

A Personal History of Grendel

by Chris Carter

Most of our current members have little idea of the history or origins of the club. For those who may be interested, either now or in the future, I have undertaken to produce a club history before all is lost in the mists of time. The story will be told in ten parts and published in our newsletter. The account will be a personal history and will reflect my own opinions and prejudices. It will, however, be as factually accurate as possible [Most of the original records have been lost See part VII.] My apologies in advance to anyone offended either by omission or inclusion.

Part I: GRENDEL'S MOTHER.

Autumn 1975. The University of Bristol Chess Club had never had it so good: League Champions, Semi-finalists in the National Club and eight teams in the League, three of them in the First Division.

I was one of several ex-students still playing for the club. My evenings were spent propping up the Long Bar and drifting downstairs to watch home matches. An average night would see six to ten of us sharing this form of entertainment, but the other two fixtures were Jim Will and Dick Kaczinski. Jim had arrived in Bristol, a few years earlier, to do a M.A. in English and had not got around to leaving. Dick was a mature student of Economics in his final year; he was Polish / German / Scottish / British as suited and drove a lime green Jaguar [number plate : PUS].

All was nearly ideal. There were only three real problems: 1) The Union bar closed at 900 pm. on Sundays. 2) The price of beer 3) There was this growing band of 'old lags' who still played for the University. All was very amicable. the continuity benefited the

club, but we could not remain 'students' for ever.

We solved the first problem by adjourning to the Quadrant on Sunday nights. There, with no chess to watch, we debated the remaining issues. We never solved the second but the Quadrant became the place to talk about the third. The matter was discussed openly with other members who joined us for a few drinks, but only in the Quadrant, it somehow seemed wrong to raise the subject within the Union.

The position was simple. We had to move on sometime, and preferably whilst the University club would view our departure with regret rather than with celebration. Bristol & Clifton was too powerful already, too impersonal and the local rivals; we could not go there. Horfield was only a second/third division outfit [their current status dates from a later infusion of strong Clifton players] and everywhere else was just too far away.

The obvious solution was the only practical one. We would have to create our own club. We would field only one team, in the First Division naturally, and would be bound together by the bonds of friendship. Details like players and venue could be solved.

The Gloucestershire Lightning Tournament was to be held at the end of January and we resolved that it would witness our declaration of independence. The tournament was primarily for individuals but also included a team prize, for the best scores by any four players from the same club.

Richard Johnson, the University club secretary, was in his final year and, like Dick, would be staying in Bristol. Mike, the Sloth, Goodland had finished his first degree and was busy post-graduating in Chemistry. We signed the pair of them and then all we

needed was a name.

We chose our name the same way my family has always named pets. Everyone keeps suggesting new names which everybody else disparages until suddenly the right name appears and all are content. The process took several Sunday evenings and many pints. Eventually: Dick, our Wagnerian, 'Valhalla? Rheingold? Siegfried or something?' Jim 'Why German? Stay English. Beowulf?' * Chris 'Wrong image. We're not the good guys. Grendel?' Jim 'Why stop half way? Grendel's Mother!' All 'Grendel's Mother? Yes I like it Right, whose round is it?'

On Saturday 31st January 1976 we drove out to the Quickplay in Hanham, Colin Pillinger [League Chairman and an official of both Gloucestershire and Hanham & Kingswood] was taking the entries. It took about twenty minutes to convince him that, contrary to appearances, we were in fact 'Grendel's Mother' and not 'The University.' In the end he reluctantly accepted our entries but clearly considered it to be a students' prank.

We were weakened by Dick's departure at teatime [Nobody had told him that the event would last until 9.00 p.m. and he drove off to watch Dr Who. Unfortunately he turned the wrong way at the main road and finished in Bath.] but still finished a respectable, but hardly glorious, third. This was just enough to get mentioned in the local papers, which all managed to mis-spell our name [a tradition perpetuated by many of our members].

In June, Richard, Jim, Mike and I moved into the lower two floors of 48 Alma Vale Road and named the place 'Grendel's Mere.' We had extended the squad to eight by recruiting three more players. Graham Lloyd and David, the Gibbon, Osborne were both mates of Richard who were about to leave the University [David actually played for Bristol & Clifton as he was a local and had joined them as a junior]. John O'Loughlen played for the University but had not attended it All

of us had played regularly in the top division. If we were desperate, and the Cup matches are over eight boards, we had an ex-flatmate of mine available by the name of Paul Pritchard [he would eventually achieve a grade of 120 before retiring].

Richard, as the retiring University club secretary, wrote to the League, submitting the University's entries for the coming season and enclosing a brief note explaining that Grendel's Mother would be replacing one of the University's first division teams. We would play at 'The Mere' and I would be our secretary. All was well with the world.

In early July Richard received the following letter from Louis Schaeffer, the League Secretary:

Dear Mr Johnson, Your application to form a new club called 'Grendel's Mother' has been unanimously rejected by the League's Management Committee. Yours sincerely ...

The following day my post included a three page letter from the League Chairman [Colin Pillinger] detailing the nine reasons why we had been rejected.

Next issue: Part II. COMPROMISE & CONQUEST.

*Footnote. Beowulf is The Anglo-Saxon epic poem in which Grendel and his Mother appear. A brief account will be given in Appendix I, which will follow chapter X All members are urged to obtain a copy of Beowulf and to study it, if need be in translation.