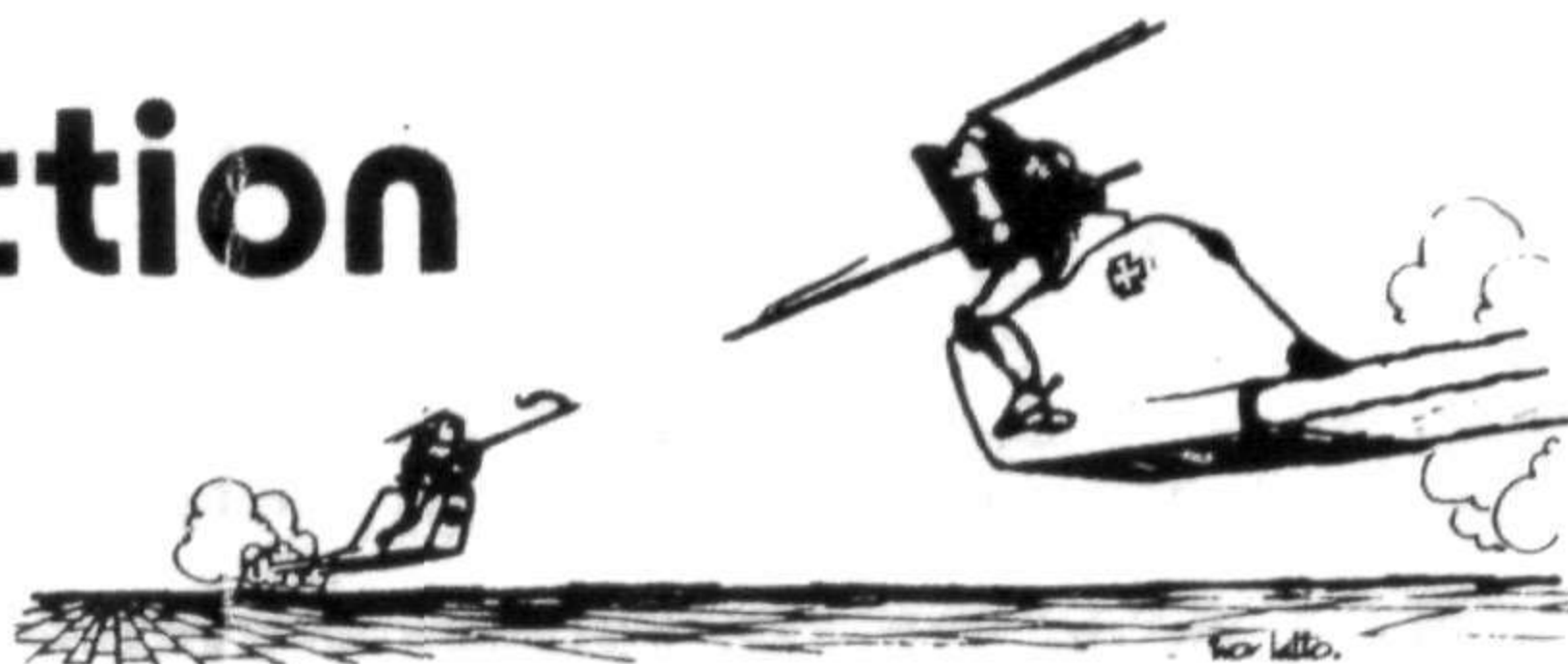


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 138

FEBRUARY 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.

FEBRUARY MEETING - Friday 18th February at 7.45 pm.

JOHN SLADEK, our speaker this month, is the creator of Roderick, the robot that is brought up in a human family. He is an American writer, resident in England, whose early novels include The Reproductive System, and The Muller-Fokker Effect, as well as non-SF novels, such as Black Alice, written in collaboration with Thomas M. Disch. Roderick and its sequel Roderick at Random are satires on the American way of life as are many of his excellent short stories. Along with parodies of well-known SF writers, some of these can be found in The Steam-Driven Boy and Other Strangers. He is also well known for his debunking of nut-cults, particularly in his book The New Apocrypha.

After the meeting, John Sladek will be eating at the "Lychee Garden" Chinese restaurant near the Ivy Bush. Any members who wish to do so will be welcome to join him.

Admission this month: members 60p, non-members £1.

JANUARY MEETING

Quite an eventful A.G.M. with all the posts, except Treasurer, well contested, the Chairman's and Secretary's posts each by three different candidates. At the last minute, under Any Other Business, it was proposed and accepted that the constitution be amended to include two extra ordinary committee members, to be elected at an E.G.M. to be called in March. Because of the lengthy business part of the meeting, the slide show, arranged by Alan Cash, was rushed.

(For new committee, see p3.)

FORTHCOMING

- * MARCH 11th-- A special meeting for the holding of the E.G.M.
- * MARCH - "Through Time and Space With..." The dynamic duo, Pete Weston and Chris Morgan, will lead a discussion (with slides) exploring SF, past, present and future.
- * April - Toby Roxborough will be giving us a publishers-eye-view of the book business.

...NEWS...

CHRIS PRIEST was chosen as one of the "twenty best young British novelists" who will be the centre of a promotional campaign by the British Book Marketing Council in the spring.

URSULA K.LE GUIN has won the 1982 Rhysling Award (given by the Science Fiction Poetry Association) for the Best Long Poem. Her winning poem was "The Well of Baln".

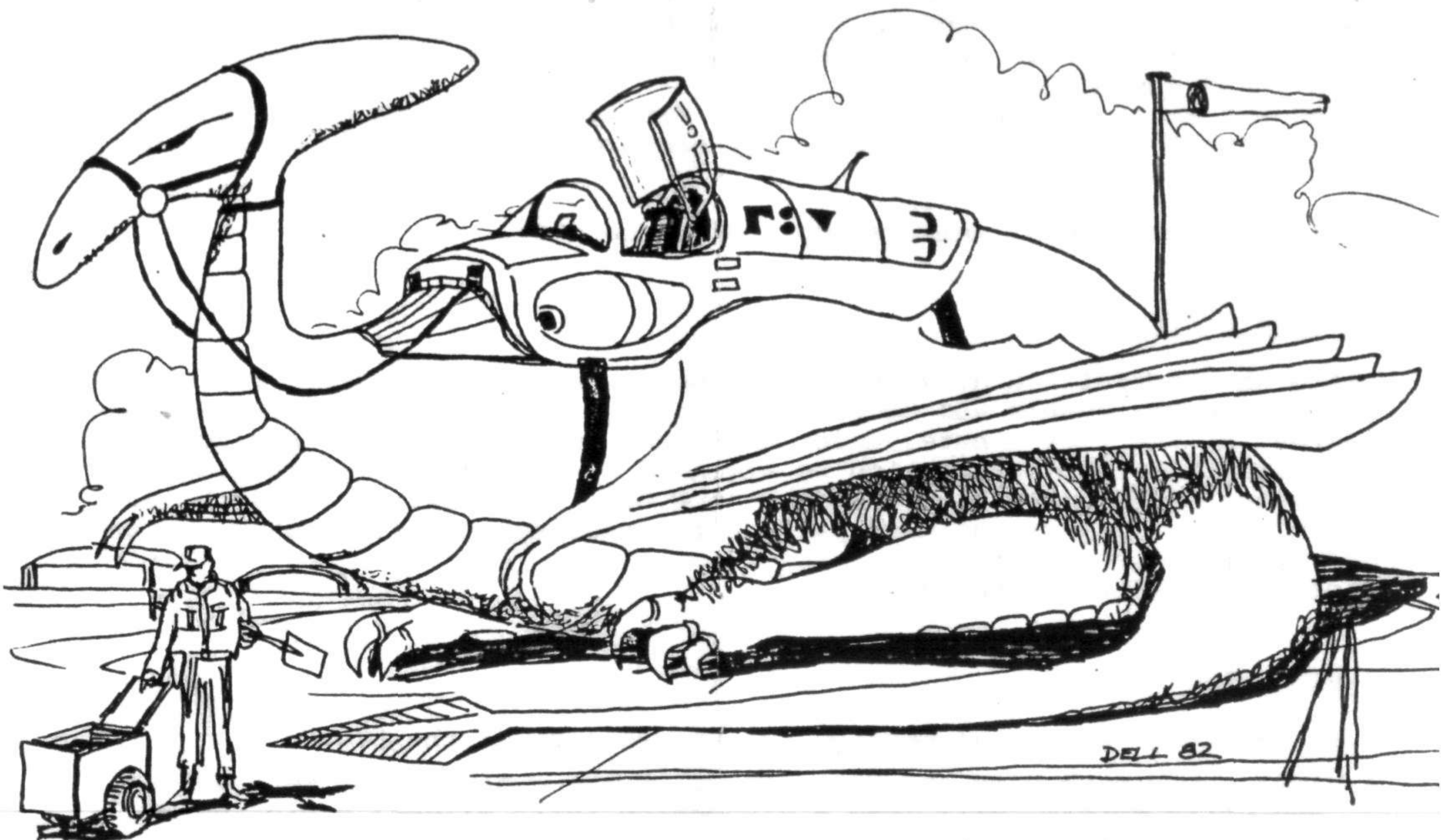
DOUGLAS ADAMS has signed with Columbia Pictures for a screen play and associate producer status on a film to be based on the Hitchhiker trilogy.

NOVACON 13 is on 4th-6th November. Please send your attending membership fee (£7) to Chris Oldroyd, 46 Colwyn Road, Beeston, Leeds, LS11 6PY.

MYTHCON, 16th-18th September will have Joy Chant as Guest-of-Honour. Send registration fee (£8 attending) to Tony Buck, 158 West Way, Raynes Park, London SW20 8LS.

ETHNICON, 7th May 1983, will be run by the Hull University SF Society.
For details write to G. Derrick, 98 Cardigan Road, N.Humberside, HU3 6XE.

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP'S top ten best selling paperbacks for January were: 1.The Stainless Steel Rat For President - Harry Harrison (Sphere), 2.Star-Search (Cageworld 4) - Colin Kapp (NEL), 3.The Elfstones of Shannara - Terry Brooks (Futura), 4.The Fifth Sally - Daniel Keyes (Hamlyn), 5=Tron - Brian Daley (NEL), 5=The Making of Kubrick's 2001 - edited by Jerome Agel (NEL), 7.The Crystal Singer - Anne McCaffrey (Corgi), 8=Eclipse - Margaret Tabor (Hamlyn), 8=Armageddon 2000 - Omen 4 - Gordon McGill (Futura), 10.Where Time Winds Blow - Robert P. Holdstock (Pan).



THE NEW COMMITTEE

As elected at the A.G.M. these are the poor fools that are to guide the Group through the next twelve months.

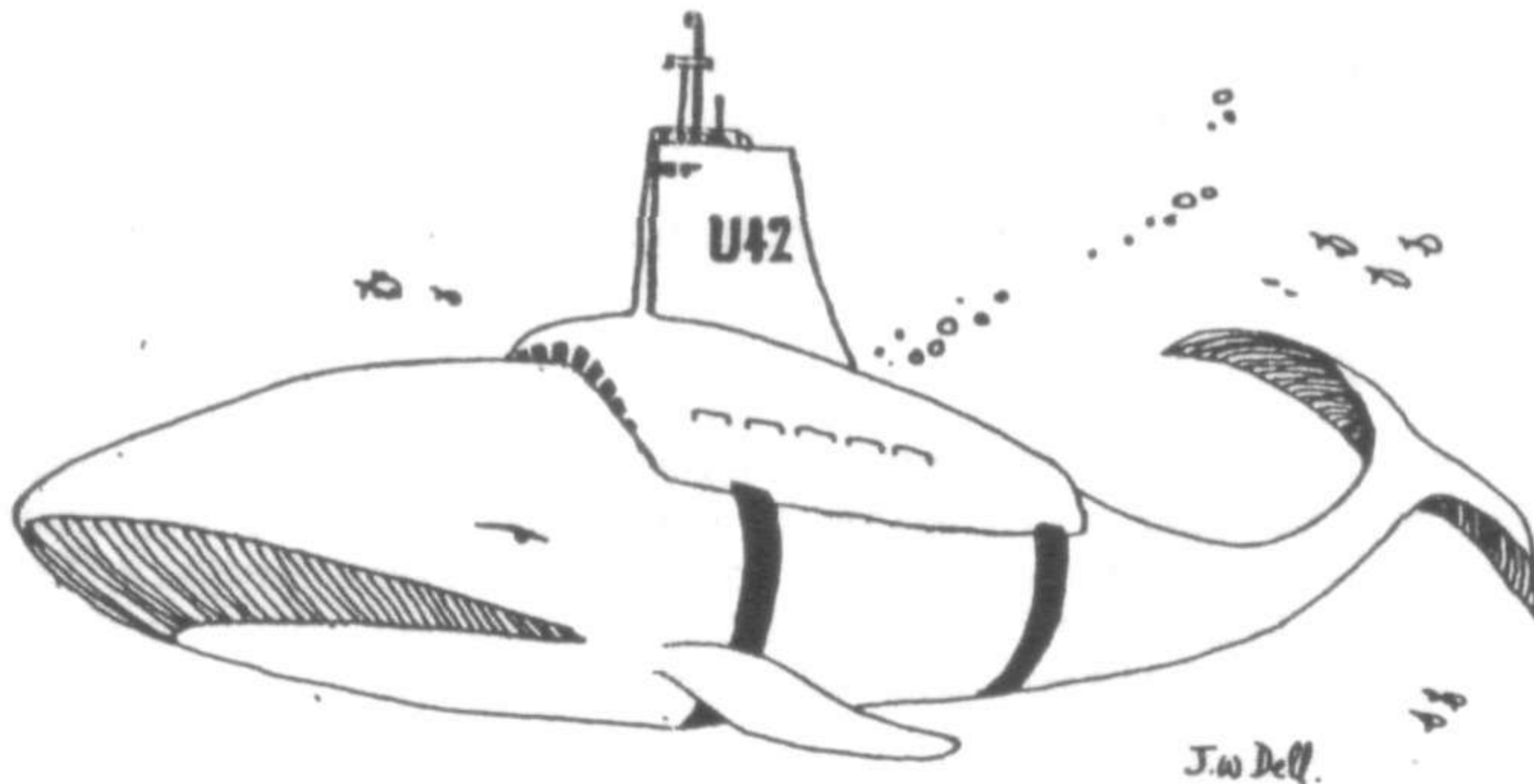
CHAIRMAN: Peter Weston has completed the circle. As one of the founders of the Group nearly twelve years ago he was the Group's first Chairman. As the new Chairman he has plans....

TREASURER: Margaret Thorpe was uncontested and will continue to do the same excellent job, curbing the spend-thrift tendencies of the rest of the committee.

SECRETARY: Chris Suslowicz fought off two other contenders for the post to be elected for a second year. We hope he'll do the job properly this time.

PUBLICITY OFFICER: Dean Bisseker is the new blood being transfused into the committee. He intends to publicise us where we have never been publicised before. He sees himself as a link-man between the members and the committee. As the time draws closer he will be asking you for help---to build and take part in the float for this year's Lord Mayor's Procession.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Pauline Morgan has taken on an assistant, Eunice Pearson, who, among other things, will be soliciting material from members---not just for the Newsletter but also for a Fanzine for and by members of the Group which she hopes to put together. Both intend to take the Newsletter to new heights of excellence (only one tipping error per page).



No comment

[From a letter to John Brunner]

15th January 1983

Dear John,

If Eurocon comes to England in 1984, I plan to be there---health permitting.....

Robert A. Heinlein.



BOOK REVIEWS

QUEST FOR THE FARADAWN by Richard Ford, Granada £1.95, 310 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Of the many talking-animal novels to appear in recent years this is about the worst. The basic problem is that it's a juvenile (though not billed as such), with noticeably simplistic plot and characterisation. The British wild animals with which the novel is much concerned are straight out of Walt Disney---anthropomorphised to a ridiculous extent and nauseatingly cute. (There is also a considerable amount of vitriolic anti-hunting propaganda here, which is unconvincing because it is so strong and unsubtle.) No part of the book is believable in the slightest: a boy raised by animals in the middle of a British wood eventually goes on a quest which will help save all animals and those humans sympathetic to them. Nobody could possibly take seriously a novel which involves talking animals, elves and the end of the world as we know it. A poor effort, though children might like it.

RED MOON AND BLACK MOUNTAIN by Joy Chant, Unicorn £2.50, 277 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

A marvellous fantasy book, and for a first novel, really outstanding. Joy Chant deals with plot and characterisation much better than do some well-known authors. The world of Kedrin is treated with confidence and clarity that spell long familiarity. Oliver, Nicholas and Penelope are transported to an alternate universe. Oliver, a 16-year-old, becomes a warrior with a tribe of Amerindian-type nomads. Nicholas and Penny, Oliver's younger brother and sister, are befriended by the rulers of a distant city. Their destinies are linked by prophecy in the coming battle with an evil, immortal sorcerer. The allegorical overtones are well handled, and the emotions of Oliver coming to terms with his two lives, both on the brink of adulthood, are superbly handled. The twist at the end is also clever and unexpected. Buy it! Also buy its prequel The Grey Mane of Morning and wait impatiently for another.

THE UNICORN by Nancy Hathaway, Penguin £5.95, 192 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This handsomely-illustrated large-format paperback follows the history of the unicorn through mythology, religion, art and culture from earliest times to the present day. It does so not in boring text-book fashion but, at least partly, by a retelling of legends about unicorns. Perhaps surprisingly, this approach succeeds well. The stories are generally simply told, which adds to their charm. Most of the illustrations are centuries old (and some are very familiar). The few modern illustrations, perhaps done especially for this book, are a poor selection. On the whole an excellent book.

THE ICE BELT by Stephen Couper, Sphere £1.95, 251pp

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

The Ice Belt, sequel to Dying of Paradise, is---chilling. Randall, the cop who ended up by destroying the Central Government, is doing life on the ice-cap, which has 99% of SF prisons beaten hollow. Is there a reason for the seemingly futile drdger? Is it a cop-out.... or a sell-out? And now that the underbelly godfathers have taken over the city, who are the off-worlders they're doing "deals" with? With The Ice Belt, Stephen Couper has ceased to be a competent writer with original ideas. He's become a very good writer with extremely good ideas. He handles sociological, political, human and mechanical themes with skill and originality, and keeps you guessing with a fantastic plot.

GOD OF TAROT (£1.00, 256 pp); VISION OF TAROT (£1.50, 272pp); FAITH OF TAROT (£1.50, 271pp) all by Piers Anthony, Granada

Reviewed by Bob Vernon.

This is a quarter-million word novel in three volumes "loosely related to the Cluster series, but is of a quite different nature; the two projects should not be confused. The complex nature of this novel may lead to confusion in certain places, and some scenes may be offensive to certain readers. Yet there is a rationale; it is difficult to appreciate the heights without first experiencing the depths" [Author's Note]. You have been warned; pseudo-profundity raises its ponderous head before the novel even begins. Piers Anthony has used a number of narrative forms for previous soul searches and now ventures (misguidedly) into the mystical/occult world of Tarot cards, sending Brother Paul of the "Order of Vision" (to which the novel is dedicated) to the planet Tarot, colonised by various religious sects, to find the nature of God among the psycho-dramatic displays and hallucinations manifested there. Piers Anthony obviously regards this as a profound novel, but comes unstuck as his zeal tramples over the demands of narrative, characterization and credibility. He overestimates the significance of his message and the load-bearing strength of his vehicle. The result is undisciplined, self-indulgent, psychologically and spiritually crass, apologetic and confused. Without being sniffy this is hardly surprising, as the occult is concerned with mystification rather than clarification, darkness rather than light, chaos rather than order. The author's intention is obviously romantic and he has been seduced by the siren attraction of the Grail/Tarot lore. He has wandered into areas explored by Ian Watson (who is philosophically sounder), Zelazny (who writes better), Delany (who is much braver) and Walter Miller (who is more perceptive and profound). I enjoyed Macroscope and the Omnivore trilogy, but this comes over as a male-menopause production, often sexist and tedious. The denouement is overdue, unsatisfactory and sentimental. Too many times we read that the secret of life is to be found in a load of shit. Not, however, in this one.

THE VANISHING TOWER by Michael Moorcock, Granada £1.25, 190pp

Reviewed by William McCabe.

This is a reworking of The Sleeping Sorceress - the third in the Elric of Melnibone series and as good as any other of Moorcock's sword and sorcery novels. It contains three consequent short stories. In the first two Theleb K'aarna - an evil sorcerer - with the aid of some other nasties, tries to destroy Elric - the good guy with bloodthirsty sword - and in the last Elric joins three re-incarnations of himself, (Erekose, Corum and Jhary-a-Conel) to save the world from chaos (and to involve as many other Moorcock novels as possible).

MYSTERIES FROM FORGOTTEN WORLDS by Charles Berlitz, Granada £1.50, 222pp

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

A fascinating collection of archeological mysteries neatly examined and explained by the simple expedient of taking a fresh and unbiased look at them. Berlitz certainly has a persuasive theory that Mankind is far older than anyone had hitherto believed; most of the traces and artifacts left by the earlier civilisations are now beneath the sea. Whatever you choose to believe, the book is well-written; all the clues and hints are knitted cleverly together to form a revolutionary theory. Certainly worth reading if you are at all interested in past civilisations.

RODERICK AT RANDOM by John Sladek, Granada £1.95, 317 pages
Reviewed by Anne Gay.

In the prequel, Roderick was the solution to a problem: how to make a robot converse rather than parrot. Let it learn as humans do, growing up in a human family. Now Roderick has grown up and everybody wants him...dead. All unknowing, Roderick bumbles through a series of bum jobs, trying to discover himself and wondering why people around him keep being murdered. This is a picaresque novel, dissecting American society---or rather watching it fall apart through the eyes of a bewildered robot-youth. Funny and satirical, Sladek shows crackpot religions and the C.I.A., industrial espionage and Machine's Lib, plus an inevitably grisly think-tank. And much, much more. If you like intelligent mickey-taking and can stand stream-of-consciousness in small doses, Sladek's humour will surely appeal.

THE CRYSTAL SINGER by Anne McCaffrey, Corgi £1.75, 302 pages; RESTOREE by Anne McCaffrey, Corgi £1.50, 223 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

I see that The Crystal Singer, which tells the expanded first half of Killashandra's story---how she first encounters a crystal singer, goes to the planet Ballybran, learns the profession and makes good---is already in The Sunday Times' best-seller list. So it's obvious that many people enjoy the author's rather emotional brand of wish-fulfilment. The business of cutting and tuning outcrops of natural crystal is original and highly fascinating, a good idea on which to hang a novel or two. If you like Anne McCaffrey's writing you will surely enjoy The Crystal Singer, now in UK paperback for the first time. Restoree, on the other hand, was the author's first published novel and is now in its umpteenth reprint; it's fairly conventional SF told in woman's magazine style. "My head ached with the pressure of stifled grief and my body from the stimulus of his caresses." Get the idea?

THE STORIES OF RAY BRADBURY, 2 volumes, Granada £2.95 each, 715pp & 685pp
Reviewed by John Farr.

The hundred stories in these two paperback volumes are the best of Ray Bradbury, amounting to about a fifth of all his short fiction. They span the full range of his output: science fiction, fantasy, horror and others. Bradbury is an author widely known to the general public, perhaps more highly respected outside our genre than within it. These stories (including a few not previously published in book form) have a magical quality about them. Recommended.

THE WANTING SEED by Anthony Burgess, Hamlyn £1.50, 282pp

Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

Anthony Burgess gives his imagination full reign in this horrific vision of a Britain subjected to population pressures equal to those experienced in Asia today. The story is one of Government control: homosexuality is officially encouraged and hetero sex is frowned upon, especially those relationships which produce children. As food shortages become worse the population and the government, in desperation, turn to religion, amongst other things. Cannibalism is rife, giving a whole new meaning to the term "bully-beef", as the government sponsors a war in order to cull the surplus population. Who are the enemy? The answer is as horrific as the problem itself. This is not a pleasant book, but it is very thought-provoking, and well worth reading.



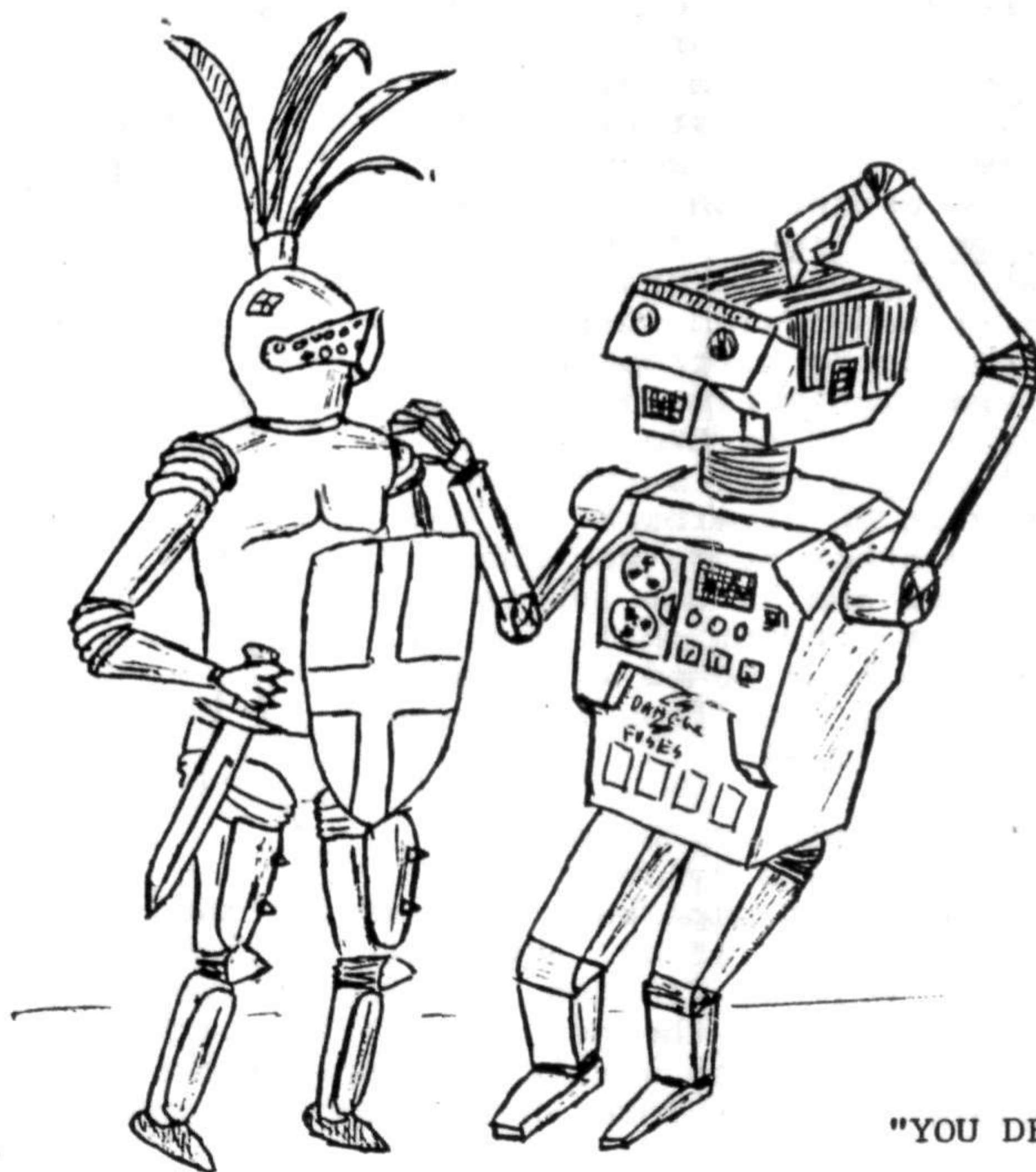
SPECIAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the Committee of the BSFG will convene an Extraordinary General Meeting on Friday the 11th day of March 1983 at The Ivy Bush for the puposes of:-

- a. Electing two extra, ordinary committee members
- b. Making amendments to the constitution
- c. Discussing the group's assets.

Nominations are therefore invited for the two committee posts, which shall be submitted in writing to the Legal Officer (TJ Stannard) at the next group meeting on Friday the 18th Febuary 1983, or by post to T.J. Stannard, 92 Nursery Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3JT by Friday 25th Febuary 1983. Each nomination shall be seconded and the nominee must be willing to stand and be present at the EGM. Voting will be by ballot at the EGM.

When the business is over, the Auction, postponed from January's AGM because of lack of time, will be held. Please bring along any surplus books, magazines, fanzines etc. you no longer want.



"YOU DEAF OR SOMETHING...?"

Editorial Notes

I can't help echoing the above caption. Despite my pleas for articles and pictures, and despite all the artists and writers in the group (not to mention all the enthusiasm shown at the AGM), we had problems filling this issue of the newsletter. (What happened to your promised reviews, Vernon Brown, Alan Cash and Dave Hardy?) Anyway, grateful thanks to Locus for news and to artists Ivor Latto (p.1), John Dell (pp.2, 3, 5 and 7) and David Wiseman (p.8). This February issue has been produced and edited for the Birmingham Science Fiction Group by Pauline E.Morgan (with help from Eunice Pearson) 321 Sarehole Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AL.