



NOVACON 22

Progress Report One

NOVACON 22

Guest of Honour Storm Constantine

Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham
Friday 6th to Sunday 8th November 1992

Committee: **Helena Bowles** is Chair with **Bernie Evans** doing Registrations; **Richard Standage** as Treasurer; **Tony Berry**, the Ops Supremo who will also do Guest Liaison; **Carol Morton** organising the Programme and **Steve and Jenny Glover** on publications.

Staff: **Mick Evans**, responsible for the Bookroom; **John Harold** who will arrange the Artshow and **Vicky Evans** who will be in charge of the Creche.

Membership and Enquiries: This will cost £18 until Easter when it will rise to £20 until October. It will be £25 on the door. **Bernie Evans** (121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley West Midlands B66 4HS tel: 021 558 0997) is the person to send cheques to and will answer any convention enquiries.

Room Rates: Twin/Double rooms will be £27.50 (per person) and Single rooms £31.50 per night.

Advertising Rates: Advertising is welcomed for the next two Progress Reports and the Programme Book and anyone interested should approach **Bernie** initially (see above). Camera ready copy can be sent to **Jenny and Steve** (16 Aviary Place, Leeds LS12 2NP tel: 0532 791264) and the deadlines are March 15 and July 15 for the Progress Reports and October 1 for the Programme Book.

Bookroom Rates: Tables will cost £15 per table and this rate will cover the whole weekend. All dealers must of course be members of the convention. **Mick Evans** is the person to contact (121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands B66 4HS tel: 021 558 0997).

Acknowledgments: Our thanks go to **Steve Jeffery** and **Vikki Lee France** of *Inception*, the Storm Constantine Information Service (44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA) for the Storm article and bibliography and to **Steve Tew** and **Helen McNabb** for the reviews which initially appeared in *Paperback Inferno*, the paperback review magazine of the British Science Fiction Association. Thanks especially to **Dave Mooring** for the artwork.

In Progress Report Two: As well as a Storm Constantine bibliography, there will be more about the committee, along with further details of the hotel, the official convention charity (the RNIB), and information on the *Friends of Foundation* and the Nova Awards.

Progress Report One

Introduction from the Chair

Helena Bowles

Well, I agreed to do it again. They did wait until the end of a Brum Group meeting to ask me, by which time the Australian Bar's Davenports had done its dirty work, leaving me grinning foolishly and saying "Yeah, alright, why not?"

I'm sure those words will be engraved upon my tombstone (or urn) as they generally follow large amounts of alcohol and precede some wildly insane and occasionally life-threatening scheme (like drinking two "Optics" in a row, buying a house, forgetting about contraception on the main beach at Penzance at 1 am, or agreeing to chair a Novacon).

So I agreed, here we are, what can I tell you? As usual at this stage, not a lot.

The eagle-eyed among you will have noticed that we are back at the Angus, hence we have had to set a membership limit (quoted elsewhere in this PR), **SO JOIN EARLY**.

Registration

Bernie Evans

Hi again. The first thing you'll probably notice about this PR is the announcement that **we're back at the Royal Angus!!** Three cheers for that, thirty-three cheers for them wot fixed it (Helena and Martin) and a **dire warning** for the rest of you. Being back at the Angus **MAY** mean the dreaded **membership limit** rearing its head again. We sincerely hope not, but take no chances, join early, join **NOW**. If there is a limit, we'll announce it when the need arises.

Speaking of joining, you'll no doubt have noticed the first of this year's forms, and an optional extra, the Mexican Membership Form. There's no financial advantage to you if you join both, but it'll save you a stamp and an envelope so, generous soul that I am, every mailing for either convention will also contain a membership form for the other.

Final point (thank God, I can stop wittering and you can stop reading), the fact that you have this PR doesn't necessarily mean that you are a member, it means either that you were a member of Novacon 21, or that I think you may be interested in joining Novacon anyway. All memberships received so far have been processed, so if you are on the list elsewhere in this PR, then you are a member. If you aren't on the list and think you should be, please phone me ASAP (021 558 0997 evenings/weekends).

By the way (OK, I lied about the final point), if you're looking for the snooker form, thinking you've caught me out 'cos it's not there, you haven't. There isn't one, because there isn't a snooker room at the Angus. Sorry about that, but come and buy Steve Tudor a drink anyway.

The Programme

Carol Morton

I'm not totally new to con committees, but having been landed with the job of programme for this con, I now have to tell you a little about it. At this stage, it is difficult to give an overall picture, but we do have some great ideas. We are open to suggestions from you for programme items, especially about the Saturday night — do you want a boring old disco as usual or a live band? A ceilidh? Or what? But anyone who suggests Karaoke will have their membership refunded and be drummed out of Fandom! Seriously, though, please tell us what you'd like for the Saturday night and any other ideas that you may have.

Storm Constantine

Steve Jeffery & Vikki Lee France (with contributions from Storm too)

Storm Constantine probably had one of the luckiest breaks into being published of any unknown author. Halfway through writing her first novel, and while visiting the Andromeda bookshop in Birmingham, she asked one of the staff behind the counter how to go about getting published.

"I was told I stood no chance. You can't get published unless you have an agent, and you can't get an agent unless you have a book published. It seemed a real case of *Catch 22*. I was about to go, when another guy behind the counter said that he was the rep for Futura and asked me to tell him more about it, and then said to send him a synopsis and a couple of chapters to look at. Then I got a letter out of the blue from Richard Evans at Futura. He wanted to see the whole book, which was great, but ... I hadn't finished it".

Next came a period of frantic writing to finish the book, sitting at the typewriter perched on the bedroom dressing table. *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit* was the first of three books about the Wraeththu, set on an Earth in which humanity is being supplanted by a race of androgynous hermaphrodites. Despite the obvious physical similarity with Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the Wraeththu are nowhere near as stable and peaceable a society as that portrayed in LeGuin's novel, being a new race of post-humans discovering themselves in a period of change and conflict.

The creator of those exotic barbarians is herself easy to pick out at a convention or SF gathering with her fondness for black and silver and her dark spiky hair. This tactic proved rather less successful at a signing in the murky bowels of Forbidden Planet bookshop when I walked up behind a slim dark clad lady with a distinctive cascade of black hair and proceeded to congratulate a somewhat bemused lady goth on her latest book. Storm walked in a couple of minutes later, having prised Dick Jude from the Cafe Munchen to pay a visit to her shop and promptly introduced her lookalike fan as a young lady named Christabel.

Her seeming predilection for beautiful long haired men in her books seems to have spilled over in her life, where she shares her exotically furnished Victorian terrace "somewhere east of the M6" with her partner Mark — who might have stepped straight out of the pages of *Enchantments*, and a houseful of cats. She has thus become quite proficient in the use of sellotape to remove white cat hairs from a wardrobe of black clothes.

The Wraeththu novels were followed by *Monstrous Regiment*, whose title was taken from the 1558 John Knox polemic, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*.

"It's a terrible book, but it had a great title. ... After the Wraeththu, I felt I should get to grips with writing a novel in the third person. When I was writing that book, I was going through a phase of being absolutely sick to the gills of hearing about how women were so superior to men, men were bad, men were all rapists and killers. *Monstrous Regiment* was my revenge on their behalf. I knew I'd get hammered for it, but still".

Seen as anti-feminist, rather than redressing the balance, *MR* did indeed come in for a fair amount of critical flak. Storm concedes that with *Monstrous Regiment*, she might have thrown a certain amount of baby out with the bathwater. "I think I needed to leave it lying in a drawer for six months and then re-write parts of it, but publishing deadlines wouldn't allow that". Although intended as a one-off, a follow-up novel, *Aleph*, followed in 1991. Storm, although being much happier with it than with its predecessor, regarded it somewhat as her "contractual obligation novel" for McDonald. One thing she is not happy about is the cover chosen for it

which she describes as having "some sort of bimbo" on the front, despite the heroine, Corrina, having been badly scarred and mutilated in the preceding Monstrous Regiment.

An artist herself, whose own work has been exhibited and featured in her own Wraeththu fanzine, *Paragenesis*, Storm regards the earlier paperback covers for the first Wraeththu novels as "abysmal" and at one point encouraged buyers who felt similarly to tear the covers off and send them back to the publisher. The *Paragenesis* magazine was produced under the banner of the Thirteenth Key, an artistic collaboration between writers, artists and musicians, whose experimental video "Scrying the Continuum" was shown at the 1988 Novacon.

She is much happier with the more abstract covers of her two books for Headline, *Hermetech* and the new *Burying the Shadow*. The designs were commissioned from friends Carl and Magan McCoy who, as Sheer Faith, are responsible for the sleeve design of the *Fields of the Nephilim* albums.

Her own strong interest in music and friendships within the alternative music scene has now extended to acting as manager for two bands, *Litany of Fear* and, more recently, *Empyrean*.

From *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit*, the first of the three books of the Wraeththu published by McDonald in 1987, Storm now has seven novels and a sizeable number of short stories published, another about to be handed over to Headline, and another already underway. A prodigious output over five years.

"Actually, it's not as prolific as it seems. *Enchantments* was written in 1985 and some of my ideas and notes for the Wraeththu books go back as far as 1977, so it really works out to one book a year. I'm still committed to the Wraeththu and would dearly like to go back and explore some more aspects of that world".

A number of common themes and concerns run throughout Storm's novels: sexual energy as a potent and transforming/transcendent force, the concept of the androgyne state as an implicit wholeness, and that nature (both human and planetary) as a force to be channelled and directed, rather than exploited. This has, on occasion, earned Storm's work the undeserved (and wide of the mark) epithet of "hippyish", whereas it is closer in its concerns with a non-exploitive channelling of nature forces to other SF authors like Rachel Pollack or Pat Murphy.

Her protagonists are frequently adolescent, discovering, or confused by, their emergent sexuality, which often makes them (rather like poltergeist theories) emotional powerhouses, or lightning-rod transducers for the forces of change, both of themselves, and of the world they inhabit.

"I believe all life revolves around the power of sexuality, even within those things, and individuals, who either are sexless, devoid of sexual symbolism, or deny it in themselves. It is part of my current belief system. (The author also reserves the right to change her mind on this subject without prior notice)".

One thing Storm is unlikely to change her mind on is her strong and abiding interest and belief in the occult and paganism. Her own interest in the Tarot is reflected by her short story contribution in Caitlin Matthew's *Tarot Tales* anthology.

With a regular column for *Gamesman* magazine and interviews for music fanzines, Storm seems to have tapped into an extra hour in the day that few other people know about. As far as we can gather, this seems to slot in sideways somewhere between 3.15 and 3.20 am, although this can be a mixed blessing when you're standing in a cold train station in the wee hours, having just missed the last train out of London.

Sexual Energy in Action

A Review of *Hermetech*

Steve Tew

Hermetech, as you probably know, is the science of orgasmic energy potential. Ari Famber is the product of a secret, probably illegal, genetic experiment conducted by her long dead and revered father, Ewan. Ewan's theory was that sexual energy can forge a link with the fundamental energies of reality: in the height of sexual stimulation, Ari will be able to step outside the bounds of space and time. The book opens as Ari reaches the onset of puberty in a state of more than usual sexual disorientation. the plot concerns Ari's leaving of her childhood home in the sticks, journeying through the ecologically ravaged deserts to the domed city of Arcady where she has to deal with the tremendous power she has access to.

The strengths of *Hermetech* lie in its compelling narrative, fascinating background, setting and colourful characters. I am always wary of near-future horror stories, given media and commercial exploitation of "green" issues, but Constantine's tackling of the issues as a background to her novel is wholly convincing. Her political factions include those who seek to tackle the ecological death of the planet by the use of technology, and those who believe humanity should leave the planet altogether so that Gaia can heal herself. Her deserts are reminiscent of North America at its most arid: the "jellycrusts" who inhabit it — so called because of the goo they wear to protect their skin from UV — are like Native Americans. The domed city of Arcady, with its high class brothels, seedy tattooists, mysterious underground passages, is peopled by prostitutes and pimps, ruthless assassins and unethical surgeons — it makes for entertaining reading.

The characters are varied and engaging. Ari's mother is a convincing broken-down lush. Ewan Famber is the genius scientist who sees his daughter as a scientific experiment, taking time to come to terms with her and others. Zambia Crevoceur is a fascinating portrait of a prostitute who finds dignity and self-esteem after a most unusual "sex change" operation. Constantine does a fine job of humanising her characters, giving depth and feeling to the homosexual relationship of Cabochan and Jordan. She brings the almost Heinleinian figure of Emanuel Hiram Lazer IV — a self-made, fantastically rich and powerful owner of an underground farm, who's basically a macho sexist boor of a man — into human perspective, without in any way destroying the attractions of the rural underground world he has created.

For me, *Hermetech* is successful because of the richness and variety of its characters and the accuracy with which Constantine explores their motivations. Impressive, too, is the convincing portrait of varied settings — Ari's rural home, the parched and polluted deserts, the underground farm, the teeming city. Its blend of hard science fiction and mysticism and the skill with which Constantine makes a human story out of what lesser writers would turn into a power fantasy, makes for entertaining and engrossing reading.

Far More Than I Expected

A Review of *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit*

Helen McNabb

This book is not at all what I expected. The picture on this paperback edition has a fairytale/Arabian castle, some trees, a path and a pretty young man wearing a wig (it looks like a wig). It is "the first book of the Wraeththu" which, coupled with the cover and the blurb, prepared me for yet another formula fantasy.

It is fantasy, but that it is not at all formula in origin, concept or plot is quickly apparent. The introduction says that this "may become a history book; but remember, it is only my history". Pellaz, the first person narrator, sketches in his peasant life in the first few pages and through clever use of hindsight, indicates the great changes to come.

The author is always in complete control of the novel, although never appearing to act as *deus ex machina* to swamp the action, both of the future to intrigue without ever revealing too much; and in writing which is fresh and sometimes extremely powerful. The Wraeththu are a mutation, the race which will overcome humanity, they are hermaphrodite, but retain the appearance of males — beautiful young men and use the pronoun "he". There is a brief discussion of the use of "he", but this seems contrived and generally one of the failings of the book is that the characters remain male, they are never a male/female mix, that relationships seem homosexual with the added bonus of the possibility of procreation (perhaps an element of a kind of wish fulfilment?) As an attempt to create a genuinely different sexual ethos, it fails, not completely, but in part certainly, which is a shame.

Generally I was impressed and absorbed by the book. I wanted to find out more about Pellaz and what happened to him. I still do, because the book reaches no conclusion, just a convenient stopping place, but one with a multitude of questions unanswered. It is a good book, one where the adage of not judging it by the appalling cover holds particularly true.

Novacon 22 Membership

(as at 1st February 1992)

001 Storm Constantine	026 Julia Smith	051 Peter Mabey
002 Mark Hewkin	027 Mark Smith	052 Adrian Snowdon
003 Helena Bowles	028 1/2r Cruttenden	053 Nic Farey
004 Richard Standage	029 Niall M Gordon	054 Martin Tudor
005 Bernie Evans	030 Tony Rogers	055 Bridget Wilkinson
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Printed by: Designaprint Ltd.

Unit 1, Croxstalls Road, Bloxwich, West Midlands. WS3 2XU.

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