

# THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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

Number 150

FEBRUARY 1984

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the Imperial Hotel in Temple Street, Birmingham city centre. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at the General Wolfe pub, on the corner of Aston Road and Holt Street (near Aston University and the Science Park). New members are always welcome. Membership rates are £5 per person, or £7.50 for two people at the same address. The treasurer is Graham Poole, 86 Berwood Farm Road, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham B72 1AG, but is likely to change soon. Watch this space.

FRIDAY 17 February, 7:45 pm.

This month the entrance charge is 60p for members and £1 for non-members. It should be an interesting meeting. Steve Green has a few words to say about our guest. "It's a rare occasion that the Brum Group can play host to a science fiction author, an editor with wide experience of the publishing world and an award-winning fan all on the same evening. That our guest for the february meeting meets all three criteria is probably unique.

Born in 1949, Malcolm graduated in anthropology at Cambridge. His interest in science fiction first evidenced itself during the fannish "new wave" of the early Seventies, editing the British Science Fiction Association's critical journal Vector from 1972-4, a stark contrast to his current fanzine, the vitrolic Drunkard's Talk.

In 1976 Malcolm began a short residence at Gollencz as an editor, moving to head the SF Foundation two years later. As well as working on the excellent Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction (ed. Nicholls, 1979), Malcolm was a member of the Seacon '79 worldcon committee (chaired by our own Peter Weston), providing valuable experience for the current "Britain in '87" worldcon bid.

His fanzine Tappen won the Nova Award for best fanzine of



# News~

Robert O'Brien's children's novel Z For Zachariah has been dramatised and will appear on BBC in the near future.

Isaac Asimov had a triple heart bypass operation in december and is now recuperating at home. Mr Asimov was sixty-four years old on the twenty-fourth of january.

The film version of Arthur C. Clarke's 2010: Odyssey Two is in production. Roy Scheider (Jaws, Blue Thunder) is to play Haywood Floyd, with John Lithgow and Bob Balaban as the other American astronauts. Pete Hymas is the director. He also directed Outland and Capricorn One. The special effects will be done by Richard Edlund (Star Wars et al and Raiders Of The Lost Ark) and Syd Mead -- the "visual futurist" who designed the city in Blade Runner. The film will take four months and will be shot on MGM's Stage 15, the largest soundstage in America. It is to be released around the end of this year.

Dot Owens, chairperson of the Star Trek Empathy-Cons has died recently.



# TOP TEN SF BOOKS

- 1 THE ADVERSARY by Julian May. (£1.95, Pan)
- 2 FOUNDATION'S EDGE by Isaac Asimov. (£1.95, Granada)
- 3 DR WHO: MAWDRYN UNDEAD by Terence Dicks. (£1.36, Target)
- 4 MORETA: DRAGONLADY OF PERN by Anne McCaffrey. (£3.95, Corgi)
- 5 STAR TREK SHORT STORIES by William Rotsler. (£1.25, Arrow)
- 6 THE SURVIVALIST: DOOMSAYER by J. Abern. (£1.50, NEL)
- 7 CITADEL OF ALTARCH by Gene Wolfe. (£1.95, Arrow)
- 8 SATAN by Jeremy Levin. (£2.50, Granada)
- 9 SHRINE by James Herbert. (£2.25, NEL)
- 10 A BETTER MAN-TRAP by Bob Shaw. (£1.50, Granada)

This list was compiled by ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1TA. phone 021-643-1999.

# SEACON 84

## THE FAN ROOM

We hope to construct a large display of the various activities happening within fandom. To do this we will need full details of all fan groups in Britain and the Continent. So relevant details of your group, such as meetings, venues, memberships, fanzines, numbers and so on, should be sent to the Fan Room organiser CHRIS SUSLOWICE (address as below). Ideally the info should be typed or printed neatly onto small blank cards as these will be linked to a large scale map which will constitute the main part of the display. Photographs of groups or individuals would also be very welcome, as these can be placed alongside the info cards.

The Fan Room will also feature this years Great Pork Pie Race. If anyone from your group is interested in entering this event full details are available from CHRIS SUSLOWICE, 111 VALLEY ROAD, COLTHULL, WEST MIDLANDS, B92 9AX, ENGLAND.

Oh yes, and don't forget the SF Trivia Bowl, which is still open to entrants. It's SEACON's answer to University Challenge & will consist of 8 teams of 4 people, after the 'entry fees' of 25 starter questions per team have been evaluated. Full details from TIM ILLINGWORTH, 63 DRAKE ROAD, CHESSINGTON, SURREY, KT9 1LQ.



# Fanzines

## NOT THE FANZINE REVIEWS.....by MARTIN TUDOR

As the title suggests, this isn't, by any means, meant to be a serious 'review' column. It is merely a quick guide to a few of the fanzines which have landed on my mat -- or in my lap -- since Novacon 13.

BLUE MOON 2 is, in the words of its, almost, famous perpetrator DAN STEFFAN, "yet another of those goddamned ensmallled fanzines that have been flooding fandom lately and diluting our precious fannish fluids," and is available for trade, contributions of witty anecdotes and letters of comment.....or 500 cents per copy in cash or stamps! It contains various amusing ramblings from Dan with the odd touch of controversy and even a short piece of satirical faan, fiction. Worth reading, although if you know nothing of US fancom you may miss several obscure references and a few in-jokes.

CRYSTAL SHIP 8 is a genzine produced by JOHN D. OWEN and is available for the Usual \*\* pause for jargon explanation \*\* The Usual = promise of letter of comment, a couple of stamps, trade with your own fanzine or contribution of artwork or article. Genzine = a fanzine open to outside contributors and not restricting itself to topics concerning SF and fandom. \*\* end pause \*\* CS is probably the most professional looking 'zine around these days and is always an interesting read. It tends to avoid the fannish 'ingroupiness' which newcomers to fandom find so frustrating. "Displays of interest may get a newcomer a copy, if there are any left." -- is what the man says, its certainly worth a try.

DON'T GET CAUGHT 4 is available for trade, letter of comment (loc) or first class stamp from KEVIN K. RATTAN, and is a mixture of genzine and p\*zine (= personal fanzine, as in personally written about personal matters -- easy once you get the hang of it eh?) described by Kev as a 'purgzine'. This issue contains an interesting piece from Steve Gallagher and the drunken ramblings of Kev.....interesting in parts.

DOMBLE IN THE WORKS is the first ever fanzine from Solihull SF Grouper and lethal cocktail maker extraordinaire LESLEY WARD. Presumably its available for the usual, but if you see Steve Green at the next meeting he's probably got a couple to dole out to interested parties. Its a very impressive perzine; Lesley chats about her first impressions of Liverpool and Novacon and reports on Wedicon 1, as well as supplying a few recipes for yet more deadly cocktails. A very entertaining fanzine.

EGOSCAN 2 is yet another of those ensmallled fanzines mentioned by Dan Steffan, this time produced by his next-door-neighbour the once famous TED WHITE, it is available for the usual or you could try a few international reply coupons. Produced monthly this is a nice relaxed fanzine produced by a guy who has produced probably more zines than I've downed pints. "The fanzine that talks about fans" is how its described and that's what it does..... it makes for great reading too.

HOLIER THAN THOU is edited and published by MARTY and ROBBIE CANTOR thrice yearly and is available for the usual or \$1.50 per issue. It is also available for five international reply coupons per issue, if you're writing for the first time this is probably your best bet -- because HTT is a BIG fanzine and is therefore expensive to mail, so Marty tends not to trade unless your 'zine is big and/or regular. This time around HTT is ninety-two pages long, all of it interesting and most of it VERY entertaining. GET IT -- if you can!

HOT WAFFLES -- another victim of the Birmingham fanzine renaissance has been PHILL PROBERT who has here produced an interesting perzine with some of his best artwork. Although the writing ain't always as brilliant as what sometimes it is, Phill can, and does, produce some very amusing pieces. Its available for a letter of comment, trade or dog food!

IN DEFIANCE OF MEDICAL OPINION 16 -- this is basically a review 'zine with lotsa other bits and pieces.....always interesting and available for Trade/Exchange sub, records, (pref. DIY material) OLD mags you've finished with, contributions, loos, non-leaking waterbeds, mink-lined underwear, oiled black satin sheets and things that go 'BOOOOOOOOOO' when you tweak them. For the desperate, an SAE (large A4 size) will help quell any feelings I might have towards your body." -- is what the man CHUCK CONNER says, it is well worth getting.

Q36 5 is a similar kind of 'zine to IDOMO, but less esoteric, this will be the last for a while and is available only for donations to The Shaw Fund, as MARC ORTLIES has now become an impoverished student in Melbourne.....well worth a look if you can get a copy.

RUDE BITCH is, well I'll let the 'ladies' describe it themselves: -- "RB, a dykey little fanzine in the small-but-dangerous tradition, is published by man-hating-killer-shark-women LUCY HUNTZINGER and AVEDON CAROL at (address below), Coast-to-Coast Castrator Conspiracy, to terrorize fandom and prove that all the nasty things they say about us are true." -- definately NOT a family 'zine and available only by editorial whim.....although you could try a suitably grovelling letter and a few int. reply coupons.....VERY, VERY FUNNY!!! Get it if you can.

SOUNDING THE RITUAL ECHO 1 is a short chatty perzine from this year's NOVACON 14 chairman \*\*\* register now only \$6 to Ann at the address below \*\*\* STEVE GREEN. Its available for "the unusual (beermats, copies of Hitler's diary, rare photographs of Ronald Reagan's brain, autographed pound coins) as well as the usual.

THEME 1 is produced by long time, but only recently born-again fan VINI CLARKE this is an excellent genzine written around the theme of 'residences'. Its available for the usual I would imagine.....good stuff.

TYPED AT THE GATES OF DAWN -- this is another genzine professionally printed and with some very nice illos, produced by two members of the alternative Bolton SF Group and available for the usual from ANDREW C. NEALE. Worth a look.

WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE 15 is an excellent genuine from Down Under, produced by JEAN WEBER and available for the usual or uncanceled British stamps. Highly recommended.

Phew: I didn't expect to run on at such length, so very briefly, here are the relevant addresses:--

DAN STEFFAN, 1010 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, VA 22046 USA.

JOHN D OWEN, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnall, Bucks. MK16 9AZ.

KEV K RATTAN, 21 The Square, Scorton, Nr. Preston, Lancs.

LESLEY WARD, c/o Lady Mountford House, Carnatic Road, Liverpool, L18 8DP.....or outside of termtime -- 135 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands.

TED WHITE, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, VA 22046 USA.

MARTY & ROBBIE CANTOR, 5263 Riverton Ave., 1, N. Hollywood, CA 91601, USA.

PHILL PROBERT, 32 Digby House, Collett Grove, Kingshurst, Birmingham, B37 6JE.

CHUCK CONNER, Sildan House, Chediston Road, Wissett, Nr Halesworth, Suffolk, IP19 0NF.

MARC ORTLIEB, G.P.O. Box 27)X, Melbourne, VICT 3001, Australia.

AVEDON CAROL, 4409 Woodfield Road, Kensington, MD 20895 USA.

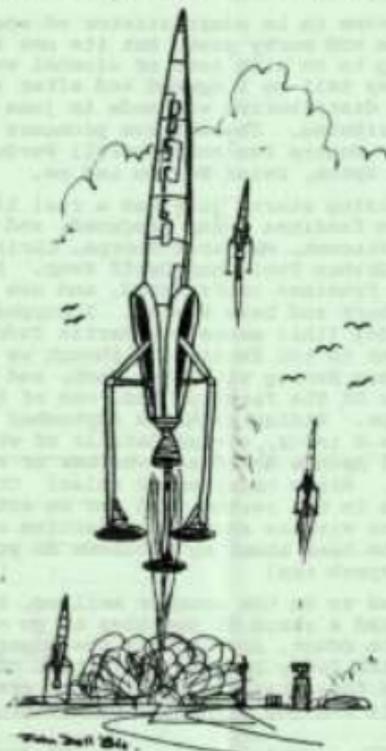
LUCY HUNTZINGER, 2739 Folsom St., San Francisco, CA 94110 USA.

STEVE GREEN, 11 Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7SD.

VINY CLARKE, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent, DA16 2BN.

ANDEW C NEALE, c/o longshot, Harwood, Bolton, BL2 3JE

JEAN WEBER, PO Box 42, Lynham, ACT 2602, Australia.



# APA-B NEWS

Hello again. Sorry I haven't been around for the last few newsletters to let you know how things are going for apa-B. (very nicely, thank you) but we seemed to have reached the point where everyone who wanted to join has already done so, and there wasn't much incentive for me to write this column despite the fact that the main priority of apa-B is to be as open and welcoming to potential members as we can. The informal meeting (now held at the General Wolfe), is pretty much apa-B in person, and I can't offhand think of anyone who attends who doesn't produce something for the apa. If you're interested in producing your own small fanzine (and remember you only need to produce two sides once in every three distributions), you could do worse than drop in at the General Wolfe on the first tuesday of each month and talk to some of the other spamembers. We'd make you very welcome.

But anyway, the main reason I'm appearing in this edition of the newsletter is because Eunice has asked me to produce an end-of-year review of how apa-B has progressed, and how its likely to do in the future. Unfortunately the end of the slender year doesn't coincide with the end of the apa year, as we only started in june, so I'm not able to give a full year's picture. Hopefully I'll produce something, maybe a 'best of' for june.

How I actually came to be administrator of apa-B is forever lost to me in the dim and murky past, but its not inconceivable that it had something to do with lots of alcohol and smooth talking. Anyhow, they tell me I agreed and after some initial publicity, our first distribution was made in june 1983 when nine people actually contributed. These brave pioneers were Steve Green, Simon Norburn, Eunice Pearson, Darroll Pardoe, Martin Tudor, William McCabe, Dave Upton, Peter Weston and me.

After that promising start, july was a real blockbuster of a month, with seventeen fanzines being produced, and this time we were joined by Paul Vincent, Margaret Thorpe, Chris Suslowicz, Joy Hibbert, Jan Poole, Graham Poole and Geoff Kemp. August was even better with eighteen fanzines contributed, and saw the arrival of Alan Cash, Phill Probert and Dave Rowley. I suppose due to rich people going on holiday (this means you Martin Tudor) numbers decreased in september to ten fanzines although we gained Ann Gay, who worked on Beam Ending with Alan Cash, and Peter-Fred Thompson with his One Of The Faceless Pen, one of the best fanzines to come out of the apa. Riding with the september mailing came my ever-so-wonderful apa-B index, giving details of who'd done what and how much, so that people could see whether or not they were in line for the chop. Minac requirement rules! Compiling this was, quite frankly, a pain in the rectum, and not an activity to be recommended to someone with as short an attention span as me. But then you don't want to hear about my problems do you? I thought not, you heartless reprob tes!

No-one new turned up in the october mailing, though Dave Langford kindly donated a stack of Ansibles to go out with this mailing. Contribution count, leaving out the super free gift, was ten. We were up to the lofty heights of fifteen contributions in november, a time when fans traditionally gather around ale-houses with their typewriters and get drunk and fall over. It doesn't

produce fanzines but its a good way to pass the time while you're waiting for your next girocheque. November was also a mailing of great significance for Peter Weston, who unfortunately Got The Push for lack of acti ty -- specifically, for not producing any-thing for three months in a row.

December saw the sad demise of Alan Cash from apa-B who became listless and seemed to loose all life after being deprived of his mailings. (Publish again Alan. Come back to the path of True Enlightenment!) Apart from that sorrowful event we had a fairly good month once again with eleven fanzines being produced. Actually, there's some doubt in my mind as to whether the number was eleven or twelve, mainly because some unkind person took it into their head to walk off with my carrier bag, which I think might have contained Geoff Kemp's Quartz. If it did, then only those people at the meeting will have received one, and I'm very sorry for everyone else, but there's not a lot I can do about it. The bag also contained all the Christmas cards I wanted to give out, as well as the cards which had been given to me and just possibly other things, but I can't remember what they might have been. If you've seen a carrier lying about, or you took one by accident from the december meeting, I'd be very grateful to get it back since this was the first year people had addressed cards both to me and Dave and they have some sort of sentimental value to me.

Anyhow, a good start for apa-B I though (must do something about that name) although we could do a lot better and I'm sure standards will improve given time. The other two British apas I'm familiar with are rather different from our group from the point of view of good writing, but for disparate reasons. The Women's Periodical is large enough to gurantee that you'll have at least one or two pieces of decent writing in every mailing (which occur every seven weeks by the way) and Frank's apa is so full of boring old farts -- sorry -- experience writers, (only kidding Frank!) that magic flows from nearly every typewriter nearly every mailing. Seriously though, you can't help but get good writing when you've got writers of the calibre of Rob Jackson, Greg Pickersgill, Dave Bridges, Abi Frost, Rob Hansen, Harry Bell and Linda Pickersgill.

I don't know much about SLAPA, the Surrey Limpwrist's apa, except that it started as a joke and is now getting serious, or about the Men's Apa, which probably is a joke. If anyone knows anything about the Men's Apa and its aims, perhaps they could let me know. Unless they're serious about discussing men's changing roles in society, I don't really see what they're going to talk about. Rugby? Football? How to be a Bitterman? Or is it just 'Ya boe sucks, if the women can have their own apa, then so can we' reaction? It won't last long if its based on the latter two reasons.

Right, OK. Copy count down to twenty now please, but for heaven's sake make sure it is twenty. There's always one fanzine which runs out before we've collated all the mailings and its INFURIATING. I'm thinking of initiating an excuse/slapped wrist corner for this sort of thing in the newsletter, so you'd better watch your step.

Glory time. Here's a list of members current as of december 1983.

- 1) Cath Easthope (I can't help it, its alphabetical listing)
- 2) Steve Green
- 3) Joy Hibbert
- 4) Geoff Kemp

- 5) William McCabe
- 6) Darroll Pardoe
- 7) Eunice Pearson
- 8) Jan Poole
- 9) Graham Poole
- 10) Dave Rowley
- 11) Chris Suslowicz
- 12) Peter-Fred Thompson
- 13) Martin Tudor
- 14) Paul Vincent (odd how those two always seem to be together even in an alphabetical apa listing!)

Those who had dropped out by december 1983 were:

- 1) Dean Bisseker
- 2) Alan Cash
- 3) Stan Eling
- 4) Ann Gay
- 5) Simon Norburn
- 6) Paul Oldroyd
- 7) Roger Peyton
- 8) Phill Probert
- 9) Margaret Thorpe (we all miss you Margaret!)
- 10) Jane Tietjan
- 11) Peter Weston (what can I say?)

Oh, if you're wondering why twenty copies are required when we have fourteen members, the reason has not a little to do with the fact that we're often short of certain contributions (see threat above) that we need extra mailings for people who show interest, and that a couple of complimentary mailings go out to other apa administrators as a friendly gesture.

(Actually, to be fair to Peter Weston, lest you think I'm getting at him, I have to say that he's handling some weighty problems at the moment -- something to do with World Domination.)

Just a couple of other matters before I wind up. Did everyone get their copy of Eunice's Daughter Of Eve for the november mailing? If you missed out, let me know and I'll send you one. (Apa members only, of course.) Lastly, you might have noticed that the post of administrator wasn't up for election at the AGM. This isn't due to any great plot on my part to become planetary dictator before Peter Weston, but rather due to the fact that apa administrator isn't a committee post. I don't attend committee meetings or have any executive powers. We're more or less autonomous, and if the Brum Group were to disappear tomorrow, we'd still be here, turning out mailings every month. No, our election will be held in June, and I'd like you to think whether or not you'd be interested in self-flagellation for the cause, because I'd like a rest, maybe. Anyhow, as you can see from the summary, the apa certainly isn't fading away. We consistently maintain each mailing at an average of thirteen contributions and the future looks good, with some excellent writing being produced by people like Eunice and William in particular. Things are happening.

Look after yourselves,  
Cathy.

# NOVACON 14

## THE COMMERCIAL BREAK

Novacon is a little like Christmas; you've barely recovered from one year's hectic celebration that you have to start planning for the next. I sometimes wonder if the organisers of that first second city shindig (Vernon Brown and the former Aston Group) would have gone ahead if they'd realised the fannish dynasty they were launching.

And the answer's yes, of course they would have. Running a con as important as Novacon, especially when you're following what is hailed as the best one ever, is an emotional cocktail of nerves, pride and a whole bunch of sensations guaranteed to get adrenalin coursing through you veins. And rightly so: chairing Novacon 14 is not something to be taken lightly, nor do I.

Choosing the committee was the first challenge; more than that, choosing the right committee, colleagues with a like commitment to the Brum Group's major undertaking, endowed with balanced judgement as much as experience, independent within the team spirit, I'm pleased to say I found just that committee: my vice-chairman Martin Tudor, head of alternative programming at Seacon '84 and a leading member of the 'Britian in '87' worldcon bid; treasurer Paul Vincent, responsible for the excellent film programme at Novacon 13; my wife, Ann Green, our hardworking membership secretary; Eunice Pearson, back to co-edit the convention's four progress reports and souvenir programme book; Dave Haden, another veteran from Novacon 13, returning to run the artshow; Kevin Clark, responsible for the games during my alternative programme last year. It's a team which bodes well for Novacon 14.

As does our guest of honour: Rob Holdstock, author of the excellent EYE AMONG THE BLIND, WHEN THE TIME WINDS BLOW and NECROMANCER, former editor of the British SF Association's FOCUS and longtime British sf fan. Amazingly, Novacon 14 will be his first convention as a guest of honour; it's a distinction long overdue.

Our venue is the Grand Hotel in Colmore Row, the dates are November 9-11; membership is six pounds, which is one pound down on last year thanks to extensive savings in printing costs. All those who attended Novacon 13 and will therefore need little coaxing from me to join this year's festivities should have received our first progress report by now; those new to Novacon would be well-advised to send their cash now to Ann Green at 11 Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7SD.

I look forward to seeing you all at Novacon 14.

----STEVE GREEN (CHAIRMAN)

# Reviews

## THE STARDROPPERS by John Brunner.

This is a remarkably bad novel by a good author. It is all the more surprising because Brunner has written some very good science fiction and the comparison between this and some of his best material shows just how bad a good writer can be. A 'star-dropper' we learn, is an instrument which, although scientifically staggeringly implausible, appears to detect noises from the stars; specifically, users are convinced they are listening to alien beings. However, what begins as a tiny minority of cranks develops into a world-wide craze, with successful contactees literally disappearing into thin air. Amid growing confusion and alarm by the authorities, Special Agent Dan Cross (yes, really) is sent to England to attempt to solve the mystery of the whole stardropping craze. This he eventually does as the unlikely plot sweeps him to its conclusion, which embraces such concepts as teleportation and instantaneous travel. Hmm. Most of the book seem fairly amateur-ishly written (for Brunner) and despite the momentary burst of interest generated by a bit of scientific rationale towards the end, the whole thing is one big let down. Cliched phrases such as "Dan moved his right ar, like a striking snake" and "Dan's mind was suddenly working like a super efficient computer" hardly endear one to finish the book. In summary, I found it rather hard to believe that this was the same man who wrote "The Totally Rich", a splendid short story I particularly remember from his compilation "Out Of My Mind". For someone with fifty-five odd novels to his credit, including the award-winning "Stand On Zanzibar", this should have been better. As a final comment: it suddenly occurred to me that possibly this was such a scathing and accurate satire of typical British acceptance of von Daniken type lunacy that the simplistic writing was completely intentional, and part of the tongue-in-cheek attitude. I thought about that for a minute, and decided no, it just was not a very good book.

Reviewed by PAUL BRANTINGHAM.



THE VANDAL by Ann Schlee, Megnet £1.50, 174 pp.

I must admit I've never before heard of Ann Schlee, and I'd imagine, judging by both the content and the style of this excellent novel, that she's come to sf via a mainstream route; probably children's books. I started to read with no preconceptions as to categorisation, but I suppose the central character (a sixteen-year-old boy), and heavy emphasis on the experience of children would place this book as a traditional 'juvenile'. If that's so, I suppose I must be fairly juvenile, because I enjoyed reading it far more than the previous book I reviewed for the newsletter -- Frank Herbert and Bill Ransom's THE LAZARUS EFFECT. I've no idea of Ann Schlee's nationality, but the story-line of THE VANDAL follows traditional British dystopian lines, a sub-genre we seem to be particularly good at, and one which is perhaps quite apt in this year of 1984. It owes almost nothing to pulp sf and has none of the standard props those of us who grew up with science fiction are used to. Instead what we have is a totalitarian society in which personal memory is abolished by means of a drug incorporated in the Drink, a universally accepted social convention, taken once a day by all except the highest levels of society. Personal memory is replaced by an electronic device on which may be recorded facts considered acceptable by the elite. Strangely at odds with the general verisimilitude engendered by the story is the fact that the 'elite' seems to be composed of only one man, who appears several times in such diverse guises as psychiatrist, landowner and doctor. That one man could be the ultimate controller of British Society I might be able to accept, but then that man has a close relationship with such an apparently insignificant citizen as the central character. I find my credibility stretched quite a bit. Still, it's a minor quibble compared with the quality of the storytelling which was good enough to allow me to look forward to each reading session. So often, plowing through a review copy is a real bind, but here the ramifications of only having a three day memory are fascinatingly explored and the book was a pleasure to read. Oddly for an anti-utopian novel, the protagonist never seems to have any real idea of rebellion. All he does is to innocently amble along, and any resistance he puts up occurs more or less by accident until he is apprehended and taken to the rural agricultural areas as forced labour. As a punishment, the memory eroding drugs are withdrawn, and some hope returns as he begins to realise the true nature of his world, and what his course must be. There doesn't seem to be any real baddies to kick against in this society (with the exception of the slightly bumbling doctor/psychiatrist/landowner) and it seems to be a totalitarianism by default. It's a well-meaning but degenerate structure and how can you fight when there's no one to fight? I found this an interesting and thought-provoking story -- well worth seeking out, and don't let the 'juvenile' tag (or the cover) put you off.

Reviewed by CATHRYN EASTHOPE

THE SORCERY SPELL BOOK and THE SHAMUTANI HILLS by Steve Jackson, Penguin (boxed set) £3.95, 107 & 159 pp.

Fantasy role-playing games have been a growing pastime ever since the inception in the early seventies, attracting large numbers of would-be armchair warriors and wizards. Many potential enthusiasts have been deterred both by the prospect of absorbing lengthy and intricate rule systems and by the problem of finding enough fellow players to start a game. Steve Jackson a ves

these problems by using a 'programmed' style which allows solo fantasy gaming, with minimal rule learning. The result is the 'Sorcery!' series of books, of which THE SHAMUTANI HILLS is the first volume of four. The text of THE SHAMUTANI HILLS consists of 465 short numbered game sections, together with a short introduction which explains how to play the game. Basically, you adopt the role of a wizard or warrior, armed only with skill, stamina, luck, a sword and spells, of which more later. The ultimate goal of the quest (which spans all four volumes) is to recover the Crown of Kings, the loss of which has cursed the once pleasant nation of Analand, and the game is begun simply by reading the first numbered section, which tells you of your departure from Analand into the epycymous hills. At the end of each short section (eg. "Turn to 278") or are given a series of choices for your next action (eg. whether to knock on a door or just ignore the house), each of which directs you to a different numbered section. In this way the story unfolds according to your decisions at each stage -- and be assured that an unwise decision can seriously affect the outcome of a much later situation. If you are successful the story culminates in your arrival at the city of Khare, at which point the second book in the series will continue the story, but before then there are many battles, traps, tricky encounters and other distractions to overcome. Battles are resolved using an extremely easy dice-rolling routine and spells may be used as described in the Spell Book. THE SORCERY SPELL BOOK lists 48 spells which may be cast (at some expense to the caster's stamina) whenever a section of the quest lists some of them as options in a given situation. These range from the obscure to the obviously useful, but there is a catch. Each spell is named by a three-letter mnemonic by which it will be referred to in the four books of the quest, such as 'DOP' which is a spell to open locked doors; but you are not allowed to refer to the Spell Book whilst actually playing the game -- you must rely on your probably shakey recall of the mnemonics to decide which one refers to the spell you want to use. This neat twist gives a very convincing impression of actually being a wizard, frantically trying to remember whether the correct spell for inducing clumsiness in an opponent is called 'DIM' or 'DUN'. Such innovations come rarely in solo gaming, and this spell system is one of the best yet. People seem to either love or hate games, and if you fall into the former category then this 'game in a book' is definitely worth a look. There are many hours of pure FUN in THE SHAMUTANI HILLS alone, and I for one am eager to pit my wits against the three remaining volumes in the series. Need I say it -- recommended:

Reviewed by PAUL VINCENT





# A SPACE ODDITY

BY D'ISRAELI D' DEMON DRAGHT'SMAN

THE STARSHIP "LONG DROP,"  
BOOMBING ALOFT AT AN  
OUTRAGEOUS MULTIPLE OF  
LIGHT SPEED...

ABOARD,  
CAPTAIN RICK  
HANDSOME

AND HIS VEGAN  
CO-PILOT, FRUITS-  
DE-MOR. ALL  
VEGANS ARE CALLED  
FRUITS-DE-MOR, BUT  
NO-ONE KNOWS WHY.

NO-ONE CARES,  
EITHER.

SUDDENLY!!!!



HEY, FRUITS... IT'S  
BORING, I'M IT,  
FRUITS?

YESSAY,  
BOSS!

... AND SO ENDS  
ANOTHER ACTION-  
PACKED ADVENTURE  
WITH RICK HANDSOME  
AND THE "LONG DROP"

