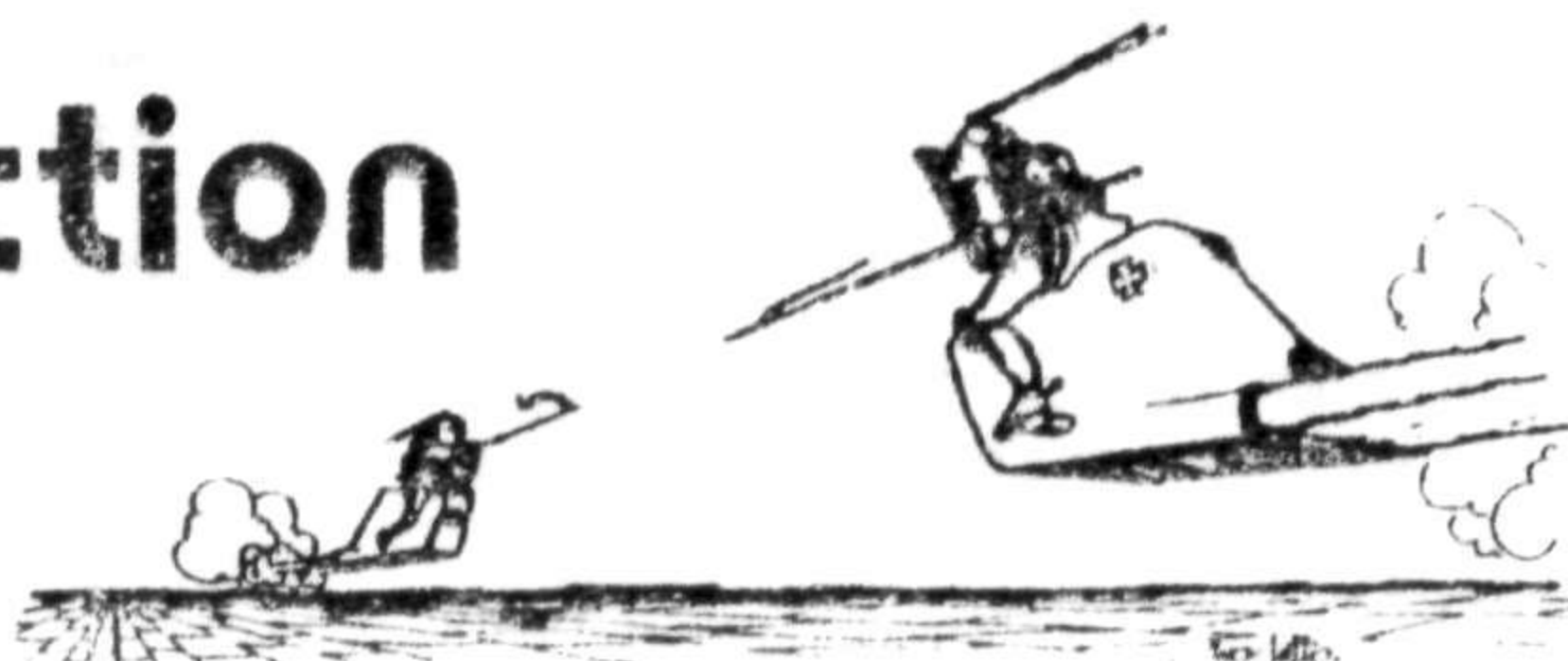


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss
and Harry Harrison)



NEWSLETTER 136

DECEMBER 1982

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the upstairs room of THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at THE OLD ROYAL pub, on the corner of Church Street and Cornwall Street, Birmingham 3. (Church Street is off Colmore Row.) New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The 12-months subscription is £3.50.

DECEMBER MEETING - Friday 17th December 1982 at 7.45 pm

XMAS PARTY at the Ivy Bush, with buffet, bar extension, competitions, etc, as last year. A few tickets may still be available by the time you read this, at £2.50 each, from Andromeda Bookshop (84 Suffolk Street; tel.643-1999) or by post from Margaret Thorpe (address as in the paragraph above; please enclose an s.a.e.).

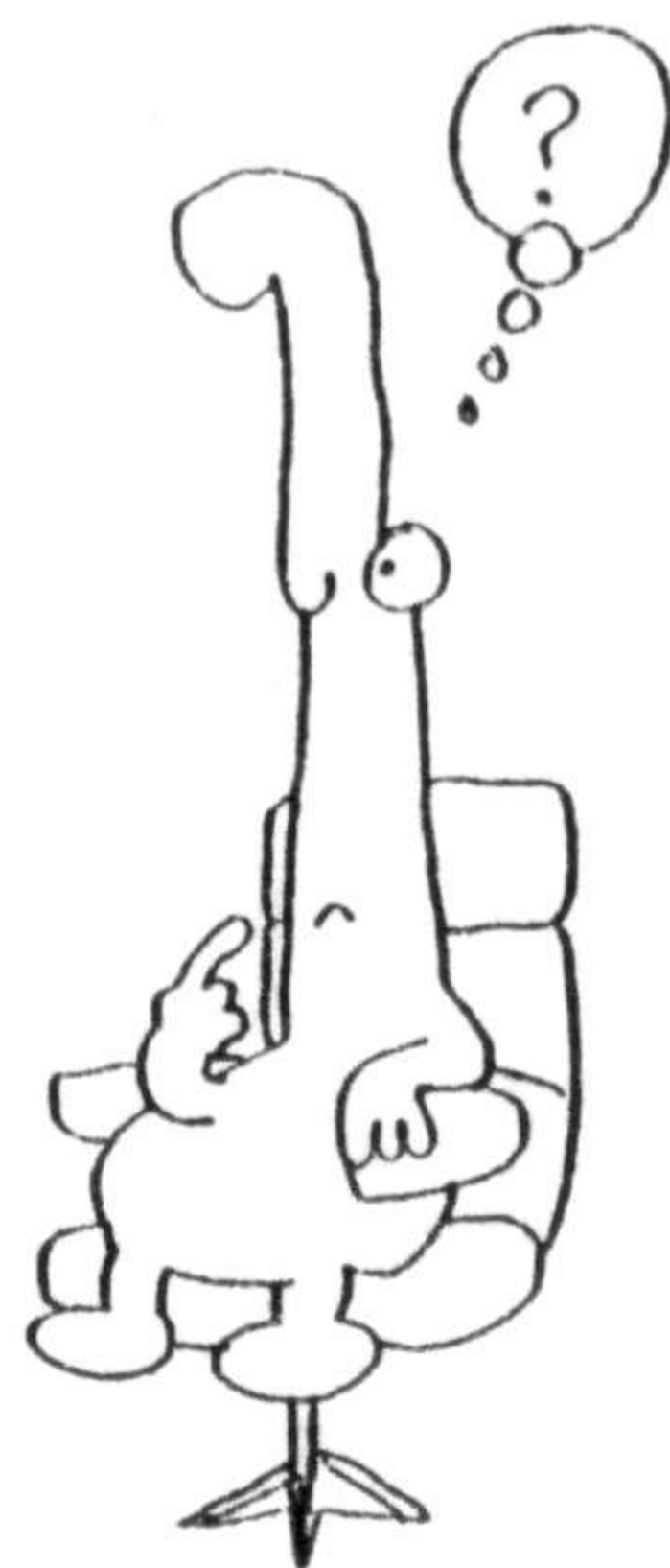
NOVEMBER MEETING

A varied evening, beginning with a BSFA Mastermind heat, convincingly won by Rog Peyton (with 30 points), Pete Weston being runner-up, and ending with slides from Dave Hardy, who told us some of his recent film-making exploits in Germany and talked about his new book, Atlas of the Solar System (which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue).

FORTHCOMING

* January - Annual General Meeting. If you'd like to stand for any of the committee posts, or nominate somebody else, or put a proposal to the AGM, see page 3 of this issue. Afterwards we'll have an auction, for Brum Group funds, for which we'd like you to donate any spare SF books, magazines, fanzines, etc that you have but no longer need. Also, we hope to have a slide show of Brum Group Highlights of 1982: if you have slides of Brum Group meetings, of the Lord Mayor's Procession, or of Novacon 12, please tell Alan Cash (554-1175), who's trying to organise things.

* March - Toby Roxborough, who will give us the SF publisher's point of view when he comes to speak to us.



WORLD FANTASY AWARDS were presented at the World Fantasy Convention in New Haven (USA) in October to: Italo Calvino (Life Achievement), Little, Big by John Crowley (Novel), "The Fire When it Comes" by Parke Godwin (Novella), "The Dark Country" by Dennis Etchison and "Do the Dead Sing?" by Stephen King (Short Stories), Elsewhere edited by Windling & Arnold (Anthology), and Michael Whelan (Artist). One of Italo Calvino's books, Cosmicomics, is reviewed by Dave Langford elsewhere in this newsletter.

NOVACON 13 has announced its guest-of-honour, who will be Lisa Tuttle.

J.HUNTER HOLLY died of lung cancer on October 19th, aged 50. She wrote thirteen SF novels including The Flying Eyes (1962) and The Mind Traders (1966).

PHYLLIS GOTLIEB has won the 1982 Canadian SF & Fantasy Award for her novel Judgement of Dragons.

STEVE GREEN will become engaged to Ann Thomas on December 31st. Congratulations. Solihull SF Group's new fanzine, The Twilight Zine, is available from Steve Green, Gutter Press, 11 Fox Green Crescent, B'ham B27 7SD for alcohol, trade or return postage.

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP's top ten best selling paperbacks for November were:

1. The Stainless Steel Rat for President - Harry Harrison (Sphere),
2. The Sword of the Lictor - Gene Wolfe (Arrow),
3. Dr Who - Logopolis - Christopher Bidmead (Target),
4. Dr Who and the Sunmakers - Terrance Dicks (Target),
5. The Men from P.I.G. and R.O.B.O.T. - Harry Harrison (Puffin),
6. The Fifth Sally - Daniel Keyes (Hamlyn),
7. Radix - A.A. Attanasio (Corgi),
7. Life, the Universe and Everything - Douglas Adams (Pan),
9. Death's Master - Tanith Lee (Hamlyn),
9. Mission - Patrick Tilley (Sphere).

Please note that the two Harry Harrison titles are not officially published until December but that copies were made available for sale at Novacon by special arrangement with the publishers.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given of the Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group on Friday 21st January 1983 at The Ivy Bush. Proceedings will start promptly at 8.00pm. As usual, all the committee members are resigning; some may be persuaded to stand for re-election if you twist their arms or get them drunk enough at the Xmas Party. Nominations are requested for all the following posts,



Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

So this is the sequel which Clarke himself said could never be written ... What did you think? "Yes, what happened next is best left to our imagination", or "So here's this fabulous Star Child, master of the world: what did he do?" The answer seems to be "Not a lot, really." David Bowman, super-energy-being, visits an old girlfriend, then his old mother, then takes a tour of Earth and the Jupiter system, acting as eyes for the ancient intelligence that created him. Finally, he waits---for the third in one of those four-volume trilogies that seem so popular these days, perhaps? To be fair, the rest of the events, and indeed characters, are more interesting, and both the science and visual descriptions of Jupiter and its moons are well up to standard. Clarke's predilection for metamorphoses and transformations finally comes to the fore, with interesting results. If you enjoyed the book and/or film of 2001 (and 2010 is a sequel to the film), this is worth reading. Unless you prefer your imagination.

THREE WORLDS TO CONQUER by Poul Anderson, Sidgwick & Jackson £6.95, Sphere £1.50, 182 pages

Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe.

This 1964 book has two scenarios, with similarities to Mission of Gravity by Hal Clement. The first, hard-science, is based on Ganymede, where our hero is battling with a deposed reactionary space commander who is threatening to destroy the Earth. A coy romance and overt frontierism detract from an otherwise credible plot. The second scenario is a fantasy set on the surface of Jupiter, where an alien's battle against a barbarian horde is aided by advice from the Ganymede connection. Although Anderson handles the trisexual aliens' characterisation well, the pseudo-science justification of its environment would be best left unsaid. The parallel events ensure a surfeit of action and suspense when read as a period-piece.

AFTER MAN: A ZOOLOGY OF THE FUTURE by Dougal Dixon, Granada £4.95, 124pp

Reviewed by John Farr.

Dougal Dixon is an optimist who has produced a super book. He's an optimist because he believes that after mankind becomes extinct the Earth will remain a habitable planet and, 50 million years on, will be populated by hordes of fascinating new animals. These creatures, descended particularly from such as rabbits, rats and bats, are marvellously illustrated in colour. This book may be guesswork but it is, at least, well-informed, scientifically-based guesswork. The animals and their habitats are well described, complemented by maps and diagrams. This is probably the best SF-oriented art book of the year, stunningly original and, for a large-format paperback with so much colour, competitively priced.

ATLAS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM by David A. Hardy, World's Work £12.50, 96 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

On account of the extreme rapidity of scientific progress any book on the Solar System is going to be out of date within five years. An advantage of this situation is that it keeps people like David Hardy in work, noting each new piece of knowledge which is gathered by by a telescope on Earth or by a Voyager probe, and presenting it in words and pictures for the layman. David Hardy's astronomical pictures are very well known, and this book includes some real beauties (my favourite is of Venus---a guess but an exciting one). There are large numbers of photos and diagrams scattered through the text, helping to make the book particularly clear and informative on all aspects of the Solar System, from its formation to its future prospects. Go and buy a copy before it becomes out of date.

THE BITE & OTHER APOCHRYPHAL TALES by Francis Greig, Corgi £1.50, 160pp

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

You know how people tell you stories---nasty, barely believable little stories---vouching for their truth "because it happened to a friend of a friend"? The pseudonymous Francis Greig has collected twenty such tales, retelling them in his own words. In essence these are brief horror stories each with a sting in the tail. The best of them ("The Bite", "Quick Change" and "A Last Fling") are excellent; a few are predictable from the first page, or are poorly told. Probably you know similar stories which haven't been included. It's an interesting and varied collection, well worth looking at.

HELLSTROM'S HIVE by Frank Herbert, Corgi £1.75, 312 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

Shades of Napoleon Solo! Special Agent Depeaux investigates mysterious disappearance at Dr. Hellstrom's farm after rumours that he has developed a Secret Weapon. At last published in Britain after a lapse of ten years, Hellstrom's Hive has the flavour of The Man from U.N.C.L.E. about it. But that is not all there is to it. The Hive is a vast underground complex, almost self-sufficient, and home for 50,000 individuals. Organised on the commune system of social insects its presence has been unsuspected for nearly a century. Now it is threatened. At the end it is difficult to say where my sympathies lie, with the outsider, like you or I, or with the Hive which is ruthless, to some eyes immoral, its practices geared to Hive preservation. The novel has some similarities to The Santaroga Barrier but is more complex. It is a book worth persevering with.

BOUND IN TIME by D.F. Jones, Granada £1.75, 283 pages

Reviewed by Mike Meara.

This (final?) novel maintains the late author's reputation for competent adventure fiction. Our hero, a man with a heart condition, volunteers to test an experimental time-machine and arrives 400 years hence in a post-catastrophe Earth, where he finds himself the reluctant saviour of Mankind. In this role he "adopts" a family of orphan children, visits the space-station Kommunia (where he is cured), and battles the tyrannical Boss of the Moon colony. Eventually he travels back to get expert help from "our" time, and..... but I won't reveal the twist in the tail. This is what used to be known as "a good read": workmanlike, undemanding, ideal train-journey reading.

FIREFLOOD AND OTHER STORIES by Vonda McIntyre, Pan £1.95, 256 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Eleven stories by Vonda McIntyre, all of which have previously appeared elsewhere. The common theme is loneliness; not just physical loneliness, but the aching loneliness of spirit caused by differences of ideals, attitudes or understanding. The stories are beautifully written and cover a wide range of ideas. McIntyre's talent for creating entirely credible aliens is well represented, especially in "Wings", and its sequel, "The Mountains of Sunset, The Mountains of Dawn." Probably her most famous story "Of Mist and Grass and Sand" is also included. The mixture is leavened with humour, as in "Recourse Inc.", a penetrating study of red-tape confusion in which the luckless Hedly Satsop will enlist the sympathy of anyone who has been caught up in the merry-go-round of complaint letters. An enjoyable, well balanced collection.

THE PASSION OF NEW EVE by Angela Carter, Virago £2.95, 191 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

Pre-Bomb New York is electrifying. A boy(?) called Evelyn (!) seeks dark excitement with a naughty negress in the murky city. (You may need this guide for the first part of the book---it's like a black and white film shot entirely in the dark.) After a sordid interlude, Evelyn is disgusted and tries to run away from himself. But he goes too. Wicked feminists capture him and make him into a woman. The New Eve, the first woman(?) to fertilise his (!) own baby, is to spearhead the anti-male crusade. But will he enjoy it? Will you? The dirty bits are well done and the background is riveting but parts of it are heavy. But it might give some males pause for a new insight.

VENUS ON THE HALF-SHELL by Kilgore Trout, Granada £1.50, 207 pages

Reviewed by Peter Day.

The Space Wanderer, an immortal Earthman named Simon Wagstaff, roams the cosmos with a dog, an owl, and a sexy female robot, seeking answers to unanswerable questions until finally.... This book should have annoyed the hell out of me, and it did. But I enjoyed it. A skilful amalgam of bad writing and dubious SF, this 207-page shaggy-dog story goes outrageously over the top, showing two fingers to the reader, the author, science fiction, the universe and many other things besides. Even worse, I am informed that Kilgore Trout is a pseudonym of Philip Jose Farmer. Now what can one do with that piece of information, I wonder?

COSMICOMICS by Italo Calvino, Abacus (Sphere) £1.95, 153 pages

Reviewed by Dave Langford.

A 1982 World Fantasy Award winner for life achievement, highly praised by "mainstream" critics, often compared with Borges, Calvino is undeservingly little-known among SF fans. The fables in Cosmicomics should win converts. They cover all of creation and evolution, mingling cosmology, philosophy, tenderness and sheer nonsense: from overcrowding in the single point before space began ("If there's a bed, it takes up the whole point... consequently, it was inevitable that she should be in bed also with each of us.") to the difficulty of explaining when, 200,000,000 years after your greatest secret embarrassment, you notice a sign hanging from a galaxy 100,000,000 light years distant, saying I SAW YOU. But cosmological growth implies loss, of meaning, reality, variety, simplicity, or (most often) loved women. Admittedly a sister lost in Earth's creation may turn up in 1912 Canberra (married, too)... but Calvino's high nonsense is ultimately touching, like Edward Lear's epic, "The Dong With a Luminous Nose". Try it.

DIFFERENT SEASONS by Stephen King, Macdonald £8.95, 560 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

What can an author do with stories which are too long for a normal collection or anthology but too short to be called novels? What Stephen King has done is to put four such long stories together, producing a book of the sort of massive proportions one expects from him. There is horror here, but far less overt than usual: the horror of being locked up in a US prison for so long (perhaps for a crime committed by somebody else) that one becomes institutionalised; the nastiness of a 13-year-old boy who, having unmasked a Nazi war criminal, insists on being told first hand details of concentration camp atrocities; the tingle of fear in four boys who find a dead body; the gruesomeness of a very abnormal birth. King is impressive rather than terrifying, demonstrating an ability to entertain and excite without needing to resort to blood or violent action. These are four distinctly male-orientated stories, of which "Apt Pupil" is the best.

TIME OF THE FOURTH HORSEMAN by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Granada £1.50, 236 pp

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

Death once more stalks the streets. When compulsory immunisation has virtually wiped out disease, the population pressure is high. So disease is brought back, and very quickly the city is in the throes of several major epidemics. It is incredible that statisticians would make the mistake that those in this novel did, causing the situation to get out of hand. This aside, the tension builds up well and the characters are believable. An enjoyable read.

THE DESTROYERS OF LAN-KERN by Peter Tremayne, Methuen £6.95, 184 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

The Fires of Lan-Kern was an excellent start to a future fantasy trilogy. This, the second in the series, is run-of-the-mill. It is straightforward adventure with many of the routine plot elements we have come to expect. Hero pursues girl who has been captured by underground city dwellers in an attempt to rescue her. Underground people, whose society is a fascist dictatorship, intend to conquer the surface. Hero and friends seek to foil the attempt. There are a number of interesting ideas in this volume, but Tremayne has failed to exploit them. I hope that in the third volume he will return to the quality of the first. Disappointing.

THE BRIGADE by John Shirley, Sphere £1.75, 254 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

This novel has everything---murder, mindless violence, sex, insanity, incest, and a pathological killer who practises cannibalism on his victims. If that catalogue of atrocities doesn't put off the potential reader, the storyline concerns a small town in America (where else?) which has replaced its police force with a group of volunteer vigilantes---The Brigade. They not only fail to catch a Saturday Night Killer, they resort to desperate methods, including murder, to conceal their incompetence and bigotry. Despite the melodramatic blurb, the book fails to engender any reaction but distaste and boredom. NOT a horror novel, just "horrible".

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT FOR PRESIDENT by Harry Harrison, Sphere £1.25, 184 pages

Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

I always feel as if I ought to like a Harry Harrison book, and I usually do. This one is no exception. The action takes place on a holiday planet, Paraiso-Aqui, which is a hell-hole for the natives. The governmental set-up resembles that in any extremist South American republic, and Jim DiGriz and Angelina cannot resist overthrowing the regime and setting up a proper democratic system. Jim, older now and relying heavily on his twin sons, behaves as usual like a cross between James Bond and Simon Templar. The lovely, and jealous, Angelina ensures that his more licentious activities are kept in check. The object of this novel is purely and simply to entertain, and this it does, superbly. The language is simple, the action fast and furious, and it is extremely funny. Highly recommended.

DYING OF PARADISE by Steven Couper, Sphere £1.75, 183 pages Reviewed by Anne Gay.

What do you do with a colony you don't need any more? A society sufficiently advanced to set up an off-world operation can't just abandon the personnel. Based on the fact that all human societies are hierarchical, Central Command promotes the ex-employees to citizens; ancillary workers become the underbelly with an elite to police the city. But a cheapskate solution can't work for ever... Dying of Paradise is a good idea with strength and originality in its handling. Couper unravels his society through two main characters but to my mind he chose the wrong two. Neither has been made particularly likeable but their battles against each other and their conditioning are worth following, and the locations are great. Be a tourist on this ex-paradise---the man shows promise.

POSSESSED by Alan Radnor, Macdonald £6.50, 313 pages

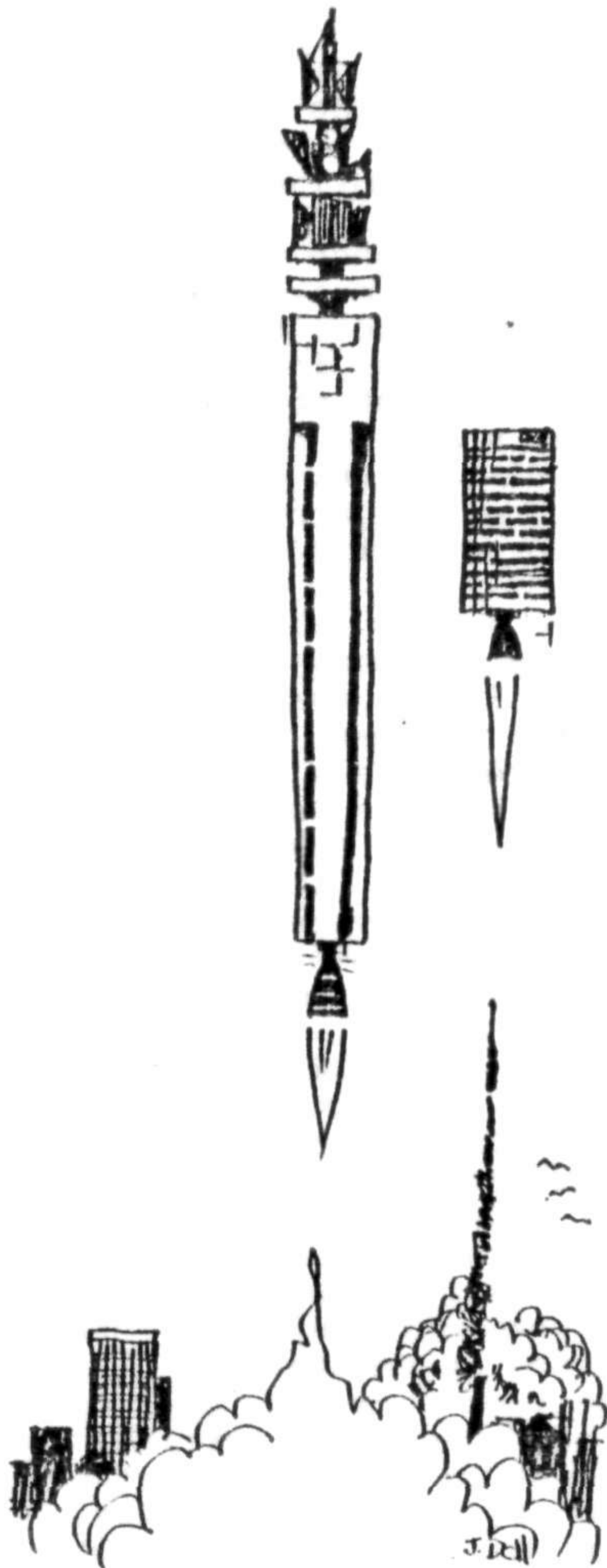
Reviewed by Bob Vernon.

Are you ignorant about computers? Devoid of knowledge concerning the occult? Have you studiously avoided learning the rudiments of narrative structure, or of the stylistic hooks that suspend disbelief and raise the hairs on the back of the neck? If so, join Alan Radnor. Unfortunately he has written(?) this nonsense about "one of the world's most advanced computers" which "is used for medical technology, or the application of science to medicine" (sic) and its brush with the primitive forces of evil. Programmers go crazy; vague shadows; hums; demonic possessions.... but all is saved by psychic Jack, lent a DIY exorcism kit and a set of instructions by an elderly priest "who can't travel too well". The evil high priestess is killed by the sacred trident that "short circuited her own forces of energy". Mine, too.

STAR TREK II THE WRATH OF KHAN PHOTOSTORY by Richard J. Anobile, Methuen £1.25, pages unnumbered

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

However much you enjoyed the film you'll be disappointed by this black-and-white photo version. The tiny pictures destroy utterly the grandeur of the special effects, leaving only the wise-cracking script (more trite when written down) and the glaring scientific inaccuracies. Tedious.



It was the best of times; it was the worst of times (as somebody or other once wrote). A curate's egg convention. The total absence of progress reports (at least, none came my way) did not inspire confidence. Over the weekend, though, there was only a small degree of organisational chaos---not bad for a con as large as Novacon being run by a bunch of self-confessed amateurs. Worst of all was the hotel. Memories of the Central Hotel will linger on after all else is forgotten in the mists of cons past. It is much overpriced, more seedy and decrepit than last year with, in the main, an appallingly low standard of rooms, and with a restaurant totally incapable of providing a proper breakfast for guests. (The story of one fan who came down for breakfast at 7.30 am and, having waited to be served until 9.30 am, was then told he was too late for breakfast, may be apochryphal but is not all that far from the truth.) The hotel also ran out of food at Sunday lunchtime.

A feature of Cymrucon---both years---has been a very full (almost continuous) film and video programme. This has attracted many attendees, enabling the majority of the 450 or so to remain hidden away from view for most of the weekend. (I received reports of a basement video room so hot and crowded as to make the Black Hole of Calcutta seem like Butlin's, but I could never summon up enough courage to go and see for myself.) The most noticeable result of all this was that the bar and foyer were relatively empty for much of the time. The only film I saw (it was shown in the relative comfort of the main hall) was Santa Claus versus the Martians, which was breathtakingly awful in every respect: a monumentally bad film quite justifiably branded as The Worst, and well worth watching because of that fact.

What I saw of the main programme was very good---a talk by each of the four guests. Lionel Fanthorpe tried to convert us to Christianity (or it might have been Badger-worship; I forget), Ian Watson made amazing revelations about his past relationships with cacti, Dave Langford described the agonies of writing and selling one's first novel, and Brian Stableford answered most of the questions in the known universe by quoting from Wittgenstein. In between these uplifting addresses I was busy chairing four writers' workshop sessions (amounting to more than six hours) at which eight or so stories were read aloud and discussed at length.

Saturday evening brought, not for the first time at a con, a fancy dress competition and disco. There were lots of fancy dress entries, ranging from good to mediocre, and the top prize went to one of the latter. Two of the judges, Ian and Judy Watson, refused to vote in the "least-dressed female" category on the grounds of its nasty, sexist connotations. The award was made anyway, though I would have withheld it on the grounds that none of the contestants displayed as much as a nipple.

For a large con which offered so much else, Cymrucon II had poor book and art rooms and no auctions. None of the known SF book dealers bothered to attend, following their dungeon location and consequent financial losses last year. Similarly, the art show attracted little talent and abysmally low prices were paid for the few items which sold.

It was a friendly con, attended by groups of fans from all over the country, but predominantly by the locals. Next year, if a bigger and better hotel can be found, Cymrucon could be a major event on the fannish calendar.

Editorial Notes

Thanks to Locus for news items and to all contributors, including artists, who were Ivor Latto (p.1), Dave Wood (p.2) and John Dell (pp.1, 3 & 7). If this issue reaches you on time it will be partly due to the good work of you treasurer, Margaret Thorpe, who has promised to get it copied and enveloped. Your newsletter editor and spouse are not slacking but are, indeed, moving house on Friday 10th December to 321 Sarehole Road, Hall Green, Birmingham 28. This December issue has been edited and produced by Pauline E.Morgan, who wishes you all a very merry Christmas.

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

CONSTITUTION (as approved by the Annual General Meeting of 16th Jan 1981 and amended at the Extraordinary General Meeting of 21st Aug 1981)

1. THE NAME of the Society is to be THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP (hereinafter called "the Group").
2. THE AIMS of the Group will be to further the interests, knowledge and social activities of readers of Science Fiction and the promotion, encouragement and participation in writing, publishing and producing books, magazines, films and any other projects connected with Science Fiction, and in particular to the management of a yearly convention known as "Novacon".
3. THE GROUP will consist of the elected Committee, the Convention Chairman, the Legal Officer, and the ordinary members. The Committee will consist of the Chairman, the Treasurer, the Secretary, the Publicity and Recruitment Officer and the Newsletter Editor, who shall be elected at the AGM. The Convention Officer will automatically be on the Committee for the year in which his convention falls. The Legal Officer shall be a supernumerary member of the Committee who shall appoint him.
4. THE OFFICE of Treasurer and Secretary will be held by one member of the Group at the Committee's discretion.
5. THE COMMITTEE will be the governing body of the Group and will have full power:
 - (a) To manage and control the finances of the Group.
 - (b) To suspend any officer or member of the Group, upon such cause being shown as they may deem sufficient.
 - (c) To fill such vacancies as may occur.
6. THE WHOLE COMMITTEE stands down at the AGM and can stand for re-election.
7. RESIGNATIONS from the Committee must be made in writing and submitted for acceptance at the next Committee Meeting by the Treasurer.
8. A QUORUM of the Committee shall be four (4) members.
9. THE FINANCIAL YEAR of the Group will start on 1st January. Membership will run for 12 months from the date of payment of subscription. The amount of the subscriptions will be reviewed at each AGM.
10. CHEQUES drawn on the Group account must be signed by the Treasurer and by one of two other appointed officers of the Committee.
11. THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Group will be held in January each year.
12. There will be at least one Committee Meeting per quarter.
13. There will be one ordinary meeting of the Group per month at the Committee's discretion.
14. The Committee can convene an Extraordinary General Meeting at any time with a minimum of 14 days' notice.
15. Any member can call an Extraordinary General Meeting at any time when so petitioned by at least one-third of the total paid-up membership, and at such an EGM there must be a quorum of at least 15 members in addition to the Committee.
16. Amendments to the Constitution shall only be made at the AGM or at an EGM, and a member calling such EGM shall give 21 days' notice in writing to the Committee of the suggested amendment.
17. The Convention Officer will be the Chairman of the Novacon Committee.
18. The Convention Officer shall appoint a Novacon Committee of not less than three (3) ordinary members of the Group.
19. A separate bank account will be kept for the Novacon convention, and cheques drawn thereon must be signed by an appointed member of the Novacon Committee and countersigned by the Treasurer of the Group.
20. Acceptance of these rules is a condition of membership of the Group.

With effect from 21st Aug 1981

Typed and issued Jan 1982