

EARLY HT 87
"Don't ever interest us. Don't make us want to know more about you."

THE OUSFG NEWSLETTER

Early Hilary, 1987

Hello again, and welcome to yet another OUSFG newsletter. Hilary may be the quiet term as far as college goes, but in OUSFG we hope for something better. Now that we all know each other a little better... we can become the fun social creatures that you were led to believe you were joining at the Freshers' Fair. Some may be in for a shock, but we doubt it. Rumour has it that newer members are quite as depraved as the rest of some of us. (Except, of course, your erstwhile Newsletter editors who are known only for our astonishing good taste and extreme discretion [sic] as well as for our considerable invisibility)

Attractions this term include two speaker meetings and the Banquet. Also, this is the time to throw around the admiration and/or slander for fellow OUSFG members. Yes indeed, your nominations, please, for a new set of committee members!

Finally, here's a reflection on the nature of the universe on which to mentally ruminate...

He abhorred the universe and would have liked to adore God; but God, for him, was less real than the abhorred universe. He deplored the fact that the firmament did not speak, and he compared our life with that of the physical world, he experienced vertigo, fright and solitude, and he put his feelings into these words; 'Nature is an infinite sphere, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.' Isn't it though?

Book News

-Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Cape, £9.95)

"Shortlisted for the Booker Prize, this novel is set in the Republic of Gilead, a large portion of the U.S. which has been taken over forcibly by Christian fundamentalists. Supposedly revered for their fertility, all women are removed from important social positions and some, the Handmaids, exist solely as wombs to be filled with the fruit of important men ('Commanders') with barren wives. Offred, the title character submits to the new order, completely cloaking her body and never appearing alone in public. She cannot own property and has no individual identity, being defined only with respect to her current Commander (Offred = of Fred).

"The book is frightening and convincing in its portrayal of the loneliness, fear and mistrust of an individual in a totalitarian regime. Best of all is Atwood's description of the means by which this totalitarian state was established and how it sustains itself. She suggests that many people would not greatly object to the sort of moral code enforced today only in 'unenlightened' countries such as Saudi Arabia and Islamic Iran ('Victorian values'?) and that the liberalism of the rest could be intimidated into submission. Atwood's message is clear; the feminist victory is not won. It has become trendy to sympathise with it but female emancipation is not an irresistible force. She fears that all may be lost in a backlash like that of the monotheocracy of Gilead. By the same token, the civil rights that we take for granted in the West must be cherished and guarded if they are to be retained. Although not mainstream SF, *The Handmaid's Tale* is in the tradition of Orwell and Koestler and is worth reading for the conviction, maturity and terrible plausibility of its political and feminist insights." (David Lane.)

-Peter Bryant, *Two Hours To Doom* (Published 1958)

"This is the novel upon which the film *Dr. Strangelove* was based. I spent ages trying to get hold of it and so I promised myself that I would read the Bodleian copy before leaving Oxford. This is a serious thriller, in fact Peter Bryant (aka Peter George) was so troubled by the possibility of nuclear war that he eventually committed suicide. Stanley Kubrick planned to film the novel 'straight' but claimed that he kept having insights into the way characters might react which appeared absurd and funny. Eventually he decided not to resist this approach and made a film which is uproariously funny but which is only a very short distance from a terrifying tragedy.

"The novel has the same set up as the film: renegade USAF commander orders B52's to attack USSR, President struggles to avoid disaster, existence of Doomsday device revealed, recall code discovered and sent but one aircraft continues to attack etc. However, in this case the Russians have to fire the device themselves so that when the lone B52 drops its weapons there is some talk of a 'city swapping' deal in recompense rather than our *Vera* and *Apocalypse Now*.

"The USAF commander is not a sexual incompetent but produces coherent reasons for his actions. As a result I realised that the existence of the Doomsday device allows you to avoid the key issue of the morality of the West attacking first. Because such an attack would result in mutual destruction it ceases to be considered by the U.S. strategists but this is simply to side-step the issue.

"Before you rush off to read this novel I should warn you that although it is quite good there are some lovely elements missing: the survival pack scene, the precious bodily fluids speech, the drunk Soviet Premier, the line 'Gentlemen, you can't fight in here, this is the War Room!', Lionel Mandrake DFC, Sgt. Bat Guano and Dr. Strangelove himself. And I certainly missed the George C. Scott character!

"After the U.S. President negotiates events away from the brink (nice to see a competent democratic figure) we get Bryant's view from the mouth of the Russian ambassador:

Ideological differences are not so sharply defined as the line between life and death. We may have to learn how to differ. But better than having to learn how to die.

"Or as Kubrick might say, 'Try A Little Tenderness.'" (David Lane)

Film News

1. The Phoenix (Walton Street)

30 Jan, Fri 6 - Thu 19 Feb: *Peggy Sue Got Married*. Kathleen Turner plays the forty-two year old mother of two who is given the proverbial 'second chance' to alter her life, with her life's experiences and recollections equipping her for decisions in her seventeenth year. Sounds like *Back to the Future* without the technology.

31 Jan, 11pm. *The Meaning of Life with Clue*. The latter film is based on the board game 'Cluedo.' An all-star cast portray the six suspects who are delightfully manipulated by Tim Curry's not un-Frank-like butler character. There are three endings, so even the smartest armchair detective will have trouble elucidating them all. This is really a very funny film. Worth seeing.

2. Cannon (Magdalen Street)

The Golden Child. Eddie Murphy battles to save a sacred child...something to do with Buddha.

3. PPP

3 Feb. *The Hunger*.

18 Feb. *Dreamchild*.

19 Feb. *Bladerunner*. with *The Man With Two Brains*.

20 Feb. *Brazil*. with 1984.

21 Feb. *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. with *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*.

Society News

1. Discussion Meetings

Wednesdays, 8:15 Ch.Ch., Meadow Buildings, 6:12;

Wk 2: 'Bruce Sterling' - Andy Read.

Wk 3: 'Literary Fascism, or why you should read fantasy.' - Ivan Towison.

Wk 4: 'Gene Wolfe. (All you wanted to know & more)' - Niall Ross.

Wk 5: 'The Death of SF' - Phil Reigns.

2. Library Meetings

On Sundays, at 8:15pm, in New College, New Building, St12 Rm3. Suggestions box: On Ivan's door. If you're sure we don't already have the book you're suggesting, then write down the title and author, and initial your suggestions. Suggestions can be seconded (and thirded etc) by adding initials on the same line.

Stacks: Some of our less popular and, ah, less inspired books now live in cardboard boxes. They are still accessible, but you search at your own risk...

3. Speaker Meetings

Friday of 2nd week, BNC, LR VII at 8.30pm...DAVID BRIN - all the way from the good ol' U.S. of A. No expense spared, eh? His latest book, 'The Postman' comes out in paperback around now and there's a signing session at Rainbow's End on Cowley Road on the Saturday morning. Other works include 'Startide Rising', 'The Practise Effect', 'Sundiver.'

5 March, probably BNC again...Terry Pratchett!

Writer of inspired fantasy-comedy tales. fantasy's answer to Doug Adams. Works include 'The Colour of Magic', 'The Light Fantastic' (and sequels), 'The Dark Side of the Sun', 'Strata.'

4. Video Meeting

Every even week on Monday. Meet in Ivan's room at 8(ish).

5. BANQUET

Nothing definite is yet settled. But! Be sure to put aside £12-£15 for a truly memorable night. (If you can remember anything the next morning!)

6. SFinx

Interested in writing for SFinx or helping to bring out an issue? See Maria/Ivan/Neal Tringham (Exeter). SFinx, for those who don't know is the society's fiction zine and compulsory reading (or we'll send the boys around (ie. Max)).

7. ELECTIONS

The Pres. would like the nominations in by the end of 3rd week, OK? So get thinking.

8. Newsletter

Send contributions to one of us, whenever you like. Film and book reviews always welcome. Someone will have to take over for Trinity, please, during which time we will be suffering greatly at the hands of the tormentors...

Well, another long night concluded...the disc-drive begins to overheat and the Beeb B begins to crash, so it's time to end.

BE SEEING YOU!

David & Pita

If there is a cross next to your name, you are no longer a member (money please).

Written, produced and edited by Pita Enriquez & David Harris (Catz)

Distributed by Rebecca Heddle (St. Anne's)

Very sparse without David Lane (Golgafincham Ark B)