

I have wept and bled for you, sometimes lost my mind for you...

THE Spung

COMING SOON TO A PUNT
NEAR YOU... PENNY HEAL'S

The Ring of the Nealebung

BASED ON A CONCEPT BY
RICK WAGNER

SEE! NEAL TURN INTO A
GRASSHOPPER!

SEE! THE RAINBOW BRIDGE
APPEAR BEFORE YOUR
VERY EYES!

SEE! JANE AND KATH THROWN
INTO THE CHERWELL!

SE - Jane, put down
that knife.

CIAL ... THE SIZZLING SOARAWAY MID-HILARY UPDATE ON S.F. IN OXFORD!!! ... ELECTION SPECIAL ... FORWARD WITH THE PENGUIN ... ELECTI

President In "Silly" Amendments Shock Probe

Sunday of 6th week is AGM day--that was the message coming from Number 84 this week as the committee went into secret session to decide, in the face of mounting public speculation, who was going to win the OUSFG elections. Polling will take place between 9 and 9:30 pm in St John's Prestwich Room on 21 February, and at the same time the electorate will be asked to consider a number of proposed constitutional amendments, many of them unnecessarily silly (well, the constitution makes such boring reading as it stands, Phil Raines, this means you). Be there, or be somewhere else.

Meanwhile, on the So This Is Real Life front, for the benefit of those who don't yet know, OUSFG's Comic Relief efforts raised a fairly substantial amount... Thanks and congratulations to Liz Wright, Chris Hughes and Tim Adye who agreed to be sold as slaves (ching! £93), Tommy Wareing who assassinated most of the Group's members and then charged them 20p for the privilege (ching! £20-odd) and last and most emphatically least all those who turned up to throw wet sponges at the committee (squelch! £40-odd).

The Picocon delegation managed to produce some very strange effects on London fandom, mainly thanks to the astral pole and various things to do with match-boxes. It was reciprocal, as those who attended the library meeting the next day may have observed. We also managed to come 4th out of 6 in the quiz (questionmaster: "Who was the author of the B-- Oxford?" Penny to Ivan: "You're the one who's read it, who was it?" Ivan: "Er..."). Oh well, I enjoyed it.

Dark plots are afoot for next term. Little need be said at this stage except beware the punt party...

And finally, in memory of the ex-tradition of Very Profound Quotes To Open Newsletters With, I dedicate the following to Fiona. Tact reign over all.

We had a teacher in school called Pellegrini; he was supposed to teach us Spanish Literature but he was a science fiction fan. In those days in Argentina... schooling was strict, science fiction was very young, and boys of thirteen were not allowed to read what was considered rubbish. One morning Mr Pellegrini stood in front of the class--the teacher's desk was set up on a dais behind which loomed a gigantic blackboard--and started to read, with no previous announcement, a story by Ray Bradbury called There Will Come Soft Rains. We sat at our desks, at first wary, then intrigued, finally completely in his power, listening to the description of a world that had stood still. That afternoon every bookshop in the neighbourhood sold out its copies of the Spanish translation of The Martian Chronicles; some thirty simply boys had decided that maybe the thing called literature was not, after all, as terrible as they had come to believe.

Alberto Manguel

<title deleted on grounds of gross implausibility>

Alberto Manguel ed: *Black Water: The Anthology Of Fantastic Literature*
(Argh! He said it again, Bungle!) Calling your book the anthology of fantastic literature is never a wise move. Manguel's book is only one among many, but at 967 pages and about 75 authors it outdoes much of the competition by sheer volume if nothing else. I don't find the quality a lot to rave about, but it does provide an excellent survey of how "serious" literature is slowly sliding towards the fantastic: here LeGuin, Comfort, Dunsany, Poe, Verne, Wells, Bradbury and Fast are joined by such distinguished Real People as Kafka, Calvino, Forster, Borges, Pushkin, Hesse, Maugham... and so on. Like Keri Hulme, these people seem to know nothing about sf. If only they had. Then they wouldn't have to work their way up through the fairy-story clichés that the genre abandoned years ago, and could use their considerable talents on worthwhile material. Many, I'm glad to say, do. Borges, Kafka and Peake, for instance, built their fantasies in ways that sf has yet to absorb (Wolfe, Crowley and Banks are the only authors who spring to mind as working in the territories indicated by these three). More, however, don't. As collections of words, they're nice. As character or place studies, or in their introductions of interesting ideas, they are welcome. As stories, they are banal.
At £4.95, worthwhile for the decent stuff (of which there is certainly a fair amount) and as an overview of sf-related material overlapping the mainstream. It is also valuable for its inclusion of many foreign-language authors. Perhaps one for the library?

Ivan Towlson

Mackerel Bites Back Probe Quiz

Library Meetings

As per usual: St Anne's, Sunday 8:15 - 9 pm in 60 Woodstock Rd rm 2, after that in St John's Prestwich Rm until closing time, then back to the library for increasingly bizarre coffee and biscuits. Astral poles not compulsory and indeed not recommended, especially if there are more than 4 of you (thank you, Penny).

Discussion Meetings

Mark Davies is stuck in Combe in a non-starting car, but the fun continues in Trinity 11/8 on Wednesday evenings at 8:15. Future delights include:

5th wk: *I was a teenage John Styles: Neal's structuralist analysis of rubbish* (hi, Rob)

6th wk: *The Left Hand Of Hype: the life and works of Ursula LePenGuin* (Mark Davies)

7th wk: not sure, but I think Simon said he'd do another thing on rubbish

8th wk: Er.

Meanwhile, John Bedford searches the stacks for more grossly perverted SF as he prepares the Ultimate Offensive Talk...

Video Meetings

Aaarrggghhh! We can't continue to use New College on Monday evenings. Progress reports at other meetings; we still hope to show *Threads*, *Terminator* and Dr Who stories *The Brain Of Morbius* and *Revenge Of The Cybermen*.

Auction

Sunday 8th week, St John's Prestwich Rm, about 9 pm. About 80 duplicates from the library to be sold to the most gullible bidder. (Hell, you paid £30 for Tim, you can't be that bright.)

Sfinx

Hey, seriously, no kidding--the Best Of Sfinx is on the very verge of publication. All we have to do now is redo the masters so we can paste in the artwork, and it's ready to go. We already have advance orders rolling in from America, so reserve your copy now (please allow 28 days for delivery, as Sir Clive Sinclair might say).

Sfinx 5 writers needed! There will be a writers' workshop on Sunday 8th week at 2 pm in Trinity 11/8 (discussion meeting venue)--please come along, preferably with story or part of same... or idea for same... or interest in thinking about same... Contact Paul Cray (St Anne's) for details.

Pigs May Fly Boggle Werble!!!

The OUSFG Annual Dinner will take place in Trinity College on Friday 26th February. Meet in the Beer Cellar for sherry at 8 for 8:30. Cost £15.50, with £2.50 discount for non-alkies and a possible refund for vegetarians (I have tried, and how, to track this one down... I will keep trying and hope to know by the time this newsletter goes out (allowing for distribution delays, or I'd have written it in, fool)). And the menu...

VEGETARIAN

Gratinee Normande Soup
Cucumber and Mushroom Satay
Trinity Syllabub

CARNIVORE

Fresh Salmon/Dill/Pink Peppercorns (?)
Fillets of Venison Poivrade
Trinity Syllabub

Coffee

The Spung Says...

"People don't usually leave their clothes on in my room." (Rob Sadler)

"Look, I want to appreciate the aesthetic bits of this film... aagh..." (Rob)

"Ah, there's a man who knows how to treat his women... aagh..." (Rob)

"OK, so you're into choirboys--so what? Cucumber sandwiches get boring after a while!" (Adrian Cox)

"It's fairly long, it's bendy--and it's yellow, but that just confuses you more." (Dave Stainforth)

"I don't think crucifixion is a criminal offence." (Ivan Towison)

"People twiddle Portia. Portia twiddles people. That's why they're symmetrical." (Angela Cowdery)

"You can't strike matches on velcro flies." (Jane McCarthy)

"Budge up, let's see if we can break the springs..." (Liz Wright)

"For an intellectual you have some damn weird habits." (Liz)

"I was expecting something small and brown and got something large and black." (Liz)

"You haven't got a good one out of me yet so nyaagh." (Liz) We beg to differ...

"There's nothing wrong with screaming racism!" (Paul Cray)

"Don't quote it out of context, I was using it about chemists and Liverpudlians." (Paul)

Credits and grovals: Neal, Mo, DaveS, Chris, Jane, PaulM, The Velvet Underground, the Triffids, Brian Eno, Patti Smith, In Tua Nua, Television, New Order, Keri Hulme, Philip K Dick, Dashiell Hammett, Ursula, Stanislaw Lem, Alberto Manguel, John Barth, Alison Lurie, Jayne Anne Phillips, Mind the flying pretensions.

Next term's newsletters will be edited by Paul Cray and John Bray. Please send all reviews, gossip, quotes, interesting things, dead mice etc to John at Exeter College.

...and you might find yourself in another part of the world.

"People tend to shut their eyes and stab it with a pin" Quiz Horror

Whoopie, they cried, election time again. The elections for the 1988-9 committee will take place on Sunday 21 Feb (6th week) at 9 pm in St John's Prestwich Room. Here is the list of nominations--and always remember, if voting could change anything, it'd be illegal. Democratic, who me? (For details of why these people might deserve your vote, see below.)

President: Paul Cray
No Holkar
Secretary: John Bray
Rob Sadler
Treasurer: Matt Bishop
Graham Harper
Penny Heal

Generic Committee: Matt Bishop
Penny Heal
Paul Marrow
Jane McCarthy
Kath Mort
Georgina Spary

At the same time we'll be holding the Annual General Meeting of the OUSFG, at which we'll be asking you to vote on these proposed constitutional amendments:

1. Insert as section 4, with suitable amendments to other relevant clauses:
 - a. The Group shall publish a twice-termly newsletter, which will be free to all members of the Group, containing society news and information, reviews of sf and associated fields and any other material deemed by the editors to be of interest to Group members. The editors shall be appointed by the committee and one of them shall represent the editors as a member of the committee.
 - b. If the editors wish to publish a newsletter covering more than four sides of A4 paper, or wish to print more than two newsletters in one term, they must first obtain permission from the Treasurer, or the President if the Treasurer is one of the editors.
2. Insert as clause 5(g): Lemon curry?
3. Amend clause 5(d) so that constitutional amendments passed at a General Meeting come into effect at the end of the term in which the GM is held (or earlier if the committee so wishes). (At present there it is unclear when changes take effect, so there is scope for Strange Loops--for instance, if motion 7. below is passed, should the discussion on whether to ratify it or not be published? This amendment ties in with committee changeover timing.)
4. Amend Purpose of Society to read "To bring together readers of science fiction, fantasy and such related areas of fiction as absurdism, 'magic realism', horror and other forms of non-naturalistic writing, and associated nonfictional fields including sf criticism, for their mutual benefit and enjoyment, to provide facilities for this purpose and to maintain contacts with sf fandom outside the University."; and add to 3(b) (committee administration of the Library) "In this it shall bear in mind the guidelines outlined under 'Purpose of Society', and shall attempt to ensure that fields outside the science fiction/fantasy mainstream are adequately represented in the Library, subject to interest among the membership and without compromising those high literary standards for which the Library is infamous."
5. Insert as clause 2(a): Members of the committee shall, on such occasions as they deem suitable, utter sentences containing gratuitous references to penguins.
6. Insert as clause 4(f): In memory of all the physicists called Dave who have over the past 25 years contributed so much to the Group, this clause shall only be effective if printed on seriously gross purple paper.
7. Amend clause 2(g) so that proceedings of committee meetings are no longer confidential but must be available to all members.
8. Amend clause 2(g) so that while proceedings at committee meetings remain confidential, a record of decisions made and matters discussed shall be made available to the membership.
9. Insert as clause 7(g): If it is at any time deemed desirable to retype this constitution, the typist shall insert at least one (1) piece of gratuitous but completely ineffectual silliness. And do try to be imaginative--future generations hang on your every word. Sensible constitutions are a definite no-no here.

(A brief comment on 7. and 8.: The problem with motion 7. is that it makes certain matters (specifically, those pertaining to a particular member of the Group) undiscussable. Hence motion 8., which is the committee's preferred alternative, avoids this problem while killing off the notion that the committee is a secretive, closed entity (patently untrue if you ever talk to any of us, but apparently some people don't). The way you vote is entirely up to you, but please think about the consequences.)

Bazaar Of The Bizarre Horror Probe

Paul Cray: "Those are only mistakes by definition, not real mistakes." Until you have gazed up from your sleeping bag at this man dancing in t-shirt and pants on a hotel bed after a particularly heavy night of charades, tea and singing *Don't Throw Up* with the CASFS lot, you don't know what that Monday morning feeling is like. Renowned for reading approx. three books in 1987 (and those were the wrong ones), and for serious pontification. This is the man who signed a statement agreeing to catalogue the stacks by author, title and subject matter. Venal, corrupt and quite likely ticklish to boot.

No Holkar: "I will not be trampled by sheep at my time of life!" Will go down in history as the man who brought LASFS economics to OUSFG. No was elected treasurer after it dawned on the massed ranks that an entire committee of gibbering

incompetents was laying it on a bit thick. He reads Heinlein but does not seem terribly proud of it--in fact he was at one point rejected as a possible Sfinx editor as Neal felt nothing would get past his rather high literary standards. Possibly ticklish.

John Bray: "It's wonderful, it's all about this chicken..."

"Is it OK if I take out a boxful of stack books over the summer?" he asked me in the last days of my librarianship. "Sure, John," I said, "as long as you promise not to bring them back." But he brought them back, all 60 of them, and he'd read most of them too. Despite this demonstration of awesome twistedness, he seems entirely unable to wrap himself around broom handles. But with practice...

Rob Sadler: "Several thousand feet up and only a piece of plastic between you and the rest of the world." My clearest memory of Rob is as a prone figure flat out on the floor during a not particularly heity party, provoking Neal to wonder if he was still alive... "I am informed that he has converted a water pistol to fire tacks and/or needles for some hideous reason..." (N. Tringham, *Useful Smears On Mr Sadler*) Renowned far and wide as one who has read all 20 Dunarest books and is proud of this achievement--what more can I say? Perhaps I should make something up.

Matt Bishop: "I want to have Philip Dick's babies." Following in the footsteps of Max O'Connor, Matt arrived at Oxford to find himself not only a libertarian and half of a dual entity, but also in possession of Max's bike. Unfortunately, it was soon realised that no key was available... After breaking one of Neal's hacksaws trying to get at it, he finally talked the St Anne's caretakers into releasing it for him and is now trying to figure out how to ride it. May be embarrassed in public if desired by mentioning fists, Maidstone and 1981 (my lips are sealed, OK?).

Graham Harper: "What's this about me being a guinea-pig?"

A guinea-pig. Has been known to "boogie on down" in a serious way to the tones of Iron Maiden and suchlike. Shares a house with Tommy Wareing, which amply qualifies him for the post of OUSFG DangerMan. Graham has many hidden depths, most of which should stay that way. Mind the low-flying puns.

Penny Heal: "I object to having my name and address quoted in connection with a post I was only elected to while being held down!" This is the one with the floor, the dragons and the serious D. Bowie fixation. Also one of the few sources of tea north of the Maths Institute Circle (these things are important, you know). The fact that she is the only person I know who finds the astral pole easier backwards than forwards only confirms that she is deeply, profoundly warped. You just try talking to her, you'll see. I should also warn you that her immediate response to being nominated for treasurer was to turn on the nearest bunch of mundanes and start selling them OUSFG memberships (also something to do with penguins in Kenya. I think.). Bizarre.

Paul Marrow: "I can see Heinlein writing the Old Testament..."

The other half of Paul Cray (it says here). They can be told apart because one of them reads books but doesn't talk about them, while the other doesn't but does. (Further details may be found in Neal's opus *An Introduction To Apologising For Making An Unnecessarily Obscure Apology*.) Has been known to bay at the moon and read Heinlein novels twice, but is rapidly growing out of it into something worse. Paul is the only member of OUSFG who can recite the words to Jean-Michel Jarre's "Oxygene" while unicycling backwards round the Camberley Wall of Death (this bit is untrue).

Jane McCarthy: "...so I told them I was a heretical schismatic." The only person with more lifelong friends than... than... (at this point Graham abandoned the sentence), kamikaze heretical schismatic Jane "actually I'm a nice person really" McCarthy has so far flown four hundred and seven suicide missions against the Christian Union, many of them resulting in ongoing disillusion situations (Neal tells me). To be honest, though (variety is the spice of life, after all), I'm still puzzling over a note I found crossed out on her door: **HORRENDOUS CRISIS DO NOT DISTURB (THIS MEANS YOU, IVAN)**. But... But...

Kath Mort: "That's not actually what I meant. Really."

Kath was set up for a £10 hit on Tommy's "Day of Death" for Comic Relief, which goes to demonstrate her popularity within the society. If she is elected onto the committee, vile green ponchos will be mandatory for all and sundry. A regular feature at breakfast in St. Hilda's (?), Kath is a real party animal--she has been known to kick her guests (ie. Rob--say no more) in the teeth if they over-indulge, though, so be warned.

Georgina Spary: (apparently she did say something, but we missed it)

The "Mansfield Man-Eater" has made herself very dear to this society, with her winning ways and cheeky smile. As George is a PPEist, she will be able to devote plenty of time to OUSFG work if elected. Definitely the person who's featured heavily in the OUSFG tea-leaves show many other small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri are there in the society?, George will go far--but not too far, say sources solicitous of her welfare. (this one was written by No over my protests --ed)

Written by Ivan, No, and Graham (a bit); No's idea; Neal's fault.

STOP PRESS!

BANQUET VEGE DISCOUNT £2.50

Thomas Pynchon: *The Crying Of Lot 49*

Basically, this is a book about a sinister conspiracy of men in black uniforms who forge stamps, set up private mail systems and occasionally pop out from behind rocks to slaughter Pony Express riders, all in the name of... (are you ready for the ultimate horror?)... *breaking the U.S. postal monopoly!* Alternatively, it is a book about entropy and the possibility of real communication, the totally mechanistic world view of predeterminism and the chance that there is a real transcendent meaning hidden under the surface of ordinary life [*so ordinary life, what about that sentence? --ed*]. I won't spoil the ending by telling you what conclusions Pynchon reaches, but I think this book well worth reading even if I did.

Neal Tringham

I May Not Be Very Intelligent But I Do Like The Pretty Pictures Adye Shock Stunner

Love & Rockets (Hernandez Brothers)

"Stories about real women in a surreal world." --Time Out. Now on its twenty-fifth issue is (according to Alan Moore, a quote from whom seems quite inevitable nowadays) "the best comic being published today." It's also one of the few comics I have read recently that does not have an introduction by Mr Moore, a distinction of sorts. Apart from all this, *L&R* is a comic which runs two separate continuing stories: *Locas*, about a group of women living in a run-down American suburb in a world where superheroes and big rockets are both very real and very silly; and *Heartbreak Soup*, about a vast cast of characters in a small Mexican town. Its strengths lie in good characterisation, inventive plotting, and occasionally clever art; its weaknesses in its tending towards soap opera (at least in *Heartbreak Soup*). I find it engaging, funny and vivid, but you may well find it boring, incoherent and under-supplied with people in fruit of the loom briefs with zap guns. Still, I'd say it was at least well worth looking at. Anyway, who can afford not to be seen with a copy of "the hippest comic in the street" (i-D magazine)? [*Who'd want to be seen with etc, might be a more appropriate question, --ed*]

Nister X (Hernandez Bros (first four issues), Dean Motter & something illegible)

This has the unlikely honour of being the only comic I know of to have produced a total of 11 issues in about 4 years, not at all bad for a bi-monthly... Despite this, I still find it worth waiting for. The comic is the story of Somnopolis, a city of the future whose architecture was designed to have a soothing, healing effect on its inhabitants--until corners were cut in the construction and it started to drive them mad. Mr X himself is a mysterious figure in overcoat and shades (but not nearly as silly as this makes him sound) who returns to the city, apparently after many years' absence, apparently to try to repair the damage done to it and its citizens... But the only effect of his stay seems to be that those he meets die more and more often in increasingly bizarre ways, while his own identity becomes more and more confused, as he is "proved" to be a large selection of famous citizens of the city, almost all of them apparently dead. By the current issue (#11) a group of men who resemble flawed copies of Mr X himself have come to the city from an insane asylum in the country, it seems with the intention of hunting him down for some unknown reason. In addition, there is a preoccupation with bizarre drugs, particularly those preventing sleep. The whole makes for a mixture I find strange and rather interesting. As for the art... faced with the challenge of creating a city that drives men mad, the various illustrators have come up with an "art deco" style that I think serves fairly well, occasionally reminiscent (presumably deliberately) of Metropolis. But if you read Mr X, I think you read it for its baffling sense of atmosphere... or alternately you read it so that you can tell me what the plot is, since I don't understand it at all. Please?

Neal Tringham

DISCH'S DELIGHTS (pause while I vomit) QUIZ SHOCK

Tom Disch is probably the least well known great writer of our times. Having started off with the customary cliché, I may as well go on to bore you all in the traditional fashion... Disch began writing as one of the American New Wave, although his audience was always more associated with the British "New Worlds" movement. He is one of the rarest of writers with a gift for characterisation, which he combines with a talent for using the gimmicks of science fiction to produce genuinely meaningful art (say god, I'm beginning to sound like Ivan again *no, it's just that nowadays I sound more like you than you do --ed*). Unfortunately, there is little else I can think of to say about him in general, so instead I shall recommend...

The Genocides: The best of Disch's early works, this is an interesting and little-known novel examining an alien invasion of Earth in an unusual way, demonstrating his vision of a hostile and uncaring universe.

Camp Concentration: In the sixties noircock hailed this as "the greatest sf novel I have ever read". It's not quite that good, but it still struck me as an interesting examination of what it would actually be like to have artificially heightened intelligence (the camp of the title is populated with draft-resisters who have been forcibly infected with a syphilis derivative that causes genius followed by death). The middle section, during which the narrator is having a psychotic breakdown of sorts, suffers from being only partially comprehensible, and the ending is something of a cop-out, but I still found this very readable.

334: This is not so much a novel as a collection of subtly interlinked stories, set in and around apartment block 334 in a heavily overpopulated near future. The stories deal with themes ranging from the nature of the artistic impulse to the human desire for dissolution to aging and despair, and do them all well (if pessimistically). Not to mention the fact that there are few books containing a short story of which Delany has written a book-length "semiotic analysis". His masterpiece.

On Drugs Or Song: People tell me this is a very good novel. Unfortunately I've never been able to find a copy, so you'll just have to take their word for it. Or not, as the case may be.

The Businessman: A Tale Of Terror: This was Disch's venture into the mainstream, and was good enough to be reissued almost immediately. It begins with the production of a ghost by a newly murdered corpse, who then wanders through an increasingly bizarre parody of the Christian afterlife. The novel alternates between religious comedy and moments of genuine horror, taking a few sidescapes at targets of opportunity (for the poet John Berryman along the way. Very funny).

Apart from these there is a "table" *The Brave Little Foster* (no comment), some short stories and novels (mostly not very good) and a lot of poetry (of which I've only read *The Que In The Death Of Philip K Dick*, which is not nearly as bad as it sounds but not terribly good either).

Neal Tringham

Spung Reader Strings Together Coherent Sentence Horror Shock!!

Jane: How long have you known Tim?

Tom Yates (JCSF): As I allowed to suck or blow?

Lynn: In what sense?

Neil: The Biblical one, of course.

Ivan: Certainly not-- Tom: Huh, well you've removed my major advantage as a bloke then!

Lynn: Oh, ages. Years and years.

Confessions Of A Pretentious Man: The Tringham Interview
A piece of gross slander in two parts, with intermission. Ice cream will be sold.

Interpid reporter: I--n (the subject's name has been censored to preserve my anonymity --ed), why do you hate Christians so much?

Subject: Well, in my first year, there were two of them living on my staircase and they... and they...

IR: Yes?

IR: They... uh...

IR: Yes?

IR: It's too awful to describe...

IR: Hung you upside down and read you the Bible? Shone bright lights in your eyes? Cut your toes off? Tickled you until you'd repeat the Lord's Prayer?

IR: No, what?

IR: They... they invited me to tea!

IR: They... what?

IR: They... what?

IR: They... what?

IR: They... what?

IR: They... what?

IR: They... what?

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