

BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: FREE

Price: FREE

The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chair-Yvonne Rowse, Secretary-Martin Tudor, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-William McCabe, Ordinary Member-Anne Woodford, Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 29 Chair-Carol Morton, Novacon 30 Chair-Tony Berry.

“Is your club dead yet?”

A panel discussion about the state of local clubs and groups all over the world (inspired by the article in Mike Glycer's FILE 770 reprinted in this issue) but focussing, of course, on that Group closest to the hearts of us all... Featuring the combined talents of BSFG committee members past, present and future (hey, they were daft enough to do it once, who knows?). These gallant few are prepared to take questions from the floor – so here is your chance to air your views before the AGM (no biting, gouging or spitting, and return to your corners when the bell rings). It'll all be happening on

Friday 10th September 1999, *

**from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge,
second floor, Britannia Hotel, New Street,
(entrance in Union Passageway).**

Food and drink may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine level and taken up to the Lichfield on the second floor. Admittance: Members £1.50 (£1.00 unwaged) , Non-Members £2.00 (£1.50 Unwaged). (*Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.*) (*VB: the second Friday of the month.)

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £15.00 per person, or £20.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Mids, B65 0RL, (e-mail enquiries via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

11 September, noon: Paul J McAuley signing *SHRINE OF STARS*, the third Book of Confluence (Gollancz hardcover £16.99) and *ANCIENT OF DAYS* (Millennium pbk £6.99).

18 September: Raymond Feist will be signing his books. Other authors attending Fantasycon will also be available for signings. Please phone Andromeda for details and times.

There will be signings in September by Christopher Priest and in October by Peter F Hamilton. Graham Joyce will be signing his book, *INDIGO*.

Forthcoming Events

10 September: Brum Group Meeting from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

10 – 12 September 99: Masque 7. Costume Con. University of Wolverhampton. Reg £30 'til 1st August, then £35. Contact 130, Hampstead Hall Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham, B20 1JB.

17-19 September 1999: FantasyCon XXIII, at The Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham

GoHs: Raymond Feist, Robert Rankin, Louise Cooper, Graham Masterton, Mike Tucker + others TBA

Art Show; Dealer Room; talks; signings; launches; Banquet, numerous attending professional writers, editors, publishers, artists etc.

Contact: SAE to: FantasyCon XXIII, 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT

<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/6859/fconxx3.htm>

8 OCTOBER 1999: Stan Nicholls will talk to the Brum Group from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

18-23 October 1999: The Chrysalids by David Harrower, based on the novel by John Wyndham, will be presented by the Crescent Youth

Theatre in the Studio at the Crescent Theatre, Sheepcote Street, Brindleyplace, Birmingham. The evening will also feature short comic pieces including Ken Campbell's GET WELL and Harold Pinter's VICTORIA STATION. Tickets £4.75 in advance or £5.00 on the door, contact the Box Office on 0121 643 5858.

5-7 NOVEMBER 1998: NOVACON 29, at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Ian Stewart. Attending membership costs £28.00 until Easter. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

6-7 November 1999: Memorabilia Europe's largest science fiction, film, cult tv, pop and collectors' fair. Hall 17, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Booking Office 0121 767 4555.

18 November 1999: Schrodinger's Box. Quantum physicist, Erwin Schrodinger, changed forever the way we look at the world and made it possible for the strangest things to happen. Reckless Sleepers explore this new physics armed only with their bodies, an experimental chamber they have constructed in the shape of a box and their wits. The Studio, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry. Box Office 0247 652 4524.

27 November 1999: Dracula by Bram Stoker, a musical performed by Katch 22 at Chelmsley Wood Library Theatre from 2.30pm and at the Solihull Arts Complex Exhibition Hall from 7pm. Call 0121 704 6962 for further details.

29 November - 4 December 1999: Return To The Forbidden Planet performed by St Augustine's Musical Theatre Company from 7.30pm in the Solihull Arts Complex. Call the Box Office on 0121 704 6962, tickets £5-£10.

25-26 March 2000: Memorabilia Europe's largest science fiction, film, cult tv, pop and collectors' fair. Hall 9, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Booking Office 0121 767 4555.

21-24 April: 2Kon, Eastercon at the Central Hotel, Glasgow with guests Guy Gavriel Kay, Deborah Turner Harris and Katherine Kutz. Reg £25, £20 unwaged; supp. £15. Contact 2Kon, 30 Wodburn Terrace, St Andrews, KY16 8BA. E-mail: 2kon@dcs.st-and.ac.uk
<http://www.theory.cs.st-and.ac.uk/2Kon>

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

13-16 April 2001: Paragon, Eastercon at the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool with guests Michaels Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lianne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership currently £25 Attending, £15 Supporting, £12.50 Junior and £5 Child. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114 281 1572. e-mail steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk

Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise readers to contact organisers prior to travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses. Please mention the BRUM GROUP NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.

If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor (e-mail yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them about) please feel free to write a report or review and send it to the editorial address.

Jophan Report #125 By Martin Tudor

I am sad to report that sf author and fan James White died of a stroke on 23 August 1999. PNN reported his death on 24 August, adding that there was a memorial gathering for him in Belfast on 27 August. James, a long-time sf fan and author, wrote the Sector General series and many other sf novels and stories. He was also the co-editor with Walt Willis of SLANT, widely acknowledged as one of the finest fanzines of all time. He was a charming and witty man, whose presence at sf conventions will be greatly missed.

Detroit rapper Stormtroopa has recorded a track calling for the extermination of the comic character in STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE - because of alleged racial stereotyping.

Nicholas Pollotta, a martial arts instructor, stand-up comic and published author of over 21 Science Fiction, Military and SF/Humor novels (including Shadowboxer for FASA, GAMMA WORLD and RAVENLOFT for TSR) has started his own small book press: Delphia BookCompany. The press will reprint his cult classic BUREAU 13

trilogy, and expanding it into an on going series. "Bureau 13" is a secret branch of the FBI that uses state-of-the-art military firepower, wizards and demons, to protect America from supernatural and unearthly criminals. BUREAU 13 will be published as a trade paperback in November 1999. Nicholas Pollotta's Home page is at:
<http://members.aol.com/NPollotta/>

THE NAKED GOD, the final volume of Peter F Hamilton's Night's Dawn Trilogy will be published in hardback by Macmillan (£20) on 8 October 1999. First editions of each of the first two books (THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION, 1996 and THE NEUTRONIUM ALCHEMIST, 1997) sold out so quickly on publication that they have become collectors items - the first is actually out of print.

So, from 1-8 October 1999, there will be an opportunity for collectors when an auction will be held, on the internet, for a complete set of signed, first edition hardbacks of the trilogy. All proceeds will go to Peter's chosen charity, The Parkinson's Disease Society. All details of the auction can be found on the Pan Macmillan website at:
<http://www.panmacmillan.com/AV/PeterFHamilton/> from early September. (Or for further information contact Lucy Henson on 0171 881 8293.)

STEPHEN JONES has completed the final draft of his latest book, THE ESSENTIAL MONSTER MOVIE GUIDE, exactly two years to the day (August 17th) he first started the project. To be published this Halloween by Titan Books in the UK, the 365,000+ word volume is a guide to the classic screen monsters of the past century in films, television, video and DVD. The book has an extensive Introduction by FORREST J ACKERMAN, the creator of the world's first monster movie magazine, FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND, along with numerous rare and unique photographs.

"Robin of Sherwood" fans are probably aware that highly acclaimed artist Chesca Potter produced a 'Greenwood Tarot' deck in collaboration with Mark Ryan (Nazir in the series). Chesca Potter is now selling the original paintings from which the deck was produced. Details are available from the "Art Sale" section of Chesca Potter's web site:
<http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/chesca/index.htm>

NASA has announced that the Polar Lander will land at the South Martian Pole on December 3. The exact site was chosen because it is relatively level and bland (no more than 10 degree slopes and no cliffs)

Solar wind sails are a common theme in SF - now a University of Washington in Seattle scientist has found a way to make them both practical and cheap. Working under a grant from NASA he has created a design concept for a craft which uses a device about the size of a coffee jar - a mini magnetospheric plasma propulsion system (M2P2) The device is powered by solar cells and these are used to generate a small magnetic bubble filled with plasma (electrons and ions). These are then shot out of an electrical field created by a series of coils, forming a huge magnetic balloon in space, estimated to be about 33km across. This would deflect the ionised gasses in the solar wind and act as a huge sail. Creator Dr Robert Winglee estimates that a spacecraft of weight 140 kg could achieve a top speed in 290,000kph.

The Royal Aeronautical Society will be hosting a lecture on SOHO - the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory - next month. The lecture, at the Society's lecture theatre in Hamilton Place, London, will be given by Eric Sawyer, of the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory. He is a project manager for CLRC, currently for the GERB instrument, which will be flying on the next generation of Meteosat satellites. Before that he was in charge of the Coronal Diagnostic Spectrometer on SOHO. The talk will be on September 13, starting at 6pm and admission is free. For further details contact: conference@raes.org.uk

BBC Radio 4 is planning a discussion on science and science fiction with Terry Pratchett, Stephen Baxter, Ian Stewart and Mark Brake, course leader of the new science and SF degree course at Glamorgan University as part of the The Material World series on Thursday September 30 at 4.30pm.

The Telkom 1 telecommunications satellite for Indonesia was successfully launched by an Ariane 42P launcher on August 12, from French Guiana.

This was flight 118 and the 45th successful launch in a row for Ariane 4, now the world's most reliable commercial launch vehicle. The next two Arianespace launches due are 120 on September 1, when an Ariane 42P will place the Koreasat 3 communications satellite in orbit for Korea Telecom and 119, an Ariane 5 launch towards the end of this year.

Following rumours that the movie of The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy will finally be made - this time by Disney, Douglas Adams is relocating to Santa Barbara (90 miles up the coast from LA). If you are

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

interested he is renting his five-storey house in Duncan Terrace, Islington, N1, through Foxtons (0171 704 5000) for just £2,500 a week....

(Many thanks to the following for the above news: FTL [http: ftlmagazine.com](http://ftlmagazine.com) ; BfS News [http: www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/index.htm](http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/index.htm); PNN [http: www.plokta.com/pnn](http://www.plokta.com/pnn) ; LINE ONE [http: www.lineone.net/entertainment/index.html](http://www.lineone.net/entertainment/index.html); BBC News Online; NASA [http: www.nasa.gov/today/index.html](http://www.nasa.gov/today/index.html); EXPRESS & STAR [http: www.westmidlands.com](http://www.westmidlands.com) ; BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL; WHAT'S ON; VARIETY [http: www.variety.com/index.asp](http://www.variety.com/index.asp); Steve Green.)

Is Your Club Dead Yet?

By Mike Glycer

In which we pile **Apocalypse** on top of **Apocalypse**, then **sheepishly admit** the entire **crisis** is actually **smaller** and more **personal** -- and is already being **solved**, one **fan** at a time.

Attendance at the meetings is down, way down, from the times when a hundred or more people would show up for the general meetings held every 3rd Saturday. Perhaps even more distressing is the overall lack of interest in anything S.T.A.R. ...The apathy has been so thick lately that you couldn't cut through it, even with a lightsaber. Ironically, there's never been a shortage of criticism for the gallant few who have tried to keep S.T.A.R.'s flame burning, while those who have criticized sat back and demanded, 'Entertain Us!' Rich Kuhaupt about *Star Trek Association for Revival, San Diego chapter (Interphase, November 1996)*

As you can see from the last financial report, the club is broke.... Several social events I had wanted to arrange -- bigger, better things than just another house party -- have gone by the wayside due to lack of funds and lack of response.... The time has come to ask some questions about the future of WCFSA -- yes, again. Changes need to be made if the club is going to survive as a functional, living entity and not just a mailing list.

Lisa Gemino (BCSFazine, April 1998)

With the club standing on the brink of complete breakdown, we must either find a way to revitalize the organization, morph it into something that works, or shut it down as a relic that has outlived its time.

Don Glover the Younger, about NWSFS (Westwind, March 1997)

Down here in Houston, the local SF clubs seem to have died out years ago.... Other clubs are suffering, too: the computer clubs have disappeared and a couple of NSS chapters have sort of fizzled.

Greg Bennett

The New Jersey SF Society suspended monthly meetings in January of this year because there weren't enough dues-paying members to continue using their present location.

Intergalactic Reporter

The Ottawa Science Fiction Society is evolving into a loose association of like-minded people in cyberspace.... Monthly meetings will continue in a desperate attempt to maintain some personal contact. Attendance is so sparse, they could be held in private homes.

Lionel Wagner (e-mail quoted in *BCSFAzine* 295-6, December 1997)

For the past several years, local Jeremiahs belonging to a lot of well-known clubs have been warning that the end is near. I could run a column in this zine titled "Club Suicide Note of the Month" and never fail to fill it. What is going on?

All of the writers are club officers, sincerely trying to reverse a downhill trend. Though thousands of miles apart, they are fighting the same problems -- A massive fall-off in attendance; All the work of keeping the club going left to an overworked handful; Fewer and less interesting activities; Empty treasuries.

Science fiction clubs are not immortal. Many of us have personally experienced the birth and death of some fledgling group. The attention-grabbing difference is these writers are sounding the death-knell for sf clubs that have met for over 20 years.

What's more, these warnings come at the same time that fandom at large wonders how long it is destined to continue. Everybody hears about "the graying of fandom" and sees how the average age of *Locus* readers creeps up from year to year -- from 36 to 43 since 1988. We're not foolish enough to think we won't get old, but where are the new, young fans? Even the newbies are gray. When Lou Tabakow was an old lion, we were the neos. Who will inherit everything we've invested in this way of life?

The popular notion is that the decline in clubs can be explained by the same theories offered about the ultimate fate of mainstream fandom -- but is that true? And how do fans feel about sf clubs today? This article explores both questions using direct comments gathered from members.

Apocalyptic Visions of the Last Days of Fan on Earth: S.T.A.R. San Diego used to have a hundred fans at meetings, now they're hovering around 30. In January 1998, the New Jersey SF Society gave up its meeting place: there were no longer enough dues-paying members for them to afford it. LASFS attendance has dropped by one-third since 1990. Attendance at many clubs peaked years ago and has tailed off dramatically, including at one of Albuquerque's two sf clubs:

Roy Tackett: Albuquerque has the Albuquerque SF Society, which I founded in 1963, and Alpha Centaura, which came along in the early 1970s. AC was originally a Star Trek club and had about 400 members. That's a bunch. It has dwindled down to about 15 now but still meets regularly every month and Star Trek is seldom mentioned.

The ASFS meets monthly also and has 25-30 members. It puts on Bubonicon every year (with our 30th coming up this year.) There is some overlapping of membership between the two clubs.I would say that both are stable.

The sf club concept was popularized in the 1930s through prozines like *Wonder Stories*, whose editor, Charles Honig, launched the Science Fiction League in 1934. The formula is simple. Fans show up, elect a president, make announcements and review the latest sf, and adjourn to eat. Once they raided the sherbet mine at Clifton's Cafeteria, nowadays they consume mass quantities of pizza. The old formula still works at BASFA (the Bay Area Science Fiction Association):

Kevin Standlee: Around 10-25 people attend the meetings, which are held [each Monday night] at a Round Table Pizza parlor. There are regulars who can be expected to be there nearly every week and others who attend only now and then. The main part of each meeting is usually the reviews of what folks have been reading and watching.

It primarily exists as a regular weekly social meeting where fans can gather to talk with each other.... BASFA's lack of ambition actually makes it easier to hold together, because we're not constantly asking the membership to do things other than have fun.

At troubled clubs something has torn the social fabric and the simple, proven formula cannot hold people together any more. When it happens at a club that was once large and ambitious, the remaining members grieve over the major changes imposed by failing attendance. For them, withering to BASFA-size is a terribly discouraging change.

On the other hand, you never see one of these club suicide notes from a NESFAn. That club remains energized by the orthodox recipe for science fictional success: a belief that science fiction matters, backed up by hard work on book publishing, discussion groups, conventions and fanzines, balanced by many social gatherings. Did the distressed clubs lose the key to their success? Or are people not relying on sf clubs to meet their needs?

Didn't I Join an SF Club? Whether speaking of the doom of clubs or the death of fandom, some fans blame both on the fact that fandom is not about sf anymore. Pat Gulley, a member of PorSFis (Portland, OR), warned members against this trend in her 1996 *Pulsar* editorial:

...In the case of our club, the frayed edges are starting to happen. The old rhetoric 'you don't have to know anything, just come and enjoy, why not run for elected office, let's go to a new restaurant after each meeting, when are we partying, is there kid care, what's going on in another club, what about gaming, how's the science fiction center doing, read any comics lately, what's at the movies, aren't the science fiction movies and tv shows awful, did you catch *Seinfeld*...' Hey! WHERE'S THE SCIENCE FICTION? All that stuff is part of the conversation of a social get-together, some is part of announcements, but is it why we joined a Science Fiction Club? I feel this present agenda is why we are sliding away from what should be the main focus of a club that calls itself a SCIENCE FICTION CLUB...

...The key word here is purpose. The club should have it and something must be expected from each of the members. I really think that's why we lose so many new faces to OryCon: it has purpose that reaches fulfillment yearly. Nothing is expected from PorSFis members. It has to be among the top reasons why it's so easy for people to lose interest.... If you have any doubts, look at some other clubs like the L-5, The Baker Street Irregulars, Sisters in Crime, the Lions Club, Kiwanis, Wilamette Sailing Club, Portland Skyliners-The Tall Club, Parents Without Partners...lots of purpose.

Of course! Clubs are ailing because they're no longer really about science fiction! When "mainstream fandom" stops participating in its core activity, who can be surprised by the lack of new "trufans"? We've become no different from the Moose, Elk and every other lodge competing for mundane members. Or so I enthused.

When I read Pat's letter I felt lightning-struck because I recognized same the mindset she in my home club, LASFS: obsessed with everything except science fiction and wondering why its attendance has fallen off by one-third in the 1990s. I could hardly wait to borrow Pat's soapbox to make my own plea to restore the exciting ideas of science fiction to the center of club activities.

Then I thought again. I joined LASFS in 1970 and witnessed its explosive growth. The reality of those times was a bit different than you would suppose from Pat's argument.

My quest through the pages of '70s fanhistory found rather different role models than Pat's theory would predict. Certainly, if it's science fiction purism you seek, you can search the history of LASFS in vain for something to go back to.

You've probably read Harlan Ellison's description of the place that LASFS met in for awhile in the 1960s, before I joined. "The Hill" was a big, weatherbeaten house immortalized in "Shattered Like a Glass Goblin":

Gothic, hideous, with grass half-cut and the rusted lawnmower sitting in the middle of an unfinished swath -- as if the half-cut grass were a placating gesture to the outraged tenants of the two lanai apartment houses that loomed over the squat structure on either side.

Boundless enthusiasm for mind-altering substances, not a fanatical devotion to literary excellence, is the legend that survives about fans who lived at the Hill.

LASFS in 1970 was experiencing one "barbarian invasion" after another as it was discovered by local pockets of self-invented fandom: the Third Foundation, CalTech students, Granada Hills High School students -- and USC "experimental college" students, like me. The first clubhouse, purchased in 1973, was immediately outgrown. Its successor was bought in 1977.

Were all these fans attracted by a focus on sf? Yes and no. There's always been just as much -- or as little -- sf as anyone wants at LASFS. A fan could tie into a state-of-the-art sf and science discussion with Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Dan Alderson and others. (After all, it was LASFSian Flieg Hollander who first proved that the Ringworld is unstable, before moving on to UC Berkeley.) But current films, comics, costuming, gaming, local bus schedules, air dates for recording tv reruns, ammo reloading, and silly news reports ("the Committee on Surrealism in Everyday Life") have been discussed just as passionately and as often. I

must admit that what made me join LASFS was the chance to go with Joe Minne to the after-LASFS poker games at Larry Niven's house....

When LASFS attempted its own sf discussion group in the mid-1970s (attended by Milt Stevens, Elst Weinstein, Dan Alderson, Marty Massoglia and me), we abandoned it after a few months. While the club drew 104 members to the first meeting in its original clubhouse and kept on growing until it bought a bigger property in 1977, our sercon discussion group never grew at all.

Skyrocketing attendance at LASFS was not the byproduct of any organized attention to the genre. Nor was there a correlation between attention to sf and the growth of clubs in other cities, for example, Minneapolis:

Denny Lien: Minn-STF has "always" (at least from 1971 when I moved to town and joined until mid-1995 when I stopped showing up) been pretty much a social club with very brief business meetings and no programming, and sf-related conversation was never necessarily a dominant theme at any given meeting/party anyway. So by the definition that appears to be assumed here, we've been spending at least two-and-a-half decades in decline/crisis, and certainly nonetheless seem to have been pretty robustly healthy for almost all of that time....

Tending to lean more towards the sercon than faanish side, I was ready to embrace Pat Gulley's argument. Instead, I am skeptical. The kind of attention these clubs give to sf hasn't really changed. We cannot bring back the days of explosive growth by retrieving the devotion to sf known in the days of yesteryear.

In fact, as I reviewed my memories of what science fiction fandom was like when I first got involved in the early 1970s, I began to suspect that the anemic state of science fiction clubs in the 1990s is not due to fandom's failure to achieve its goals, but is the penalty for its success.

Defeat Through Victory! However few clubs keep sf as the focus of their activity, all of them depend on sf to filter people into fandom (and membership) in the first place.

I started this article looking for the grand theory that explained the rash of "club suicide notes." Pat Gulley's theory didn't hold up under analysis. Then something Leah Zeldes Smith wrote online made me wonder: Could it be that the fatal problem is not at fandom's center, but at its boundary? Perhaps sf can no longer be the medium that filters people into fandom once the gradient between sf and mass culture disappears.

One evening, Leah Zeldes Smith went to a business dinner with a marketing consultant, a judge, and another fan. The conversation turned to the relative merits of various sf TV shows and movies (mostly panned), recommendations of books, the failure of the modern day to live up to childhood predictions of the future, and the gloominess of modern sf vs. the optimism of Asimov. Then it segued into Walt Disney, the stock market, and the effectiveness of various local PR agents. Leah realized:

These people were engaging in nothing more than smalltalk with chance-met strangers about subjects of modern cultural literacy.

Had I had a conversation like this with strangers 20 years ago, we would have been hailing each other as kindred souls, taking down each other's phone numbers and I'd have promised to send info about fanzines or cons. But it was nothing like that at all. The only thing that inspired either of them to take out pencil and pad was my recommendation of a Greek restaurant.

Science fiction has become such a prevalent part of mass culture that it's no more difficult to find a fellow enthusiast than it is to find a Democrat or Republican. With opportunities for fanac on every street corner, why do people need to join a club?

There's practically no reason at all if you agree with Moshe Feder's famous comment:

Moshe Feder: It was the outside world's scorn that was crucial in leading fans to band together. As that scorn has diminished, so has fandom's attraction. It was the goal of early fandom to make SF universally popular. Judging by the list of all-time most-successful movies, by what one finds on TV and on the best seller lists, that goal has come as close to being achieved as is practical. That success has rendered fandom obsolete. Why should a kid seek out an SF club or write a LoC in order to discuss the exciting ideas he finds in SF when he can do it with almost any kid in his class, even the girls?

Whether one believes that prospective fans are attracted by fandom's unique emphasis on sf, or get rejected into fandom because of an unacceptable obsession with sf, the mass acceptance of sf must be seen as short-circuiting the psychological forces that fandom relies on for new recruits.

Dave Kyle properly diagnosed the blight on modern fandom years ahead of any of the rest of us in his superb FGoH speech at the 1983 Worldcon (now available in Joe Siclari's *Fanhistorica* 5.) In his view, true fans are people with a Sense of Wonder, an emotional responsiveness

that points the way for our logical minds, and also a Sense of Mission, a special, vigorous characteristic that makes an enthusiast more than just a reader. Kyle said in 1983 that "we *all* have a Sense of Wonder," but as for the Sense of Mission, "few of us have it now."

We had a mission, a sense of purpose, we had found a form of literature which liberated us and which could liberate the rest of the world -- if only the rest of the world could know about it. To us, science fiction was a miraculous Aladdin's lamp of hope. Our mission was simple: sing the praises of science fiction.... Because of our beliefs, filled with the power of our dreams and sure of the infallibility of science, we supported causes which had high purposes and benevolent and humanistic goals.

The Sense of Mission is missing today for obvious reasons: "After all, we have achieved our goals: to make science fiction known and acceptable to the general public."

If You Can't Live Without Me Then Why Aren't You Dead? ©Lynn Maudlin

So, if the roots of fandom have been severed, why is it the tree still upright?

In spite of having brilliantly described the problem, Kyle did not grasp the full implications of the psychological truth he had discovered, which is that the vitality of fandom comes from having a Sense of Mission -- period. The original catalyst of fandom's Sense of Mission was love and loyalty for science fiction. But other things can also catalyze fannish activity -- including a the commitment to perpetuate fandom itself.

Once the sociology of fandom came into being, the rest was "just engineering." Fans applying what they'd learned in sf fandom also went out and founded fandoms for comics, media sf, mystery fiction and Regency romance novels. Nor did it pose any problem in starting a fandom if the genre was already fully accepted by mundane Americans.

Joining fandom is an option that only a tiny minority have ever pursued. When pulp magazines reported circulations of hundreds of thousands of copies per month, there were only a few hundred fans, period. Today, when sf is popular with millions, there are thousands of actifans. So many people are interested in sf that, somewhat like the primordial "nutrient soup" once theorized by biologists, fannish life is bound to spring forth.

In fact, that's been happening all along: Lee Gold's Third Foundation, and the library-sponsored group I joined in 1967, are just two examples of the many clubs that formed without input from trufandom.

Important from the perspective of Feder and Kyle is that the promise of a new generation of fans includes no assurance they will perpetuate the fandom owing its traditions to Speer, Ackerman, Warner *et al.* From that viewpoint, it is necessary that clubs survive whose leaders are socially networked into mainstream fandom and will introduce newcomers to our history.

Why Clubs Survive: What are fans getting from the local club that keeps them coming back meeting after meeting? That's fairly obvious: socializing and friendship. Clubs also satisfy some people's desire to become attached to a tradition or identify with a history. In short --

Sourdough Jackson: It's COMMUNITY. DASFA is a lively social group that happens to revolve around SF fandom. Without our meetings and parties, and our friends at those meetings and parties, there would be something irretrievably missing from our lives.

Clubs build community through face-to-face social interaction. They answer our human need to be among other people. Though other forms of fanac (fanzines, apas, newsgroups, etc.) also promote friendship and fannish identity, they never fill that well of loneliness in the same way that being present in person at a club meeting (or a convention) will.

Other Media: Lionel Wagner of OSFS tried to blame his club's shrinkage on e-mail lists, chat rooms, web pages, and other Internet technologies:

The Ottawa Science Fiction Society is evolving into a loose association of like-minded people in cyberspace.... Monthly meetings will continue in a desperate attempt to maintain some personal contact. Attendance is so sparse, they could be held in private homes.

Lionel Wagner (e-mail quoted in *BC'SFazine* 295-6, December 1997)

But in the course of blaming cyberspace for OSFS's low attendance, Wagner winds up emphasizing that there are members "desperate" for personal contact. The human need for face-to-face, in-the-room-with-you personal contact cannot be fully satisfied by a computer experience, or by a letter, phone call or other remote communication.

I don't believe the various Internet activities compete against sf clubs' most important attribute, in-person socializing. Don't forget there are

hundreds of fans out there having no difficulty staying active as club members and active on the Internet at the same time. I'm skeptical that fans ever find themselves making a choice between cyberspace and the local sf club.

It's COMMUNITY: "Community" is a feeling that people know when they find it, and comes in a wide range of styles.

As I mentioned, you never see "club suicide notes" from NESFAns. You also never see them from Lunarians, which is more remarkable because club minutes portray the group as being one of the most contentious since the Laney LASFS, yet the club is going strong:

"The secret of managing a club is to keep the five guys who hate you away from the five guys who are undecided." Casey Stengel." *The Lunarians Meeting Notice*, February 1998

Fannish organizations come together like an army of *condottiere*, a few from here, a few from there, each group deciding to join for different reasons. Individuals fans have a range of interests. Clubs admit and reflect that diversity. They also develop a rough consensus about the activities that will be supported with club resources. Yes, even a science fiction discussion group that appeals to only half a dozen fans might be tolerated if it keeps them around...

Because of the paperback sf boom of the late 60's and the media sf boom of the mid-70's, we've become accustomed to seeing large numbers of people respond to the merest hint of organized fandom. And when a club is enjoying explosive growth, as LASFS did during my first 15 years as a member, people's struggle to get connected with the social life of the club isn't evident in the membership numbers but in the visitor records. One afternoon I went through about 700 guest cards collected by LASFS registrars in the 1980s and learned that less than 10% of guests ever came to a second LASFS meeting. It's tempting to wonder how large LASFS could have grown if we'd worked harder to get to welcome our guests.

Australian fan **Paul Ewins** finds the same challenge facing his local club:

The last expansion [of the Melbourne SF Club] coincided with the boom in the Star Trek clubs following the local release of *ST: TNG*.... Over the past few years there had been an unwillingness to go looking for members, probably through sheer apathy and perhaps because in the last boom new members had come looking for us. While the club is now in stable shape, it is likely to decline again if we get another apathetic committee that sits around waiting for things to happen.

Those who are not content to take their chances waiting for new members to wash up on the beaches of their personal desert islands have to actively work at building relationships with guests and new members. Joyce Katz wrote that Las Vegas fandom was started from scratch through forging individual relationships, what some would call "friendship evangelism."

A welcoming atmosphere is created by conscious effort. Sometimes literally: for example, LASFS outlawed smoking in the meeting room in a controversial vote. However, seven smokers immediately quit coming to meetings, which reminds us that politics and feuds are also poison to a club.

T. Bruce Yerke, looking back on the 1930s LASFS, wrote: "The activity was undiluted with cynicism, vicarious motivation, and petty jealousy which later wrecked the [club]." Meetings drew 50 fans a week in 1941, but once problems struck, attendance gradually dwindled until there came a meeting in early 1945 when only Laney and Ackerman were present. (Plenty of more recent feuds that might serve as examples will go unmentioned in hopes they won't be revived in these pages.)

There are many strategies for getting people to come once to an sf club, but really only one reason for them to return: enjoyable social interaction.

Where You Find Them: By the way, the best strategy for building a club where you'll want to stay is this: recruit people who are already engaged in the activities you enjoy.

Scott Patri delivered a clear-minded and eloquent sermon on the importance of bringing readers into fandom, in *Vosfax 176*:

We cannot return to the past, nor wallow in the reminiscence of it, but we must bring the spirit of those days to the present if we are to survive. Reading is a part of it, for it was the word that fired the imagination, while the visual just makes us react, and the reaction is to purchase and sell, not to dream or think.

Barney Bernard, a LASFS legend, went to bookstores and put club business cards in the science fiction books. These days, we hope to get a table at UCLA's annual bookfair: some members are collecting donations to pay the hefty entry fee. An idea that clubs could adapt locally is the Buccaneer committee's science fiction contest for students.

Web pages are also a good example of advertising a club to people already engaged in an activity members enjoy. Fans designing web publicity for clubs need to keep in mind Avedon Carol's critique of convention advertising: "They advertise to people who've seen movies about aliens. They should be looking for people who *feel* like aliens."

Clubs need to avoid advertising themselves as if they are another form of passive entertainment, thereby attracting people who will transfer to club membership the habits learned in theater seats. >From the viewpoint of club survival, their presence is a two-edged sword: they attend and pay dues, but they frustrate the fans who keep things going. As Rich Kuhaupt wrote, "Ironically, there's never been a shortage of criticism for the gallant few who have tried to keep S.T.A.R.'s flame burning, while those who have criticized sat back and demanded, 'Entertain Us!'"

The Magic Goes Away: So far I've been arguing against some of the suggested explanations why a number of sf clubs have lost a high percentage of their members.

(1) *Purpose:* I'm not convinced clubs pay less attention to sf than they used to.

(2) *Mission:* Fandom has not been doomed by public acceptance of science fiction: as sf's popularity and respectability has multiplied, the size of mainstream fandom has multiplied -- as a constant, tiny percentage of the overall audience.

(3) *Formula:* Healthy and troubled sf clubs are more alike in their style of organization than they are different: it's not like some use poorer methods than others.

But I do have two observations to make about **Oldpharts** and **Outlanders** that might have something to do with the membership problems some clubs confront.

Oldpharts: I believe a lot of these troubled clubs have in common that they were formed 20-25 years ago in the boom time of the 1970s. A crop of longtime members have hit age 40 and decided to redirect their energy to unrealized ambitions outside of fandom. Younger fans aren't filling the gaps in the ranks the way they used to. When most of a club's members are fortysomething, the club only attracts newcomers who feel comfortable socializing with people in that age group.

Dennis Doms: About survival: I think one reason is the range of ages of active participants in KaCSFFS. Youth and energy combined with age and treachery is a good combination.

Most organizations that I have been in weakened perceptibly when the influx of new (active) people dropped below a certain level (though you also need the continuity of longer-term members).

Another thing clubs have to overcome in order to attract new members is the unwelcoming appearance of longtime members' established relationships:

Matt A. Smith: As an organization of people who'd known each other for five, ten, even fifteen years, [S.T.A.R.] was virtually impenetrable to strangers unless they plainly offered something to make it worthwhile to the longtimers to reach out to them (physical attractiveness, artistic skill, or deep pockets, for example.) [*Interphase, August 1997*]

The relationships and shared history of remaining core members, some of them club founders, may be an invisible barrier to new members.

Rob Ross: S.T.A.R. has degenerated into a number of small "cliques" that go off and do their own thing, while paying lipservice to the larger whole that makes S.T.A.R. [*Interphase, August 1997*]

Outlanders: While clubs certainly lose members whose interests or responsibilities (family, work, religion) change, I have noticed clubs also have a circle of formerly active members who remain attached to its social life although they no longer come to the actual meetings.

Outlanders is admittedly not the best handle for these fans -- the historic Outlanders were an independent, very fannish Southern California group in the late '40s. But some fans became Outlanders when LASFS didn't appeal to them anymore, and it is in that LASFS-centric sense I am applying their name to this section of my article.

LASFS members have always gathered for an "after-meeting" at a local coffee shop or restaurant.

Glenn Glazer: Even groups as successful as LASFS and NESFA have the structure of an actual meeting somewhere followed by an "after-meeting" which allows for both formal and informal social dynamics to occur... I can't speak for NESFA, but with some few exceptions LASFS meetings are pretty dull. Why anyone still goes to them is because *of the people who attend them*. In other words, I don't go to LASFS to hear the reading of the Menace [Minutes] (easily the funniest and best part of the meeting), I go to see my friends on a weekly basis. [*Interphase, August 1997*]

But within recent memory, a core of members have formed the habit of skipping most of the club meetings and going straight to the after-meeting.

A number of clubs have a "cometary halo" of once-active locals who have remained in its social orbit. If these clubs knew how to rekindle their

interest in the club, there would not need to be such a desperate search for new members.

No Room At The Top? In the midst of this angst about why clubs lose members and can't seem to replace them, I will point out that it could be even worse, and there is a reason it's not.

A malady that strikes clubs with a lot of veteran members is a kind of "leadership gridlock" that happens when a club is full of talented workers but has a finite number of high-profile jobs. A few exceptionally gifted new members are immediately catapulted into leadership. Others with ambition are in for a longer haul. Fans may lose interest when their talents have too little room for expression in the organized life of the club.

I'm intrigued by Tom Veal's comparison of contemporary fannish demographics with those in 19th-century France:

...Society can cope as France did in the mid-1800's, when it experienced similar demographic trends. The young can accustom themselves to painfully slow advancement, with some finding solace in their avocations or pleasures and the rest growing into the sour malcontents portrayed by Balzac.

[Chicon 2000, PR#1]

Few large sf clubs have sour malcontents who have been locked out of leadership roles by more senior members because most of them run a proprietary local convention, or have an overlapping membership with a local concurring group. The formation of con committees within these clubs expands the number of leadership jobs, relieving the "leadership gridlock."

Interestingly, in one town where there is no central club anymore, the locals recognize that their Worldcon bid committee is providing a club-like social structure:

Alex von Thorn: [In Toronto] there is no overall science-fiction club similar to NESFA, LASFS, etc....

In practice, functioning concons play the role of social club, with monthly meetings, e-mail discussions, parties, and other events....

The proprietary con provides an outlet for the ambitious, and good work for competent fans who would not be content to sit on the sidelines.

But of great interest is what will happen in Minneapolis where a club convention that provided an outlet for the gifts of newer fans is being recaptured by an earlier generation of leaders:

Joyce Scrivner: Minicon is being worked on. The 'council' of twelve has a two year commitment to the immediate changes and a five-year commitment to action. They are mostly older and mid-age fans locally, though. The changes have flaked off many of the newer and younger fans from being (visible at least) at committee meetings. There is a wide variety in the age range, but most of the admitted committee are older fans returning to work on the committee again, not younger fans coming for the first (or third) time. It's too new to see what's happening here, but it is being actively pursued.

Death Will Not Release You: Since "club suicide notes" abound, you'd think that in the two years I've been working on this article at least one of these clubs would have disbanded.

Instead, in every instance what has happened is that the remaining members have adjusted and continued on a smaller scale. S.T.A.R. San Diego has left its hilltop meeting location for a nomadic existence at local pizza parlors. (Though isn't it a little redundant to be meeting at the Round Table Pizza in La Mesa? -- which is Spanish for "the table.") Attendance has stabilized around 30, with a healthy percentage of new visitors. OSFS has not evaporated in a flash of pixels: it still meets, and has even managed to find an editor to resume publishing a paper clubzine. Etc.

It helps keep things in perspective to remember that few sf clubs have ever pulled 100 regularly-attending members. Many "large, successful" clubs draw fewer than 40 to meetings. The majority of clubs are smaller yet. No matter their size, almost all clubs necessarily lead a nomadic existence, meeting in homes, libraries, bookstores, coffee shops, condo association rec rooms and student unions. Clubs rely on a relatively small number of people to hold things together. They have limited income from dues and donations. For all of these reasons, uncertainty and change are the norm in an sf club.

Whether fans suffer from insecurity and stress when these limitations affect club life depends on each individual. Denny Lien laughs it off with a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that Minn-Stf has spent "two-and-a-half decades in decline/crisis." That contrasts with Don Glover's dire prediction about NWSFS which led off this article:

With the club standing on the brink of complete breakdown, we must either find a way to revitalize the organization, morph it into something that works, or shut it down as a relic that has outlived its time.

Don Glover the Younger, (*Westwind*, March 1997)

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

It is bemusing to set his prediction alongside comments Greg Bennett made in 1987:

I think the NWSFS has lost its identity with literary sf. Their hold on the necessary sound business practice that enables the organization to survive is tenuous. And they have no goals. When I suggested they consider a few long-term goals, such as getting a clubhouse, enlarging the membership base, improving *Westwind*, or hosting a major SF convention, the response was generally that those goals weren't worth pursuing because they were unachievable.

Greg Bennett (letter to *File 770*, October 1987)

The April 1998 issue of *Westwind* announced that NWSFS' May Social would include "*Kuhoda Garden* tours; *Hot Tubbing* -- bring your swimsuits and have fun! *A fannish tradition revived* -- an *Eye of Argon* reading, complete with tank of helium...." Does this sound dead to you? Me neither. Changed from, and not so ambitious as, the NWSFS Greg Bennett originally shaped, perhaps, but the heart is still beating.

The message is: as long as a club continues to fulfill enough members' needs for friendship and social opportunities, it will keep going, though its purposes and membership may fluctuate.

Thank you to Mike Glycer for permission to reprint this piece from his newszine FILE 770. FILE 770 is available for news, artwork, arranged trades, or by subscription. Subscriptions cost \$15 for 10 issues mailed surface (air mail at \$2.50 per issue). Contact Mike at 705 Valley View Ave., Monrovia, CA 91016, USA or e-mail Mglycer@comuserve.com Ed.

LETTERS

I am also printing the letter I received from Mr Douglas Chillington and my reply as I think this is also pertinent to the discussion.

To whom it may concern.

I attended the Robert Rankin talk on the 9th July 1999.

This was a complete waste of time. I believe that anyone giving such an address should stick to the point. The BSFG by definition has a primary interest in Science Fiction. When anyone is invited to speak. It should be about Science fiction or an attendant Subject, such as the recent talk "Science of the Discworld".

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

I believe that the Group can impose on a speaker some guide lines as to what the Group wants to hear about.

For example -

Books the speaker has written

The art of writing

Where ideas come from

Opinions on films/books etc.

This would then provide a fertile grounding for questions.

I also believe that the Group officers can police these talks. To drive them in an appropriate direction.

Mr Robert Rankin's performance was a disgrace. The Group should ask for it's money back, if there is any fee involved.

Thank you for your time.

D F Chillington

PS Talks should be re-timed to start at 7:30 with one hour for the first session. Currently the time does not always last for the full 45 minutes. Which I believe it should. Further as there may be outsiders present who have paid £4. They should get a full hour. 7:30 to 8:30

Dear Mr Chillington

Thank you for your letter. I apologise for the delay in replying to you. I'm sorry you didn't enjoy the July meeting. I *did* enjoy the meeting. Unfortunately what suits one person does not always suit everyone and there are a number of things that you may not be aware of about how the Group organises our speakers.

No fee is involved. We do not pay our speakers because money from attendance barely covers room hire and a meal for the guest (and Robert did not even have a meal). Guests speak out of fannish goodwill or to promote their books (as Rog Peyton can confirm, this is mainly the former as the BSFG is *not* a lucrative market!). Because of this it is difficult to impose restrictions on Guests (who, after all, are doing *us* a favour). But the format of the meeting 20-30 minute talk/reading and 20-30 minute Question & Answer session is designed to give members a chance to find out what they want from the Guest. In the case of the Robert Rankin talk the meeting floundered mainly because no one had any questions!

Quite apart from matters of protocol, if we gave every Guest the same narrowly defined areas to talk about we'd end up with the same

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

meeting each month (if we could convince anyone to take part under such stringent requirements).

We are sorry to say that none of the current committee are particularly proficient public speakers and would find it difficult (or impossible) to direct or "police" meetings in the manner suggested - perhaps you should stand for office next year?

Running times, again we can only suggest these to Guests and a 20-30 minute talk or reading is as long as anyone can reasonably be expected to give. Most speakers are happy to spend longer than this on the Q&A session - as long as there are Questions - this is up to the audience!

Particular points raised "Books the speaker has written" - Rankin discussed these; "The art of writing" - Rankin spoke of his early method (pub and note book), later drugs and more recently writing sober; "Where ideas come from" - Rankin covered this (alcohol, drugs and his neighbours); "Opinions on films/books etc" - Rankin spoke with feeling about the works of Pratchett and Holt along with others.

Whilst we are unable to provide even travelling expenses for our guests I think you will see how difficult it is to impose the sort of rules that might be possible if we paid a decent fee.

Once again, I'm sorry that you did not enjoy the meeting but we hope to see you at future meetings.

All the best

Yvonne Rowse
Chair BSFG

I also received a letter from Dave Hardy:

While not casting nasturtiums at any previous newsletters (don't forget I was Editor myself for four years, so know how difficult it can be. . .) I felt I must write to say how much I enjoyed the August issue of Brum Group News. For once, it was a really meaty read, full of information and real news. Some members might, I suppose, ask what the demise of Mir has to do with science fiction, but we all know what they can do, don't we? I look forward to the next issue.

One thing I used to do, which I have heard other members say they would appreciate, especially when they have to miss a meeting for some reason (as I have -- sorry -- just circumstances) was the report on last month's

meeting. Any chance of reviving that?

Yours,

Dave

Book Reviews

FRAMESHIFT by Robert J. Sawyer, Voyager £5.99, 343 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a book that tries to do too much. At its heart is a decent thriller, which would translate into a reasonable film script, but it is cluttered by sub-plots which deserve to be treated as major components of other novels.

The main thrust involves a series of murders - made to look like muggings or the results of violent burglaries. Paul Tardival is alerted because he is a genetics expert who is attacked. He knows he is a carrier for Huntingdon's Chorea - a degenerative disease, and the change in rules in state legislation means that his medical insurance will have to pay for his long-term treatment. He realises that in other brutal killings the victims have been in likely need of expensive medical treatment. To complicate matters, there is a hunt for a Nazi war criminal, the cloning of a Neanderthal woman, and a breakthrough discovery involving the process of evolution along with smatterings of philosophy. To help - or hinder - matters, his wife, Molly, is a telepath.

Sawyer is a respected writer and his other SF books have been well-crafted. This has the feel of a first novel, in which as many ideas have been given expression as it is possible to contain within this number of pages.

GATEWAY by Frederik Pohl, Millennium £6.99, 313 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Whoever is choosing the books for this SF Masterworks series, is doing an excellent job. All the books I have read (or re-read) in this series so far are as fresh now as they were when they were first published.

Gateway dates from 1976 and caused controversy at the time because the main character was so unsympathetic but still won a Hugo. Robinette Broadhead (male in spite of his name) is, on the surface a spoilt rich man who spends his money on women and a shrink. Some would regard him

as lucky. He is in fact haunted. The Gateway of the title is an artefact orbiting the sun in a plane at 90 degrees to the ecliptic. It was built by the mysterious Heechee and contains spaceships. Although no-one knows the technology that makes these work, they can take people out to unknown destinations, and back again. But not everyone returns. Those that do, and come back with Heechee artefacts can become fabulously wealthy overnight. Broadhead was a worker in the food mines of Wyoming. Basically, he dug out the oil shale on which yeasts were grown to convert into basic food. He wins enough in a lottery to buy a one-way ticket to Gateway. In sessions with the computerised shrink and flashbacks, the story of how Broadhead got his wealth unfolds. It is not a heroic story. He is a man full of hang-ups.

Pohl also manages to paint a picture of a bleak future for Earth in few words, in the spaces between the main story. This is Science Fiction at it's best.

KISSING THE BEEHIVE by Jonathan Carroll, Vista £6.99, 251pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Jonathan Carroll is a quality writer whose books, though thoroughly grounded in the contemporary world, contain elements of fantasy. *Kissing the Beehive*, though, can best be described as a crime thriller. The central character is Sam Bayer, a successful writer who has run out of ideas. After a signing for his latest book, impulsively visits the small town in which he grew up. While there, he is reminded of the first dead body he ever saw. He found Pauline Ostrova floating in the river. Although her boyfriend was convicted of the murder, Sam decides that Pauline's story will be his next book. His research into her death is complicated by Veronica Lake. Sam is not good at relationships, having three failed marriages to his name. Veronica is a fan of Sam's work and at the start of their relationship, seems a nice, vulnerable woman. As his investigations into Pauline's life and death progress, he also begins to discover more about Veronica, who is becoming possessive and manipulative. Some of the incidents that point Sam in particular directions in his research, initially seem to border on the supernatural, but in this book, the fantasy is definitely in the minds of the characters. Bizarre things happen but they are not inexplicable. Compared with some of Carroll's earlier book, this is an enjoyable, relatively undemanding read.

KIRINYA by Ian McDonald, Millennium, pbk, £6.99, 412 pp.
Star Rating *** but only if you've read the previous volume, otherwise
**

Reviewed by Peter JB Day

I hate reading sequels when I've not read the books that precede them. I particularly hate it when the publisher has neglected to indicate anywhere, as in this case, that it isn't the first in the series. It can only cause confusion for the reader if he isn't warned about such things in advance.

This was my initial experience when I read the book. Although I did gradually catch on to what was going on and was able to follow the plot, at first I was frustrated by the baffling opaqueness of what was happening and the frequent back-references – often irritatingly cryptic – to crucial previous events, all fairly certain indications that I'd come in somewhere in the middle.

It seems that mysterious aliens have come along and deposited a huge satellite between Earth and the Moon, then seeded Earth with spores which have started a radical transformation, into something rich and strange, of the planet's biosphere ... up to and including humans themselves. The situation has stabilised somewhat, with the southern hemisphere transformed while the north remains untouched and still up to its bad old ways.

Gaby McAslan was once a hot-shot news reporter who compromised her relationship with UNECTA researcher Dr Shepard for the sake of her story. Shepard has gone up to the satellite to explore it and disappeared, and Gaby, no longer a journalist, has dropped out and become a junkie, living in obscurity in the southern zone. She doesn't want to be a full-time mother, even though her child Serena, now grown up, is her last link with Shepard. But the massive political and military upheavals that are rocking the world are about to drag her back into the action.

At least ... I *think* that's what's going on.

Don't get me wrong! This is not a bad book. It's reasonably well written despite its rather slow opening sequence, with plenty of action, and the basic ideas behind it are fascinating, but because of the difficulties mentioned above I am unable to fully recommend it to the casual reader. I'm sure that anyone who's read and enjoyed the story so far will want to buy this book, but if you haven't – do take care! You'll need to read the whole story in the correct order.

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS by Gene Wolfe, Millennium,
pbk, 252pp, £6.99
Star rating ****
Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Another very fine reprint in the SF Masterworks series. I struggled rather with this book, not because it isn't well written but because at times it was a little too subtle for my rather distracted state of mind and because I haven't had the concentrated time to read that I usually like. Despite that, I am glad to have read it. I was fascinated, if not rivetted.

The book consists of three interlocking stories, each beautifully written and interesting in their own right but together forming a complex picture of two societies, a series of events and a mystery. In the end, despite the clumsy blurb on the back cover, I was unsure whether the mystery of the missing shape-shifting inhabitants of Sainte Anne had been solved or not.

This is a book that will reward re-reading and I'll get onto it just as soon as I've got my 'to-be-read' pile to a more manageable size.

Colophon

The contents of this issue are copyright 1999 the BSFG, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the membership of the BSFG. Text by Yvonne Rowse except where stated otherwise.

Many thanks to: PETER DAY & PAULINE MORGAN for their book reviews; MARTIN TUDOR for Jophan #125; MIKE GLYER for his article; and ANNE and ALAN WOODFORD for the labels and envelopes. Particular thanks to MARTIN for copying, collating, stapling, stuffing envelopes and posting them. Photocopied on the Critical Wave photocopier. For information on Wave's competitive prices contact Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, (off Clarkes Lane), Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX or e-mail on empties@breathemail.net