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# The OUSFG Newsletter

## Trinity Term 1997

*being the organ of the science-fiction group*

Well, enough identification of our orientation. Who are the exciting folk who will help you to achieve transcendental levels of confusion, excise your engrams with cruel precision, loan you books, feed you coffee or alcohol, and teach you to churten or persuade you at least to contort yourself around a pole?

Yes, I mean the New Committee, created solely to service the society (since there are certainly no CV points in the jobs). First "Genital Piercing Officer" and "Beard of OUSFG": **Rhiannon** avoided excruciating embarrassment when **Vicky** was selected as Beard in her place. Now she speaks for the noble Prince Albert or Princess Caroline whenever an uncomfortable pause in the conversation occurs.

**Peter Sidwell**, though a finalist, became a Dead Hand.

OUSFG Invisible was quietly replaced, the new holder of the title being our tip for the top or the loony bin **Alex Williams**. Maybe Piniata has retired, his life's ambition pruned down to being poked for sweets instead of being noticed and squished by the Great International Conspiracy led by the awesome Earth spanning forces of the Milk Marketing Board. Or maybe he's still active but even less visible.

The obligatory proctor-registered posts of President, Treasurer and Secretary went to the extremely splendid and worthwhile **Duncan Martin**, **Ian Snell** and **Eleanor Joslin**, respectively. I shall field their e-fan mail (no pics or personals, please).

As video ubermensch and Newsletter Editor, I shall try to supply your media needs. Submit to [cen@ecs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:cen@ecs.ox.ac.uk) (Tanaqui) - any requests or offers in the video/newsletter material realm happily received.

The rest of you are all shadows of fish, says the constitution.

## The All-Important Termcard

As of Sunday of First Week, 27th May, there is a library meeting each Sunday in St 3 Rm 8 Christ Church Peck Quad (nearest Oriel). Staircase code is 2912. A good time can be had by all from c. 20.30

Even-Week Wednesdays: revert from Writers' Circle to the more involving heckle-fests of Discussion Meetings in our library, same address as above. Official start time is c.20.15. The Turf Tavern often receives us at the end of a wild night sating our desires for literature, polemic or simple beverages-and-biccies.

Odd-Week Wednesdays: meet at 20.00 outside Oriel for our native guide to this term's video venue, since Ian Snell's room is quite hard to find and we don't want to go bothering those nice porters, do we?

## Special Events

Banquet at Nontas Greek Restaurant, London on 17 May (Sat. Third Week ). Please tell Tanaqui by email or in person ASAP if you want to go).

Blackwells has Iain M. Banks reading from *Excession* at Freud's on 29th May, and we are trying to get him to come and play with us that Wednesday.

Punt Party 14 June (Sat. Seventh Week): how do we follow Father Ted meets Trainspotting the play?

## Wednesdays

First Week (Wed 30 Apr)

Depp's film *Dead Man* if you can spare May Eve.

Second Week (Wed 7 May)

Discussion Meeting: *John Crowley* (Tanaqui).

Third Week (Wed 14 May)

"*Third Rock* in Third Week" - award-winning TV

Fourth Week (Wed 21 May)

Discussion Meeting: *Robert A. Wilson* (Duncan)

Fifth Week (Wed 28 May)

Possibly **Iain (M) Banks** before he goes to Freud's Cafe the next day, otherwise video delicacy *Cold Dog Soup*.

Sixth Week (Wed 4 Jun)

Discussion speaker needed, otherwise a free-for-all

Seventh Week (Wed 11 Jun)

*Species*: leave critical faculties at home please

Eighth Week (Wed 18 Jun)

Much beloved and traditional Games Night fun

## The Vaguely Literary Page

This is all your own silly fault for once again turning over the Newsletter to someone from the English Faculty, although the engineers etc. who have had the newsletter foisted on them have done book reviews and stuff. And the Maths-Philosophers of the Society through history seemed, ah, over-eager to

prove that maths was an arts subject and they could pontificate with the best of the rest.

I am, in any case, delighted to have read some of Ursula Le Guin's new works over the past few months. The first in publication order and therefore, by the rules of the universe, the last I read, was the short story about Gethen (Winter). Its short title is *Coming of Age in Karhide* (1995) and, ignoring the politico-social details prevalent in the novel *Left Hand of Darkness* and the short story *Winter's King*, it deals on a personal level with the patterns of interaction resulting from humans leaving **somer** (sexually neutral androgyny) each month to gender either as male or female. The **kemmer** state is linked to all institutions driven by sex: pregnancy, marriage and the orgy. This story deals with all phases of life - the childhood **somer** phase before *Coming of Age* and the other prolonged phase when one goes **somer-forever**, and the intermittent times in **kemmer** between them. Le Guin revises a few of her earlier views on the world Gethen in this story, which does follow after 25 years. Flowers bloom on Winter, and homosexuality exists. One type occurs in the **kemmerhouse**, is mixed with heterosexual experience, and actually described. The other is implied within the "marriage" of **vowing kemmer**, since Le Guin says that hormone balance causes one to **kemmer** as male near the end of one's sexual life. There must, statistically, be a number of homosexual male pairings in marriages where the partners are both nearing the time of **somer-forever**.

*A Fisherman of the Inland Sea* and *Four Ways to Forgiveness*, Le Guin's two most recent books (1996) have been reviewed for Rhiannon's critical project, so get less space here. The first is a miscellaneous collection, where the last three stories are interlinked to describe the principles of the **churten**. This means of instantaneous travel is rather more reliant on consensus and consciousness than the equally swift communication of the **ansible** and needs several viewpoints. Also, I can't rearrange the letters of **churten** into a revealing new configuration. Please tell me if I'm missing something. These stories are of the Ekumen's universe, including the title story, and the rest are a mixed bag of humour, s-f and fantasy. *Four Ways* contains four novellas about Werel and Yeowe, twin worlds with a history of slavery, though now the Hainish institution of the Ekumen has involved them in sudden cultural change and notions of freedom.

Michael Marshall Smith's latest book *Spares* had barely been published before it was sold off to the remainder bookshops, despite being quite good. *Only Forward*, which is really good, suffered the same fate for its paperback edition. *Spares* is again rooted in cyberpunk but with the nature of the human mind and other realities throwing curves into the cold equations. This time it's not flying over the sea which provides a gate, but finding out where cats really want to be... and the chances of missing redemption look truly scary.

## **Sfinx** (incorporating the Shared-World fiction project)

Rhiannon ([sbarber@e-mail.ccc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:sbarber@e-mail.ccc.ox.ac.uk)) is in charge of this, and its attendant Writers' Circle, moving to a new weekday somewhere near you. She also runs Oracle, a project to have our book reviewers acquire copies of books for the Library at the very least. So, if you are keen on writing reviews of books that are reasonably fresh, or in stories which no-one has reviewed yet because they've only recently emerged from the pens/ typewriters/ wordlooms/ muses/ nether orifices/ drug habits of a member of the society, you need to talk to an English student. Our prize example is Rhiannon, who is having her first book published by Point Fantasy and also finds time to co-ordinate the writers in OUSFG - not an easy task.

## **The OUSFG Web Presence**

Not only do we have a newsgroup, [ox.clubs.ousfg](mailto:ox.clubs.ousfg) (currently empty of messages) but we have a [Web Page](#) maintained by Tim Adye. Probably the best way to find it is to search for it using terms which are rare on the Internet and it will be obvious which ones are OUSFG Web pages (trust me, it will, and Tanaqui is an ideal term for finding OUSFG - another good term). The other ways are to go to the [OUSU web pages](#), select for info on societies and figure out that we come under Media and Literature. This is easier than typing tedious URLs like

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ousfg/>

into the header [*not necessary: just select the above, Jack -WebEd*], and you can always bookmark it once you've found it. Looking for OUSFG, you will find a few other amusing resources besides Tim's primary page.

If this entire section is gobbledegook to you, thank your gods that our constitution forbids discussion of computers or e-mail in the second meeting of every term.

end of the most concise and non-burbly newsletter ever, not counting the term card overleaf.

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## **Some (Very) Old Newsletters**

Here are some newsletters from the ancient and revered days when [OUSFG](#) had cyberpresidents. 'Txiixt then and now, while an OUSFG president has been just the thing if you want to know exactly what is meant by a [metonym](#), they are unlikely to be good companions on the infobahn.

- [Early Michaelmas Term 1993](#)

- [Late Michaelmas Term 1993](#)
- [Early Hilary Term 1993](#)
- [Late Trinity Term 1993](#)
- [Late Hilary Term 1994](#)
- [Michaelmas Term 1996](#)

Today, we can announce a great step forward: a literate [cybercommittee](#)! This is just what one would want from the forward-looking SF group that brought you [Sfinx](#) and the [Bloomsbury Good Reading Guide to Science Fiction and Fantasy](#). Mark my words: in a couple of years' time, everyone will be hopping on the cybermetonym bandwagon.

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Created on 28 April 1997; converted to HTML on 30th July and 22nd October 1997 (the first half was previously missing) by [Tim Adye](#), <[T.J.Ady@rl.ac.uk](mailto:T.J.Ady@rl.ac.uk)>

