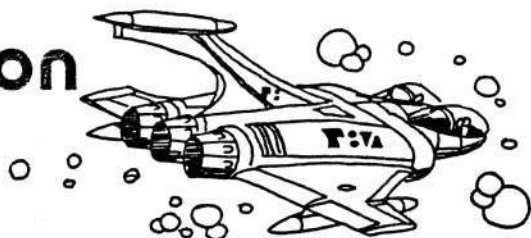


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



Number 155 JULY 1984

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the New 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). There is also a MiSFits meeting on the last Friday of each month at the same venue, the General Wolfe.

JULY MEETING - Friday 20th July 1984 from 7.45 pm onwards

We originally planned on a special Saturday evening event this month but due to lack of interest shown at the June meeting this has been cancelled. Instead we'll be meeting at the usual venue, usual time and date, and we'll be having ~~the usual~~ a quiz, hosted by Brum Group stalwart Vernon Brown. In fact it's the first quiz we're holding for a long time based on teams made up of everyone in the room. Questions will be graded easy, medium and hard so don't worry if you're new to SF, there's bound to be some questions you can answer.

JUNE MEETING

Unfortunately a previous engagement (and wedding) in Hertfordshire meant that Jan and I missed Jack Cohen's talk but I hear that it was a good evening and Jack was in good form and would have gone on talking for hours if it wasn't for closing time.

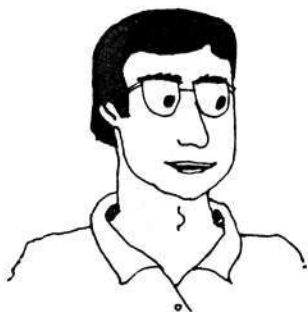
FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Having just had Jack Cohen talking about his research for Harry Harrison's WEST OF EDEN we have Harry himself in August. Leading up to Christmas (when we will be holding our usual Christmas party) we are expecting two more authors one of whom will be Christopher Priest.

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Editorial address: Graham R. Poole, 86 Berwood Farm Road, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield West Midlands, B72 1AG

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THE JOPHAN REPORT

This month I'm afraid I must start with some bad news. On the first of June Australian author A. Bertram Chandler was discovered unconscious by his wife Susan when she returned from a trip. He had apparently suffered a major heart attack several days earlier. Doctors hold little hope of his ever waking from his coma and no hope for his recovery because of extensive brain damage.

Until recently Chandler concentrated his writing on the various 'Rim Worlds' books and stories usually featuring a ship's captain called Grimes, but he recently completed a serious alternative world novel about Australia - "Kelly County" for which he received an Australian Grant. The US edition of the novel will appear later this year from Daw.

Moving on to more cheerful matters Arthur C. Clarke makes his screen debut in December when the film "2010" opens. He has a brief cameo role as a tramp on a park bench in front of the Whitehouse...

Remaining Stateside for the moment Beaumont, Texas plans to establish "a museum dedicated to honouring the greats of the field and preserving its memorabilia" - the National Hall of Fame of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Beaumont is on Interstate 10 an hour and a half drive from Houston if you want to nip over there ...but don't rush. Construction isn't slated to begin until the Spring of '85.

Back in Europe Bob Shaw has won the Deutscher SF Club's Clark Dalton Prize for the best foreign novel published in Germany in 1983 for THE CERES SOLUTION. The award was presented to him during his Guest of Honour appearance at Interessesf '84 a convention in Amsterdam - I'm sure he was delighted.

Now especially for all those of you who still secretly read all that funny rocket ship stuff a bit of actual 'book' news... Michael Moorcock's new collection THE OPIUM GENERAL (Harrap June '84) contains a short story billed as the "final Jerry Cornelius story" - I'll bet. Angela Carter's first novel in seven years has been sold to Chatto and Windus (paperback rights to Pan) - it's called NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS and Locus tells us that it "appears to be mainstream rather than fantasy" - surprise, surprise. The new new Dune novel CHAPTERHOUSE:DUNE, which takes place 150 years after HERETICS, was finished in April and will appear next year...as yet Herbert remains non-committal about the possibility of still another in the series...so keep your fingers crossed we may yet be spared.

I suppose now is as good a time as any to come clean and admit that all of the above news has been lifted from Locus - British

subscriptions available from Fantast (Medway) Ltd, 39 West Street, Wisbech, Cambs., PE13 2LX at the rate of \$23.00 for 12 issues seamail or \$35.00 for 12 issues by air...alternatively you can pick up a copy from Andromeda for a mere £2.25.

Of course, despite being arguably the most reliable newspaper of the SF field Locus isn't exactly perfect - as Jack Cohen could tell you. You may remember from last month's meeting that Jack spent some time painstakingly constructing the background biology of Harry Harrison's WEST OF EDEN. I'm afraid, however, that Locus's reviewer Dan Chow didn't appreciate it, - "Harrison's prose is best described as unrelentingly 50s style sf. He gives a great deal of attention to creating strange-sounding names, devising exotic technologies, and inventing a system of saurian reproduction which owes more to pulp sf than to the current state of scientific knowledge." From across the Atlantic comes the unmistakable sound of a foot being painfully removed from a mouth.

There's not much more to say this time around so I'll just briefly run through the convention calendar. Almost as you're reading this Albacon '84 will be taking place in the Central Hotel, Glasgow (20-23 July) GOH Harlan Ellison, attending membership £9. Contact Ms F.J. Nelson, 62 Campsie Rd, Wishaw, ML2 7QG, Scotland. I just wish I could afford to go - ah, tis a hard life...

Next we have Silicon 8, a small fannish con with minimal programme which will be held over the weekend of 24-27 August at the Grosvenor Hotel in Newcastle, details from 2 Seaton Ave., Newsham, Blyth, Northumberland.

Over that same weekend we also have Oxcon at St Catherine's College, Oxford with Brian Aldiss as GOH. Attending membership £8. Further information from Catherine Watson, 18 Norham Gardens, Oxford.

A little later, on the continent we have Beneluxcon 11 on the 7-9 September 1984, Guests of Honour Robert Sheekley, James White and Michael Kubiak. Attending membership 500 Bfr and room rates 400 Bfr the con is a real bargain taking place in the Fabliolahome, Ghent in Belgium, another con I wish I could get to. Full details from Andre de Rycke, Eendenplasstraat 70, B-9050 Evergem, Belgium.

Which brings us right up to the last con of the year, our very own Novacon 14. This will take place over the second weekend of November (9-11) at the Grand Hotel in Birmingham. GOH is Rob Holdstock author of WHEN TIME WINDS BLOW, EARTHWIND, EYE AMONG THE BLIND and NEGROMANCER. Attending membership £6, room rates £15 per person per night. Full details available from Ann Green, 11 Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 7SD.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Hard on the heels of being voted 'Best European SF Graphic Artist' at Seacon/Eurocon this Easter, the Brum Group's resident pro. artist and erstwhile Chairman Dave Hardy has just received another honour. In the July issue of ANALOG one of his paintings was voted 'Top Cover of the Year 1983' in a readers' poll. Just to complete the Brum Group interest, the original artwork for this cover is owned by none other than our legal eagle, Tim Stannard.

Did anyone leave a pink, hand-knitted sleeveless cardigan in the New Imperial at last month's meeting? It was found by Pauline and Chris Morgan who were the last to leave. They will be bringing it along to this month's meeting but if you claim ownership and are unable to attend then they may be contacted on 777 2777.

Anyone know R. Saville's address? He (or she) joined the BSPG in March but failed to let us have an address for the Newsletters!

BSPG T-SHIRTS: About a year or so ago the Group purchased a number of BSPG T-shirts which had been ordered by members who subsequently failed to claim or pay for them. It seems a shame for them to remain lying around in a carrier bag doing no good (especially when that carrier bag is looking a little out of place in our dining room) so we're offering them for sale at £2 each - first come first served. They all have the same logo on, Birmingham SF Group, with an illustration of a 50's style magazine cover complete with monster and scantily - er, completely unclad woman. Sizes and colours are yellow M 36", yellow L 38" - 40", white XXL 46" - 48", white M 36" and red M 36".

MEMBERSHIP RATES: £5 per person or £7.50 for two people at the same address. Money to be sent to the treasurer Stan Eling, 124 Galton Road, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B67 5JS. Cheques to be made out to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group".

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Allen Lane	Asimov, Warrick & Greenberg (eds)	Machines That Think	£10.95
Corgi	Nancy Springer	The White Hart	£1.75
Robert Hale	Philip Daniels	Cinderella Spy (crime)	£7.50
Macdonald	Gregory Benford	Across the Sea of Suns	£8.95
Panther	EE 'Doc' Smith	Subspace Encounter	£1.50
Penguin	Pohl & Kornbluth	The Space Merchants	£1.95
	Jack Chalker	Twilight at the Well	
		of souls	£2.50
	Philip K Dick	Time out of Joint	£1.95
	James P hogan	Voyage from Yesteryear	£2.50
Sparrow	Joe Dever & Gary Chalk	* Flight from the Dark	£1.50
	Dever & Chalk	* Fire on the Water	£1.50

* Fantasy role-playing books

FORTHCOMING BOOKS FROM GOLLANCZ

July: Gordon Smith MERVYN PEAKE, A PERSONAL MEMOIR (illustrated)
Frederick Pohl HEECHEE RENDEZVOUS

August: Robert Holdstock MYTHAGO WOOD
Bob Shaw FIRE PATTERN

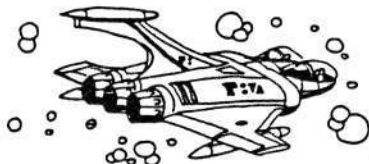
Sept: J.G.Ballard EMPIRE OF THE SUN (non science fiction)
William Gibson NECROMANCER

Oct: Frank Herbert - reissues of DUNE, DUNE MESSIAH, CHILDREN OF DUNE and GOD EMPEROR OF DUNE to tie in with the \$60 million DUNE film due for release at Christmas.
Garry Kilworth THE SONGBIRDS OF PAIN

Nov: Terry Carr (ed) BEST SF OF THE YEAR 13

Jan: J.G.Ballard THE VOICES OF TIME (formerly THE FOUR DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE) collection of shorts
J.G.Ballard THE TERMINAL BEACH
Robert Silverberg THE CONGLOMEROID COCKTAIL PARTY

Children's books: Aug; Gwyn Thomas and Kevin Crossley-Holland TALES FROM THE MABINOGION: Sept; Douglas Hill THE CAVES OF KLYDOR: Jan; Peter Dickinson A BOX OF NOTHING; Michael Allaby 2040



Reviews

A THEATRE OF TIMESMITHS by Garry Kilworth, Gollancz £7.95 185 Pgs
Reviewed by Anne Gay

With A THEATRE OF TIMESMITHS Garry Kilworth has a great title and a variety of interesting themes. Unfortunately most of them have been done before.

Kilworth does however show some originality in his treatment. Morag MacKenzie and her hero Ben are trapped along with the other citizens in First City, a dead-end society enclosed in an ancient and threatening wall of ice. The logistics of such a situation have been carefully worked out, as has the eventual (and inevitable) escape. What happens then is a removal from stock situations and the ending is pleasantly ambiguous.

As for characterisation, there is some. I can't reveal the one identity which appears original, but the book is worth reading just to get to know that one.

Hardly un-put-downable - as you may have guessed I've put it down several times - but there are plenty of exciting possibilities in the sidelines. Go and borrow it from someone rich.

GREYBEARD by Brian Aldiss, Panther (Granada) £1.95 272 pgs
Reviewed by Anne Gay

Greybeard used to be Algy Timberlane back in the days when names mattered. Now he is a youngster in his fifties: there are no children left since the Accident. The novel charts Greybeard's course through changing social situations; he, his wife and companions journey through a natural landscape which parallels the human condition. All the same there is some hope - or is there? - at the end of the river.

A very deep, intricately woven book, this. Aldiss handles the psychological and physical effects of global disaster on a personal as well as a mass level. Moreover he manages to treat the threat posed by stoats etc without its becoming risible. When coypu flood a town it is in no way dramatised, but more the subject of legitimate pathos.

First published in 1964 GREYBEARD deserves its subsequent paperback reprints for its thoughtful approach to a now clichéd root idea, and its memorable, colourful characters, most of whom are more than credible. The reader actually cares about what happens to them.

I can't think why they didn't make it into a film.

BATTLEFIELD EARTH by L. Ron Hubbard, Quadrant Books £8.95 819 pgs
Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Yes 819 pages for only £8.95. Must be good value you think. I was aware when I agreed to review this book that some harsh

things had been said about it, but I managed to avoid any other reviews, and started reading with the vow that I would accept the book on its own terms: after all, I used to enjoy the old space operas - Doc Smith, Van Vogt, et al. One can't expect to review the latest work by an SF writer of the 30's in the same light as a new Ballard or Aldiss. And a book that started from an initial printing of 3000 and has gone on to sell literally millions must have something. What?

I'm still wondering. It starts out promisingly enough. It is the year 3000, and Earth is in the hands of an alien race, the Psychlos, who regard humans as animals. Jonnie Goodboy Tyler is one of the few thousand remaining humans; a mountain boy, skilled in hunting and tracking, but with an inquisitive nature that won't let him accept the myths, gods and monsters used by his peers to explain the world around them. (Fair enough, though familiar to SF readers.)

Jonnie leaves his sickly tribe, seeking a new home. His discoveries and capture by an evil Psychlo named Terl are quite readable. After that the mind begins to balk... The Psychlos are huge and very strong, but apart from having bony faces and using 'breathe-gas' instead of air are virtually human in all respects (Jack Cohen would love them!) They are also very stupid, greedy and vicious, among their other good points. Terl, for instance is interested only in obtaining a large quantity of gold and smuggling it back to Psychlo so that he can become rich and famous, and a large part of the book is devoted to his efforts to force humans ('animals') to procure it for him.

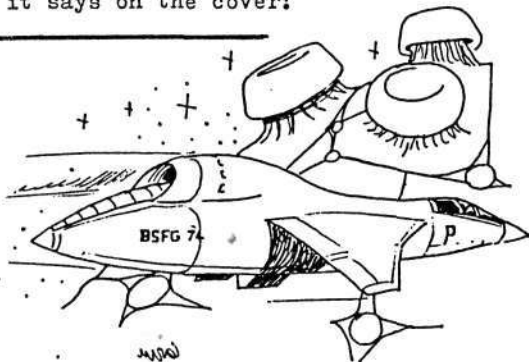
As more characters, both human and alien, appear, one is struck by their incredible stereotyping. The Scots wear kilts, carry claymores, call Jonnie 'MacTyler' and lapse into dialect when excited. The Russians look and act like Cossacks, Germans say "Ach, gott", French "mon dieu", and so on. Jonnie also has a human enemy, the pathetic psychopath Brown Limper Staffor. The other alien races which later turn up (purely for what they can grab from Earth) could come straight from DR. WHO - human except for peculiarities like no noses, fangs, a reptilian appearance. When an intergalactic reporter called Roof Arsebogger of the 'Midnight Fang' turned up I began to wonder whether I had been mistaken and the whole thing was meant to be a comedy send-up à la Harrison. But no, it plodded on: one reason this book is so long is that the author relates every detail as it happens, almost down to what the characters have for breakfast. He also writes without pace, in short sentences throughout. It could be a children's book in style - except that no child would last more than 20 pages. There is much violence, but no sex.

The humans, in remarkably short time, learn to read both English and Psychlo, fly aircraft (using a strange 'teleportation' drive: teleportation on a galactic scale also features widely), use sophisticated machines, weapons, espionage devices and instruments, and finally wipe out Psychlo, defeat the aliens and free Earth. Yet the motives throughout are (apart from Jonnie Goody-Goody Tyler) petty: revenge, greed and power, with Earth almost coming under the hammer but 'saved' by some very devious and suspect financial wranglings at the last minute. The book is sexist: women are purely for cooking, mending, cleaning and having children. As for the science! For instance, being an alien planet, Psychlo has a different periodic table, with heavy elements not known on Earth. There are 'sixteen universes'.

Breathe-gas explodes when in contact with uranium. The aliens have different genetic backgrounds; thus, one has a 'bark-like skin and masses of leafy looking hair...' his genetic line '... must go back to trees'. And so on.

BATTLEFIELD EARTH has, as I said, been bought by millions. How many finished it is not on record, but if, as one presumes, a large proportion of these readers are new to written science fiction and take this as a typical example, it could set SF back years. Maybe they really do enjoy it; hopefully they will then go on to read some decent stuff. One thing is certain. This is not a book for SF fans, whatever it says on the cover!

LETTERS



Martin Tudor
845 Alum Rock Road,
Ward End,
Birmingham B8 2AG

I felt I had to write to put the record straight...at Mexicon I didn't lose my bed...I know exactly where it was all through that Saturday night Brum Group party - it was outside in the corridor with an empty keg on it.

On the subject of the informals I tend to agree with William McCabe that a change would be a good idea. I doubt that it would lead to increased attendance but I think the first Friday of the month would be a more convenient date...I know it would make it easier for me to attend at least.

However, I agree with you that there's no real reason to change the venue. It is very difficult to find a pub near the city centre with relaxed dress regulations (ie no bouncer) at weekends, and it's even more difficult to find a relatively uncrowded pub on a Friday night. Both the pubs William mentions do have a tendency to become fairly packed on Friday nights due to their proximity to the night clubs around Hurst Street.

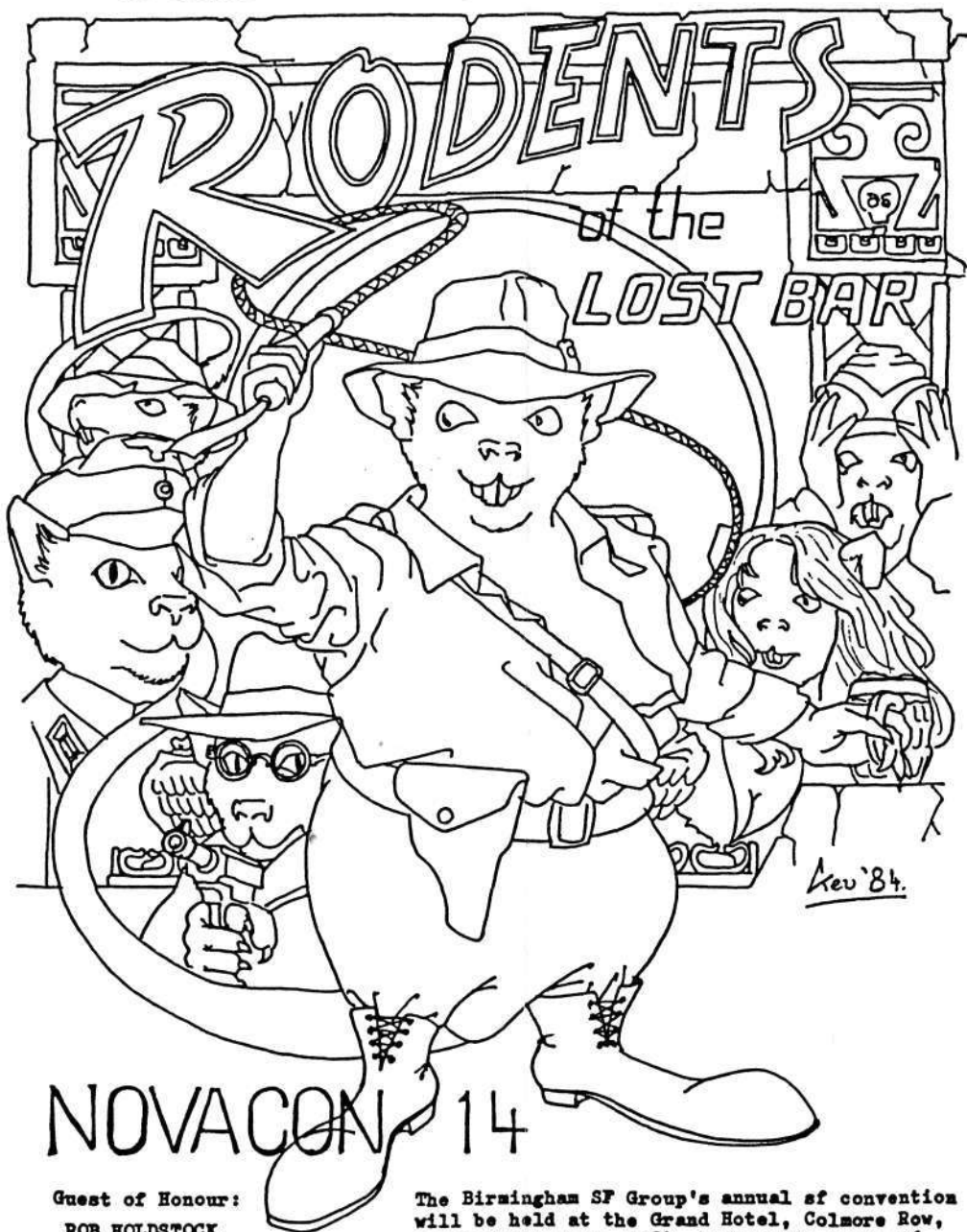
Anyway let's move the informal to the first Friday but leave it at the General Wolfe - unless anyone has any serious objections.

MARTIN TUDOR

((Since you were the only one to reply, Martin, it looks as if the choice and date of venue is something to be decided between you, me and William. However, I will wait one more month before announcing any change just in case anyone else wants to add their own point of view.))

That's all for this issue except to say a very big thank you to all the contributors and to the publishers for the review books. The artwork for Martin Tudor's Jophan Report is by Lucy Huntzinger and was previously used by Martin in his Frank's Apa zine Spillage. All other artwork is by John Dell.

THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE --- AND IT'S HELD RIGHT HERE IN B'HAM!



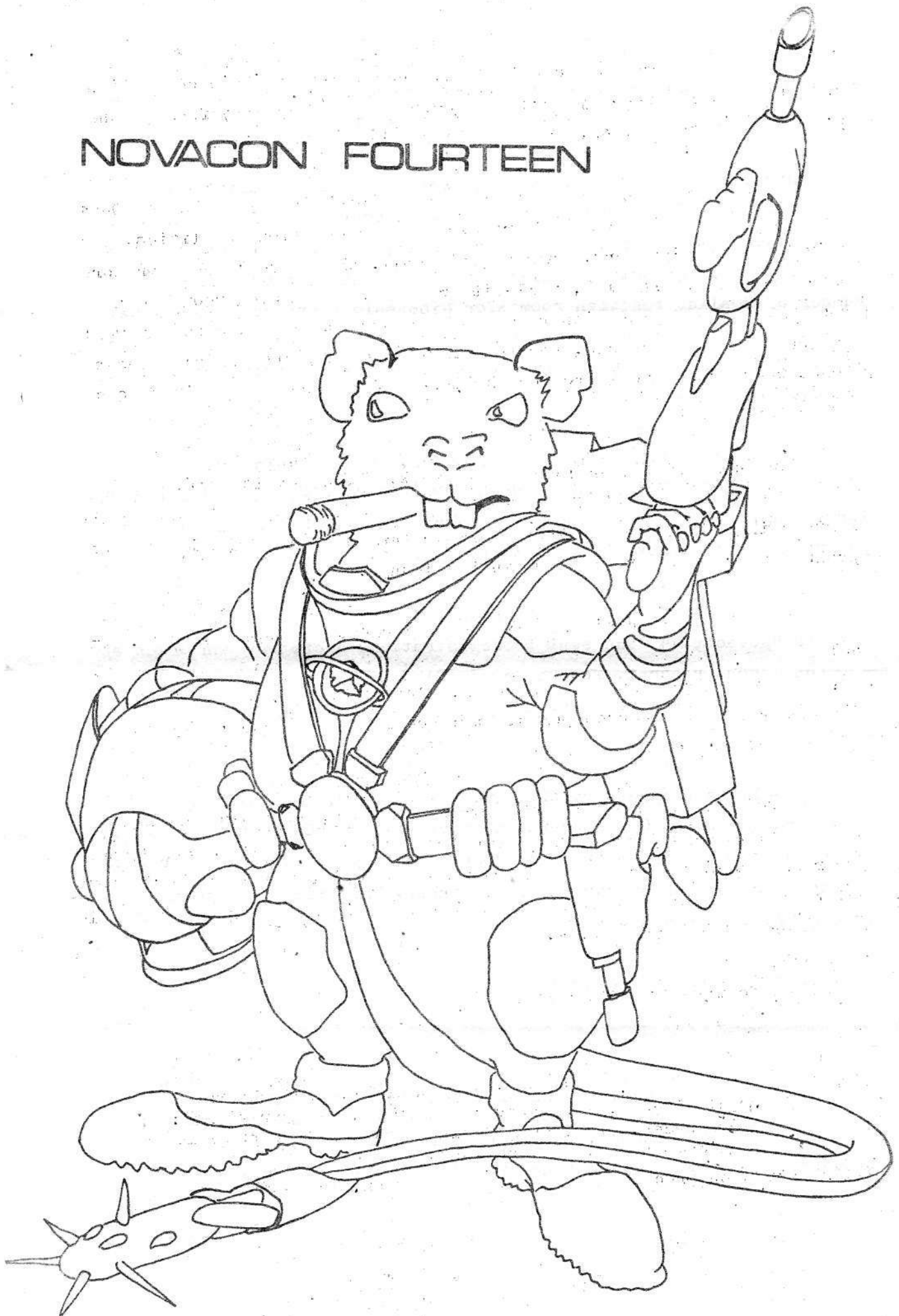
NOVACON 14

Guest of Honour:
ROB HOLDSTOCK

The Birmingham SF Group's annual sf convention will be held at the Grand Hotel, Colmore Row, on November 9-11, 1984. Membership costs £6.

Full details from: Ann Green, 11 Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 7SD.

NOVACON FOURTEEN



Since the first Novacon in 1971, the Birmingham Science Fiction Group's annual three-day party has been regarded by many fans as the highpoint of their year, and 1984 should be no exception.

Novacon 14 will be held at the Grand Hotel in Birmingham on 9-11 November, 1984. The Grand offers excellent convention facilities: two private convention bars, massive main hall, extensive lounge for more off-the-cuff programming, well-lit art room, large book room and a number of smaller function rooms for discussions and debates, as well as the convention creche. For the first time in years, Novacon has a venue which can face up to the challenge of hosting Britain's second-largest sf event.

Our guest of honour is Rob Holdstock, whose novels include EYE AMONG THE BLIND, NECROMANCER, WHERE TIME WINDS BLOW, EARTHWIND and the forthcoming MYTHAGO WOOD. Many other writers will be appearing on the programme or at informal items in the lounge.

Attending membership is six pounds ; cheques should be made payable to "Novacon 14" and sent to registrations secretary Ann Green at 11, Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, B'ham, B27 7SD. Room rate is fifteen pounds per person per night ; booking forms will be sent out with the third progress report in July.

As well as progress reports (pr2 is out now, including an article on Rob Holdstock by Chris Evans and Dave Wood on 50s conventions) and programme book, all members will receive a special souvenir short story written for Novacon by our guest of honour. This will only be available to members of the convention.

Look forward to seeing you.

Committee: Steve Green, chairman ; Martin Tudor, vice-chairman ;
Paul Vincent, treasurer ; Ann Green, registrations ;
Dave Haden, art show ; Kevin Clarke, lounge programme ;
Eunice Pearson, publications.

Illustration on preceeding page by Kevin Dixon, (c) 1983.