

OUSFG Newsletter, Early Michaelmas 1993 (Freshers beware!)

Mark Charsley <mcharsley@cix.compulink.co.uk>, 20th October 1993

Your Committee:

Mark Charsley had the misfortune to join in a spectacularly lean year, and has thus ended up with far too many jobs, these include being president and editing the newsletter, as well as more distasteful jobs. He also doesn't feel aardvark enough to keep on referring to himself in the third person, so... I'm the one who keeps on moaning at people to get things done, getting moaned at for things people haven't done, and moaning about all the moaning that happens around me. I have been known to occasionally sport a waistcoat, and can be found at Wadham.

Frances Hardinge had the misfortune to be drunk when we needed a volunteer to be secretary. No-one's entirely sure what she does, but she is very good at saying how badly she does it. She can be found at Somerville.

Alex Ralph has the misfortune of being the first treasurer in living memory who is both keen and able, and thus has lumbered herself with being a dead cert for the presidency next year. She too can be found in Somerville when she isn't wandering around assaulting people for money.

Lucy Marsterson has the double misfortune of having her name routinely mis-spelt by me, and living in a college with a decent video room. She was thus the ideal choice for Video Rep, which means she's the person to moan at if films like Inseminoid get shown. She can be found at St. Hilda's.

Matthew Marcus had the stupidity (sorry Matt, but there are things that cannot be described as mere misfortune) to actually say "Yes" when asked to house the library. He can be found in Magdalen (especially every Sunday night, ha, ha, ha).

Discussion Meetings:

These are held every Wednesday evening in St. Hilda's Lady Brodie Room (go in the main building, up the stairs and follow the signs), at 8.15. The basic plan is that we all drink tea or coffee, eat biscuits and take part in a workshop / have a discussion / watch the Interzone Players make fools of themselves etc. then go down to St. Hilda's bar, or in the all too often occurrence of them having no beer, to the Half Moon the other side of the roundabout at about 9.30.

Week 1 Dave Clements on SETI: are there aliens out there, and if so where are they?

Week 2 Guest Speaker! Dave Langford (see article later on) will be giving us what'll probably be the most amusing meeting of the term: things can only go downhill from here...

Week 3 Colin's William Burroughs Workshop. Bring along some form of printed media you don't mind cutting up, some scissors and some glue. Alternatively, large quantities of illegal substances, a wife and a gun.

Week 4 Mo on Mad Scientists.

Christmas Party

As usual, this is being held on Saturday 7th week, probably in Corpus Christi. There will be plenty to drink, the usual argument about

what music should be played and optional fancy dress, so start planning those costumes now... See Alex, our treasurer for more details and tickets.

Library Meetings

These are held every Sunday evening, from about 8.15 in Matthew Marcus' room in Magdalen (New Building 1, 15). The library has over 2500 books, and some of these are even worth reading, so there is bound to be something you'll like. Considering that last term, when we lacked a library, people turned up every Sunday just for the bar-meeting, we are certain to be in a bar somewhere afterwards.

Video Meetings

These are held every Monday evening at about 8.15, or whenever people stop watching Brookside, in St. Hilda's South JCR (go in the college, turn left, walk down to the river, go in the door by the dining hall, turn right, and it's on your left). Alternatively go via the bar and pick up a drink before-hand: some of the films we've had have been better when watched blind drunk (or even better, not at all). This term's selection is a bit better though...

Week 1: Dracula: Coppola's version.

Week 2: Fire walk with me: The film prequel to Twin Peaks

Week 3: Exorcist III: The true sequel to the 70's classic.

Week 4: Amazon Women on the Moon quite a good collection of comedy sketches.

Other videos that have been suggested are: the vegetarian story from Sapphire and Steel, Deep Space Nine, and The Muppet Christmas Carol. If any of you fancy these we'll put them down for the next half of term: as usual, see a committee member.

T-shirts

After the heroic efforts of Alex last term, we finally got our first T-shirt order for over three years sorted out. In the unlikely event of anyone wanting a T-shirt in the middle of November, then:

- a) you're a hardier person than I'll ever be (although we do sweatshirts as well)
- b) quickly contact Alex for more details

Coming Attractions

Next term sees the OUSFG banquet: an exercise in eating so much that you can't get drunk, and then drinking so much that you do. I've been thinking that it might be cheaper and better to hold it in a nice restaurant than in a college: what do other people think? Trinity sees the OUSFG punt party. This doesn't often feature that many punts, but at least it has the OUSFG Punt Party Panto: which is utterly hilarious after you've had a few. On the guest author front, negotiations are continuing with Iain Banks and Terry Pratchett. Watch this space for further details... come to think of it, reading future newsletters might be more productive.

SFinx

While we're on the subject of long delays: now that the last of the material that Neal edited about four years ago has been printed, our affiliated fiction magazine is looking for more short stories and artwork of a vaguely SF-ish nature. While it has published the work of Ian Watson, Dave Langford and Colin Greenland, it has also published stories (allegedly: I haven't read them) about Telekinetic Bra's and Sentient Genitalia, so you needn't worry too much about your cherished work being rejected. If you're interested, get in touch with Frances.

Zool

Dragging the tone down a bit, Zool III is gathering a rather worrying momentum, with people actually asking to do episodes. For the uninitiated, it's a round-robin fiction thing, with people taking turns to write 800-odd word episodes. The general trend appears to be derailing the plot at the beginning of your episodes (and quite often at several other points as well), and filling it with lots of obscure in-jokes about two other poeple will get. If you're interested or, God help you, want to read a copy get in touch with me.

Dave Langford

Dave Langford is known for many things: some remember him as the author of the Critical Mass book review column in White Dwarf, others know him as the author of books such as The Leaky Establishment, many know him as the being involved in all manner of fanzines, some (admittedly slightly old and rare people) even know him as an ex-OUSFG president, but most know him as the writer of vicious and hilarious talks on the worst (and sometimes best) of SF. This year he will be performing Tell Me The Old, Old Story. I don't know why it's called that, but from what I can remember of it from Illumination, it's very funny. If you like his talk, next time you're in the library it'd be worth your while looking at his Platten Stories (a collection of his articles over the years), and the aforementioned Leaky Establishment. Finally, if anyone wants to have a meal with him beforehand, please get in touch with the committee by the end of first week.

Context

Yup, it's a collection of stupid quotes: a space filler almost as old as the printed press, but what you don't know is not all these quotes are out of context_

Mark C.: "Mark, can I knurdle with your beans?"
 Mo: "OUSFG's like a leper colony."
 Phil: "No it's a real western: with people and everything!"
 Adrian: "It's not fair: my buttocks don't grip as well."
 Neal: "I've got lots of fuzzy pictures of poo."
 Mark C.: "Mavis, what is that, and why is it hairy?"
 Neal: "Everyone in Switzerland is dead."
 Frances: "It's a long story and it involves llamas."
 Gordon: "He dislikes RPG's and Genital Piercing... can't see the

difference myself."

Neal: "You can only grab people when you're alone together in the toilet."

Mark B.: (upon seeing Paul's new haircut) "It's Mr Job Interview!"

Mark C.: "Next time I've got a jar of crunchy peanut butter, I'll hold you to it."

Frances: (looking at her glass) "Oh look it's gone down."

Matthew: "Don't bother talking, you're not very good at it at the moment."

Mark B.: "Aaah, this is where the party always ends up isn't it: outside the ladies' toilet."

Frances: "I haven't got drunk this year."

Editorial, or The Presidential Address.

Well, here we are, another year, another newsletter and the same old cover. Still, at least some of the articles are new. Should anyone be daft enough to want to write an article, I'll be more than happy to publish it, as long as it has something to do with SF: sorry Neal, Glastonbury doesn't really count. Apologies to Mo for misquoting him last issue. He actually said

"There's a plague of large babies in Wessex at the moment. Can you fill us in Ralph?"

Quite what psychological aberration caused me to replace the word 'babies' with 'zombies' is, quite frankly, beyond me. Hmm, can't think of anything else to say, hold on I'll look at the stuff I printed in previous newsletters... Oh. I've already dropped hints about other people writing articles, I can't explain last issue's title, 'cos it didn't have one and I haven't had any problems with word-processors to moan about. So I'll just thank Colin Johnson for his cover again, and point out, as usual, that this bit is just a complete waste of time that fills a couple of column inches.

Mutual plugging session

In return for getting some free advertising, I've got to give plugs to the Comic Book Society and the Role Playing Game Society. Right let's get it over with. First RPGSoc: if you begin to wonder what all the references to Conclave, Brandel, and the unfeasibly brilliant cult of Rincewind are about, this is the society for you. They also act as a source of players or GM's for any RPG you're interested in. Contact Mike Oswald in Magdalen for more details. If you're more artistically inclined, however, CBS is devoted to showing people that they can draw after all, promoting both small press and mainstream comics, and running an annual(?) comics convention, if this tickles your fancy, get in touch with Dan Mitchell at Keble.

Freshers' Guide to Fandom

OUSFG members, it must be admitted, do occasionally come out with some incomprehensible gibberish_ actually that isn't entirely true: they're forever coming out with it. This next little guide may help a bit, but I've been in the society for two years now, and I still don't understand some of them...

Fan: a deranged alcoholic who uses SF as an excuse to meet other members of

fandom in bars all over the country and have really bizarre conversations. Surprisingly several of them are very fun to know (even some of the beard 'n' beer-gut brigade). There is a movement to use the word fan like man (eg fen, wofan etc.), but fortunately not within OUSFG. It must be stressed again that SF is just an excuse, and the true focus of fandom's attention may well be gleaned from later entries in this article.

Neo: the pupal form of a fan. Any freshers reading: this could be you...

Mundane: anyone labouring under the misapprehension that SF is all about Robot-men from the planet Tharg, thus understandably avoiding SF like the plague.

Penguins: What certain fans in Oxford occasionally call themselves for reasons lost in the nonsensical mists of time, Easily identified by the characteristic call of "Gaaaak!", with simultaneous flapping of stiffened arms against the body.

Fanzines and APA's: Various amateur publishing antics fans many years ago got up to. They were full of intellectual discussions about the scientific and literary merits of SF. However they didn't involve enough alcohol, so Fandom changed it's principle activity to going to_

Cons: Short for conventions, bizarre events where marauding hordes of fans invade and occupy a hotel, confusing the mundanes, drinking the bar dry and running all the local takeaways out of food. Recent ones you might hear people talking about have been Illumination, Helicon and Lunicon; and then there's...

Intersection: The 1995 Worldcon: which has about 3-5000 attendees, lasts for 5 days, and costs about £50 just to join. This is being held in Scotland, as opposed to the more usual America, and is almost certainly going to be the biggest and most expensive con of the decade.

Trufan: someone at a convention who is still in the bar when you eventually go to bed.

Fakefan: someone at a convention who leaves the bar before you do.

SMOF: Acronym for Secret Master Of Fandom: some git who comes up to you when you've had a bit too much to drink and convinces you that running a con will be fun and not at all stressful, leading to your being 'smoffed'. And the really scary thing is despite the fact that you've never met them before, they know who you are!

Media Fans: Fans who spend large amounts of money, travel the length and breadth of the country and then spend the entire con slumped in front of a video. They're usually harmless unless provoked (just don't ask them about the glaring continuity errors in episode 15 of whatever they're watching). To be fair several Oxford societies have been set up purely so people can sit in front of a video not talking to anyone without all the inconvenience of actually travelling to a con.

Caffeine: Substance taken by most fans to counter the effect of alcohol.

Alcohol: Substance used by most fans to counter the effects of caffeine.

Stroh: Extreme form of the above (80% by volume). A charming little Austrian rum often given to unsuspecting freshers in large amounts with the phrase "This is stroh: you drink it in one".

Road to Nowhere: A song that for some reason has to be played at every OUSFG party ever, unless the host can get to the Hi-Fi in time, shouting "No, no, no. I like my floor where it is, not in the room below."

Bohemian Rhapsody: An offence in the sight of Man and God, that also appears to have to be played at every OUSFG party ever, mainly because the President can't stand it.

Felching: An utterly revolting perversion that you'll be told about by certain members of OUSFG if you aren't careful. Just make sure you aren't eating at the time.

Usenet and Email: Very computery stuff that comes in surprisingly useful if you know other computery people, eg most of OUSFG, if some conversations are anything to go by. If you want to join them (and you certainly can't beat them: half of them would enjoy it) wander along to 13 Banbury Rd, and ask about computer accounts.

Elron: Not a Tolkein elf, but slang for L. Ron Hubbard. This rather unpleasant man wrote several dire SF books, founded the Church of Scientology, and used it to become stinking rich as it ruined thousands of lives. He then ruined even more lives by publishing the Mission Earth dekalogy.

Role Playing Games: a type of game played by several OUSFG members (and most of RPGSoc, funnily enough) where people imagine themselves to be super-heroes, wizards, vampires, space men etc, with varying levels of seriousness. Quite good fun, but liable to steal away large quantities of your life if you aren't careful.

Conclave: an extreme version of the above, which causes you to suffer from paranoia while you're playing it, and extreme paranoia when you're not, because you know other people are playing behind your back.

The `Ton: A pub in London (currently the Wellington in Waterloo Rd. opposite Waterloo Station, but it occasionally changes), where most of fandom from around London converge every first Thursday of the month. Spectacularly cliquey, but at least there are a lot of cliques. Some penguins are usually there by 8pm.

Genital Piercing: An old and not very funny joke I'm getting heartily sick of. Ask someone else who looks older than you (and who's a member of OUSFG, otherwise you might get some strange looks), and you too can realise how funny it isn't.

John Norman: Infamous author of the Gor series of books: a rather misogynistic work, where large beefy men prove in unbelievably inarticulate and ungrammatical prose that a woman can only achieve fulfilment by being tied up, whipped and raped etc. Not a very good read, much in the same way that radioactive waste isn't a very healthy meal.

Lunicon: the Con report.

This was this year's Unicon, a medium size con held mainly for students. Apparently the committee kind of fell apart at some point last term, and there had been a massive panic the week before the con started, but this wasn't too noticeable. Being smaller than the Eastercons I'm used

to, it seemed remarkably dead in the mornings (which wasn't helped by the bar not being open before 11am), but it picked up in the afternoon, and what I remember of the evenings were enjoyable.

Highlights of the con included: the Victorian invention workshop (my favourite was the steam-powered mobile cathedral: ideal for those missionary expeditions), the ninth pit of hell debate (a panel including Cthulhu, Torquemanda and Professor Plum arguing about who deserved to roast for all eternity in the bottom-most pit of hell: Jeremy Beadle won), the round robin fiction game (highlights of which have been censored for no readily apparent reason) and some of the cabaret items. Low-lights included a deathly boring quiz (of which I was foolishly a panel member: which rather hindered my escape) and some of the other cabaret items (the four Yorkshire men of the apocalypse spring to mind, the worst comedy production I can remember seeing^[1]: for a start there only seemed to be three of them. One didn't say anything for the entire sketch but just sat around in a corner - come to think of it, he may have had nothing to do with the sketch - and the other two staggered around a little the worse for drink and muffed the lines they were reading from a script. How anyone can cock up the line "Luxury!" when it's all they've said for the last couple of minutes is beyond me). On balance the highs outnumbered the lows, and if all else failed there was always the bar.

Frances claimed despite knowing nothing about SF, and only three of the people there, she enjoyed it, as did Mark: who doesn't normally attend such events. On the whole it wasn't as good as an Eastercon, but it was a lot cheaper.

Stop Press

For all you laser fans out there, there's a new shooty shooty place, called Megazone just by the Canon cinema in George St. I haven't been there so I don't know how it compares to LaserQuest.

Reviews

Crow Road, by Iain Banks

Not really an SF book (as you can tell by the lack of middle initial), but it is very good and written by an (occasional) SF author, so I'm reviewing it anyway. I think it's his longest work yet, and concentrates on the life of two generations of "a family of mostly amiable over-achievers" called the McHoans. It lacks any particularly strange or nasty bits as found in *The Wasp Factory*, or *The Bridge*, but has a non-linear chrononicity, with the narrative jumping around over about thirty years. I liked it, and if you liked the real world bits of *The Bridge* (finally back in the library), you'll enjoy it too. Oh and there is a reason why some passages are in italics.

N.B. Lucy seemed to think I didn't make it clear enough that I thought this book was very good. I do, and so does she.

Complicity, by Iain Banks

Iain Banks latest book however is full of all manner of unpleasant deaths and unusual sex. The basic plot is that a rather imaginative and vicious vigilante starts killing the likes of arms dealers, ex-government ministers and paedophiles, in highly appropriate ways. The prime suspect is

a journalist who just happens to be investigating a possible arms deal with Iraq involving large quantities of plutonium. If you happen to be suffering from an over-developed sense of left-wing injustice, or just like reading about nasty things happening to nasty people, it's a good book: certainly if you enjoyed *The Wasp Factory* you'll like this. Personally though I preferred *Crow Road*.

The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction, by John Clute and Peter Nicholls.

Well, what can I say, the title says it all. It's over 1300 large pages of small text packed to the brim with SF info. If it doesn't hold the information you want, God alone knows how you'll get it^[2]. However in the process, you'll gain lots of information you didn't actually want and lose a couple of reasonably enjoyable hours browsing through it. The entry on Larson, Glen A. is my favourite. Should OUSFG ever get enough money then we really ought to get a copy for the library, but until then, if you actually want 1.2 million words devoted to SF information, then rush out and spend £50 on it now. If you don't then don't.

Mistress of the Empire, by Raymond E. Feist and Jenny Wurts

Not a good book... it's the concluding part of a trilogy (*Daughter and Servant O.T.E.*), which was a spin-off of Feist's *Riftwar Trilogy* (which is one of the better fantasy trilogies around). The basic plot is that Mara is the sole surviving member of the Acoma clan in a world closely based on Medieval Japan (only with wizards). Over the last two books she has brought her family back from the brink of extinction to pre-eminence in the empire in a mildly interesting way; but now, unsurprisingly, she faces the biggest challenge of her life, with the stakes not just being her life, but that of the empire itself! Even less surprising for those who've read the previous books is that she succeeds in her quest, losing some of her friends and followers in the process. There are some very good bits (for a fantasy trilogy) in here such as the Cho-Ja city, but most of the book just wallows in how bad Mara feels for losing her son, or her favourite servant etc, and the bitter-sweet ending defies description. It's difficult to feel sympathy for someone who you know is going to win through in the end without ever making a serious mistake. It's just about worth reading for curiosity's sake if you've read the previous two (which were a bit better), but no more than that.

A Fire Upon The Deep, by Vernor Vinge.

This book, by contrast is one of the best SF books I've read in recent years. The plot is pure Space Opera. The basic gist is that the galaxy is split into zones. The unthinking depths at the centre do not allow complicated machinery to work, and even reduce the IQ of sentient creatures that enter them. As you travel further out, however, the complexity of machines and thought allowed increases, until near the edge in the Beyond it is possible to travel faster than light. Further out still is the Transcend where the Powers can operate: creatures immensely more powerful and intelligent than the mortal races in the Beyond. In the prologue, some humans messing about with stuff they shouldn't wot of create a highly malevolent Power. A few of them escape, carrying something the Power wants very badly indeed. These humans travel far out of its influence, almost in to the Slow Zone, and are taken into the care of a civilisation of small hive minds, known as Tines. The book then alternates between the humans'

interaction with the Tines (which reads much like Duncton Wood, or Watership Down to use a slightly less accurate, but more widely read analogy), and the search in the Beyond for these humans and the information they carry. The Beyond reminded me of the Hegemony in Hyperion, and Vinge has obviously become a Usenet freak: there are plenty of Net postings, some even with the typical 'please forgive me if you've heard this before, but_' introductions. To be fair, in a society like Vinge postulates, information would be the most important commodity around, and bandwidth restrictions would limit rule out cyberspace-like environments, but it's slightly disappointing that Vinge's far future civilisation is just Usenet writ large. That aside, this book is a very well written example, like the aforementioned Hyperion, of 90's technophobia, and is well worth reading.

Membership Prices

Well, assuming we convince you to join, here's the damage:

Term	£3	Year	£8
Life	£12	Eternal	£16

The first three are obvious, and the last is some ridiculous complication some idiots put in the constitution, and can be safely ignored unless you're very drunk and/or foolish. You can upgrade your membership by paying the difference, plus an extra quid. Of course the ideal place to pay up is...

Freshers' Party

This is on Sunday 1st week, from 8pm, in St. Hilda's M.C.R.: follow the map below, and then follow the signs. Various silly games will be present, as will OUSFG's infamous free punch, in it's very own limited edition presentation bucket. All freshers are welcome, as are all society members, but can the latter please bring along a bottle, 'cos we know how much you drink.

[1] remember: I don't watch the interzone player productions_

[2] Assuming of course you want some SF information: it's not quite so hot on what's for dinner for instance.

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