

J. Bray, Editor

## THE OUSFG NEWSLETTER

Late Hilary, 1987

The end of this term sees the approach of the OUSFG banquet and the visit of Terry Pratchett. Those who have read Pratchett's books 'The Colour of Magic' and 'The Light Fantastic' will realise that if The Man is as amusing as The Book, then we should be in for an entertaining evening.

David Brin, earlier this term, gave a controversial although fascinating talk - less a 'talk', in fact, than an argument. Some of us found his argumentative weapons formidable at dinner; less impressive when repeated at the meeting; and almost reassuring when we heard them again at the Saturday morning signing session. Ah. The man is human after all. If you have read his books (especially *The Postman*) you will, perhaps unconsciously, be aware of many of his views, or at least those propounded by him at the meeting. Pity I hadn't read *The Postman* before - at least the counter arguments were sometimes mentioned there. At the meeting it was largely Phil Reigns and Neal Tringham who engaged in serious refutation of many of Brin's ideas - which seemed to impress him. "I like you guys," he said. "You push back, you don't let me get away with anything and...I'm proud of you." Brin is certainly an engaging and likeable character - if slightly too often playing the Devil's advocate, and occasionally insulting. If it wasn't all hype, then it would be worth getting hold of him again in May; a rematch of wits against Phil and Neal perhaps, and a chance for those who missed his talk to hear him...?

But back to Terry Pratchett, whose 'The Light Fantastic' provides the following quote:

The barbarian chieftain said: 'What then are the greatest things that a man may find in life?' This is the sort of thing you're supposed to say to maintain steppe-cred in barbarian circles.

The man on his right thoughtfully drank his cocktail of mare's milk and snowcat blood and spoke thus: 'The crisp horizon of the steppe, the wind in your hair, a fresh horse under you.'

The man on his left said: 'The cry of the white eagle in the heights, the fall of snow in the forest, a true arrow in your bow.'

The chieftain nodded, and said: 'Surely it is the sight of your enemy slain, the humiliation of his tribe and the lamentation of his women.'

There was a general murmur of whiskery approval at this outrageous display.

The chieftain turned respectfully to his guest, a small figure carefully warming his chillblains by the fire, and said: 'But our guest, whose name is legend, must tell us truly: what is it that a man may call the greatest things in life?'

The guest paused in the middle of another unsuccessful attempt to light up.

'What shay?' he said, toothlessly.

'I said: what is it that a man may call the greatest things in life?'

The warriors leaned closer. This should be worth hearing.

The guest thought long and hard and then said, with deliberation: 'Hot water, good dentistry and soft lavatory paper.'

A kind of Dungeons and Dragons with a hint of Hitch-Hikers isn't it?!

## Book News

-David Brin, *The Postman*

"Gordon Krantz wanders aimlessly through a post-holocaust America, trying to stay alive in spite of conditions, scarce food, bandits, and 'Holnist' survivalists. After robbers make off with his warm clothes, he takes the uniform from the body of a dead postman. At the next village he comes to, he is welcomed and given letters to deliver by people trying to convince themselves that the USA is being resurrected.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & ELECTIONS

At 8:30pm Sunday March 1st in the library. The election will be by secret ballot. Here's the list of nominees for society officers and committee members:

President	Mark Grant Rebecca Heddle Ivan Towilson
Secretary	Fiona George
Treasurer	Mark Grant Mo Holkar
Committee members	Paul Cray John Graham-Cumming Graham Harper Chris Hughes Samantha Pyle David Stainforth Neal Tringham

*Rob Sadler*

The following constitutional amendments will also be voted on:

- (i) Voting on all matters shall be by secret ballot.
- (ii) Voting for society officers and committee members shall be by the S.I.V. system (i.e. that the candidate with the least number of first place votes be removed from the ballot and the second place votes of people who put her/him first be counted as first place votes, and so on).
- (iii) The librarian shall automatically be a member of the committee.
- (iv) The constitution shall be displayed in the library at all times.
- (v) The Chairperson and one other committee member shall both act as returning officers.
- (vi) The society shall be re-named 'The O.U. Science Fiction Group.'

### Notes on the Amendments:

- (iii) At the moment, the Librarian (obviously not an elected post!) has to be co-opted onto the committee. Usually s/he is, but a few years ago the secretary and the Librarian didn't get on, so he wasn't co-opted. This sort of thing could lead to great administrative difficulties! On the other hand, it will remain a non-elected post.
- (v) The 'S' stands for 'Speculative' because at the time the Group was formed, the Proctors wouldn't let them call it the 'Science' Fiction Group - it was 25 years ago! But now some people feel that 'Science' is more obvious and appropriate. Others feel that as the scope of the society is 'speculative' fiction, which includes fantasy and things not easily classified as fantasy or science fiction, and that the name has become a particular distinguishing mark of OUSFG among the horde of University Science Fiction societies.

### The OUSFG Banquet

We now have the final choices of menu. The deadline for confirmation of which combination you want and also for payment (£15.00 with alcohol or £12.00 without) is Sunday March 1st at the AGM. Well here 'tis

Mushrooms in Breadcrumbs

or

Paté

ooo00ooo

Duck in Honey

or

Ribs of Beef in Stilton

or

Cottage Cheese, Spinach and Mushroom Wellington (Vegetarian)

or

Vegetable Bake (Vegan)

ooo00ooo

Cheese and Biscuits

Coffee

Dress is Black Tie! Offenders shall be scolded!! The Banquet will be in Cherwell Boathouse on Friday March 6. We'll meet in the Horse & Jockey, Woodstock Rd. at 7-7.30 (The time will be finalised by next week, hopefully).



"He next comes to a little fort-village and, arming himself with duplicated notices announcing a 'Restored USA', tries to get in ('Assault on a postal courier is one of the few federal crimes that the pro tem Congress hasn't suspended.'). When he turns out to have at letter for one of the villagers, they accept him and his myth of a Restored USA and USPS.

"The first third of Brin's novel is tremendously powerful: the way that a symbol of something long-disappeared inspires people to believe that it's still around after all, and the way that this belief becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, are ideas that sf tends to avoid using, though they seem to me to be one of the few half-way credible bases for an optimistic post-holocaust novel (and God knows we've got enough of them around). Maybe the genre is completely ignorant of any idea of myth or the power of myth (other reading tends to confirm this).

"It's a pity, then, that the rest of *The Postman* is tedious, ill thought out and implausible junk. The survivalists, for some reason, band together (huh?) to have a war with the civilised area; Krantz and co. keep them off for a while (oh yes?); Krantz is captured, but rather than kill him, the Master villain gloats, lets him escape and recaptures him (really...); the M.V. is then revealed to be an "augment" (superhuman) (why?); as the survivalists prepare to overrun the civilised area, a Master Goodie comes down from the hills and wrestles the M.V. into the ground (does he now?); at which point the survivalists give up and become Nice People.

"Read Part 1, then throw the rest away. A waste of a brilliant novella." (Ivan)

-Robert Sheckley, 'Mindswap', 'Dimension of Miracles', 'Options.'

One of my favourite Sheckley novels (the other being *The Status Civilisation*), recently, or not so recently, reissued. *Mindswap* is about the trials and tribulations of a man who mindswaps to a vacation on Mars and ends up chasing the being who stole his body across the universe and beyond it (beware the terrors of metaphoric deformation). *Dimension of Miracles* is a sort of sophisticated Hitch-Hikers dating from 1966. And *Options* - my favourite - is a game with premises. A Zen text? A childish fantasy? A drug-induced hallucination? A self-exploration? A suggestion of what would happen if orthodox causality went wrong? All these things and more in a very funny and very clever surrealist novel - the most interesting puzzle on the market today. All highly recommended." (Ivan)

-Fred Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth, *Wolfbane*.

"A good adventure novel set on an Earth that has been kidnapped (dragged away from the Sun) by a mysterious alien force. The population live in subjugation to a collection of animate pyramids - all except for the 'wolves in sheeps clothing' (the real survivor types) who spend most of their time running around on the Moon trying to Save The World and getting eaten by lumps of green goo. Baaa..." (Neal)

-Greg Benford and David Brin, *Heart of the Comet*.

"I woke up from what seemed to be a typical 1980s US sf story - ecology, sex, nasty governments vs nice corporations, electricity/diseases/ice/food from space - to realise that I'd just read a passage in which a handsome spaceman, a mad scientist, a beautiful and an intelligent robot fight off voracious green and purple slime in a cave on Halley's Comet, with ray guns!... Zap! Pow! Whoopee! I loved it. Perhaps I've finally found something to put on the bedside shelf next to Captain Future..." (Neal)

-Delany, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*.

"This, the long awaited new Delany, apparently features everything from deliquescing doors to the tragic tale of a man searching six thousand worlds for his ideal erotic partner (a boy suffering from an extreme case of acne). Everybody who is Anybody drools about this one, and to make things even better there is a sequel on the way. Who could ask for more? (Apart from a bookshop that actually has a copy in stock of course)." (Neal)

-Ian Watson, *Queenmagic*, *Kingmagic*.

"This is a chess novel of another kind, set on chessboard where black totalitarian Chorny and white Bellogard play out their game with living pieces. Since the world ends whenever a game is won, how can the young pawn Pedino hope to survive? (Time off here for nailbiting in the back row). Apparently it's quite good, though described menacingly by Interzone as 'having a strong Nabokovian feel.'" (Neal)

## Film News

### 1. The Phoenix (Walton Street)

28 March. Repo Man with Stranger Than Paradise.

### 2. Cannon (George Street)

The Golden Child.

### 3. Not the Moulin Rouge

4-7 March. Romancing the Stone and The Jewel of the Nile.

11-14 March. Highlander: Christopher Lambert as the 'Immortal' whose exploits in the Past and Present are switched between by a variety of startling transitional devices. Production and texture seem to be the highlight of this film - the plot is basic to say the least.



### Discussion Meetings

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

Wk 7 : Maria - "Out of the gutter, into the sewer." - the wild and wonderful world of SF fandom. Find out why 'life' on your membership card means just that!

Wk 8 : John Styles - "I could have been a contender." - Awards: Hugos, Nebulas et al. A good idea or a mere book-selling ploy? Do the right people get them? What do they really mean?

### Speaker Meetings

Terry Pratchett. Thursday 5 March, 8:30pm BNC Lecture Room VII. Need any more be said?

Next Term we'll be seeing Colin Greenland who did his Oxford D.Phil thesis on SF and went on to review SF and write fantasy for a living. Did a spell editing Interzone, Britain's avant-garde SF magazine, but left with a soupçon of controversy.

Alan Garner Should be having his gall bladder out...about now! So should be along in the summer.

### 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 books now live in cardboard boxes. They are still accessible, but you search at your own risk...

### Video Meetings

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

### SFinx

Interested in writing for SFinx or helping to bring out an issue? See Maria/Ivan/Neal Tringham (Exeter).

### Lost Property

Somebody please claim the pair of gloves which were left at the Xmas disco!

7 Stop Press... Kaos - Anyone interested in a team game running in 7th/8th weeks, please see Ivan by 1st March

The Tongues of Men and Angels: OUSFG Observed

1) "Are you talking about the real world now?" - John Grandidge

2) Phil : .....sexual fascism-

Max(TM) : Trendy pseudo-intellectual use of 'fascism'!

Phil : Er, I was just quoting someone...

Max(TM) : Well don't, it's wrong!

3) "Well....." - Neal

4) "The situation is actually a bit more complex" - Neal

5) "Yes and no" - Neal

(David Lane(!))

[David kindly supplied this when we asked him to contribute something 'original and innovative' for the newsletter. Subsequent newsletters will be edited by Ivan, but if anyone sends him any amusing quotes from OUSFG 'angels' which they feel merit going down in the annals of OUSFG history, he may wish to continue this section.]

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)  
Printed and published by Rebecca Heddle (St. Anne's) (mouses)