



THE INSTRUMENTALITY

of the Australian Science Fiction Foundation

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Notice of Annual General Meeting 1992

Date: *Sunday, 19th January 1992* Time: *2:00 pm*

Place: *137 Green Street, Ivanhoe, Melbourne*

Agenda:

- 1) Opening of Meeting;
- 2) Apologies;
- 3) Minutes of previous AGM;
- 4) President's Report;
- 5) Secretary's Report;
- 6) Treasurer's Report;
- 7) Election of Committee of Management;
- 8) General Business;
- 9) Close of Meeting.

Notes: All members of the Committee of Management must resign at the AGM but they are eligible to stand for re-election. Nominations for the following positions will be accepted by the Committee of Management until Sunday, 12th January 1992:

- a) President;
- b) Vice-President;
- c) Secretary;
- d) Treasurer;
- e) THREE ordinary members.

Nominations must be made by two members of the society and endorsed by the nominee.

Light refreshments will be provided at the close of the meeting.

New Foundation Editor Needed

After two years as ASFF Publicity Officer, I have decided not to accept reappointment to a third term. I advised the committee of this at the 1st December Committee Meeting. I have enjoyed the job, but *THYME* is demanding so much of my energy that *THE INSTRUMENTALITY* and the Foundation are suffering by comparison — *THYME* being a job where I am free to exercise my ideas and creativity while *TI* is limited to ASFF news and material. This means that the Foundation needs a new Publicity Officer. The job is not particularly demanding. You don't need fancy equipment (a typewriter will do). Given the way the Foundation works, it would be an advantage to live in Melbourne. Access to printing equipment would be good but not essential as I am willing to continue printing the magazine.

Heir To The Empire

by Timothy Zahn

Reviewed by Alan Stewart

Bantam Press hb 8/91, 361pp, \$24.95, ISBN 0-593-02481-8

Timothy Zahn's latest novel exhibits a change of pace as it's set in someone else's universe. To be exact it concerns the characters of the *Star Wars* series of films and takes off five years after the conclusion of RETURN OF THE JEDI. It's a time of regrouping and consolidation as the Republic, formerly the Rebel Alliance, strives to hold newly conquered planets and the remains of the Empire continue to fight on. With a new Grand Admiral at the head of their fleet the Empire plans daring raids, and a Republic beset by internal political squabbles seems destined to fall apart. With Luke Skywalker absent on an enigmatic errand, and new characters such as smuggler Talon Karrde adding intrigue, this new series starts off full of promise.

With a Hugo under his belt Zahn at least delivers competent writing, and this novel lives up to his better works. His misuse of the term 'borg' fits in so well with the original 'droid' problem, particularly when applied to Artoo, that he appears to have captured the *Star Wars* "feel" very well. It's fairly easy to visualise Leia and Han deliver dialogue as contained in the text, but a wookiee's roar just can't be captured adequately in print. His use of existing characters, and introduction of new ones, adds to the collected ethos fairly seamlessly and glimpses of Chewbacca's home world are particularly welcome.

Overall HEIR TO THE EMPIRE is a straight forward adventure, perhaps relying a bit too much on prior knowledge of the characters and their world, but entertaining and leaving lots of intrigue dangling for the next in the series. There are no great shocks or revelations to upset fans, but rather interesting discoveries and new facts which offer a more detailed view of George Lucas's creation.

The Rowan

by Anne McCaffrey

Reviewed by Greg Hills

Corgi pb 1991, 320pp, \$10.95, ISBN 0-552-13806-1

'A new concept, a new legend,' raves the back cover of this expansion of a short story. *Lady in the Tower* was first printed more than three decades ago (*F&SF*, April 1959). When she collected it with a second story using the same characters, *A Meeting of Minds*, in GET OFF THE UNICORN (1977), McCaffrey said of them:

'Both are unashamed love stories. That's what I do best: combining either science fact or fantasy with heterogeneous inter-action.'

'These two stories were supposed to be part of a novel I'd tentatively entitled THE BITTER TOWER.'

THE ROWAN consists of new material up to page 137, where *Lady* begins the section titled *Callisto*. *Lady* has been extensively revised and expanded, and merges into more new material from about page 163. No material from *Meeting* seems to have been used, but I hear rumours of a 'sequel' being on the way and have suspicions about what that sequel will be based on. In any case, THE ROWAN hardly qualifies as 'a new concept', unless the rehashing of ideas decades old can be thought of as a new gimmick to gype the reading masses. *Nowhere* in this book is *Lady in the Tower* mentioned, nor is there any hint of prior publication of any portion of the book.

The premise is that ESP, in the form of telepathy, telekinesis, teleportation, tele-empathy, and so on, exists and that certain especially powerful espers can be trained to use their powers — bolstered by energy from vaguely-defined 'generators' — to propel goods between the nearer stars. Some of these 'Talents', the so-called 'Primes' or 'T1s', can do this single-handed. They are employed by the Federal Telepath and Teleport Network to man stations ('Towers') on Earth, Altair, Beteguese, Capella, Procyon, and maybe other places.

On Altair colony, a Rowan Mining Company town is washed away by a mudslip. There is one survivor, Angharad Gwyn — a three-year-old telepath who later becomes known as 'the Rowan'. This is her story, from the moment of the mud-slip through her assignment to the new station on Callisto through the discovery of the maverick Deneb station run by Jeff Raven to the time her husband Jeff Raven becomes the Earth Prime and the 'Gwyn-Raven Dynasty' begins.

It is still, unfortunately, an 'unashamed love-story'. Mills & Boon meets sf. Since the romance is the central part of the story, it should come as no surprise that when romance conflicts with plot, plot loses. Rampant emotion controls the story. If a character must develop new abilities or old limitations must be redefined in order to allow the romance to proceed, the new ability comes along or the old neurosis breaks down. Love conquers all and they all live happily ever after. Not a good book.

Rats And Gargoyles

by Mary Gentle

Reviewed by Greg Hills

Corgi PB 1991; 510pp; \$10.95; ISBN 0-552-13627-1

Take a world in which alchemy works. Let thirty-six all-powerful gods take up fleshly ('rocky'? 'stony?') residence there. Build a city around their dwelling, a city so large that it takes a ship three days to sail from the heads to the quays of its river. Place a nobility of intelligent, anthropoid rats over the human populace. This, very briefly and in oversimplified detail, is the setting for this long novel.

My reaction to the book is a mixture of annoyance and delight. In order to create a novel background, Gentle

has glossed over many inconvenient details. Such as just exactly how this enormous city keeps itself going, since the medieval society it hosts displays none of the infrastructure required to get food and other perishable goods into its heart (and wastes out) in sufficient quantity and sufficiently quickly to stave off starvation and pestilence. The history of the city and the world it is set in is very fuzzy where it does not directly touch the story. There are inconsistencies (inevitable in a novel this long, but irritating when stumbled across) in plot and characterisation — for example, of the ‘Acolytes’ (aka ‘daemons’ and ‘gargoyles’, the last being the most descriptive term) a god says: ‘*They are only animals . . . Except in the darkness behind the eye and in the Fane, they have no voice . . .*’; yet earlier in the book, they tortured a priest (in the Fane, admittedly, but this seems at a slant to the sense of the passage quoted above), ‘*. . . for their own pleasure . . . I allow the acolytes their play —*’. A minor defect, introduced mainly to highlight difference that the granting of ‘speech and souls’ has upon the ‘animals’, but illustrative of the way in which Gentle works.

In fact, the book is nowhere free to develop logically. At every turn of plot or character the author stands, guiding events in the direction she has decided they should go rather than the direction the internal development of the

story would suggest. This results in perpetual novelty — a fresh surprise on every page — and perpetual confusion, since it is difficult to anticipate the twist that will be imparted by the next authorial intervention. If Gentle’s gods are impulsive and whimsical, they are no more than the reflection of their creator.

Thus the irritation, but the book has more to offer than this. It is a rich and fascinating tapestry, a shadowy weaving of the *was* and the *might-have-been*. Here and there are reproduced pages from famous books of alchemy, adding verisimilitude to the mix. As I read I had the perpetual feeling of things happening just beyond the grasp of my knowledge — a sense that despite the whimsy and the heavy authorial hand, I was reading a true tale from some alternate world where God threw cocked dice and science as we know it could never develop.

‘Tapestry’ is a word I used advisedly. This book belongs firmly to the sub-genre of subcreations carved out by Gene Wolfe in *THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN* and various novels, and by Brian Aldiss in *THE MALACIA TAPESTRY*. The latter, in fact, being the book that *RATS AND GARGOYLES* most strongly brought to mind. The book features effusive praise from Michael Moorcock, which is not surprising as Moorcock, too, has delved

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extensively in this area in his more recent works. This is not to say that RATS AND GARGOYLES is derivative, for it is not; but if you have read and enjoyed any of the works mentioned in this paragraph you will quite probably enjoy this book too.

Hoffman's Guide to SF, Horror & Fantasy Movies 1991-92

Reviewed by Mark Loney

Corgi 1991, \$24.95, ISBN 0-552-99478-2

It is always difficult to comprehensively review books claiming to be comprehensive guides to a subject. The approach which I chose for this rather specialised guide to the movies which readers of *THE INSTRUMENTALITY* are supposed to be interested in, was to look for movies with which I was familiar as starting points for random wanderings through the listings. HOFFMAN'S came up quite well when subjected, over a period of several days, to this type of testing. Every sf, horror or fantasy film that I was able to think of was listed and critiqued in HOFFMAN'S and most of the time I found myself in agreement. If I could digress for a moment and put in a good word for one of the movies that we did disagree over, *THE KEEP* was a film that entranced me when I first saw it on the big screen and subsequent viewings on video have simply demonstrated the limitation of the cathode ray tube. I strongly recommend *THE KEEP* should it ever show at a cinema near you (HOFFMAN'S felt that *THE KEEP* was 'Strange, incoherent and above all terrible!').

In closing, I think that the greatest praise that I can give this book is to say that, when I have a television again, it will be an indispensable companion during those difficult visits to the video store when I am trying to work out whether the latest unknown title in front of me is another Z Grade waste of time and money or a little known gem. To this end it is worth noting that HOFFMAN'S, a trade paperback size publication, is a convenient size and weight to carry around. Recommended for all VCR owning fans of sf, horror and fantasy movies.

All The Weyrs Of Pern

Anne McCaffrey

Reviewed by Greg Hills

Bantam hb 1991, 494pp, \$29.95, ISBN 0-593-02224-6

This is it! This is the capstone to the *DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN* series! This book contains the definitive permanent solution to the Thread menace and ties off many of the loose ends that trail from *THE WHITE DRAGON*. A major character dies, a system goes down, and the Pernese get their past back. All of which is not to say there won't be more Pern books. *ALL THE WEYRS* is set after *RENEGADES OF PERN* and picks up on the scene in which the Dragonriders find the still-operational AIVAS

(Artificial Intelligence Voice Address System) of the original colony at Landing. After 2525 years of peace and quiet in which to think, and taking into account the unexpected abilities of the dragons, the AIVAS comes up with a plan that will prevent future Passes, though it won't stop the current Pass. There is therefore ample scope for additional Pern stories, but the mainline started by F'lar in *DRAGONFLIGHT* culminates here.

The book has some problems with time. It features 400-Turn trips *between*, similar to the one Lessa made in *DRAGONFLIGHT*, the catch being that (1) it's kept secret even from the large number of dragons involved (yeah, none of them notice that they're out of contact with their friends . . . and in contact with a lot of strangers), and (2) it seems to have none of the deleterious effects Lessa experienced. Also, after a lapse more than 2500 years, the AIVAS just turns on its printer and supplies hard copy *on paper* for its shopping list. Must be pretty good paper — definitely acid-free! (Pretty good printer, too.)

The book also has problems with science. The three spaceships are in decaying orbits. The flagship, *Yokohama*, has fuel to correct this. For the others, 'a slight alteration in their speed and altitude will send them harmlessly off into space . . . eventually to be captured by the sun's gravity and pulled into it'. Dropping them into the sun Rukbat would first require stopping them dead in Pern's orbit, which is a more than slight alteration in speed, particularly as none of the ships has enough fuel for such a jaunt. And McCaffrey is still working on some bizarre notion that the Oort Cloud is so dense that one planet smaller than Mars can pull fifty years worth of Thread after it all the way to Pern's orbit. Actually, compared to (for example) Sol's Asteroid Belt, any Oort Cloud is a pretty thin place indeed, and the Asteroid Belt is none too dense. If Thread is floating loose in the Oort Cloud rather than growing on the Red Star, this is a sticky trick indeed.

On a more positive note, this book, despite its 400-page length, is almost as lean and to-the-point as *DRAGONFLIGHT* and *DRAGONQUEST* (don't be fooled by page count — the print is large) and concentrates heavily on resolving the story rather than spinning off new plot convolutions and fostering romance. Apart from the death mentioned earlier in this review, there are no major developments in the characters, no love affairs, no weddings; even the obligatory Hatching is matter-of-fact and free of serious drama, though the introduction of yet another Queen (and a new character to fly her) hints at a new adolescent series in the offing if McCaffrey lives long enough to write it.

On the whole, this is the book long-time dracophiles have been demanding. For them it is a must-buy. Those who dislike McCaffrey's work will probably do well to stay clear of it, since it really does demand some knowledge of how the story got here. For those who are open-minded but unfamiliar with the series, a minimum list for prior reading would be *FLIGHT*, *QUEST*, *WHITE*, and *RENEGADES*, in that order.