

# THE BIRMINGHAM <sup>1</sup>

## SCIENCE FICTION

## GROUP

Number 145

September 1983

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 Road, Birmingham 3. (Church Street is off Colmore Row.) New members are always welcome. Membership rates are £3.50 per person, or £5.50 for two people at the same address. The treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2NJ.

### SEPTEMBER MEETING.

Friday September 16 at 7:45 pm.

Our guest speaker this month is BOB SHAW. As a 'taster', he has this to say about Orbitsville Departure. "The book came about because Orbitsville is such a big idea that it was impossible to do it any kind of justice in one volume, especially as I write shortish books. I would have done a sequel years ago, except that I had made up my mind that it was not going to be anticlimatic, the way so many sequels are. That posed me a big problem. I had stated at the end of the first book that Orbitsville had been built as a kind of sink, to divert Man from his intention of spreading out across the galaxy. That appeared to be a reason for building the sphere, but it really begged the question -- why should any super-beings want to stop us colonising the galaxy? Not because we are too good at making war. That's too old and corny. Not because we would become rivals for the super-beings. That is corny too, and highly unlikely. There had to be a bigger reason, and after several years of thought it finally came to me. But if you think I'm going to reveal it here, you're crazy. Incidentally, while I was writing the sequel I realised that I had the makings of a good third book there as well, so it looks as though I could end up with one of those highly fashionable trilogies."

ADMISSION -- Members: 60p. Non-members: £1.

# LETTERS

PAUL VINCENT.

25 Dovedale Avenue, Pelsall, Walsall.

"Good grief, the newsletter actually takes time to read, these days. And this months contained only one book review! Actually I think that's about the right balance, when there are more important, more social things to be spoken of. This in itself is the heart of the group's renaissance -- we actually seem to be preoccupied with strange things like, wee, talking to each other, having fun and other equally subversive activities. Things couldn't be more different from the days of launching bitter little diatribes against the group from the cosy confines of Abdump. Christ, it actually feels good to be part of the group these days! What a pleasant turnabout.

Graham Poole is quite right, the informals are finally starting to take on a life of their own. Actually it's almost like walking into a verbal extension of the apa, since each and every attendee at the last two sessions has contributed to at least one mailing. Mind you, this does seem to suggest that those involved in visiting the inform-als are also those who are getting involved in other aspects of the group. There's always space for new faces (if you get there early enough to swipe a table!) and an informal is the perfect chance to get to know other members of the group -- 3½ hours of jawing time. Shame on Graham, though, for suggesting that the Old Royal lacks

Real Ale! It sells four real ales on electric pump dispense; beer doesn't have to be handpumped to be real, y'know, as long as the ale is cask-conditioned and not served by carbon dioxide pressure.

Now for the good news. Following preliminary investigation by Martin Tudor, W.A.M. and myself, we now announce the dawn of the Informal Informal! If, in the midst of all your fanac, withdrawal symptoms start appearing, get yourselves over to the General Wolfe pub on the last Thursday of each month, from 8 PM onwards for the third, unofficial (so far!) Brum meeting. The format is as per the Old Royal informals, but even more relaxed and informal if that's possible. Special note to Graham -- the beer there is handpumped!

Many thanks to good ol' Bob Shaw for correcting my miscon-ceptions about Birmingham Alabama. They sound like a great bunch of fans, so let's get on with the project! It's all too easy to remember the negative rumours about places you've never seen, so I'm glad Bob redressed the balance.

Finally, wasn't the Barbecue a great evening? Thankfully the surfaced element soon removed themselves to a watering-hole while the rest of us got on with the frolics. Phill Probert very tactfully omitted to mention that we didn't finish the booze! Shockhorror! Can this be true? Alas yes. So much for the guy who seeringly criticised an alleged shortage of bheer. Oh yes, the visiting Swedes were suitable impressed by the evening and found us a very friendly bunch. Nice to have a favourable international reputation, ain't it? Walk tall."

## News~

Brian Aldiss has received the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for the best SF novel of 1982 -- Helliconia Spring.

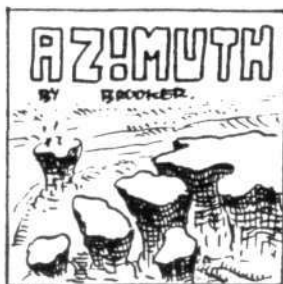
Robert Heinlein has just finished his latest novel, Job: A Comedy Of Justice. It is an alternate-world fantasy satire on religion, part of which is set in heaven.

Arthur C Clarke's project, the Arthur C Clarke Centre For Modern Technologies will open in Sri Lanka in October. Its aim is to recruit teachers to share western technology with the developing countries.

Janet Jeppson, and her husband Isaac Asimov (who he?) are doing a series of juvenile robot books. Their first, Norby, The Mixed-Up Robot will be released in the autumn.

A Stainless Steel Rat Is Born, the prequel to the series about the wily intergalactic crook, will be released soon in Bantam books.

The latest Seacon '84 guest-of-honour is Roger Zelazny.



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# APA-B NEWS

Administrator: Cathryn Easthope.

113 Abbey Road,  
Erdington,  
Birmingham. B23 7QQ.

Well, I'm glad to say that last month's collation session went a lot smoothly than the previous meeting's disaster, and for about the first time I knew more or less who'd had a mailing and who hadn't. Even so, there's still room for improvement (as some confusion was caused by people taking mailings without signing for them), so next time please put your contributions on the table which will be placed by the door (next to where Margaret sits) as you come in. A dynamic team of hand-picked collators (or anybody I can drag in) will then rapidly collate the mailings during breaks in the program, and you'll be able to pick up your copy of the mailing at any time after we've finished. With a bit of luck they'll even be in (gasp) envelopes, with your name on the front, courtesy of Chris Suslowicz Cybernetic Systems PLC.

Very flexible rules seem to be coming together over things like minimum activity and page count and I think you'll agree that they're not particularly rigorous. This is because I'm boss of this gang, see, and I think it'd be nice if being an apa contributor was made as easy as possible. If someone can't produce two sides once every three months, then they can't be very interested anyhow.

So; Apa-B Flexirules (subject to administrator's discretion).

- 1) Minimum activity requirement is two sides of A4 or equivalent, once in three mailings.
- 2) The apa is open to any BSFG member.
- \*3) All members buy me a drink now and then!

\*(Well, ok. Maybe 3 isn't an official rule, but I find that a drink helps my memory a lot -- like remembering to put your sticky label onto the envelope, for example. Gosh. Abuse of power. Whatever next?)

Finally, I'd like to repeat that any BSFG member is welcome to submit a contribution to apa-B, any format and content, as long as it's readable -- you're really missing something if you don't give it a try. If you're looking for more ways to have fun whilst we're waiting for the Bomb, you could do a lot worse than produce a contribution for the wonderful apa-B. Next month I'll be reviewing the various methods of reproduction available, just to help you out.

Okay, now go and wash your mouth out!

Love,

Cath.

# Reviews

5

GOLDEN WITCHBREED by Mary Gentle, Gollancz £8.95, 476 pp.

If this book hasn't won an award yet, then it ought to; not only does it tell a good story, the execution of the whole book is excellent. Lynne de Lisle Christie is an envoy from Earth to the planet Orthe. She is the only one of the human group of observers to be allowed to travel to other cities, thereby discovering that there are two opposing factions: one pro-Earth contact; the other is anti, seeing the humans as representing a return to a high-tech society. Christie finds that there was once a similar society on Orthe, dominated by the hated "Golden Witchbreed", who were wiped out in a holocaust. The Ortheans use her to start a civil war, which will decide the fate of everyone on the planet. It's an intriguing political novel, background and characterisation are faultless, and there's a couple of unexpected twists in the story, which never threatens to become boring. The book succeeds on two levels -- the creation of a complex and convincing alien society, where even the mental processes of the natives are consistent with their 'alienness' -- they are not just peculiar-looking humans; and it also manages to convey a few important ideas about equality (a much-maligned word nowadays). Mary Gentle is one of the few writers whose characters are all People, not cardboard figures acting out either obligatory male or female roles.

Reviewed by MARGARET THORPE.

TEA WITH THE BLACK DRAGON by R. A. MacAvoy, Bantam £1.50, 166 pp.

Martha MacNamara, a middle-aged fiddleplayer who has no sense of decorum and who plays gigs with an Irish band, has been called from her home in New York to San Francisco at the urgent request of her only child, Elizabeth, a very decorous high-level computer programmer. While waiting for Elizabeth to contact her, Martha is introduced by the hotel barman to Mayland Long, a strange Oriental gentleman, who, she is told, claims to be a Imperial Dragon when he's had too much to drink. Mayland helps in the search for the missing daughter, then Martha herself disappears, leaving Mayland to rush to the rescue. So much is hardly more than the standard detective novel offers, but the limited conversation between Martha and Mayland made me long for more. They talk of such things as Thomas the Rhymer and the Queen of Elfland's son which she bore him, Chaucer, Bodhidharma, china tea, zen, dragons and computers. The computer jargon, save for one tiny error (CPM for CP/M), is accurate, the references to literature is accurate, so I assume that the philosophy is equally accurate. And, the characters are great fun -- they are odd and quirky, but manage to be likeable and believable too, so that the plot seems real. It's not sf but is fantasy, but what makes it so is not revealed until the end of the novel, so I'm not going to tell you about it here, although you have all the clues above to guess it for yourself. This is a

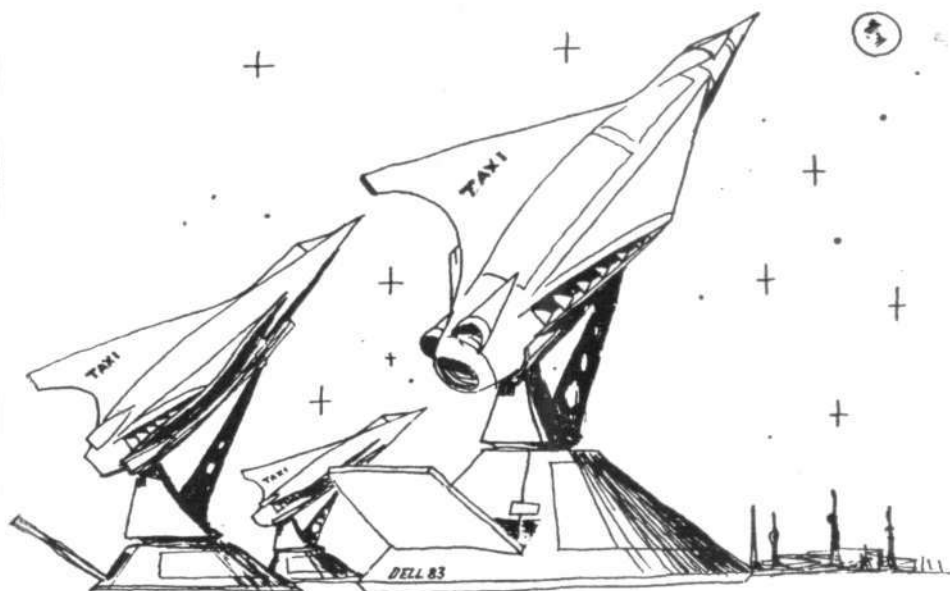
first novel, and I would be very pleased to read more by this same author. Try it -- it's unusual but delightful.

Reviewed by CHRIS DONALDSON.

ORBITSVILLE DEPARTURE by Bob Shaw, Gollancz £7.95, 166 pp.

Orbitsville was first published in 1975, so this sequel really is 'long-awaited' as the cover claims. To be honest, a large part of this book seems to have very little to do with the vast hollow Dyson Sphere of the previous title, being a fairly straightforward murder/revenge-type thriller (which nonetheless relies on a science fictional device initially), taking place on an almost deserted Earth. This, as one would expect from Bob Shaw, is handled expertly enough to hold the reader's interest: but one does start to wonder (rather as in the case of 2010: Odyssey Two) what happened to the great potential of that mysterious artifact. Then, in the last twenty-five or so pages, events concerning Orbitsville itself build up to a cosmic climax of which Clarke himself might be proud. Overall, very satisfying.

Reviewed by DAVE HARDY.



# Fanzine Reviews.7

I have been sent quite a few fanzines lately, but then we are on the final stretch of the path to Novacon. Cons are going on all over the place this summer, and the masses of fan-eds are busily jamming the post-office with their latest efforts. I though I would review only the very latest fanzines I have been sent over the past few weeks.

Chuck Conner must be the most dynamic fan-ed in existence. Not content with scouring these iles for some excellent amateur fiction and poetry for one 'zine, he puts together a second 'zine of reviews and assorted letters. Sadly, this is all coming to an end. Chuck will be busy with some navel-type course for a year. So he has combined both fanzines to produce one bumper edition, entitled Sex, Smut and Violence: or Idomo 15. If you are new to the world of fanzines, this issue will be invaluable as a source of hundreds of 'zines to send away for. Old Chuckles will certainly be missed.

Barddoni 6 comes from a delightful Welshman, Pete Presford, and is full of some very moving poetry. The whole fanzine is beautifully laid-out and is well worth reading, if only for the superb Steve Sneyd's poems. Spook is the very first fanzine from a young lady who will no doubt be a Nova winner one day. Elspeth Brown is nine years old and produced Spook to go out at Racon -- her ninth convention. Spook contains a couple of short stories and a trio of poems -- the best being An Encounter With A Big Squashy Tomato. For all that it was written by such a very young person, Spook is very impressive and worth reading. The Dundee SF Society seems to be a relatively small group, certainly no bigger than the Solihull group. Yet they manage to produce a very readable fanzine, Hindmost. Issue four is the last to be edited by Jon Wallace, (who also produces his own fanzine, Blood In The Bathroom). It contains a superb article on verbosity by Moira Shearman (who will be the 'zine's next editor) and some excellent amateur fiction and poetry, plus an account of the group's search for a new venue. John D Owen produces by far the best fanzine, in terms of lay-out and contents (particularly the artwork), called Crystal Ship. But since it seems that the next issue will be a very long time in coming, he has produced Rastus -- his personalzine. John writes of the memory, the future of books, sport and the misguided attitude American fans have towards British fandom, in a relaxed style with no fussyness.

All these fanzines are available for a postage stamp, a letter of comment, or trade with your fanzine, from:  
IDOMO: Chuck Conner, C/O Sildan House, Chediston Road, Wisset,  
Near Halesworth, Suffolk. IP19 0NF.  
BARDDONI: Pete Presford, 'Ty Gwyn', Maxwell Close, Buckley,  
Clwyd, North Wales.  
SPOOK: Elspeth Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Scotland.  
HINDMOST: Jon Wallace, 21 Charleston Street, Dundee. DD2 4RG.  
RASTUS: John D Owen, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnall, Bucks,  
MK16 9AZ.



BY MATT BROOKER

# DOUBLE CROSS

FANTASY

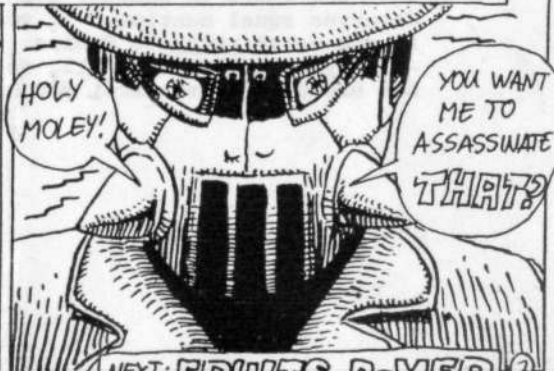
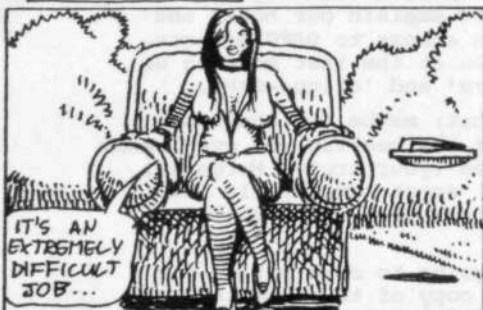
APEX  
INDUSTRIES

MY NAME IS  
WYNN ST. PRICE,  
AND I AM A  
PROFESSIONAL  
ASSASSIN...

THIS MORNING I AM  
PAYING A VISIT TO  
APEX INDUSTRIES,  
TO SEE SOMEONE  
WHO IS INTERESTED  
IN ENGAGING MY  
SERVICES...

MR ST. PRICE,  
OVER HERE!!





\*A STRIKE: AN ASSASSIN'S VICTIM

NEXT: **FRUITS DeMER** ②

# chairman's report

## COMMUNICATIONS FALIURE

This year we (the Committee) have been trying, really trying, to get things moving, to explain our hopes and ambitions, and to put our ideas across to BSFG members. Imagine the surprise, then, when at the last meeting we were accused of being 'secretive' and 'clique-ish'.

Well, maybe we deserved that; maybe the shock has done us good. Certainly, after the meeting was over, some of the above-mentioned Committee (your truly, Margaret, Chris, Steve, Eunice and Phill) spent some little time analysing our performance -- after all, there's always room for improvement.

And some good things are going to come out of the argument; we're going to put a copy of the Committee Minutes onto the Bulletin Board for each meeting, and I will invite a committee member to summarise any developments, publicly, and look for reactions.

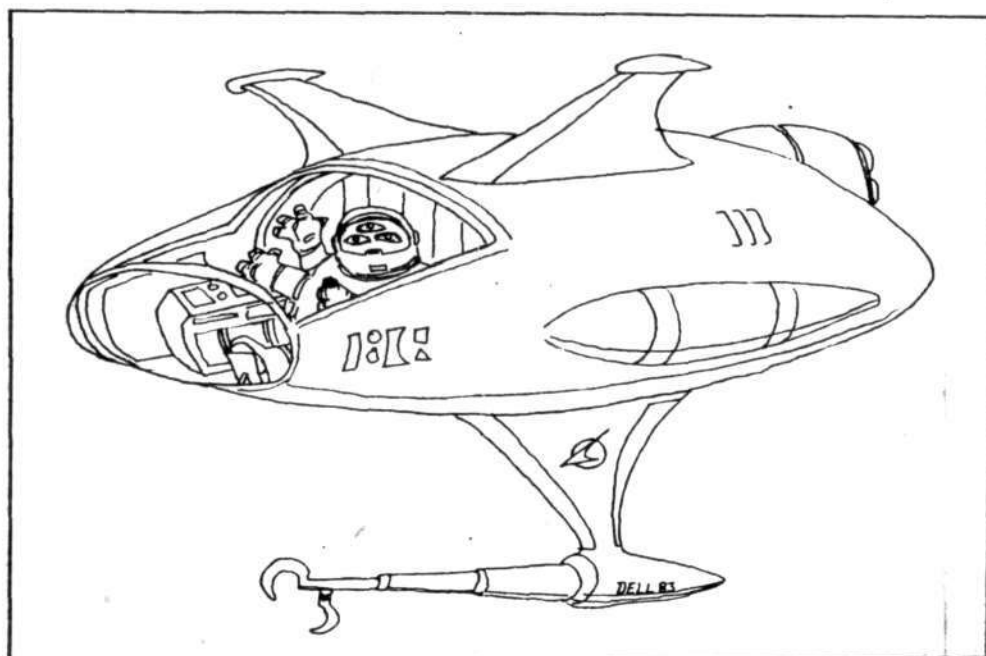
But you know, these aren't big issues. However you look at it, we've been pretty good this year, with the EGM, half-a-dozen special circulars about various matters and of course, a greatly-expanded Newsletter in which Eunice has been trying to represent all shades of opinion.

Still, it's worth repeating in case the message hasn't yet gone over; there are no secrets in this Group; no conspiracies, no undercover scheming and conniving. If you want to know something, just ask; if you want to suggest something, then be our guests. And if you, too, want to enjoy the 'power' of being on Committee, well, we're sure something can arranged for 1984!

But there is another side of the coin, one which deserves equal mention. If you don't make any comments, if you never write to Eunice, then you're effectively silencing yourself. After all, as I said last month, "We're not bloody mind-readers, you know".

PETE WESTON.

1. Dr Who: Earthshock by Terrence Dicks. (Target)
2. Juxtaposition by P. Anthony. (Granada)
3. Helliconia Spring by Brian Aldiss. (Granada)
4. Return of the Jedi by James Kahn. (Futura)
5. Tea With The Black Dragon by R. A. MacAvoy. (Corgi)
6. Downbelow Station by C. J. Cherryh. (Methuen)
6. Wargames by David Bischoff. (Penguin)
8. Warhound and Worlds Pain by Micheal Moorcock. (NEL)
9. Return of the Jedi Storybook by Joan Vinge. (Futura)
10. The Dragon and The George by G. R. Dickson. (Delrey-Futura)



# NOVACON 13

SHEDDER PR.

4 NOV - 6 NOV 1983  
ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL  
BIRMINGHAM

GUEST OF HONOUR  
LISA TUTTLE



**OUT NOW**

**SPECIAL**

GUESTS, PANNEL DEBATES, ART SHOW, NOT THE FAN ROOM, NOVACON AM, BOOK ROOM AND A WHOLE LOT MORE... GUEST OF HONOUR LISA TUTTLE AUTHOR OF FAMILIAR SPIRIT. NOVACON 13 TAKES PLACE ON THE 4th - 6th OF NOVEMBER 1983 AT THE ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL, BIRMINGHAM. NOVACON 13 IS THE NUMBER ONE EVENT OF THE YEAR FOR SF FANS IN BIRMINGHAM, BE THERE.....

REGISTRATION IS £7.00 ATTENDING AND £3.50 SUPPORTING.

SEND TO :- CHRIS DONALDSON, 46 COLWYN ROAD, BEESTON, LEEDS 11, YORKSHIRE.

# BeNeLux Con 13

## ON PAROLE -- AN X-CON REPORT

I have been told about conventions that are held in a couple of rooms so that you can see everyone all the time. This was not one of those. According to the programme there are nine separate rooms and so few people that it could have been possible to leave some of them empty for most of the time without anyone noticing. It is quite possible that there were people there that I never saw at all. The programme itself included all the usual items (films, videos, speeches, art room, fan room, book room) and a couple of others -- a writer's workshop, (in Dutch) and displays of computers and synthesizers (not that I bothered with these). There was, of course, a small British contingent who could generally be found in front of the bar. Someone may have expected this as the location of the bar moved as many as three times a day. I managed to see about one item of each section of the programme in English. The films were all in English, but included mostly films everyone had seen before (2001, Close Encounters, Logan's Run, Dr Strangelove) and only two that I hadn't -- Charly (which the programme spelt as "Charlie") and Soylent Green (which I still haven't seen). As for the video programme -- I can't remember what most of them were, (although I did type out a list at one point) except one in German -- called Captain Future -- the Star Trek movie, and as I was told later, a pirate tape of a certain film which may, or may not, have something to do with a large reward being offered for it's capture.

ALRIGHT, SO NOW WE GOT THE CRAP OVER WITH.....

How does anyone amnage to publish a translation of a book two months before the original? Helliconia Zomer was launched on saturday. The English version will appear in November.

Personally I think this is a great idea. Someone put up a board which anyone could write on. Like where your next room party is coming from.

The Dutch do not speak English as often as I had been led to believe. Unless you can get one or two of them alone, or you're in a meeting with a guest that can't speak the language. For this reason I may have become something of a pain to the aforesaid guest. (Sorry.)

Someone mentioned phoning through to America to find out the results of something (Worldcon '85 bid? Hugo awards?) but as most people had gone home, no-one bothered. I still don't know the results.

At the fan-room party, saturday night, Judith Hanna demonstrated a trick to be done with a broomstick (something like an 'astral pole' it was called). Someone unexpectedly managed to do this trick (but their identity will remain secret for this report so no-one will ask me about it or I'll print it elsewhere).

All in all, this was a different kind of thing to anything I've seen before in that all the films were old, the language was foreign, and there were too few people for the space provided. There is only one comment left. I was told on Friday night at a party that the Dutch are the best at room parties (by a non-Dutchman) but as I have had nothing to compare with yet, I cannot tell whether or not this is true.

WILLIAM A. McCABE.

A PERSONAL STATEMENT BY DAVID HARDY.

Re. Steve Green's regular letter spot in the August newsletter, I suppose my (edited) letter in the July issue could be considered absurd if I hoped that Mr. G could accept my mediatory comments without digging around for more crap to throw. May I suggest that Steve ducks before it hits the SF fan -- himself.....

As a professional journalist, Steve should take care to avoid making statements which are at best ambiguous, and which could be taken as malicious innuendo or insinuation (or perhaps that is the art of journalism?). His remark on the 'less than praiseworthy actions of certain Novacon 12 committee members regarding the Art Show prizes' and 'blatant self-interest' has been interpreted by others than myself as suggesting that the prizes were somehow 'rigged'. I categorically deny this.

For the record, and for the sake of any member not present at N12, prizes for 'best fantasy painting' and 'best SF painting' were won by Chris Baker and myself respectively. And, yes, we were both on the N12 committee, and responsible for the Art Show (it seemed a logical idea for artists to run the Art Show). There were no fewer than three artists on the N12 committee, and when Chairman Roger Peyton suggested having prizes for the Art Show we accepted that there might be shouts of 'fix' if any of us won, though we didn't think for a moment that anyone would be serious if so. And since a fairly large part of the Art Show each year features our work, it seemed a little unfair -- as well as limiting on voters -- to exclude them from the competition. (One could equally exclude Group committee members from the regular monthly raffle!)

Incidentally, my own winning painting, Marshmallow Moon?, was actually painted as a joke, to counteract the oft-repeated remark of N12's Chairman, Rog Peyton, that my rocks look like marshmallows. I decided to paint the sharpest, most jagged rocks that I could -- and no-one was more surprised than myself at the reception of this piece of artwork.

DAVID HARDY.

((If anyone should be blamed, it's me. I should never have printed the first letter on the matter and I have learned from this. I'll use my 'editorial discretion' more carefully on letters I receive in future, okay? And please, can this be the last word on the subject? Thank you...ed))

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue. Artwork if by Matt Brooker (the comic-strip in the centre pages), John Dell and Phill Probert. The news was taken from Locus. In the next issue there will be a review of Shaun Hutson and his potted autobiography. Please send lots of letters, artwork, articles etc. to Eunice Pearson at 32 Digby House, Colletts Grove, Kingshurst, Birmingham, B37 6JE.

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRE

BOB SHAW will be <sup>at</sup> Andomeda Bookshop (84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham Birmingham) on September 16 at 1 pm. He will be signing copies of his new book, ORBITSVILLE DEPARTURE.

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This newsletter was printed by Mr  
Stannard and his wonderous photocopier  
(Many thanks.)



# Zoltan in Fame

Eat your heart out Leroy....



"I'm putting on my top hat,...."  
You want fame ? Well fame costs and right here is where you start paying.....In dog food.

I'm not afraid of fame. I quite enjoy all this attention I get. Free dog food and offers to do commercials. It's the letters from Joe Nicholas I can't take.



I'm to star in a new Alan Cash movie called, 'Captain Zap and the Evil Hound beast of the Planet Orathon.'



I'm to play Captain Zap.

I'm giving up my fame to continue with my career..

Which is selling 'Zoltan' sweat-shirts.



PHIL 83