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# PRODIGAL

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SPECIAL BSFA ISSUE

As you can see, the whole of my mailing this time is taken up with the, to me, enthralling business of the BSFA. If you're not interested in the abovementioned organisation, I wouldn't bother to read any further as you'll undoubtedly be bored stiff! You have been warned.....!!!!!!

Reference is made in the text to a list of the people who were present at the inaugural meeting - subject to my failing memory, here it is

Jill Adams  
Ron Bennett  
Eric Bentcliffe  
Sid Birchby  
Brian Burgess  
Pete Chappell  
Dave Cohen  
Cyril Evans  
Audrey Eversfield  
Barry Hall  
Sandra Hall  
Terry Jeeves  
Eddie Jones  
Eric Jones  
Margaret Jones  
Ivor Mayne  
Ken McIntyre  
Archie Mercer  
Dave Newman  
Ella Parker  
John Roles  
Norman Shorrock  
Ina Shorrock  
Frank Simpson

Phil Sless  
Ken Smith  
Ted Tubb  
Iris Tubb  
Norman Wansborough  
Norman Weedall  
Bryan Welham  
Bobbie Wild  
Jack Wilson  
Phil Rogers  
Peter West  
Jeanne Vallis

I think that that's the lot - wouldn't want anyone to be left out!

IN DEFENCE  
OF A

# SACRED COW

OK, so at Kettering this last Easter we went and formed the BSFA..... And this is my chance to try and answer some of the criticisms and cries-from-the-wilderness which have seen the light of day over the past few weeks!

But first of all, let's have a look at the scene when this deed was perpetrated -

As Vinç has already told you in his admirable summary in the latest ZYMIC, the stage was set for some sort of discussion to take place at Kettering a week or so before the event. What he didn't say though was that there was no sort of wide publicity of this intention in advance. One or two of the mob knew that there was to be a meeting on the "state of fandom" sometime during the weekend and a few others suspected that this might be so. In consequence, very few of the fans (with the exception of OMPAns and their close associates) arrived at Kettering with much in the way of preconceived - or, at least, prediscussed - ideas. This meant that most of the proceedings of the two meetings were spontaneous and it's remarkable, with this in mind, how very nearly unanimous the attendees were on all the major points.

It has been suggested that the meetings were by no means representative of Anglofandom as we know it. I agree that a large number of prominent backbone-type fans weren't there - mainly the old-guard of the London Circle - and I think that it's a pity that they didn't have a chance to say their say. However, if you look at the list of people who did attend the meetings (not all the Kettering attendees were interested) I think you must agree that a fairly representative body was present. What I think these critics really mean is that "long-service" fans weren't there in large numbers..... Look at the list again, and you'll see that such notables as Walt Willis, James White, the Clarkes, the Bulmers, Sandy Sanderson, the Buckmasters, the Rattigans, Ken Slater and other stalwarts couldn't make it. From this, it was inevitable that the organisation as formed was bound to differ in one respect or another from the ideas which these people had. Once again, I think that this is probably a pity but, please remember, the BSFA is still in its infancy and the committee are by no means impervious to ideas.

However, back to that Sunday afternoon at the George.....

I think that everyone attending Cytricon IV was told some-time or other during the weekend that a discussion session was to be

held, but I don't think that any of us really expected to see such a large turn-out in the Residents' Lounge as actually materialised! At one time or another during the sessions, there were well over thirty people there - and this was out of a possible total of forty-three actually resident in the hotel on that day.

Norman Shorrocks & myself, I think, probably knew more of the overall background behind the meeting than anyone else present as we had heard Vin's tape which gave a very clear resume of the comments he had received from a considerable number of fans. Furthermore, we had had a fairly extensive tape correspondence with the Inchmery crowd and others, and had discussed the subject exhaustively between ourselves. Somebody had to start the meeting off, and it seemed logical that it should be one of us two..... Norman resolutely refuses to do any sort of public speaking so the honour (?) therefore fell to me.....

I've never considered myself to be any great shakes at this sort of thing mainly because I suffer a particularly hideous sort of stage fright - silly, isn't it? - and normally can't manage to put more than half a dozen words together in an intelligible manner when confronted by an audience. For some reason though, even though I still feel nervous starting off, I find that I can talk to fans &, once started, keep on! On this particular Sunday, it was if anything better than usual as the gang were obviously in sympathy with what I was trying to say.....

Anyway, after a brief and rather halting analysis of the situation to date, I threw the meeting open to discussion and from then on it more or less looked after itself. For a fan gathering, it was remarkably well-disciplined - only infrequently were two or three people trying to talk at once and most people managed to achieve marvels of relevancy.

It was getting towards tea-time when it became obvious that conditions were ripe for something really constructive to come from the meeting. This placed me in something of a dilemma as I didn't particularly want to offend those not present by rushing ahead and forming an organisation effectively "over their heads" and without their approval. I thought that the likelihood of giving offence was all the more strong because it was becoming increasingly evident that any organisation born from the meetings was going to diverge quite strongly from ideas already expressed by leading fans. On the other hand, I was beset by the conviction that if the sessions closed on a note of inconclusive discussion then an unparalleled opportunity might have been missed. There was no possibility that a similar meeting of a large number of fans could be assembled together until the next convention - and God alone knew when that might be! I wasn't really left with much of an alternative, was I?

Anyhow, the matter was more or less taken out of my hands when Pete Chappell got up and framed a tentative motion that some sort of an organisation should be formed. I took this, edited it verbally and presented it to the meeting who adopted it almost unanimously..... And there we were - stuck with it!!!

This proposal naturally led to a lot of discussion and opinion regarding the precise form which the organisation should take. I, however, was beginning to feel very dry and sundry other folk wanted to take a break so I took a chance of losing a portion of the people present and adjourned the meeting until after dinner that evening.

Once again, a remarkable fact emerges and that is that for approximately  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours a meeting had been held without any assistance in the form of alcoholic beverages. This was, in part, due to the hotel managements' ruling that no drinks would be served in the Residents' Lounge and also, I think in part, due to the fact that people were too interested to consider going out of the room.

Naturally enough, in the two-hour break which followed the adjournment there was a terrific amount of good-tempered argument and discussion among the people who had been present. This was obviously a good thing as it gave those who were not very vocal at the meeting a chance to advance their own points of view and also the mob had an opportunity to get things straight in their own minds, a thing which is not always as easy as it may seem in the heat of a debate. During this interval, I took my opportunity of taking on board some desperately needed beer and then, after making my peace with my girl-friend (who felt somewhat neglected) we had ourselves an excellent meal..... I must admit, though, that I spent the better part of this time rather preoccupied with the forthcoming session and I did wonder how many of the afternoon's faces would re-appear that evening.

Sometime after 8.30 pm I walked into the new venue (the Basket Lounge) and was delighted to find a large crowd impatiently awaiting my presence. Eric Jones had improved the shining hour to a notable degree by arranging the tape recorder to one side of the hall, the microphone in front of a screen (a very effective-looking arrangement) and seats for the mob in nice tidy rows. It all looked very businesslike and business was commenced forthwith. I would like to say, incidentally, how much I appreciated Eric's efforts on the recording side..... At both sessions he sat over his machine, riding the knobs, in an effort to produce the best possible job under rather difficult conditions - I rather think that he succeeded!

A motion having been passed recommending the formation of a science-fiction organisation, nothing remained to be done but to get on and form one! This we promptly did, though not without a hell of a lot of backing and filling on the various motions setting up the detail of the organisation. Probably the most interesting passages of arms occurred in choosing the name under which we would go, and we finally settled on the British Science Fiction Association.

An association now being in existence it was necessary that officers should be appointed. As might be expected, there were no volunteers for the jobs concerned but a committee was eventually set up (Bentcliffe/Jeeves - Joint Secretaries, Mercer - Treasurer, Tubb - Editor of Journal & self - Chairman) with power to go ahead and get the Association going. Basically, of course, this has initially

resolved itself into a series of investigations resulting in the multifarious details of administration, etc., being slowly but, we hope, surely sorted out. As you'll appreciate, the problems are enormous in some cases as there's no real precedent to go on and, as a matter of fact, difficulties of semantics alone have frequently reared their ugly heads..... But we're coping, and I'm happy to say that memberships are rolling in!

After the meeting was finally closed, (it was, once again, beerless & lasted a couple of hours) the new committee settled down to a bit of serious work. One of the things which arose from this meeting was who would do which of the secretarial jobs and what would be the Association's official address. This explains why Eric only has his address on our headed notepaper and you may take it as official that Eric is Secretary and Terry is Asst. Secretary. One or two other points were dealt with, such as opening a bank account in the name of the Association, and the composition of the journal. It was also decided that, as soon as the initial organisation was completed, I would prepare an initial mailing which would go to anyone that we thought might possibly be interested. All of you will have seen this by now.

Well, that more or less covers the general picture at the time of forming the Association, so now for some particulars.....

Firstly, let's examine the philosophy behind the organisation as set up. The committee has endeavoured to follow the recommendations put forward at the inaugural meetings and, as a result, the BSFA is a serious organisation devoted to science-fiction. It's immediately obvious that this statement of fact will bring forth a certain amount of howling from the more rabidly trufannish types among us..... Nonetheless, the inaugural meetings directed that this was what the gang wanted and showed, quite inescapably, that a very large proportion of the fanzine-reading and fanzine-publishing field regarded a return to science-fiction proper as essential to the continuing welfare of fandom as we know (& love) it today. As a result the Association is endeavouring to cultivate the attentions of the ordinary (?) science-fiction reader and to provide a service which he will appreciate and which will, at the same time, be appreciated by our friends the faaans as well. It is the opinion of those who inaugurated the BSFA that the longest way round, in this case, may well be the shortest way home and that readers, once they are given a sense of belonging to the field as a whole, may very well find their way into fanzine fandom. If members evince any interest at all in fandom, the Association will encourage this (as it also proposes to encourage any other specialised interests of its members) and information, sample fanzines, names & addresses of fans and fan-groups will all be available to foster this interest. THE BSFA, HOWEVER, DOES NOT INTEND TO TRY AND SHOVE FANDOM DOWN ITS MEMBERS THROATS. The initial approach must come from the individual. After all, an appreciable song and dance has been made in some fannish quarters on the theme that a faaan is born and not made. I am inclined to agree with this dictum, and so, I think, are the committee - hence the Association's attitude. I should, I suppose, also add that officially we regard fandom as being a part of the BSFA, &

not the reverse as some people seem to think. Naturally enough, though, I (and the rest of the committee) will be delighted if some of our non-fan members do drift into fanzine fandom.

It's not really very easy to put into words the philosophy behind an organisation such as ours, particularly as it's so new &, as yet, untried. I have to try and express - concisely - the attitude of the committee towards their duties to the science fiction field as a whole. This isn't so bad, as the committee can be regarded as a corporate body whose character need not bear any readily discernable relationship to the individual characters of its members. The really difficult part comes when I find it necessary to set down my personal views on things. Obviously, it is essential that my published opinions should largely be those of the Association, if only to avoid confusion. This means that I have to speak as 'myself as Chairman' without allowing any emotional-type overtones of 'myself as faan' to creep in. On the other hand, as far as the fan field is concerned, it is desirable that I should speak as a fan when addressing them..... As you can see, striking a balance at times will not be easy.

I have already experienced one difficulty which I know will crop up time and time again. This is to come to a decision in the best interests of the Association as I see them which I know will not be popular with fanzine fandom and which I would also not necessarily support as a private (fan) individual. It is my grief, that most of these decisions will undoubtedly arouse the most vociferous of the trufan types. My feelings on the whole business are rather mixed (as I imagine you'll have gathered by now) but if I do find it necessary to enrage people in the proper performance of my job, I will endeavour to comfort myself with the thought that lack of uproar on the part of my supporters does not automatically indicate that support is lacking. Furthermore, I shall hope that my friends will understand and not bear me any personal ill-will due to decisions with which they strongly disagree. Perhaps I am rather making mountains out of molehills on this particular point, but I have had some considerable prior experience in running things both in the fan field and out of it, and I know to my cost that one's efforts are rarely regarded dispassionately until long after the event and almost never judged purely on their merits.

However, enough of this soul-searching and let's get round to what is probably the most-vexed question of the lot. This, stated briefly, is "What do we get for our money!?"

First of all, let me say that I agree that £1 per year is a lot of money for some people to pay..... As a committee member, I can't afford to be sentimental about this and my attitude must, of necessity, be that this is their hard luck. To be perfectly brutal, them as can't pay, can't join! So there! As you all know, we've tried to alleviate the blow as far as the younger people are concerned and we're not exactly being greedy with our overseas members. The one thing that must be remembered, though, is that money - and quite a lot of it at that - is necessary to run any self respecting organisation. If you don't believe me, ask Sandy Sanderson or

the Treasurers of the Liverpool & Cheltenham groups. And I might add that starting an organisation costs a hell of a lot more than keeping an existing one running.

One or two people have written to me suggesting that a sub of 5/- per year might be more sensible. From the point of view of collecting it from reluctant subscribers, it might be, but as a sum with which something can be done and in return for which something is expected it is mighty little these days.

Ken Bulmer has in part implied that five bob an issue is rather a lot to pay for the Association's official organ. From this I am forced to assume that this is all he expects to get out of the Association. So let's have a look at one or two other purely financial benefits..... Firstly, there's the question of conventions. As the BSFA is undertaking to sponsor future British conventions, it seems only reasonable that BSFA members should have the advantage of reduced-price Convention Membership. If you examine this idea in detail, you will see that it is only fair really as BSFA money will, in all probability, be used to underwrite the convention funds and losses, if made, will be borne by the Association. We think that this is only right as the Convention may be regarded as the biggest single activity of the Association and the one deserving of the most support. Vince asks us not to forget that we were born at a social convention and you may be sure that we have the social side of our activities well in the forefront of our plans. Then, of course, there is the postal library..... This is a facility which no-one else can offer at our rates. All other postal libraries at present in existence, are basically profit making organisations and therefore cannot compete with us on the purely monetary side. At the moment, I agree, they may be able to offer a better selection of books, but this is only a question of time. As regards the Official Organ itself, I'd like to point out that it will probably cost a considerable portion of the subscription to produce. A decent quality job just cannot be turned out for peanuts as any fanzine editor will tell you. I defy anyone to name a British fanzine of decent quality which shows a profit or even covers costs..... I think it's pretty fair to say that all good fanzines are heavily subsidised by their editor/producers.

Naturally enough, we can't afford to make a loss on the Journal as we have our members' money to think of..... Neither can we subsidise it out of our own pockets - even if we wanted to - because, if we did, the Association would be existing on a false economy and in the event of a change of officers a certain amount of alarm and despondency might well be experienced by the new committee when they attempted to do what their predecessors had done using only the subscriptions available.

Some other ideas are currently lurking up our sleeves, but in the final analysis the Association exists to give the member just what the member wants..... And as I've said before, it's up to the member to come along and tell us what it is he wants. Obviously, we can't pander to needs of one individual only, but if there appears to be a good potential field of interest in a project, the committee

will undoubtedly give it their earnest consideration.

As is quite natural, there will be a considerable number of fans who consider that the BSFA has nothing to offer them. In this case the only advice I can tender is that they don't make any effort to join. On the other hand, I think it's only fair to mention that, if you don't join, you can't expect to have any say in what the Association does..... We can't, for instance, take any serious notice of anyone who comes along and says that he will join the Association if it will undertake to provide a particular facility. From now on, as we have quite a few members already, we can only afford to take notice of those members and no amount of fuss created by outsiders will have any effect.

In much the same vein, I would add that I have been taken to task by a number of people because I haven't published the full Constitution and Rules of the Association. This is because it isn't normal practise to make these available to anyone but members. Of course, if a member chooses to shew his copy of the rules to a friend, there's nothing that the committee can do to stop him even though these should normally be regarded as confidential. Once again, it should be pointed out that we can't change the rules to suit every prospective member.

After reading the above, it is quite possible that some of you might have the feeling that I am being unduly truculent. Now, I've had this accusation thrown at me before when I have made particular efforts to make myself clear..... Let me assure you, however, that no truculence is intended, merely an effort at absolutely plain speaking! And if you're one of those people who don't care for plain speaking - well, I'm sorry.

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The whole of the preceding six-and-a-half pages was composed straight onto stencil, without benefit of any notes.

If it appears disjointed in part, or if some topic of great importance has been neglected, I can only apologise and hope to do better next time.

I realise that the year's mailings have been shamefully neglected on my part, in that I have not made any comment or criticism thereon. Please be assured that all have been read, digested and enjoyed. I can only plead pressure of other work in the fan field as my excuse..... Hope it's good enough!

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STOP PRESS.....

Have just heard that Ron Bennett has won the TAFF election for this year. Congratulations, Ron, and have one or two for me while you're in South Gate!

MORE STOP PRESS.....

Please be advised that due to a variety of reasons, as from the end of July my address will be 1, Howard Road, Bournemouth, Hants., England..... Probably the biggest single reason is that I have been away from home for over ten years and I want to live at home for a while. Just suddenly made up my mind and handed in my notice at my job in Liverpool..... Hope I can find a decent one in, or around, Bournemouth.