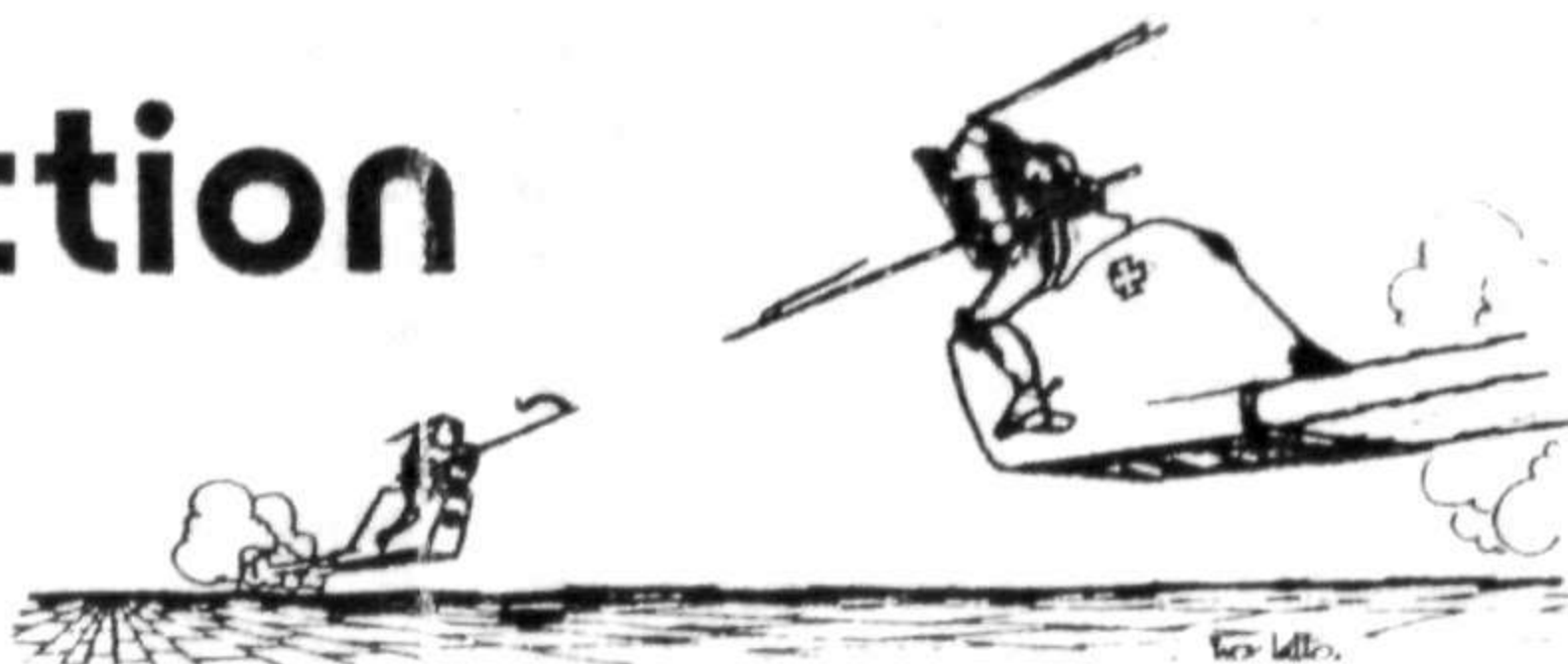


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 139

MARCH 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 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.

MARCH MEETING - Friday 18th March at 7.45 pm.

"Through Time and Space With....." Pete Weston will lead a discussion (with slides) exploring SF, past, present and future. He would like this meeting to be one of active participation by the members, putting forward their views about authors and SF.

Afterwards, interested members are invited to go for a late night meal together.

Admission this month: members 30p, non-members 60p.

## FEBRUARY MEETING

John Sladek is an entertaining writer who read us a hilarious short story full of black humour. He answered questions about his career and revealed that he prefers his books to be published first in paperback so that they reach the readership instead of collecting dust on library shelves, as he feels his duty is to entertain.

Afterwards by Dean Bisseker.

Those of you who did not come missed a great rounding off to the evening. The innovatory idea of finishing the meeting with a meal or as it was called by one critic "watch the author feed" was a great success.

Lasting nearly two hours (for those brave individuals who used chopsticks) conversation never dried up --- talk of early fanzines and methods of reproducing them; of Banders and Litho's, purple arms and slimy jelly. The meal proved to be a great informal get together and we intend to repeat it after all future meetings, maybe at different restaurants. It is well worth coming along.

## FORTHCOMING

- \* MARCH Friday 11th - Extraordinary General Meeting at the Ivy Bush. See pages 3 and 8 for further details.
- \* MARCH Tuesday 15th - at the Ivy Bush, to discuss plans for various activities e.g. Film making, Fanzine, Lord Mayor's Procession. If you plan to go to Albacon by train go along as details of an 'en masse' voyage will be thrashed out.
- \* APRIL - Toby Roxborough will be giving the Group a publishers-eye-view of the book business.
- \* LATER - Barrington J. Bailey has expressed a willingness to be a guest speaker.





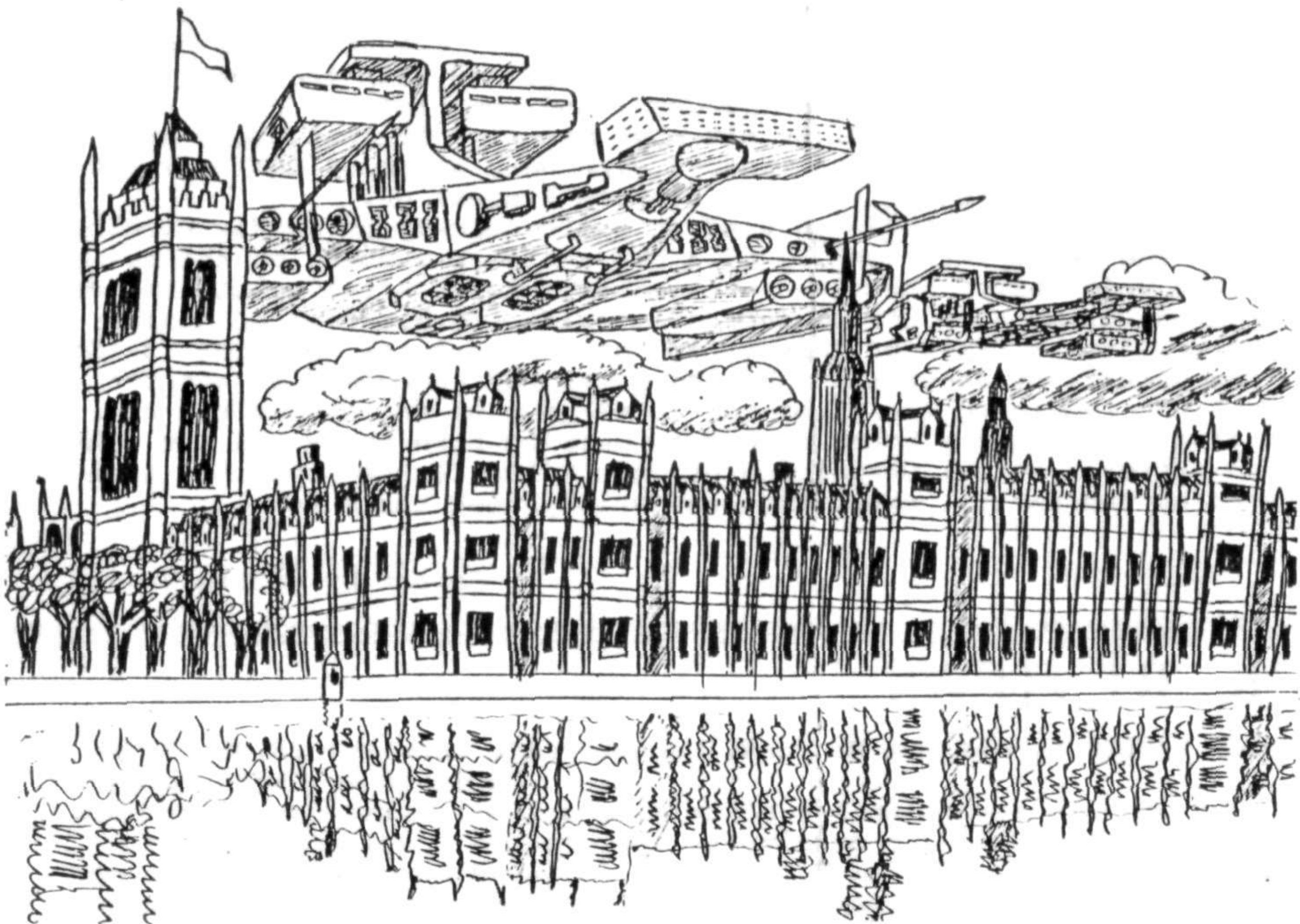


# E.G.M.

This newsletter is being pushed out early to remind you of the Extraordinary General Meeting to be held this Friday, 11th March. It is important for you to be there. It will be chaired by the Legal Officer, Tim Stannard. The order of the meeting will be as follows.

1. Introduction by the chairman.
2. Peter Weston will outline the expectations he has for successful candidates for the two vacant committee posts.
3. The candidates will introduce themselves---their platforms will be limited to three minutes each.
4. Appointment of two ordinary committee members by ballot.
5. Constitutional amendments other than those with regard to Novacon.
6. Group finances: a statement by Peter Weston.
7. Group assets: a short discussion led by Peter Weston.
8. Constitutional amendments pertaining to Novacon.

See page 8 for details of the four candidates nominated.



## membership update

### New and Rejoined Members

387	Paul Vincent	25 Dovedale Av, Pelsall, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 4HG
384	Bernie Evans	7 Grove Av, Acocks Green, B27
?	Dave Wiseman	204 St Bernard's Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands

We say goodbye to Dave & Kathy Holmes, Gordon Bolton, Trevor Burr, Kenneth Mallett and Ian Warner.







FLOATING DRAGON by Peter Straub, Collins £9.95, 623 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

A demonic presence arises about every thirty years to ravage a small town in Connecticut. This is the story of its 1980 coming. There is SF, fantasy and horror in this huge, complex novel, but mainly horror. Parallels exist with Straub's last-but-one novel, Ghost Story, where another small New England town was cursed and its inhabitants slaughtered one by one. In Floating Dragon the scope is much broader (the subject is certainly the biggest Straub has yet tackled) and the atrocities more extreme. Dozens of characters are introduced; most die nastily. I've never before come across a novel containing quite so much blood (even if a considerable amount of it is hallucinatory) or so many sickening deaths or walking dead. But this is not just another James Herbert-type horror novel. Peter Straub is a writer of considerable ability who makes one believe in the unbelievable (or even in the unthinkable). He plays with the reader, shifting viewpoint smoothly, mixing reality with hallucination. Floating Dragon is compulsive reading from start to finish.

THE AFFIRMATION by Christopher Priest, Arena (Arrow) £2.50, 213 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Now that Chris Priest has been included in the list of Britain's 20 Best Young Novelists it seems likely that all his work will be published as general fiction rather than as nasty, illiterate SF. His most recent novel, now in paperback for the first time, is brilliant and absorbing. SF fans will see it as SF---a Dream Archipelago novel to go with some of the stories in Priest's An Infinite Summer collection. Other readers will see it as the story of a young man's attempts to create an imaginary life (and world) for himself to make up for his failure in our world and to act as a refuge from it. Both reactions to the novel are valid. It's a complex, tantalisingly ambiguous work, yet gripping. Highly recommended.

THE BARBIE MURDERS by John Varley, Futura £1.95, 260 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

Without question John Varley is one of the most compelling SF writers today. The aliens and environments he depicts never fail to fascinate and enrapture the reader, the most obvious examples being Titan and Wizard, so it's a delight to welcome this collection of some of his best stories from the 1970s. Varley's world is that of the hermaphrodite. He creates with deft skill a sexual zone of demilitarisation. Feminism and male chauvinism seem out of place here. Take for example the title story which deals with a lunar colony of sexless cultists, where the conventional detective story is given a strange and original twist, or "Equinoctial", which concerns the symbiotic relationship of a pregnant mother and her amorphous alien friend. The modus vivendi of Varley's characters may sound antiseptic and clinical, but he is simply highlighting the prejudices which widen the divisions between all ages and cultures. To my mind he succeeds admirably.

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS by Gene Wolfe, Arrow £1.50, 192 pages

Reviewed by Peter Day.

A closely-linked trio of stories set on Sainte Anne and Sainte Croix, twin worlds settled from Earth a few generations before. Against a richly-textured background the various narratives intertwine to weave their way through a wealth of colourful and bizarre detail. Throughout all this runs the undercurrent of a central mystery---whatever became of the vanished race of primitive aborigines on Sainte Anne? Did they die out, or are they still around somewhere? An above-average piece of writing, as one expects from Gene Wolfe, and a very satisfactory book to read.

THE TROUBLE TWISTERS by Poul Anderson, Granada £1.25, 192 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

A reprint of Poul Anderson doing what he does best: buckling his swash. Three linked novellas trace David Falkayn's meteoric career through the ranks of the Polesotechnic League. His ability to survive problems and twist them to the particular solution he wants is witty and imaginative; lateral thinking beyond anything de Bono could produce. A kaleidoscopic background of embracing or repelling worlds plus a foreground of entertaining aliens provide a good foil for the hero's heroic skills. And even if you're familiar with the basic idea, Anderson writes and develops it well. Good old-fashioned SF at its best.



WHITE GOLD WIELDER by Stephen Donaldson, Collins £8.95, 500 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

There is hope here. After two volumes of gloom and despair filled with depressing revelations about and by the two principal characters, this is a welcome relief. The fast pace brings Covenant and Linden Avery (now lovers) back to the Land to face the things they had run away from in the search for the One Tree. They return, their quest---for a new Staff of Law with which to rid the Land of the Sunbane that has turned it into a surrealist nightmare---a failure. Anticipating criticism, Stephen Donaldson has Linden question the value of the quest when the one who sent them on it knew they were doomed to failure. Yet the suspense is there till the end, each piece slotting into place, as characters from The Wounded Land and The One Tree (the previous two volumes) reappear to fill their ordained roles. There is an inevitability about the denouement---from chapter one of The Wounded Land you don't expect Covenant to survive in the real world, but there is also the unexpected. This trilogy, The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, is interesting because it is an unconventional fantasy---it breaks the rules.

ASGARD by Nigel Frith, Unicorn £2.95, 293 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

A difficult book to review, not because of its complexity or deviousness, but because I'm not sure what type of readership it is aimed at. On the one hand it is quite simply written with longwinded explanations and descriptions and a relatively small vocabulary. On the other it is fairly sadistic in places and punctuated with a large number of anatomical four letter words, most of which are totally unnecessary. The actual storyline is a retelling of the Norse Balder myth, which has allowed the author to use a pseudo-archaic style of writing---the "then did he this, then did he that" sort, that really grates on the mind. Despite the cover blurb it's not really worth reading.

THE THRALL AND THE DRAGON'S HEART by Elizabeth Boyer, Del Rey distributed by Futura £1.50, 294 pages

Reviewed by Eunice Pearson.

At first glance, this novel would seem to be just another quest/sword-and-sorcery epic. But Ms Boyer has a quality that your average fantasy writer lacks---a sense of humour. The tale of Brac, a rather plump and cowardly thrall who becomes a hero in spite of himself, is highly entertaining. It makes a welcome change from the usual pseudo-Celt, Tolkein imitators. There are dark elves (Dokkalfar) and good elves (Ljosalfar), Norse-style zombies (known as the drauger), an evil witch-queen, a tough elf lady and an omnipotent force known as the Rhbus (who cannot intervene too much). After all, people are supposed to have free will. This book is definitely recommended!

UNFINISHED TALES by J.R.R. Tolkien, Unicorn £2.95, 472 pages

Reviewed by Alan Cash.

This is a book to dip into rather than read right through. It is hard going---in one section the same piece of information is repeated in three different ways linked by the schoolmasterly prose of J.R.R. Tolkien's worthy son. However, in the bran at the bottom of this barrel there are a few nuggets---the origin of the Palantiri, or seeing stones, and of the Istari, of which Gandalf and Saruman were two. Unfortunately, much of the book is too remote---even from The Silmarillion---to provide much insight into the wonderful world of Middle Earth. A lot of the writing has been earnestly resurrected from scribbled notes consigned to the wastepaper basket or dusty desk drawer by the Great Man who knew a thing or two about polishing writing before it saw the light of day.

MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN by John Brunner, Hamlyn £1.50, 142 pages

Reviewed by Mike Millward.

Ace reporter Drummond (no, not Bulldog) investigates monstrous hyper-transmogrifications! Close Encounters of the "Zounds!" kind. Is the entire human species an unwitting race of ETs, I ask myself? Our heroic non-hero takes us through a readable yarn wherein the hackneyed phrase "bug-eyed monsters" takes on a new dimension. (I did say "new", not "improved") There is, of course, the statutory Girl---one of the female persuasion---but, phew and gee-whizz, no sex. Not a new novel, but a rewrite of The Astronauts Must Not Land, from 1963.



PREFERRED RISK by Frederik Pohl & Lester Del Rey, Methuen £1.75, 187 pages  
Reviewed by Bob Vernon.

Galaxy's competition-winning novel from 1955, would you believe? During the year of the infamous 'McCarthy Hearing' our intrepid authors sweated over this expanded novella. Their quirky accounts of this endeavour are appended, and show how hard a collaboration it must have been---they don't even agree on how it was written! Pushing the idea that if insurance companies took their profits and actuarial tables seriously they would surely do all they could to stop people from dying, and their beneficiaries from claiming, using whatever means they had at their disposal, this is a long way short of the earlier Pohl/Kornbluth The Space Merchants, but is fast, fun, flawed and a 'one-off', worth having on your shelves.

THE WAY THE FUTURE WAS by Frederik Pohl, Granada £2.50, 318 pages  
Reviewed by Anne Gay.

Fred Pohl's autobiography is a fascinating portrait of an era---the era when SF grew up. The Depression and World War II had their effect on people and society, creating an atmosphere in which literature's youngest son could grow to maturity. Pohl, as observer and participant, Reveals All. From both inside and outside come rivetting disclosures. Pohl himself is a worthy subject---prodigy and child of his times, editor of two SF magazines at the age of 19, friend of the famous, co-founder of SF conventions, gentle gossip and humanitarian. Pohl has led a varied and interesting life. Plus writing good SF. His autobiography is also a valuable social document (and a lot of fun).

GALACTIC EFFECTUATOR by Jack Vance, Coronet £1.50. 219 pages  
Reviewed by Terry Johnson.

An entertaining book comprising two stories. In part one, "The Dogtown Tourist Agency," Vance misses no opportunity to describe in detail the planet Maz and its thoroughly objectionable misanthropic inhabitants, the Gomaz. Galactic Effectuator (a private detective without violence) Miro Hetzel goes to Maz to investigate the elusive Istagam manufacturing company, which is flooding the Gaeen Reach with cheap cybernetics. The plot is strong, as is the characterisation, but the fleshed out planetary backgrounds slow it down to almost a point of tedium. The second story "Freitzke's Return", in which Hetzel searches for Faurence Dacre who has been taking parts of living people for transplant surgery without always asking permission, is more enjoyable because of the faster pace. An ideal book for holidays and long train journeys.

TOO LONG A SACRIFICE by Mildred Downey Broxon, Futura £1.75, 251 pages  
Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

A mixture of ancient and modern. In the 6th Century Ireland of Tadgh and Maire, magic and the worlds of Faerie are real. In modern Belfast the magic has faded so much that the centuries-long prisoners of the Sidhe are freed from the underwater palaces of Lough Neagh. Gifts from their former captors cushion Tadgh and Maire from culture shock---a useful device---but more than two humans emerge from the waters. The two that span cultures are the focus for an unearthly war of which the Troubles in N. Ireland are merely a symptom. Although I enjoyed the book, particularly the handling of the mythical theme, I was not wholly convinced by modern Ireland and the ease with which Tadgh and Maire chased each other around the countryside.

ALIEN CONTACT by Jenny Randles and Paul Whetnall, Coronet Books £1.75, 207 pages  
Reviewed by David A. Hardy, FRAS, FBIS.

One's first reaction on picking up a book of this type is probably "Oh no - not another UFO contact book!" However, if you are interested in the phenomenon, and can stick with the rather naive style and occasional grammatical slips, there is enough here to provide food for thought. Any psychiatrist---or Ian Watson---would have a field day with it. The authors, although untrained except as 'UFO investigators', make a sincere attempt to look into every possible explanation for this particular case---the Sunderland family, and in particular the mother and four out of the five children, who encounter various craft and aliens. Their conclusion: it's all in the mind?



## Editorial Notes

There are four candidates for the two committee posts to be voted on at this Friday's E.G.M.

MIKE MILLWARD has been a BSFG member for 15 months. Some of his photos of committee members have appeared in the newsletter. He has read SF ever since discovering Dan Dare at the age of 5 or 6. He is an NHS manager and still finds time to follow an Open University course.

SIMON NORBURN, aged 25, is a chiropodist. He also has read SF since the age of about 5 and has regularly attended group meetings for well over a year. He is willing, enthusiastic and was one of the candidates for the post of secretary at the A.G.M.

Both Simon and Mike would make excellent committee members and would bring a fresh view to the committee as they are relative newcomers to fandom and can represent this segment of the membership.

DAVE C. HOLMES (no connection with the one at Andromeda) has been a member of the group for several years. He was one of the incompetents who tried to run the late Birmingham Science Fiction Film Society, and he was on the committee of the aborted Filmcon of 1981. He is still remembered for the unpleasant and probably libellous letter he wrote at the time, which tried to shift his own blame onto Rog Peyton.

STEVE GREEN is the man who has been described by fans and authors such as Brian Stableford and Chris Evans as "obnoxious". He will barge past visitors to the group without apology on his way to the bar. He writes a column in the British SF Association's zine Matrix in which he has attacked the BSFG, its committee and individual members. He has blown up out of all proportion minute events at committee meetings (at which he was not even present) and put false words into people's mouths. He will misquote

visiting speakers when they have specifically asked not to be quoted, and at the February meeting he was the one wearing a BSFG committee badge to which he was not entitled. If you care about the reputation of the group in the SF world as a whole you will not vote for him. After all, he was asked to resign from the last BSFG committee post he held.

Last year I made a statement to the then committee that I would not serve on the same committee as Steve Green. I asked then that this should not go outside the committee as I did not wish to influence the membership in casting their votes at the A.G.M. After taking exception to something in the newsletter, Chris Suslowicz declared his intention of publishing this in a nationally-distributed fanzine, Ansible. In the end, Vernon Brown, then BSFG chairman, persuaded him not to, and to withdraw his personally insulting (to me) letter, but he did not apologise. When Peter Weston demanded, at last Monday's committee meeting, that I make a public apology to Chris Suslowicz regarding a further statement (true in my opinion, but not printed with my approval) that he had taken exception to I refused and said that if he wished me to resign I would do so. I have enjoyed doing the newsletter and I am very sorry that I have been forced into this position, but I do not feel that I can continue to fill the post under the present circumstances.

I would like to thank all the contributors I have had in the past and wish luck to my successor. Thanks to Locus this month for news. Art credits: Ivor Latto (p.1), John Dell (pp.2 & 8) and Dave Wiseman (p.3). This issue has been edited by Pauline Morgan (with help from Eunice Pearson and Chris Morgan) 321 Sarehole Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AL.

