plot is almost irrelevant to the reader's enjoyment of the book. What is important is the chase, the attempt to anticipate the next improbable lurch of events before the author brings it on stage. How high can the absurdities be piled? How many times can the author kill off major characters, only to miraculously bring them back a little later on? How many one-liners and in-genre references can be plastered onto each page?

This book is plainly not intended as a serious work. To judge it on that basis is therefore to attempt to bind it to a false referent. By the same token, a book that attempts to tap the same well of light-hearted humour mixed with social commentary that Adams and Harrison use, that Keith Laumer used in EARTH-BLOOD, and that many other authors have tried down the years, must dance a perilous jig around the rim. One missed step and the humour is, so to speak, all wet, at the end of its rope, and apt to receive a bucket. The success or failure of such a book, then, can largely be judged on the basis of whether or not that misstep occurs.

Rankin passes this judgement. Ossa is piled upon Pelion, probability is confounded, and the book flounders in apparently unguided fashion from one ridiculous scene to the next. However, although the reader may (quite understandably) become disoriented during the drunkards walk of events, every major element of the book can be seen — after the fact in many cases — to lead inevitably to the confrontation between Christ and His Sister at the end of the book. Nor does Rankin shrink from carrying the book through that climax. The author has in fact been in control (albeit barely, and often by the skin of his inspiration) throughout, and the final lines after the climax carry about the same impact to the reader as the feeble twitches that epilogue the successful conclusion of a session of serious self-abuse.

So. A good book, though not world-beating in its chosen genre. Well worth the read. And look! I managed to get right through to the final paragraph this review and *I didn't mention Terry Pratchett once!* This is quite a feat, given that Terry Pratchett's name is almost as prominent on the cover as Rankin's, and that there is a five-page listing of 'other Corgi books by Terry Pratchett' at the back of the book. One cannot help but wonder who this Robert Rankin chap really is.

— Greg Hills

You're probably wondering why I'm here, well so am I, so am I  
— Frank Zappa (as reported in ATM)

<sup>1</sup> 'Trevor Gudsell' is a house pseudonym of Brass Cannon Unlimited, made available as a service to shy Foundation reviewers. All reviews using the Trevor Gudsell byline © 1991 by Greg Hills, regardless of actual writer.



Australian Dr Who Fan Club  
Dallas Jones, O Box 148, Gladsville, NSW 2111

Australian S. F. Foundation  
PO Box 428, Richmond, Vic, 3121 (1991) President: Cath Ortlieb, VP: Alan Stewart, Secretary: Mark Loney, Treasurer: Carey Handfield, Publicity Officer: Greg Hills Publications: The Instrumentality.

Australian Science Fiction Association (Sydney)  
Regular monthly meetings, social, based on SF. Bring books for trading. Queries to Graham Stone, GPO Box 4440, Sydney, 2001 (02) 3009879  
May 18, 1991 meeting hosted Leigh Blackmore, 3/78 Elswick St, Leichhardt (one of the oldest continuing groups - meetings change location most months).

Australian SF Gaming Association  
PO Box 68, Harbord, NSW 2096

Austrek  
Star Trek club Victoria GPO Box 5206AA, Melbourne, Vic, 3001 Monthly magazine Captain's Log Battalion

The Australian Legion of Batman Fan Ian McLean, PO Box 110, Rockdale, NSW 2216 Newsletter Utility Belt

Blue Mountains Science Fiction Group  
Meets on the first Friday of each month at members homes (founded 1990) Details from (047) 51 5740 or (047) 59 2187

Canberra Science Fiction Society  
Meets Thursday fortnight, monthly newsletter, overseas book ordering, short story competition. PO Box 47, Civic Square, ACT, 2608 (062) 290 1698 AH

Canberra Science Fiction Media Appreciation Division, irregular meetings and video afternoons, newsheet. Contact astringa Weedon, GPO Box 2080, ACT 2601.

Conquest  
GPO Box 1376, Brisbane, Qld

Critical Mass  
Literary criticism of SF, said to be formal. Meets first Wednesday of each month, at 8 p.m. outh Australian Writers Centre, 2nd floor, 155 Pirie St, Adelaide  
3 July, Jeff Harris on An oddly shaped tree root 7 August, John Foyster, The longest view, part 2 4 September, Allan Bray, Boy's own SF 2 October, Roman Orzanski on the other Carroll 6 November, Zoran Bekric on Lovecraftian horror December Xmas party.

Curtin Imagination Association (CIA)  
c/o Curtin University Student Guild, Kent Street, Beckley, WA

Dark Star  
PO Box 499, South Perth, WA 6151

Decoy  
DeForest Kelley/McCoy fan club Ann Richardson, 4/21 Angus Ave, Edwardstown, SA 5039

Fanderson Australia  
(Gerry Anderson Society) PO Box 104, Broadway, NSW 2007

Free for All  
PO Box 330, Applecross, WA 6153

For The Prisoner, Avengers, Danger Man and similar TV. Quarterly meetings, and newsletter Tally Ho. Send SSAE

Friends of Pean  
(Anne McCaffrey fan club) GPO Box 2034, Brisbane, Qld 4001

Grey Company  
Mediaeval simulations, real weapons  
address unknown

Melbourne Science Fiction Club  
Frequent meetings, newsletter, library, membership costs \$12 per year. Meets every Friday at 7.30 p.m. at St. Davids Church Hall, 74 Melville Road, West Brunswick, Vic (Melways Map 29 C6, catch a No. 55 tram). PO Box 212, Melbourne, Vic. 3005, or phone (03) 370 0503 for more information.

Murdoch Alternative Reality Society (MARS)  
c/o Guild of Students, Murdoch University, South Street, Murdoch, WA

Novocastrian Dr Who Fan Club  
D Barrett, 16 Bennett Ave, Newlambton South, NSW 2305 Magazine. The Scrolls of Rassilon

ORGASM  
The Original Radio Goon Appreciation Society of Melbourne PO Box 114, Boronia, Vic 3155

Perth Animation Society  
Japanese animation, Saturday night meetings  
address unknown

The Perth Mediaeval Renaissance Group (PMRG)  
c/ Philippe Madden, History Dept, University of Western Australia  
Academic group, history and customs

Phantom Club  
(Phantom comic) PO Box 183, Coorparoo, Qld 4151

Queensland Star Trekkers  
GPO Box 2084, Brisbane, Qld 4001

Queensland Writers' Centre (possible SF sub group here)  
PO Box 42, St Lucia, 4047, Qld

Rom'line  
Queensland Star Trek? Mark Geraghty, 6 Uralla Crescent, Rochdale South, Qld. 4001

S.A. Dr Who Fan Club  
Meets third Saturday of each month, at Adelaide High School, at 1 p.m.

Sastrek  
Star Trek SA PO Box 369, North Adelaide, SA 5006 Newsletter Tau Ceti

Sherlock Holmes Society of WA  
PO Box 284, Tuart, WA 6060

SF Writers Group  
Meets regularly at Victorian Writers' Centre (Tasma Toe, 12 Parliament Place, East Melbourne, 3002, Vic - no other details available).

The Society for Creative Anachronism  
address unknown

Star Trek Welcommittee  
Diane Marchant, 2 Margaret Street, Mordialloc, Vic, 3195

Starfleet Australia  
USS Bounty, 16 Oorana Ave, Phillip Bay, NSW, 2036

Supreme Council of Time Lords  
Dr Who fan club PO Box 879, Pennith, NSW 2750

Sydney in 95 Inc (renaming to Sydney Fans Inc)  
GPO Box 429, Sydney NSW 2001, meetings 1st Sunday of month, 2 p.m.

Woodstock Community Centre, Church St, Burwood

Threads  
SF oriented arts and crafts, costumes PO Box 257, Brunswick West, Vic 3055

Timetalk  
Andrew Lynch, 18Aber St, Wavell Heights, Qld 4012

UniGames  
c/o Guild of Undergraduates, University of Western Australia

Regular gaming group  
United Space Colonial Marines of Oz  
99/6 Truman Avenue, Riverwood, NSW 2210

University Science Fiction Association (UniSFA)  
c/o Guild of Undergraduates, University of Western Australia, Crawley Campus, Crawley, WA, 6009

V Fan Club  
30 Third Street, Mentone, Vic 3194

The West Lodge  
PO Box 330, Applecross, WA, 6153

Dr Who fan club of Perth. Meets 1pm on first Saturday of month at Collins St Centre, South Perth. \$2 for non-members, membership \$10 annual. Send SSAE for more details.

Westrek  
Star Trek WA PO Box 307, Bentley, WA, 6102 Newsletter Constellation.

## Publications

(Generally available for subscription or payment)

ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association)  
Clive Newall and LymC, PO Box 4024, University of Melbourne, Vic, 3052 Home (03) 386 0721

Aphelion Publications  
Science fiction book publishers. Rynosceros by Terry Dowling. ISBN 1 875346 01 5 \$12.95 Wormwood by Terry Dowling. ISBN 1 875346 02 3 \$12.95 PO Box 619, North Adelaide, S.A. 5006.

Aurealis  
The Australian Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction Chimera Publications, PO Box 532, Mt Waverley, Vic 3149 Four issue subscriptions \$24, back issues \$6

Eidolon  
The Journal of Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy Eidolon Publications, PO Box 225, North Perth, WA, 6006 Four issue subscription \$20. (Make cheques payable to Richard Scriven) Most recent issue #4, 1991

Ethel The Aardvark  
Edited by Alan Stewart. Produced bi-monthly by Melbourne Science Fiction Club, PO Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Vic 3005. Membership \$12. Subscription \$8. (Most recent issue #35, Feb 1991)

Naf'n'ifics  
The Australian fan magazine for science fiction and fantasy PO Box 353, Cannon Hill, Qld 4170 (Mark Keohn, Grant Montgomery, Cindy Keohn) \$4.50 (subscriptions \$23.30 PA - 6 issues) (Not seen as yet)

The Newsletter - Star Walking, Inc.  
Lucasfilm, Star Wars, Indiana Jones activities PO Box 118, Springvale, Vic. 3171

Science Fiction  
A review of Speculative Literature Editor Dr. Van Ikin, Dept of English, The University of Western Australia, Nedlands, W.A. 6009 Four issues for \$15. Most recent issue #30, 1990

## Space Activists

Space Digest  
Bi-monthly professional magazine promoting commercial use of rockets. South Pacific Science Press, 8 Maddox St, Alexandria, NSW 2015, ph (02) 519 6267 Fax 519 1410. Subscriptions \$27 per year. Also at selected newsagents at \$5.

Adelaide Space Frontier Society  
Jane Brooks, 31 Avenue Street, Millswood, SA 5034 (08) 271 4168 AH

Canberra Space Frontier Society  
Frank Panich, GPO Box 227, Canberra, ACT 2601 (06) 286 4486 AH

Melbourne Space Frontier Society  
Kate Doolan, O Box 93, Burnley, Vic 3121 (03) 805 3727 BH

Newcastle Space Frontier Society  
Chris Sparkes, PO Box 1150, Newcastle, NSW 2300 (049) 69 2148 AH

Perth Space Frontier Society  
Sylvia Byers, 2 Downey Drive, Moeman Park, WA 6012 (09) 383 3404 AH

Queensland Space Frontier Society  
Julie Fitzpatrick, PO Box 419, Nundah, Qld 4012 (07) 297 0077 AH

Sydney Space Association  
PO Box 49, Gordon, NSW 2072

Sydney Space Frontier Society  
Kirby Ikin, 5 Boyce Avenue, Homebush, NSW 2140 (02) 809 7149 AH

Western Sydney Space Frontier Society  
Ralph Buttigieg  
PO Box 1083, Auburn, NSW 2144 (02) 635 6797 AH

## Fanzines (amateur magazines available for love of it)

Sorry, no room for fanzine lists this issue.