

The Experiment of Gdańsk Ten Years Later

The Prelude

At the beginning there was Chaos... A while later (in 1984) Science Fiction Club "Collaps" was founded as the Gdańsk Division of the Polish Society of the Science Fiction Fans. Constantly thrown out, the small group of the members strayed from one community centre to another. The misery ended when "Collaps" settled down in "Remus", the community centre of the Gdynia-Cisowa housing estate. It was then when the club was thriving, even in spite of being unjustly and arrogantly expelled from the Polish Society of the Science Fiction Fans.

Science fiction film reviews LAPSBIAX '85 and LAPSBIAX '86 as well as I Convention of the Science Fiction Clubs of Poland NORDCON '86 should be mentioned as the bigger enterprises organised by the club.

In June 1986 there was the first attempt towards the legal registration of the club in the City Hall of Gdynia. Due to the vigilant intervention of the so-called "well-know factors" (that is, the political police) the attempt, treated as "anti-socialistic manuevours of persons suspected of participation in conspiracy", was put down immediately.

In the very 1986 another science fictions clubs were founded in the Tri City area, namely "Galactica" (community centre "Macius", Gdańsk) and "Hydrus" (Naval Academy, Gdynia). In September 1986 all the three clubs decided to merge into one society, whose registration had to be valid in the Gdańsk voivodship due to the fact that the member clubs had their sites in two different cities.

Administration resisted yet another six months. Eventually, after numerous interventions (even in the Home Office) and the addition of the line "the society works for the cultural welfare of the socialistic Poland" to the preliminary version of the statute, Science Fiction Club of Gdańsk was registered on 26 February 1987!

From the registration to now

Many science fiction fan-clubs existing in the Tri City area as well as in the neighbouring towns, e.g. Tczew and Reda, joined the society in 1987 and 1988. At the turn of 1988 and 1989 there were 11 clubs belonging to the federation and the number of members reached 520. The GKF Correspondents' Club (Klub Członków Korespondentów GKF), which customarily used nickname "Kaczka" (the Duck) was taken from the Polish abbreviation "KCzK", was founded in order to provide nation-wide fan service.

Some of the clubs turned out to be short-living. Founded, they were active for a time, then began to shrink and eventually quitted. Sometimes the process was successfully slowed down or even reversed with the help of GKF. There were various reasons why the clubs disbanded; to name only a few, the loss of the club's site leading to the loosening of the contacts between the members, the lack of an energetic leader, the lack of people who would like to do something for nothing, etc..

Polish Science Fiction Clubs' Conventions organised by GKF with the name NORDCON began to grow in prestige. NORDCONS took place in 1987 and 1988,

subsequently, and in 1990-96. In 1989 GKF organised Polish Science Fiction Convention POLCON '89. NORDCON '95 was, in turn, the famous PiN (POLCON and NORDCON, the "two in one" convention).

From the end of 1989 GKF faced the apparent crisis. Some of the clubs disbanded, two clubs seceded, and the number of the members was sharply decreasing. The collapse could be blamed on the economic transformation of the country, with its fatal influence on the financial condition of community centres which were the clubs' sites, and many other factors such as bringing video players into much more general use than it used to be before, thus making the fans who joined the clubs only to watch films quit.

Years 1991 to 1993 were the period of seeming stabilisation but also the reduction of the number of clubs to four, and the number of members to 170 ("Galactica" and "Gateway" merged into one club "Angmar").

The year 1994 was the turning point. Two new clubs, "Armageddon" from Sopot and "Abrael" from Puck, joined GKF. New obsessions, role playing games and strategic games, lured lots and lots of teenagers and young people into the club. At the same time the federation got a subsidy from the Polish Foundation of Children and Teenagers, which drastically increased our opportunities. In 1994, too, the idea of Allied Clubs was developed. From then on clubs throughout the country have been able to join the federation.

From 1994 to 1996 the society was joined by many clubs from all around Poland, some of them existing before but some just freshly established. At present (August 1997), there are 4 Local Clubs, 8 Allied Club, and the Correspondents' Club in the federation, with 342 members altogether.

The Hierarchy of GKF

A federation of autonomic clubs, the Science Fiction Club of Gdansk is highly exceptional in its organisation structure in comparison to the rest of the SF fandome.

The supreme authority is the General Meeting of the clubs' representatives, which takes place every four years. All current activities of the society are controlled by the Management Board consisting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman (elected during the General Meeting), the Treasurer and the Secretary (appointed by the Management Board) and all the Chairmen of the local clubs (elected by General Meetings of their clubs) as well as the Chairman of the Correspondents' Clubs (appointed by the Management Board). If available in the Tri City, the Chairmen of the Allied Clubs can also participate in the decisions of the Management Board.

The finances and all the substantial matters are supervised by the Controllers (elected during the General Meeting of GKF).

However, there are permanent structures working on account of the whole society, namely:

- the Library Section, collecting books and fanzines and running the library open for all GKF members; at present, the Polish division of the library is in possession of 1830 items, the English division 1220, the Russian division 80, and the German division 25. The Cartoons and Fanzines division has 860 items.
- the Film Section, which is in charge of purchasing and lending video films, and responsible for film programmes of conventions; at present the section has 283 SF&F&H films as well as 17 convention documentaries.

- the RPG Section, in charge of RPG games and all related publications; the section organises playing sessions in clubs and runs the RPG Studio at conventions.
- the Strategic Games Section, concerned with strategic games and all related accessories and publications; in charge of lending the accessories as well as organising playing sessions; runs the Strategic Games Studio at conventions.
- the Distribution Section, which runs the club's bookshop offering the books at wholesale prices and is responsible for the distribution of the GKF publications; the section purchases the books for the Library Section and runs the bookshops at conventions.
- the Publishing Section, responsible for the publication of *The Red Dwarf* and the fanzines of the local clubs, as well as the monthly "GKF Informer", helps the Allied Clubs to publish their own fanzines. The section collaborates with editor's offices. The section is also in charge of publishing various publications such as conventions' agendas.

The Clubs of GKF

At present, there are 13 clubs in the federation, namely:

1) the Local Clubs:

- SF&F Club "Angmar" from Gdańsk
- SF Club of Sopot "Armageddon"
- SF Club "Hydrus" from Naval Academy of Gdynia
- The Elite SF Club "First Generation" from Gdańsk

2) the Allied Clubs:

- SF Club "Rassun" from Warsaw
- SF Club "Hobbit" from Złotów
- The Elite SF&RPG Club "The Chamber of Star Lords DAGOBAN" from Łódź
- SF Club "Ubik" from Białystok
- SF Club of Koszalin "Xenomorph"
- SF Club of Elbląg "Fremen"
- SF&F Club "Conan" of Silesia
- SF&F Club of Piła "Moulder"

3) the Correspondents' Club

What is the most exciting about our federation is the variety of the clubs. Each club has its own unique and specific atmosphere. No club allows for any unification. There is the biggest club of GKF, "Angmar", which prosperity seems to change according to some sinusoidal pattern: at one time the club is thriving, while at the other undergoes serious depression. There is a highly *elite* club, in order to become a member of which one must be over 30 years old: "First Generation", nicknamed "Degeneration" by the young people from the other clubs. There is even more *elite* one as it accepts lords only: "Dagobah". There are irritating clubs and serene clubs, clubs which are laborious and such which are lazy, megalomaniac clubs and clubs with a strong sense of modesty. Some clubs have all these features in one!

The Correspondents' Club is a story in itself. Led by Mother Duck, the club has been working successfully for nine years. The 12 foreign members of GKF (representing US,

Canada, Australia, Germany and Great Britain) along with numerous acclaimed Polish authors such as Ziemkiewicz, Dębski, and Kołodziejczak, are members of the Correspondents' Club.

The clubs are just like their members (and *vice versa*). And this is absolutely fabulous, so to say! That is how we avoid stagnation. Never are we bored; very often we are excited.

GKF Publications

In the late 1980's almost every GKF club strove to edit its own fanzine. As the result 34 issues of "Collaps", 9 issues of "Galactica", 5 issues of "Hydrus", 3 issues of "Mizar", and 2 issues of "Nazgul" were published. Its form changing, "The GKF Informer" has been published since the very beginning of the society; nowadays it is a monthly bulletin and its 100 issue will see the light of day in September 1997.

Since 1991 GKF has been publishing literary magazine concerned also with the graphic arts, *Czerwony Karzeł* (*Red Dwarf*). Until February 1997 10 issues and two special editions of *Red Dwarf* have been published. Edited by the American members of GKF, #6 of the magazine was put out entirely in English.

Under the auspices of *Red Dwarf* has been published a series of essays called THE ANATOMY OF SCI-FI. The series has been issued in collaboration with a group of the University of Gdańsk dons who take care of the edition. Consisting in literary criticism, THE ANATOMY OF SCI-FI is designed not only for fans but also for the much wider audience. As yet there have been published three books, the first being Jerzy Szyłak's *Horror and Cinema of the New Adventure*, the second Beata Iwicka's *The Culture of Middle-Earth in the End of Third and at the Beginning of Fourth Age* and Milena Bianga&Mariusz Stawicki's *Myth and Magic. Ursula K. Le Guin*.

Apart from *Red Dwarf*, the Publishing Section of GKF publishes fanzines of our different clubs, as follows: "Dragon Helm" (6 issues); "Kaczkowisko" (7 issues); "Czarna Dzióra" (4 issues). We help our Allied Clubs to edit their own fanzines: "Brainstorm", and "Nowe Wizje".

We have been also publishing cartoons, the most famous being the so-called "Wampiurs Wars" cycle developed exclusively for GKF, graphic art. Collections, conventions programmes etc.. Altogether 252 items!

GKF Conventions

The annual Polish Science Fiction Clubs' Convention NORDCON is, no doubt, the biggest event organised by the GKF. As yet there have been 10 NORDCONS. Since 1990 NORDCON has become a kind of manifold happening. Each and every NORDCON has its topic. The character of a NORDCON is created by all elements of the programme, such as films, competitions, meetings with authors, fancy dress parties etc., which are correlated so as to fit in with one another and the general topic of a convention. The topics of NORDCONS are taken from the common stock of science fiction but at the same time linked with some current controversial events, for instance Polish regaining of democracy or the influence of Catholic church on our political life. The idea behind this is to make as much fun of the convention as possible; with catch-word topics and abundant supply of half-price beer provided by the best Polish brewery, which is our main sponsor, NORDCON is

famous for its great atmosphere. Sometimes, however, there seems to be too much fun and the more detached members of Polish fandom are apt to cry murder over NORDONS' misbehaviours. It is said that half of every year of Polish fandom is devoted to discussions over the past NORDCON and the next half is filled with anticipation of the following one.

For example, in 1990 the convention was entitled "Gulag Nordcon", the name alluding to Russian concentration camps in Siberia. The participants were being prisoners of conscience, the staff played political police, and the slogan was: "Big Brother lives forever". NORDCON'91 was called "The Space Rangers and Special Forces' Recruit Camp" (there was a pun on Polish words, actually, because the name contained the acronyms SS and KGB), and the participants played secret agents called up for training. The theme of NORDCON'92 was "Lunatic Asylum" and the participants pretended to be mentally deranged patients locked up for the compulsory treatment. NORDCON'93 was "The Great Meeting of All Magic Powers" with the slogan "Let's fight for magic values" (suggestive of the slogan of right-wing parties). In 1994 the conventions' site, "Hutnik" Hotel in Jastrzębia Góra at the Baltic Sea, was turned into a *Star Wars* style rebel base, this convention being particularly successful. In 1995 two major conventions were mixed into one called PiN (POLCON and NORDCON). The topic was "The First Conference of Alternative and Magic Science" organised by fake "Baltic University". This time over 500 "students" and "lecturers" came to the "Hutnic" Hotel, which was the greatest number of people ever taking part in a Polish convention. NORDCON'96 was called "Alternative Saturnalia" and was poking fun from both the antiquity and political correctness; for the first time fancy dresses were compulsory during the convention.

Apart from NORDCONS, which are organised by the whole society, the clubs of GKF carry out various events, nation-wide and local, throughout the year. Here belong all kinds of smaller yet complex conventions along with special RPG conventions, LARPs, and film reviews etc.. 106 events of such type took place from February 1987 to the end of 1996.

In March 1996 GKF collaborated on the First SF Film Seminar of Gdańsk organised at the University of Gdańsk with the title "The Faces of the Horror Film". In March 1997 the Second SF Film Seminar took place, this time its topic being hard science fiction.

From Now to Eternity

The prevailing opinion is that being a society of independent and autonomic clubs, GKF has been completely successful during the ten years. We are not a lone club which would perish with a minor crisis. Should any of the clubs be in dire straits, it will always be able to rely on the society's help. We have close friends, the GKF members, all over Poland and even in some places all over the world.

We have been active for ten years. Almost 3.000 young people have been or were members of the society's clubs and despite the fact that most of them left us we have been remembered well. Our activity would be considerably restricted were it not for the well-wishing people and institutions, who have helped us. From the very beginning we have been supported by the Voivodship Office of Gdańsk. Since 1994 we have been receiving substantial help from the Polish Foundation of Children and Young People.

The translation of the Chairman of GKF
Krzysztof Papierkowski's text
by Aleksandra Marczyńska