

matrix

Nov/Dec 2002

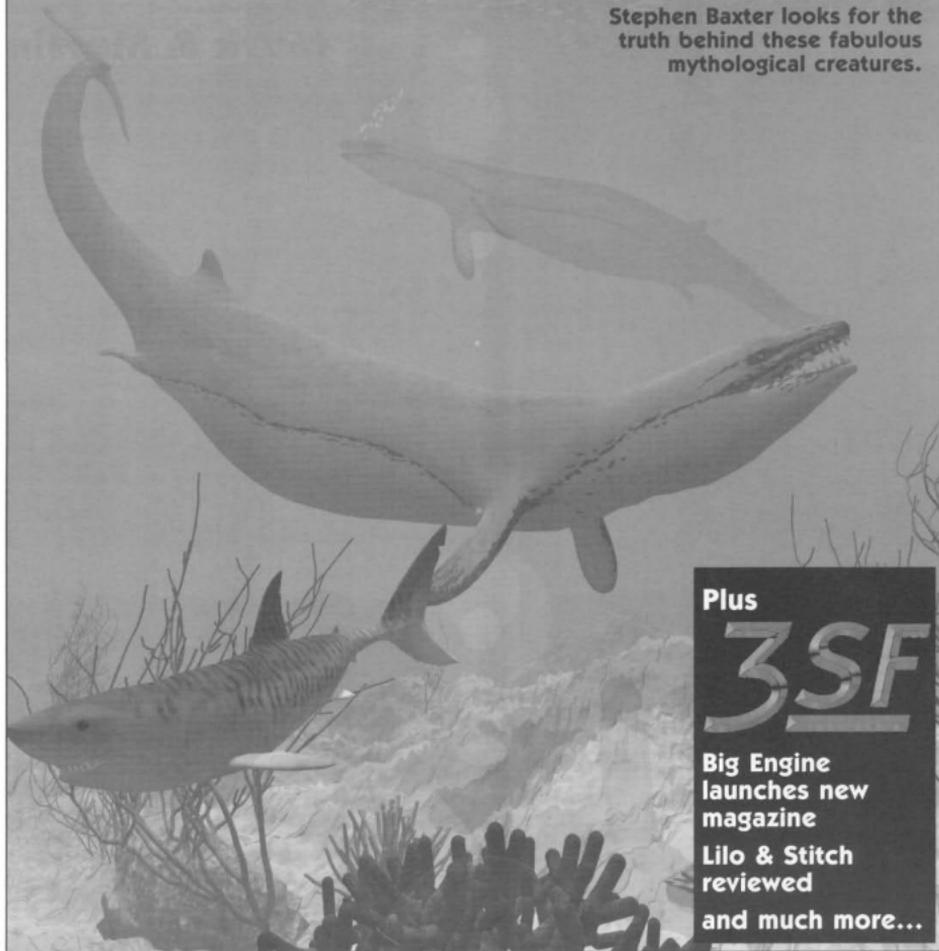
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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

unicorns, sea serpents & elves

Stephen Baxter looks for the truth behind these fabulous mythological creatures.



Plus

3SF

Big Engine
launches new
magazine

Lilo & Stitch
reviewed

and much more...

matrix

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Welcome,

Matrix is under new management. Thanks to Gary Wilkinson, who passed on a great magazine. Over the next few issues, we'll build on Matrix's strengths, while creating something distinctive. We've already had the painters and decorators in.

But Matrix is your magazine and we need new blood. Glenda plans to leave us soon, after some sterling work on her magazine column. If you fancy becoming the contributing editor for magazines, please let us know. We're also looking for a new contributing editor for fandom news. The BSFA also has a long-standing vacancy for someone to help with publicity, promotions, advertising and so on.

It's an interesting time for SF. Over the next few issues, we'll have, for example, author interviews, features on web fiction magazines and articles on the small presses. Despite producing some of the most provocative SF and fantasy, small presses don't always get the publicity or sales they deserve.

Mainstream media has long used elements of SF and fantasy, but the overlap between SF and the mainstream seems greater today than ever. It seems that the mainstream could soon engulf SF and fantasy. Mark regards this as a bad thing (see opposite). On the other hand, the proliferation of SF and Fantasy means there's no shortage of subjects to write about.

So, let us know what you've been reading or watching. We welcome short reviews of between 250 and 500 words. We also want longer features, but let us know first. We're open to any contributions that relate to SF and fantasy within the genre and more widely. So we'll cover television, plays, films, art and comics, role-playing or computer games, a soundtrack, dance video or rock CD. Mark's itching to write on fantasy themes in Scandinavian Death Metal. In depth. Unless we get some contributions - deadlines are November 29 for the next issue and 7 Feb for the first issue of 2003 - Martin might let him. You've been warned.

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RAGE against the... ...new respectability of Science Fiction

As a teenager I spent much of my time - probably too much - hanging out in Soho. So I found the news that the latest edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* includes Klingon, warp drive, dilithium, Jedi, the Force, the Dark Side and Tardis deeply disappointing. Let me explain.

Once upon a time, Soho's St Anne's Court played host to the two pillars of my cultural life. The legendary SF, fantasy and comics shop Dark They Were and Golden Eyed and Shades, a record shop specialising in hard rock. Their influence on me remains profound. For instance, I bought every volume of *Moorcock* I could lay my hands on, mostly from Dark They Were. His writing, along with the politics espoused by the punk movement, led me to Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin as well as radical philosophy more widely. Buying William Burroughs from Dark They Were led me to Bukowski, Ginsberg, *Ambit* and other small literary magazines. Buying Lovcraft, Poe and Clark Ashton Smith led me to de Baudelaire and then to Zola, Sartre and Camus.

Anger and alienation

In those days, there seemed something subversive, almost dangerous, in all this. The books, underground comics, forteen literature and counterculture magazines I bought from Dark They Were represented perfectly my alienation, anger and disenfranchisement. Then I'd move on to Shades. Punk and extreme rock, which was just beginning to blossom into the thrash and dark metal genres, formed the perfect soundtrack to my reading. Here was a culture that reflected, analysed and characterised my often vaguely felt values, views and beliefs.

Today, SF, fantasy and comics seem to have gone soft. Once the genre's intellectual centrepiece seemed to be some distance from the edges of the mainstream. The occasional film, book or TV programme would cross over. But SF's focus was firmly counterculture. Today, SF's intellectual hub seems stuck in the mainstream.

Facing the tail end of my 30s, some of that alienation,

Klingons plan to use new-found respectability to tour in Queen tribute band.



© Paramount Pictures

disenfranchisement and anger should have dissipated. It hasn't. Extreme music still reflects my sense of deep unease about the society we live in. Hatebreed's *Penitence* or Corporate Avenger's *Freedom is a State of Mind*, prove that punk and extreme metal can still savagely attack the systems, attitudes and values that breed a feeling of apathy, if not nihilism, across society.

Want some proof of the pervasive nature of this apathetic apocalypse? How many people voted in the last election? How many people are crippling themselves with consumer debt to attain a lifestyle perpetuated by the media that they'll never attain and is ultimately banal? Do the rows of women's, men's and lifestyle magazines or the choice of satellite channels really entertain and inform - or are they intellectual soporifics?

Banal media

Fantasy and SF can protect us from the invasive intrusion of this banal media. Supernatural fiction, Lovcraft wrote in *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, counterpoints the prevailing tendency towards "a didactic literature to 'uplift' the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism". Later he derides the "empty literary conventions

such as the happy ending, virtue rewarded and in general a hollow moral didacticism, acceptance of popular standards and values".

Apply this more widely and you have a pitiful characterisation of much of today's media. Too much SF and fantasy now fits seamlessly in the mainstream, which - as David Edwards notes in *Free to be Human* - aims to create "a buying environment which maximises advertising sales. This requires the careful avoidance of stimulating deeper thought that interferes with the buying mood." (Edwards book on "intellectual self-defence in an age of illusions" is well worth reading.) SF and fantasy could help bolster our intellectual self-defences.

Counter-cultural focus

SF and fantasy's huge strengths is its ability to stand apart from the current mainstream, look upon it and ask difficult questions. I'll trot out the usual suspects to underscore the point: *Brave New World*, 1984 and *Clockwork Orange*.

And everyday I'm reminded of just how much we need a different perspective; not just to avoid us unthinkingly accepting popular standards and values, but more specifically to help

us understand the rapid pace of scientific change.

My day job is writing about science, especially biomedical advances. And science increasingly actualises ideas, concepts and technology once the preserve of SF.

I've just finished an article for *Pharmaceutical Visions*, for example, on tissue engineering, which allows scientists to grow organs in the lab. According to a recent *Nature* paper, Huxley's artificial womb is rapidly becoming a reality. Cloning is here. Genomics allows doctors to diagnose disease long before symptoms emerge. More effective and safer therapies should follow over the next few years.

Ethical issues

Such advances could dramatically improve morbidity and mortality. However, these advances also raise numerous difficult and, currently, unresolved ethical issues. These are issues that are core to our views of ourselves and the society that we inhabit. Yet SF in general seems remarkably quiet on these crucial scientific questions.

You can find exceptions, of course. However, too much SF and fantasy seems aimed at creating long series of blockbuster books or an environment to sell videos, spin-offs, computer games and toys, rather than question society. After all, even the original *Star Trek* took considerable risks in depicting inter-racial relationships, questioning the validity of war and attacking societal prejudice. Few current TV series or Hollywood films are as provocative or challenging. Indeed, because SF's intellectual focus is now part of the mainstream (which wasn't the case with the original *Star Trek*) it's constrained, inhibited even silenced in its criticism.

The addition of Tardis, Klingon and Force to the *Shorter* is a mark of respectability. And I don't want my SF and fantasy to be respectable. I want it to comment on mainstream society, not be part of it. I want it to deal with the difficult questions. I want it to subvert mainstream media. I want it to regain some of the danger I felt in Dark They Were all those years ago.

Mark Greener

RAGE against the...

...is our opinion column. Your chance to get something off your chest. Rant, rave, or even offer rational argument, about an issue related to SF and Fantasy in between 750 to 1000 words, and send it to the editorial address.



Private company plans moon trip

The idea that private companies would explore and commercially exploit space is, of course, a recurring SF plot device. In the latest example of SF becoming fact, TransOrbital, Inc., announced it's the first private company approved by the US government to explore, photograph, and land on the moon. TransOrbital expects to launch its Trailblazer Mission from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan within a year.

Trailblazer will provide high-definition video and maps of the moon's surface with a one meter resolution. They'll also take new images of earth-rises over lunar craters and view equipment left behind from Apollo and Russian landings.

The mission will deliver a time capsule containing

messages, photographs and other "personal cargo" from Earth. Finally, the Trailblazer Mission will provide a "barnstorming" video as the probe impacts on the lunar surface.

And this mission isn't just scientific curiosity. TransOrbital believe there's money in them there lunar hills.

"We're not returning to the moon simply to explore... we're returning because there are true opportunities there - true revenue streams," said Dennis Laurie, TransOrbital's CEO. "TransOrbital has the technology, the desire - and now we have the licensing. It's a significant moment for our company, and a significant development for all of aerospace. People may soon get to experience the moon in ways they never imagined."

Pratchett returns

Terry Pratchett's new Discworld novel *Night Watch* is due out in November. Although it's the 27th visit to Ankh-Morpork, apparently Pratchett's still managed to create "a delightfully rare case where familiarity breeds contentment", according to Frank Harris in *Waterstone's Books Quarterly*. Based on the review, which describes Pratchett as "possibly the most gifted English language storyteller since Dickens," his legions of fans will lap it up. In 1996, apparently, Pratchett accounted for 1 per cent of all books sold in Britain. (Source: *Waterstone's Books Quarterly*)

Gaiman makes history

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* won both the Stoker and the Hugo. It's the first novel to take both awards. Gaiman is also in the running for a World Fantasy Award and was nominated for an International Horror Guild Award. (Source: www.Darkechoes.com)

Clones rakes it in

According to *Star Wars Magazine*, box office receipts for *Attack of the Clones* reached \$291 million within 53 days of release, topping the \$290.5 million taken by *The Empire Strikes Back* over three releases, in 1980, 1982 and the special edition in 1997. That makes *Clones* the 14th highest grossing film of all time. *Attack of the Clones* will probably make around \$300 million in the US. In the UK, *Clones* made £11.4 million on the first weekend and £36.5 million over the eight weeks after the release.

More Gor and Wolfe

Darkechoes.com reports that John Norman sold his first new Gor novels in 14 years, *Witnes Of Gor* and *Prize Of Gor*, to New World Publishers. Meanwhile, Gene Wolfe sold his latest currently untitled collection to Tor. Carroll & Graf should publish SF Weekly's chief drama critic Michael Scott Moore's interesting sounding first novel *Too Much Of Nothing*.

"The novel recounts the final months of a murdered teenager, and the Clockwork Orange-obsessed friend who killed him", Darkechoes.com reports.

The 'fact is stranger than SF' section

I'm not making this up: though it would stretch my credulity in an SF book. An American company LifeGem is offering "a certified, high quality diamond" created "from the true essence of our loved ones". In other words, the carbon in their cremated remains. LifeGem says this offers "a most unique and timeless memorial available for creating a testimony to their unique life". (www.lifegem.com)

AWARDS

British Fantasy Awards 2002

Best Novel: (The August Derleth Fantasy Award): Simon Clark, *The Night Of The Triffids* (Hodder & Stoughton)

Best Anthology: Stephen Jones, Ed., *The Mammoth Book Of Best New Horror: Volume Twelve* (Robinson)

Best Collection: Paul Finch, *Aftershocks* (Ash Tree Press)
Best Short Fiction: Simon Clark, "Goblin City Lights" (*Urban Gothic: Lucina And Other Trips*)

Best Artist: Jim Burns
Best Small Press: PS Publishing (www.britishtantsociety.org)

Rhysling Awards 2002

The Rhysling Awards, for works of SF and fantasy poetry, went to Lawrence Schimel for the long poem "How To Make A Human". William John Watkins took the short poem award for "We Die As Angels". (Source: www.locusmag.com).

Sunburst

Margaret Sweatman's *When Alice Lay Down with Peter* won the 2002 Sunburst Award for "Canadian Literature of the Fantastic". (Source: www.sunburstaward.org)

Dragon's Egg author dies

Robert Forward the hard-SF writer and a former senior scientist at Hughes Research Laboratories in Malibu, California, died on September 21 from brain cancer. He was 70 years old. Forward's 1980 novel *Dragon's Egg* won the Locus and Seiun Awards. Forward also published the "RocheWorld" series and several other works of fiction and non-fiction. (Source: Locus online)

Eagle awards: vote now!

Voting for the 2002 Eagle Award for comics is now open. The Eagle Award, started in 1976, is now one of the most coveted international prizes. Previous winners include *The X-Men*, *Swamp Thing*, *2000AD* and *MAD*. <http://www.comics-international.com/eagleawards/index.html>

Alien Online now official Google source

The Alien Online (www.alienonline.net), the website offering SF, fantasy and horror news and reviews is now an official Google News source website. "I sent them an email, they took a look at the site, liked what they saw and agreed to include us as one of their 4,000 or so official news sources," said Ariel, the site editor.

New Earthlight editor

Darren Nash is the new editor of Simon & Schuster's *Earthlight SF&F* imprint. For the past two years, Nash worked as Marketing Manager for fiction and *Earthlight*. He takes over from *Earthlight's* founding editor, John Jarrold. (Source: www.thealienonline.com)

Focus editor breaks out

Focus editor Simon Morden has broken out of the magazine and anthology markets with two new publications. *Thy Kingdom Come* is a multimedia CD ROM from award-winning US publishers Lone Wolf. "It's not quite a novel, and more than a collection

of short stories. It tells of nuclear terrorism conducted by fundamentalist Christians, trying to provoke God into the Second Coming." As well as the stories, there's art from Marge Simon, introductions and background to the stories, internet hyperlinks, and a dozen video shorts packed with weird and wonderful things. "We've filled this CD - 650Mb of goodies. And there's only ever going to be 200 copies, all signed and numbered."

In the more conventional area of paper, Morden's novel *Heart* (Razorblade Press) is being released with a "bloody great sword on the cover". So despite its classification in the Crime and Mystery section on Amazon, it promises to be somewhat unconventional.

Heart can be ordered via Amazon or bookshops (ISBN 0954226704). *Thy Kingdom Come* is available at \$15.95 from lonewolfpubs.com, or direct from the author for £10 (info from simon.morden@blueyonder.co.uk)

BSFA appoints new Membership Secretary

Estelle Roberts is now the BSFA's new Membership Secretary. You can contact her at 97 Sharp Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2AE. E-mail: estelle@lyhonde.freeseva.co.uk

Low but Sure

The European Space Agency communications satellite, Artemis has been saved by its station keeping ion engines. In July 2001, an Ariane 5 launcher failed to put Artemis into the correct transfer orbit. At an altitude of 17,000km instead of required 36,000km, the spacecraft was too low to operate and still inside the Van Allen radiation belts. Using all but 5% of its chemical fuel to escape pushed it to 31,000km. Fitted to demonstrate the technology, the ion thrusters were intended for inclination control. Accelerating charged particles to provide thrust they are very efficient, but at 15milliNewtons their thrust



Are we what we read?

If we are what we read, and we read science fiction, what are we? It's a worrying thought.

To mark World Book Day on March 6 2003, a poll is being held to see what book best describes life in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, publishers are getting to submit the books, which will then be whittled down to shortlists the public can vote on. (www.thebookseller.com/news/dnadsplay.cfm?id=2002_08_07_1.dat)

But in a spirit of creative theft - which sf or fantasy book or short story best describes our present? Not necessarily in some ploddingly literal 1936-story-from-Astounding-which-describes-something-like-the-internet way - although we'd be happy to see those too - but who's got it right in a more oblique way? Do the Sheep Look Up at cows, cows, burning bright? Do we really love Big Brother (or do we prefer Survivor)? Could we all stand on Zanzibar? Did anyone anticipate George Jr? Did anyone imagine an election where nobody came?

Send about five hundred words on the book or story of your choice to Andrew M Butler, D28, Dept of Arts and Media, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ or to ambutler@enterprise.net by 10 January 2003, and you may see your words appear in *Vector*. You might even win a prize...

levels are tiny. Designed for pulsed operation, they have been working almost continuously for over 200 days raising the spacecraft's orbit by 15km per day. Early in 2003 it will arrive at its destination, eighteen months after launch, but able to fulfil its mission. (Source: www.spacor.com)

X-prize now has 20 entrants

There are now 20 entrants reaching for the skies and 10 million dollars. The X-Prize challenge is to carry three people to an altitude of 100km, return them safely, then repeat the trip within two weeks. Some of the attempts are worth noting.

Scaled Composites, builders of *Voyager*, the aircraft that flew non-stop around the world, are one team. They plan an air-launched rocket system. The unconventional Canadian project da Vinci lifts their rocket part of the way using the world's biggest hot air balloon. There are British entries too. Bristol Spaceplanes have *Ascender* that looks like a conventional jet and will use a mix of jet engines and rockets. Starchaser Industries will use a multistage rocket. With millionaires willing to fork out 15 million dollars for a trip to space, the prize may be the smallest part of the pay off. (Source: www.xprize.com)



Pulitzer for Spidey

With big name television producer Michael J Straczynski (*Babylon 5*) and film director Kevin Smith (*Clerks*) writing the comics these days, Marvel were going to have to pull out all the stops to impress people with a scriptwriter for the next Spider-Man movie.

They succeeded. Pulitzer Prize winning author Michael Chabon has been announced as the man who will pen *The Amazing Spiderman*, sequel to this year's massive hit movie.

Chabon is a renowned novelist whose works include *Wonder Boys*, already a successful movie. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 2001 with *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, the story of two Jewish boys creating comics during World War Two.

Bats back

Darren Aaronofsky, director of *Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream*, was supposed to make his blockbuster debut with *The Fountain*, a science fiction epic of, apparently, brain-busting intricacy. The plan fell apart when Brad Pitt jumped ship from the project just weeks before filming.

So what next for Aaronofsky?

Well it seems that Warners have now sent him back to the adaptation of Frank Miller's *Batman: Year One*, a project Aaronofsky had been working before the studio lost it in development hell.

Aaronofsky will have help on the script from Miller himself. We can only hope it improves on *Robocop 2* and his latest Batman comic, *DK2*.

Marvel ready for new wave

While Warner Brothers, owner of DC Comics, have struggled to get their superhero franchises on the big screen in recent years, Marvel Studios have had a host of successes. *Blade*, *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* have all delivered big financial rewards and considerable acclaim both from fandom and critics. Just around the corner are sequels to all those movies plus *Daredevil* and Ang Lee's *The Hulk*.

But Marvel aren't resting on their laurels.

It now appears that the long-awaited *Fantastic Four* feature has taken a step closer to reality.

Studio executive Avi Arad claims filming could start as early March 2003 and he wants George Clooney to lead as Reed Richards. David Self, scriptwriter for *Road to Perdition*, is working on a script for *Namor: The Sub-Mariner* and Jonathon Hensleigh is in place to direct the story of *The Punisher*.

Who's watching who?

Alan Moore told him not to bother but David Hayter is going ahead anyway. It defeated Terry Gilliam and Darren Aaronofsky but the writer of the *X-Men* remains confident that he can adapt Moore's classic *The Watchmen* to the screen. "It was considered too dark, too complex, too 'smart'. But the world has changed," Hayter said.

Matrix in the can

The two *Matrix* sequels, *Reloaded* and *Revolution*, have finished their 200 day marathon shoot in Sidney, Australia. Described as "one enormous film cut in half" by producer Joel Silver, the films will be released within six months of each other. The first, *The Matrix Reloaded*, will be released in America and Europe in May 2003.

Wesley crushed

After two days of filming on the set of the next *Star Trek* movie, *Nemesis*, Will Wheaton who played Wesley Crusher in *The Next Generation* discovered that his scenes had been left on the cutting room floor.

Star Trek: Nemesis is due for release on 3 January 2003 in the UK. A fabulous trailer and an even number (*Nemesis* will be the tenth *Trek* movie) have fans hoping the film will be an improvement over *Star Trek: Insurrection*.

Despite denials, rumours continue that this will be the last outing for *The Next Generation* crew. These began with the reports of behind the scenes wrangling and were fuelled by the film's tagline: "A generation's final journey begins."

Harry who?

Chris Columbus will not direct the third *Harry Potter* film. Citing the heavy workload and a desire to spend some time with his own children, the director of *The Philosopher's Stone* and the hugely anticipated *Chamber of Secrets* will bow out for the third movie.

The Prisoner of Azkaban will be directed by Alfonso Cuarón. While the director of *Y tu mamá también*, a funny but distinctly adult-themed Mexican road movie, might not seem to be the obvious choice for such a high-profile kids movie, Cuarón cut his Hollywood teeth on the sweet and visually lush *A Little Princess* (1995).

Soderbergh does

Solaris
Another curious directorial choice. Steven Soderbergh director of some of the most sharply observed contemporary

films (*Out of Sight*, *Traffic*, *Ocean's 11*) will remake the Stanislaw Lem book/Andrei Tarkovsky movie *Solaris*.

Little is known about the film at the moment, even though it is due for release in America at the end of November.

Solaris will star George Clooney and Nastascha McElhone. The teaser trailer reveals almost nothing with a long tracking shot past a space station circling a planet wholly covered by water.

However, James Cameron, the film's producer, showed footage at the recent San Diego Comic Convention. The short clip produced a very positive response from those lucky enough to see it and had them comparing the film to Kubrick in look and feel.

Pitched back

Pitch Black, the low budget science fiction action movie that made a star of Vin Diesel, will have a sequel. In fact, there may be three sequels in the works if original director David Twohy gets his way.

Pitch Black 2: The Chronicles of Riddick will see the return of Diesel in the title role. Story details remain sparse but Twohy says he has pitched a three story arc following Diesel's adventures against a variety of adversaries.

Pitch Black 2 is expected to be released Summer 2003. Twohy's latest film, *Below*, a horror movie set aboard a sunken submarine is currently on release in America.

Disney has them in Stitches!

The new Disney animated movie features retro-styled animation, a soundtrack by Elvis, a genetically engineered alien monster and single parent families. **Martin McGrath** watches *Lilo and Stitch* and tries to work out what is going on at The House of Mouse.

Stitch is the first alien in a Disney animated film. I was so surprised when I read that I had to go and check a reference book to make sure that it was right. For those of you as shocked as I was, I'll repeat it again: *Lilo and Stitch* is the first proper science fiction Disney animation.

There's been fantasy by the bucket load with witches and wizards and talking puppets and dinosaurs but never an alien. No, the things in *Toy Story* don't count. They were toys. As for Goofy, while I still have no idea what it is, I'm pretty sure he is terrestrial.

Rubbish

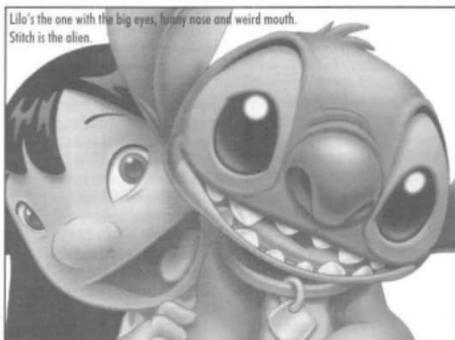
And no, I don't count *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* as proper SF, either because it was total rubbish and only marginally SF.

So, this is the first animated Disney to feature a science fiction plot, but is it any good? Yes.

There, a nice, quick review that wraps everything up neatly.

I could just stop now, fill the rest of the page with a big picture, and go on to something else because either you are one of those people who will relax, go with the flow and enjoy what

is, plainly, a childish and silly film or you are not. If not, Mike



Leigh has a new movie out.

Experiment 626

Experiment 626 (Stitch) is an illegally created, genetically engineered monster of enormous destructive power who is also cute and furry. When his creator, Dr Jumba Jookiba, is caught the High Council sentence Stitch to be banished to an asteroid prison. But Stitch escapes (hurrah!), steals a police cruiser, "the red one" of course, and crashes to Earth. Luckily, he lands in Hawaii.

Infuriated, the alien Grand Council decide to destroy Earth, but are stopped on environmental grounds. The mosquito is, apparently, an endangered species and humans are protected as the mosquito's preferred food.

Meanwhile, on Earth, Stitch is adopted as a pet by the tearaway Lilo, a young girl being brought up by her sister, Nani. Much hilarity ensues as the aliens try to grab back Stitch and Nani struggles to keep her little family together despite the attention of the worlds baddest (that's bad meaning huge) social

worker Cobra Bubbles, voiced superbly by Ving Rhames.

This film doesn't boast the stunning visual stylisation of recent Disney releases (for example: *Tarzan* or *The Emperor's New Groove*). It is certainly beautiful to look at but the style quite deliberately harks back to earlier films, especially *Dumbo*, rather than taking animation in bold new directions.

One technical breakthrough, however, is the soundtrack. The mind-numbing Elton John ballads have been banished. In their place is a music soundtrack containing more Elvis songs than any film made by The King himself. Not only is the choice of music good, it is occasionally used to brilliant effect.

What else can I say to persuade you to see this film?

Sentimental

Yes, *Lilo and Stitch* is hopelessly sentimental in places. But it is by no means as sickly as it could have been. Lilo is cute but wild enough not to be irritating – the whole cinema gasped when, early in the film, she thumps another little girl. Stitch is a work of genius. The

little alien remains unpredictable and entertaining throughout the movie.

Nor is this just another moralising Disney movie about perfect families. It's not, by any stretch of the imagination, a political film but, when Stitch tells the High Council that he has found his family and that they are "little and broken but still good" it is a big leap for Disney. The film doesn't hammer you over the head with a message, it's too busy having fun, but it is clear that Lilo and Stitch both come from "broken families" and that the film sides with those who would see such wild children nurtured in a loving environment – regardless of whether their family looks "normal" – and against those who would have them institutionalised.

Lilo and Stitch isn't quite as good as Disney's Pixar collaborations, but how many films are! It is certainly better than most recent Disney movies (it seems I'm one of the very few who love *The Emperor's New Groove*) and has snappy dialogue and sharp delivery reminiscent of *Aladdin*.

House of Mouse

If all that still isn't enough to persuade you to grab small children off the street and drag them to see this at the cinema then my last card is that Lilo and Stitch is *The House of Mouse* at, or very close to, its best. It entertained small children, it amused adults and it made me laugh quite a lot. It really is worth seeing just for the *Godzilla* homage.

If you don't like this you're a miserable old grouch who should stick to *EastEnders*.

Unlucky for some

Martin Lewis explores virtual reality on *The Thirteenth Floor* and finds it shallow and glossy.

Part of the glut of late Nineties virtual reality movies, *The Thirteenth Floor* never made it to general release in the UK. Since it forms a sort of mid-point between *Dark City* (1998) and *The Matrix* (1999) this may well be a case of familiarity breeding contempt.

The film opens in what is soon revealed to be a computer simulation of Los Angeles, 1937. The creator of this simulation, Hammond Fuller (Armin Mueller-Stahl), has a vital message for his partner, Douglas Hall, which he believes will be safe inside this ersatz reality. Fuller then returns to the real world of 1999 where he tries to contact Hall. Before he can do so he is murdered, providing the engine for the narrative.

The next morning Hall (Craig Bierko) awakes to find blood-stained clothes in his apartment and important gaps in his memory. Moving between 1999 and 1937, his attempts to solve the puzzle are complicated by the arrival of Jane (Gretchen Moll), a daughter Fuller never mentioned.

Since Hall must play the hero, the real detective, McBain (Dennis Haysbert), is left with an implausibly passive role. Similarly, Moll is required simply to let the camera linger on her face. This is indicative of the lack of care taken with the screenplay. On the other hand, the film is beautifully shot with a keen eye for detail and composition. The Thirties sections are filmed in

an effective sepia wash - Hall remarks that "the colourisation needs a little work".

However, this is no compensation for the the glacial pace, detached camera work and surprising lack of dialogue which conspire to create a film that is desperately unengaging. This being a virtual reality film there are a few plot twists, but they are so obviously telegraphed they fail to hold the interest.

The Thirteenth Floor opens with Descartes' famous reductio: I think therefore I am. As with much in the film it is there only for aesthetic reasons, it certainly isn't a prelude to philosophical investigation. This fundamental truth has little bearing on the film; in fact, the scriptwriters seem to reject it. The section

of Descartes' Mediations from which it derives concerns the question of reality - how do we know we are not living in a dream or an illusion created by an evil demon? The conclusion, of course, is that we do not and *The Thirteenth Floor* never goes any further than this. Director Josef Rusnak's belief that "the philosophical background of the material is the crux of the story" is sadly misplaced.

The Thirteenth Floor was inspired by *Welt Am Draht* (1973), a German TV movie that is in turn based of Daniel F Gayoule's 1964 novel, *Simulacron 3*. These earlier works are well regarded and must be better than this shallow, glossy film that fails as science fiction and as film noir.



Martin McGrath delves into his video and DVD collection and takes a fresh look at some historic SE. This issue, he dusts off *Rocketship X-M*.



Rocketship X-M on DVD is released by Dark Vision and I paid £12.99 from Amazon.co.uk.

The past, someone much cleverer than I once wrote, is another country. They do things differently there. It is possible that these words were first written shortly after watching *Rocketship X-M*, Kurt Neumann's 1950 movie.

What's good?

The opening description of the two-stage rocket that will blast the travellers into space had my jaw dropping in surprise - not least because the time it must have taken to draw that chalk diagram probably made it the film's most expensive special effect.

The sequence on Mars remains effective. The American desert may have become familiar from a thousand *Star Treks*, but it works here as a blasted, sepia-tinted, Mars.

The downbeat ending comes as a surprise to someone raised on a diet of modern, more determinedly cheerful, Hollywood fare. Most surprising of all, though, is the liberal message slipped into the last twenty minutes. The film's moral outrage over nuclear weapons still burns brightly after fifty years.

What's not good?

Much of the science is appalling. There are too many gaffes to mention here, but my favourites include astronauts depressed by the "darkness" in space and the rocketship missing The Moon and ending up on Mars.

The script is leaden and the acting hammy. Lloyd Bridges plays the role he would later reprise in *Airplane!*

However, what really marks *Rocketship*

X-M as an artefact from another time, another country, is the sexist way the film deals with Dr. Van Horn played by Osa Massen. Even I blanche when Lloyd Bridges' character tells the female scientist that she should have stayed in the kitchen with the kids. My wife throws things at the screen.

Worse, however, comes when Dr. Van Horn comes to a different conclusion to John Emery's professor after a lengthy calculation. She suggests they continue to work on both figures, but the men treat her as if she's gone mad. She is forced to accept that the professor is "naturally" correct and apologise for her "emotional outburst."

I like to think that the way these archaic attitudes grate with modern audiences demonstrates how far we've progressed in fifty years.

What does the title mean?

Rocketship eXpedition Moon. Apparently *Rocketship E-M* lacked something. Perhaps it was the X factor?

Should I buy this?

Truthfully, this is not a great film. But everyone who enjoys American sci-fi cinema from the fifties should see it at least once. It's important because *Rocketship X-M* represents the first American pulp science fiction movie to explore unfashionable, even left wing, ideas. *Superior Films - The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*, *Dr. Strangelove* and *Rollerball* - would continue the tradition. But it faded away in the post-*Star Wars* era.

Incredible Pulp

With this month seeing the launch of Big Engine's new magazine, 35F, (see our review on page 17) it seemed like a good time to take a look at the competition. So, we grabbed every SF magazine we could lay our hands on, read them, and then wrote down our opinions. Nothing to this reviewing lark, is there?

Interzone September 2002 Number 182 £3.00

I picked up my first issue of Interzone almost fifteen years ago and it doesn't seem to have changed in all that time. This is both a weakness and a strength. Comfortable familiarity, immediate recognition and solid reliability make its arrival welcome every month. But sometimes I can't help wishing the magazine was a little more unpredictable.

Five pieces of fiction grace issue 182. The best, I felt, was *Geese in the Mist* by Zoran Zivkovic. Zivkovic has become an Interzone regular and I always enjoy his gentle, clever stories. In *Geese in the Mist* a woman has a cold shower, gets covered in ketchup and travels on a ski lift. But, like the best *Twilight Zone* episodes, Zivkovic can make the commonplace fantastic.

Paternity by Christopher Evans is a tale about visitors from the future visiting government run hostels. It starts promisingly, building up a sense of frustration and trapped helplessness. But I felt the story petered out.

I always enjoy Mat Coward's writing and *Early Retirement*, while not his best work, is still a sharp and clever look at the madness of management theory.

A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens by Claude Lalumière was less successful. I found the story stiffly written and awkwardly structured. It is, however, rescued by a twist and a final line that made me laugh.

The weakest story was *Cruel and Unusual Punishment* by Maya

Kaathryn Bohnhoff. Lots of little things got on my nerves about this story. Americanisms, like the presence of yearbooks in Northern Irish schools or referring to a "neighbourhood church" rather than a parish church, grated. The inclusion of an Irish Catholic reminiscing about singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" and Irish terrorists "disappearing into the underground" will feel wrong to anyone who, like me, lived in Northern Ireland during The Troubles. There is

not enough space here to deal with the story's theological gaffes.

These are small things. But they are signs of a bigger problem, the story lacks insight. Terrorism does not exist in a vacuum. It is the complex product of social interactions, political beliefs, emotional biases and has its own logic, however twisted it may appear to others. I found none of that complexity in this story. It doesn't uncover what motivates someone to murder children for "the cause." Far from revealing emotional or political truths, the story disguises them behind a screen of sentiment. The protagonist begins the story as an automaton, impossibly devoid of emotions, conveniently devoid of family ties. From that point on his progress to understanding and "salvation" is fundamentally undermined. So the story, though well meaning and well written, is doomed to fail.

This story aside, the usual substantial features and reviews round out an issue that is solid and up to *Interzone's* reliable standards. I just wish it would thrill me more often.

Marlin McGrath



Fantasy & Science Fiction Oct/Nov 2002 \$4.99

For several years, F&SF has been the only major US magazine I read regularly. And I still find that it's rarely less than entertaining, which I can't say of Analog or Asimov's for example. And the 53rd Anniversary issue doesn't disappoint.

Charles Coleman Finlay's *A Democracy of Trolls* gets the issue rolling. But it's not the best of starts. There's nothing wrong with the story of a human brought up by a tribe of trolls. It's just that the idea of a feral child isn't new and Finlay didn't reinvigorate the story for me. I heard Tarzan's call echoing off the troll's mountain home. So while it's well written, entertaining and fun, it's ultimately unsatisfying.

The issue picked up after this. *Tanith Lee's In the City of Dead Night* mixes SF and fantasy in an entertaining story of a couple of thieves who find more than they anticipated when they try to rob The Treasury. *Lucius Shepard's* novella *The Drive in Puerto Rico* mixes magical realism and Latin American politics in a powerful story with strongly

drawn characters. I'd like to see this expanded into a novel: it really is a cracker. There are several more stories in this double issue, but the strongest of the lot, for me, was *Le Guin's Social Dreaming of the Frin*. It's

a thought-provoking story on the nature of dreams and social relationships. It comes from Le Guin's new collection, *Changing Planes*. If the other stories are up to this standard, it should be well worth reading.

The columns and other stories ensure that this issue is up to F&SF's usual high standards. However, it ends on a sad note. *Damon Knight* first wrote for F&SF's second issue. Knight died this year and *Watching Matthew* is probably his last story for the magazine. It's a strong, evocative, poignant tale (which I won't spoil by describing further) and a fitting tribute to one of SF's masters.

Mark Greener

The Fix Number 4 £2.50

The Fix fills an important niche, reviewing short fiction magazines from *Ambit* to *Asimov's*, from *Peepshow* (erotic horror) to *Green's Magazine* ('Fiction for the Family'). However, genre, SF and Fantasy account for most of the magazines covered. The reviews are, generally, intelligent and well argued, and there's a smattering of stimulating features, such as *Ed Gorman's Top Ten Stories*, *Neil Asher's* and *Brian Aldiss's* most influential book and a column by *Peter Tennant* arguing that horror is dead. *The Fix* is required reading for anyone - readers and writers - interested in the small press. Just about my only complaint



is that the type, black on grey, can prove a tad difficult to read. With *The Fix* planning to include more interviews, articles and guidance on writing over the next few issues, it's rapidly becoming essential.

Mark Greeneer

Roadworks

Issue 13

Winter/Spring £5.00

With twenty-one stories (and seven poems) in 122 pages, you certainly can't criticise Roadworks as being light on content. Nor could it be accused of lacking variety.

For a start the stories vary widely in length. Most of the very short stories fail, but *Penis Envy* by Paul Rencher is worth a mention as an amusing piece.

The subject matter of stories also cover a lot of ground. Stories cover staples from science fiction (time travel in Dan Coxon's *The Memory Engine*), horror (vampires in Mark West's *Giving Blood*) and fantasy (demons in RH Chamber's *Demon*). Not all the stories can be easily fitted into genre categories. *Community Care* by Paul Williams has no fantastic element, but was one of the best in the collection.

Unfortunately, the quality of stories also varies wildly. This issue features some stories that really aren't up to the mark. I see no point in naming and shaming here, but in this case, I'm hoping for less variety in later issues.

Two stories deserve honourable mentions for their titles, *Bloody David Irving* by Andrew Humphrey and *No More Haloos... Just Goodbyes* by James Ward. Both are good, Humphrey's is better, but neither quite lives up to their inspired names.

Despite the some dud stories, Roadworks 13 is a competently produced small press magazine. Perfect bound and A5 sized it is great for reading in the bath - though glue more resistant to steam would be preferred in future.

Marlin McGrath

Spectrum SF

Issue 8 £3.99

Does it give away my age that, every time I try to type the name of this magazine my fingers

automatically insert a ZX before Spectrum? Regardless of Sir Clive Sinclair's legacy, this is another top class issue from a top class magazine.

Spectrum feels like an old-fashioned pulp magazine.

Produced like a small book, the design of Spectrum SF is functional. There is no internal art, indeed the first few issues had no illustrations on the cover either. And the magazine is produced on cheap-feeling, pulpy paper. But it doesn't matter. The magazine is comfortable in the hand and easy on the eye.

In this issue four short pieces include a neat thriller from Michael Coney and Eric Brown, a bewildering journey on a craft powered by the imagination from Colin P. Davies, an exciting Neal Asher story which felt like a western on Dune, and the clever, but too short, story of a cineaste in a closed community by Josh Lacey.

Only Lacey's *A Night at the Movies* disappoints, because it is too short. I really wanted it to go the other, longer, way.

However, good as it is, short fiction is not what sets Spectrum apart from its rivals.

The first jewel in Spectrum's crown is *The Archive*. This enormous review section, all written by Spectrum's editor, Paul Fraser, can be, by turns, informative, amusing and discursive, but it is never less than interesting. Over eight issues it has built up into an entertaining guide to one man's view of science fiction.

The second unique feature about Spectrum is its determination to publish serialised novels. This issue features the second part of *The Atrocity Archive* by Charles Stross. I find Stross both funny-haha and funny-polar. He is a writer whose stories I have begun to go out of my way to find. *The Atrocity Archive* is a curious tale that I don't feel qualified to summarise and that I can't really explain except that it features a kind of mystical civil service and that I am enjoying it immensely. The only problem with the story is the wait between issues.

Indeed this is my only

problem with Spectrum. Paul Fraser is producing a very good magazine but it is clear from the website, and from the increasing gaps between issues, that he

is finding it difficult to regularly produce Spectrum SF. His personal stamp is on every page of this magazine and I wouldn't want to see the quality slip but I hope he can find a way to keep Spectrum SF appearing on a regular basis.

It would be a shame to see this Spectrum fade to black.

Marlin McGrath

Albedo One

Issue 25 £3.00 (€4.50)

It is possible, being Irish, that I'm biased - but I think Albedo One is amongst the best small press magazines on the market. Publishing stories of a consistently good standard, it is always a welcome arrival. Recent issues seem to have come thick and fast so we must assume that the editors - whose website announces: "We'll do it as long as it's fun." - are having a good time.

Issue 25 isn't the best that Albedo One has produced, but it was, nevertheless, an enjoyable read. Four stories, an interesting (and lengthy) interview with Kim Stanley Robinson, a one page comic strip and Famous Monsters, a hefty book review section, make up this issue.

Best of the fiction were the two stories on clones. *Elvis is Dead* by Sarah de Forest and *The Olivia Reunion Party* by Philip Raines and Harvey Welles approach their subjects from radically different points of view. *Elvis is Dead* is a tongue-in-cheek cyber-noir story featuring numerous, soon-to-be-dead, Elvis clones. By contrast, *The Olivia Reunion Party* manages to summon up the gloom, misery

and dramatic flourishes that can only be created by a room full of teenage girls. Also good was Sam Millar's horror tale, *The Barber*.

A special mention should go to Rico J.C. who provided the striking photo-montage on the cover of this issue.

Marlin McGrath

Cemetery Dance

Issue 39 \$4.00

Over the last few months, several critics suggested that the horror genre, if not yet dead and buried, is fading away. But that's not the impression the latest issue of Cemetery Dance left. There seems life in the old genre yet.

Take the first story, *El poso del mundo* - a hugely enjoyable tale of a criminal scam that goes wrong. *El poso* reminded me of a literary version of Tarantino: hip, knowing, extremely violent and great fun.

Two of the other stories - *Secret Murders* and, especially, *The Lady Down the Street* - are more disturbing. Both push the

boundaries, only just staying this side of being offensive.

But as such, these powerful, well-written tales pack a considerable punch. I can't shift some of the images from my head, even several days later. And that's just what horror should do. True horror leaves a mark; the stories haunt you for weeks.

But it's not all extreme horror. *Badgetree: a Bracknall's Point Story* and *The Panic Switch* are effective dark fantasy tales. However, I found the ending of both a tad predictable. But don't let that put you off; they're still worth reading. The final story *Harming Obsession* is a little too short. There's not time to really crank up the tension. But it's still a diverting story to read over a cup of coffee. Indeed, remarkably, all the stories in the latest issue are well worth reading.

Several non-fiction columns round off the issue. There is



too much Stephen King for me. But then I don't find his later books particularly engaging. On the other hand, the reviews are intelligent and offer an excellent overview of what seems – despite the doom-mongers warnings – to remain a vibrant field. And the interviews offer some real insights. In particular, the interview with Gary Braunbeck seems to really get under the skin of this remarkable horror writer. All in all, this is excellent issue of this leading dark fantasy magazine.

So I think the doom mongers have it wrong. Even based on this single issue of Cemetery Dance, there's considerable mileage left in horror. Like any good monster, whenever anyone writes off horror, it has a habit of rising from the grave and biting you in the butt. And that's just the way it should be.

Mark Greener

Ambit Issue 169 £6.00

Ambit, one of the mainstays of the UK's literary scene, often seems to overlap with slipstream fiction and the more literary end of SF. If you admire Burroughs, Vonnegut, Ballard or Sladek, chances are Ambit will appeal. Indeed, each issue of Ambit seems to include at least one story that fuses Atrocity Exhibition era Ballard (one of Ambit's prose editors), with a modern literary author (someone like Elizabeth Souden's *Girlfriend Evans*), and an ear for mid-century poetry.

This issue's *The Science of Imaginary Solutions* by Michael Brett seemed reminiscent of Ballard – but with a more poetic flourish. It's a clever, witty and thoughtful work 'about' Parisian literary life. Another work – Catherine Eisner's *The Eleven Surviving Works of L. v. K (1902-1939)* – reminded me of the literary games that Sladek seemed so keen to pursue – but played out against the intellectual backdrop exemplified by Tate Modern. The final prose work *Bananas* – my *Bananas* by the Hindi writer Satyendra Srivastava is – as befits a work by a lecturer at Cambridge University – clever, subtle and wonderfully executed. But, for me, lacked the punch of the others.

Ambit always includes a good selection of modern poetry. Poetry is a subjective art form but Ambit and I share much the same ear. I was especially taken by Abigail Mozley's poems *Potato Fields* and *Snow White*. As one of the declining number of people that still buys poetry books, she's someone I'll be looking out for.

Poems by several other writers – including the wonderful Fred Voss – and a round up of new books rounds the literary side of Ambit. There's also a couple of portfolios by modern artists. I usually find the art in Ambit dispensable. With a few exceptions, while I can appreciate the art technically, it doesn't engage me on an intellectual or emotional level.

Ambit is a magazine that appeals to the intellect, while avoiding pretence. It has the feel of a house journal for some of the creative writing courses at a trendy university – and that's not intended as a criticism. So Ambit is more likely to tantalise your cerebral cortex than grab you by the balls. Nevertheless, if you like literary SF or slipstream, you'll probably find it an excellent read: often compelling, usually challenging and always inspiring.

Mark Greener

The Third Alternative Issue 31 £3.75

All is not well in SF it seems. Claude Lalumiere, in a guest editorial in the Summer issue of TTA, bemoans the fact that "commercial SF has retreated even further into insular nostalgia, alienating new readers by glorifying an outdated model of fiction that reinforces an ideology that was already obsolete 50 years ago". Lalumiere comments that SF's "transgressive nature" led him into the genre – in much the same way SF appealed to me as a teenager. And, although I wrote this issue's 'Rage...' before I read Lalumiere's editorial, he seems to articulate many of the concerns I have about the genre, but takes a narrower focus.

Certainly, SF, at it's best, is transgressive. And, in general, TTA is an eloquent testament to the artistic power of such fiction. Gala Blau's *The Routine* is, for

instance, a powerful story of a hit man that seems to lose his mind and his nerve on the edge of making it into the criminal big time. The gradual accumulation of tension and alienation makes this a compelling story and one, I'd venture, has a good chance of making it into the 'best of' compilations.

Conrad William's *The Machine* is a genuinely moving story about a man and his wife dying of brain cancer. Steve Mohr's *The Producer* relates the tale of a Hollywood producer's close encounter with ETs that tell him aliens will destroy the earth. Both are effective, if not quite to the high standard set by *The Routine*. Indeed, *The Machine* would be equally at home in a 'straight' literary magazine, such as *Ambit*.

Chris Fowler, as usual, comes up with a competent horror story: this time concerning a jealous, unemployed photographer and Kate, his biologist wife who agree to act as caretakers at a hotel in Malaysia. For me, *The Green Man* is not one of Fowler's best. I find him most effective when writing about urban horror and the story seems to lose some of its power because of its setting. It's also a tad predictable. But Fowler always delivers and it's still effective.

Putting Away Childish Things, by John Aegard, was, for me, less successful – but only because TTA published the story. A bit like *Toy Story* on steroids, it's a good enough piece and would be worthy of F&SF, for example. And it's well worth reading. I just don't feel that TTA is its natural home. It's witty, diverting and well written. However, it doesn't even really approach the boundaries that TTA often leaps over. It's just too conventional.

Mat Coward's *One Box of Books* left me with that 'so what' feeling. It's enjoyable enough but the other stories – including Aegard's – seemed to have deeper agenda that *One Box of*

Books lacks. There's nothing wrong with that: I thoroughly enjoy escapist fiction. But TTA at it's best doesn't just entertain. It makes you think.

TTA's reviews and features reflect the magazine's interest in transgressive fiction. There are informative interviews with Michael Marshall Smith, Jeffrey Ford and Alan Moore. The feature with Peter Weir, which rounded up his career to date, seemed a bit superfluous. (But then I'm not really a film buff, so perhaps it's unfair to comment.)

In his guest editorial, Lalumiere concludes that SF's 'reactionary conservatism is hostile to the subversive energy of youth, to the rapidly changing polycultural zeitgeist and to transgressive dreams'. That, he argues, is one

reason why young people aren't reading SF anymore. (I'm not sure I agree with that. If you exclude Buffy, Pratchett and Potter, you're still left with the plethora of Star Wars and Star Trek novels that seem to sell in vast quantities. But I suspect Lalumiere means 'real SF' – and his general points are ones I agree with wholeheartedly.)

On the other hand, there is hope. This isn't the strongest issue of TTA I've read. But it's a damn sight stronger than many other magazines out there. In general, TTA offers just the type of transgressive fiction that can engage the subversive energy inherent in our multicultural society. And it's an energy that could revitalise SF.

Mark Greener



Contact details for all the magazines listed here can be found on page 23 of this issue of Matrix.

In space, everyone can hear you giggle

Kirk never had to cope with a Maoist parrot, a strike by the expendables in red, an army of James Joyce quoting zombies or a woman with three knife-throwing breasts, but they're all in a day's work for Captain Sane and the crew of the Amadan. **Simon Morden** listens to Crazy Dog Audio Theatre's *Big, Big Space* and emerges with big, big grin.

Imagine... a spaceship prepares to set out on a new mission. The dedicated bridge crew run through the pre-flight checks when they discover that not all is that it seems: the rest of the ship's personnel are on strike. A tricky situation for the captain and her officers! It's worse than that - the in-flight magazines haven't been changed, and James T. Chancer of the Expendable Characters' Union has organised a mutiny.

Thus start the adventures of the Amadan and her thoroughly worthless crew. Captain Roslyn Sane is the Janeway sound-alike, but with more gumption. RomManDroid, Disco Trojan and First Officer Hoax Minstrel make up the robot, the very camp ship's counsellor and the romantic male lead.

Top-class comedy

Brace yourself for some top-class science fiction comedy from the Crazy Dog Audio Theatre, an Irish-based collective who've been scoring hits on the Republic's RTE1 radio station. *The Big, Big Space* series consists of six half-hour episodes on three CDs, all written by Roger Gregg.

Gregg, an expat American, fondly remembers the SF comics, films and TV programmes of his youth: you can tell he loves the genre. He then proceeds to deconstruct them all to the point of absurdity. He and his team of actors and musicians enthusiastically trash mad scientists, exotic nightclubs, paradise planets, Deus ex



machina plots, and where an android keeps its attachments.

To make things even harder, they perform the whole lot live in front of a theatre audience, sound effects and everything. Hats off to the FX guru Peter O'Kennedy, who has to coordinate the madness. He even has his own Theremin. The audience are roped in to provide the cast of thousands.

But what of the episodes? In 'Mutiny on the Amadan', 'Big Jim' Chancer, the ship's tea boy and his Maoist parrot, Polynomial, rise up against the indignities of having no lines and being killed every time they walk off camera. No, no, no the...arrgh! The second episode, 'Pirates of Pleasure Island', finds Sane and her officers marooned on an asteroid and facing certain death. They are miraculously

saved by the mad Prince and his oh-so-convenient escape dinghy. 'Big Jim' and his mutinous crew are partying naked on an island paradise. The over-dressed heroes have a chance to get their ship back, but things don't go according to plan.

Disc two brings us to the 'The Cabaret of Forbidden Celestial Delights'. Marlene Exotica has three knife-throwing breasts. Oh yes. Everything goes pear-shaped when the club is raided by Smirk Viper and his team of intergalactic neo-fascist accountants. It's up to the Amadan to save the day and make sure Hoax Minstrel's frilly shirt stays in one piece.

The last two episodes find us on the very edge of madness, courtesy of Doctor Rotwang Krell, his insane plan to create life, and a pair of thick red

rubber gloves. It all goes horribly wrong, and the characters are soon trapped in Krell's space tower by an army of James Joyce quoting zombies.

The word-play is fast and furious, but nothing is lost behind an unnecessary laugh track. Sometimes the SF in-jokes fall by the wayside in the rush to get to the next one. It's not all laugh-out loud hilarity. But it's hard to criticise something done so well and with so much energy.

Subversive

If I had to make comparisons, it's more *Rocky Horror* than *Hitch Hikers' Guide*, more *Red Dwarf* than *Andromeda*... It's subversive and knowing: commissioning editors should be strapped in a chair and forced to listen. "See, it's been done so often that it's a joke. We'll laugh whether you like it or not."

The recording quality is excellent, as you'd expect of a broadcast radio show. The packaging is bright and colourful, the inserts informative, and some of the more parochial Irish gags are explained inside - I can't fault it. It's true: the pictures are better on radio.

Running time: 3 hours
Main cast: Roger Gregg, Morgan Jones, Danna Davis, David Murray
Music and FX: Peter O'Kennedy and Clodhna Quinlan
Series Producer and editor: Tim Lehane
 cost: €35/\$35
 For ordering information see www.crazydogaudiotheatre.com

Nightwish: Massive in Finland

He was gobsmacked by Nightwish's last album, *Wishmaster*. Now, **Mark Greener** listens to their latest work, *Century's Child*, and declares the goth-rockers' complex and eclectic music to be the perfect soundtrack for the horror-based fantasies of Anne Rice, Taniith Lee or Kim Wilkins. But can a band who cover "Phantom of the Opera" really be any good? Read on.

It doesn't happen very often. The first time I heard Motorhead, the Pistols or System of a Down. The first time I played 'Killing In the Name Of', 'No More Heroes' or 'Roots Radical'. That moment when you know you've come across something special.

Nightwish are the latest of the very limited number of bands that's evoked this reaction. When I first heard the opening cords of 'She is My Sin' on their 2000 CD *Wishmaster*, I stopped typing and just sat gobsmacked. It's hard to describe the power of their music. Imagine taking a Jim Steinman epic - 'Bat Out of Hell' for example - and adding the bass and drums of Motorhead, Slayer or Darkthrone without losing any of the melodies, harmonies or subtleties. Then get Pat Benatar or Kate Bush to do the vocals. That approaches - only approaches - the sound Nightwish evoke.

Century's Child

Mainland Europeans recognise Nightwish as a major band. Their latest album *Century's Child* went gold in two hours and platinum in less than two weeks in Finland.

They've charted in Germany and several other European countries. And they're rapidly gaining a fan base over here. *Powerplay* - a rock magazine - gave *Century's Child* 10/10 calling it "Breaktaking. Intoxicating. Unique. Enthralling." They described *Century's Child* as an "extraordinary work of art ... make no mistake: *Century's Child* is just that, and I'm still staggered every time I play it."



Nightwish draw on imagery from romantic, dark fantasy.

That's a view I can only concur with. I doubt if I'll hear a better CD this year.

Century's Child is about as far from three-cord thrash songs, with words written on the back of a beer mat, as it's possible to get. The lyrics are almost poetic; the music is complex, intelligent and sophisticated. Indeed, orchestration is an integral part of their sound, rather than an afterthought. In places, *Century's Child* is restrained, yet remains powerful and heavy. 'Forever Yours', for example, is a beautiful and moving song, with elements drawn from folk music. More remarkably, they cover 'Phantom of the Opera' - and make it sound good.

Operatic is an over used description for rock. But it actually applies in Nightwish's case. The complex musical

structures of *Century's Child* seem closer to Verdi or Wagner than, for example, the blues-based metal of Iron Maiden or Led Zeppelin. Indeed, *Century's Child*, in common with its predecessor *Wishmaster*, seems closer to classically influenced progressive rock than heavy Goth metal. But with balls. And stripped of prog's pretentiousness.

Nightwish's lyrics draw on imagery reminiscent of dark fantasy. *Century's Child*, for me, is an almost perfect sound track for Anne Rice, Taniith Lee or Kim Wilkins, for example. For instance, *Powerplay* describe the lyrics of 'Feel for you' as "a tender if semi-erotic piece with vampiric overtones, and is suggestive yet sad and wistful all at once".

But Nightwish doesn't rely on overt Goth sensuality and

horror: they're not trying to ape, for example, Type O Negative. Rather in *Century's Child* as in their previous records, Nightwish draw on a romantic, dark fantasy, Goth sensibility that contributes to their dense images and music, pervading the sound without dominating it.

Nightwish are one of the few bands that really can cross boundaries. They're heavy enough to appeal to the most extreme metal fan. They're commercial enough to have hit records, at least in Europe. They're lyrical enough to appeal to prog rockers. Their music is complex enough to appeal to classical music fans. Nightwish are unique. After all, can all those Finns really be wrong?

• Their website www.nightwish.com contains sample mp3s.

World to end soon, says giant rabbit

Donnie Darko is the first film by 27 year old writer/director Richard Kelly. If that alone wasn't enough to put you off, it is also very good. **Martin McGrath** (33) holds back the tears of disappointment at his own wasted life and recommends this strange but moving film to anyone who enjoys intelligent, unusual, fantasy flicks.

One difficulty with a film like *Donnie Darko* is knowing how to describe it. You will want to recommend it to your friends but, if you do, they'll start asking awkward questions like: "What's it like?" or "What happens?"

And, when you come out of the cinema, you probably won't be able to answer them.

Lazy journalists will drag out comparisons between this film and the work of David Lynch. True, there is something of Lynch's *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* in the eighties' suburban setting of the film. Ultimately, however, these comparisons do *Donnie Darko* a disservice.

Stunning debut

First, though 27 year old writer/director Richard Kelly has made a stunning debut, he is not yet making films with Lynch's visual or philosophical breadth.

Second, comparing this film with just one other film-maker ignores the huge breadth of movie knowledge effortlessly encompassed by *Donnie Darko*. There are references to film-makers as diverse as Lynch, Capra, Hughes, Landis, Spielberg, Raimi, Aaronofsky and, of course, Papa Smurf. That the director not only marshals this diverse material but also creates a movie that rises above pastiche and emerges as an interesting film in its own right is a remarkable achievement.

There are also distinct echoes of Philip K. Dick in *Donnie Darko*. Like, for example, *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*, the film deals with madness, the nature of reality and dislocation of an individual from the society in which he lives.



Donnie and Gretchen go to see *The Evil Dead*. Frank plays gooseberry.

Donnie Darko is the story of a young man who suffers from mental illness. One night he is drawn from his bed by a vision of a giant, skull-faced rabbit named Frank. Frank warns Donnie that the world will end in twenty-eight days. Donnie returns home to discover that a jet engine has crashed through his house and destroyed his bedroom. Strangeness is piled upon strangeness as it becomes clear that no one can find the plane from which the engine must have fallen.

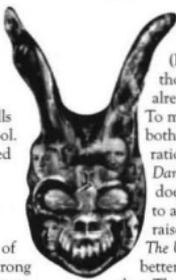
The film counts down time until the end of the world. Donnie's actions gradually become more and more unpredictable. He falls for a new girl in school. He becomes interested in time travel. And he finds himself in increasing trouble at school as he rebels against the teachings of a self-help guru - a strong cameo by Patrick Swayze,

of all people. Donnie's world becomes darker and darker.

Donnie Darko is not without flaws. There are too many branches, such as the fate of the teacher Karen Pomeroy (the film's producer, Drew Barrymore), which could, fruitfully, have been trimmed. At the same time, the movie remains infuriatingly oblique about some core plot points.

This is not a popcorn movie. It requires attention and some effort to understand. But it repays that effort.

Some SF fans have complained about plot holes (I won't spoil it for those who have not already seen the film). To me the film made both emotional and rational sense. *Donnie Darko* emphatically does not offer answers to all the questions it raises but, a little like *The Usual Suspects*, it is a better movie because of that. The film is ambiguous,



sometimes downright obtuse, but it remains intelligent, well-formed and entertaining.

The performances, especially those by Jake Gyllenhaal in the title role, Jena Malone as Gretchen, and Mary McDonnell as Donnie's mother are excellent. They are well served by a script that contains wonderful, polished moments. There is, for example, a hint of Tarantino in the set piece discussion of Smurf anatomy and sexuality, while the conservative teacher Kitty Farmer (Beth Grant) almost steals the show with some great one-liners.

Dan Quayle

The soundtrack, full of eighties' indie hits from the likes of *Echo and the Bunnymen* and *Joy Division*, adds to the atmosphere of the movie, but perhaps highlights the film's most serious flaw. Despite sideways nods to the period in which the action takes place - Kitty expressing her undying admiration for Dan Quayle - I could see no reason for the eighties setting. It is a homage too far, and the only occasion when Richard Kelly's ambition over-reaches his ability.

With only slight reservations then, I commend this film to anyone seeking an unusual and clever science fiction/fantasy movie. Go to see this film. Encourage your friends to see it. The more people pay to watch films like this, the greater the chance that studios will make more of them.

Donnie Darko goes on limited release on 25 October, 2002.

For details of the cinemas screening the film, go to www.donnie-darko.com.

Lynch's Drive into the unknown

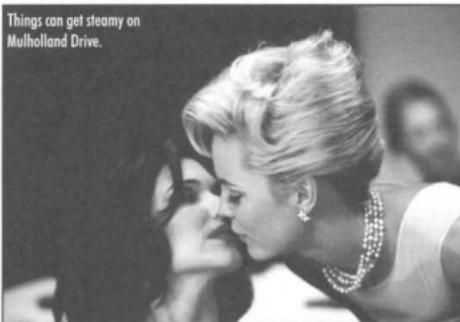
Mulholland Drive is the latest film from the often disturbing Canadian director David Lynch. Reality twists, plots wander and expectations are confounded in a labyrinthine and visually dazzling movie. Out now on DVD, **Gary Wilkinson** guides us through a difficult movie that refuses to answer many of the questions it raises.

Mulholland Drive had an unusual genesis. Originally developed as a two-hour, \$8 million pilot for a television series in 1999, it was rejected by ABC, who obviously wanted another *Twin Peaks* and ended up with something entirely different. The project was rebuilt by director David Lynch as a feature film, having gained an additional \$7 million in funding from CanalPlus allowing additional shooting and a new round of post-production. The final result is an extraordinary masterpiece: a dark surrealist noir fantasy that dissects the dream-factory that is Hollywood.

Murder

A limousine on the eponymous road; in the back is a beautiful brunette (Laura Elena Harring) about to be murdered. She is saved by a car accident. Staggering from the wreckage with no memory of who she is, she finds her way to an empty apartment. She is discovered, naked in the shower, by a perky blonde (Naomi Watts) who has just arrived from Ontario to start her acting career. Watts almost immediately takes on the role of amateur sleuth to discover the origins of her new friend. The women's quest takes them to an apartment block where they discover a decomposing body, to a nightmarish Hispanic nightclub 'Silencio' where everyone mimes to tapes, and as their friendship develops into love, into an erotic lesbian affair. Meanwhile, we also experience an accident-prone hit man, two cops investigating the accident and a hideous monster that lives behind a diner. Of more

Things can get steamy on *Mulholland Drive*.



prominence is the sub-plot involving a director forced by dark-suited heavies - in a scene of brilliantly sustained menace and just sheer weirdness (best use ever of a cup of espresso) - into giving a leading role to a particular actress. He goes home to find his wife in bed with the pool man. And eventually he is given orders by a quiet talking, quite deadly cowboy.

Then in the last act everything changes and it all gets really strange...

Through it all is a simply amazing performance by Naomi Watts that should have won her an Oscar. In particular, she has one brilliant sequence in which she rehearses a corny melodramatic audition piece with her new best friend and then, on the day, does it in a completely different, steamily inspired way in a close clinch with her sleazy top-dog co-star. It's the stand-out scene from recent cinema. Interestingly, Watts - like two other actresses in the film - is a graduate from Australian soap *Home and Away*. Harring, a former Miss America,

film in many ways. Or then again just perhaps it has no explanation at all. One thing is true, the more confusing it gets, the more you will want to watch, the more to luxuriate in its lush darkness (even though paradoxically, much of takes place in bright Californian sunlight).

Confusion

Part of the confusion, of course, is its origins. Lynch, never the most obvious plotter, had to stitch together something out of the many plot threads that were started in the original pilot. Not everything is sewn up and there are many cul-de-sacs and no sequiturs that would, no doubt, have been expanded if a full series had been made. However, unlike *Twin Peaks*, which ended too abruptly, being cancelled at the end of its second series, with plots cruelly left hanging that *Fire Walk With Me* did not resolve, *Mulholland Drive* is a majestic whole.

You cannot help but think that this is the film that Lynch has been working towards for his entire career. There is a finally a film that bridges between the most difficult of 'difficult' Lynch such as *Eraserhead* and *Lost Highway* and the more obvious aspects of his work that you see in *The Straight Story* and *The Elephant Man*.

Like the greatest of art, *Mulholland Drive* will never be completely resolved. But if it is about anything, it is about the experience of the watching film. Like the eponymous road itself it twists and turns, creating a mesmerising spine high above Hollywood. Enjoy the ride.

is also an ex-soap star, previously appearing in *Sunset Beach*. Lynch also brings off other stunt-casting with an actor better known for '70s television films and a dance star from the '40s in quirky roles.

Mulholland Drive is, essentially, Lynch's love-letter to Hollywood past and present and an analysis of the art of acting. Lynch, being Lynch, is not going to avoid the dark side of his profession, just as with one of the many films that *Mulholland Drive* references, Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*.

Its availability on DVD allows the multiple watching and the mental dissection that this film really needs. Lynch even gives us '10 Clues to Unlocking This Thriller' on the inside cover. Yes, *Mulholland Drive* is a difficult work that, is almost impossible to 'get' on first viewing. However with effort (or by surfing around the many sites on the internet devoted to the film) you can work out at least one explanation. However, although there is a 'favoured' answer you can reinterpret the

Welcome to the new kid on the block

Mark Greener talks to the editor and publisher of *3SF*, the UK's latest SF prozine, blending media, science fact and short stories. Meanwhile, **Martin McGrath** has seen an advance copy of the magazine – and considers whether *3SF* lives up to our expectations.

A new UK-based SF prozine is always eagerly anticipated – especially when it comes from Big Engine, a widely acclaimed publishing house. But as *3SF*'s editor Liz Holliday notes – “any fool with a big budget or a fat contacts book can probably get enough stories from big names to fill at least a couple of issues”. And it's a hard world out there. So the real question is whether it can sustain the excitement that surrounds the first issue. Will *3SF* survive, when even some big mass-market magazines are feeling the pinch? Will its eclectic mix of media, role-playing, science fact and short stories be sufficient to capture a sustainable market share against some formidable competition? Will, in other words, *3SF* become another *Interzone*? Or will it be another *Ad Astra*?

As with so much in British literary SF, *3SF* is as much a labour of love as a moneymaking venture. But there are sound commercial reasons behind the launch, as publisher Ben Jeapes explains: “Publishing an SF magazine is something I've always wanted to do. But Big Engine needed it. The problem with book publishing is that the cash flow gets very lumpy, with most of the income clustering around the moment any particular book is published. A periodical makes it all much smoother. Most of it flows out at first, but at least it's flowing.”

But can the UK market support another literary SF magazine, even one that offers media and science fact coverage? Certainly, Big Engine are looking abroad, promoting *3SF* in the US. Even so, Liz believes that the home market can sustain another fiction magazine. “I think that the success of *Spectrum* and *The Third Alternative* proves that a magazine doesn't have to be *Interzone* to survive over here,” she told Martin. “Although those magazines obviously have a lot to offer – they must, or they wouldn't be doing so well – I think there are people who like short fiction, but aren't finding what they want in them. And I think that there are people who don't really think

about short fiction, but might if it was presented in a way that would attract them. I think we can tap into both those markets.”

So, obviously, *3SF* needs to find a distinctive voice. And that need to be different drives, at least in part, the science fact and media sections. “Any magazine is influenced by the tastes of the editor and that alone makes each mag distinctive,” Ben comments. “In particular, we want to explore that area where media and written merge. I believe that that as far as generating new ideas goes, media is still always lag behind the written form. But still, there are the occasional readers and writers who will admit to liking the TV shows and the films too, and they

who enjoy them,” Liz adds. “We aren't interested in trashing these shows or adulating them – what we're after is thought provoking, challenging commentary and analysis. It really does come from the things Ben and I like – unlike some other media reviews, where you get the feeling they're there because someone thinks they ought to be even when the editor doesn't like it himself.”

Indeed, a combination of almost fannish enthusiasm, while being provocative and challenging seems to encapsulate the *3SF* editorial vision. “I believe that science fiction and fantasy should be expansive, provocative, and stimulating,” Liz adds. “I think it's terribly sad that

points between covered as well.”

So over the next few issues, *3SF* will include fiction by Gene Wolfe, Colin Greenland, Dave Langford, Ian Watson, Liz Williams and Liz Counihan. There are also a few newer voices including James van Pelt, Jay Lake and Greg Beatty. “I'm also proud of some of the really new writers I've found, such as Vaughn Stanger, Karen Thistle, and Paul Martens,” Liz says. “What I delight in, and what I think magazines should be doing, is bringing on new writers – finding them, working with them, helping them, and knowing that what you publish by them is as exciting and worthwhile as the stuff by the big names. That, for me, is the buzz in running this magazine.”

Inevitably, therefore, Liz will face a deluge of manuscripts from budding and established writers. So what does she look for in a story? “The stuff that I like and tend to buy does tend to have some things in common – well developed characters I care about, originality of vision (which sometimes means good ideas, sometimes means new twists on older ones and sometimes means insight into characters), solid plotting, and satisfying resolutions,” Liz comments. “On the other hand, I can sometimes be seduced by a piece of sheer fluff, or an out-and-out idea story.”

Apart from the fiction the next few issues will include Eclectica articles by Philip Pullman on The Republic of Heaven, and Ben Jeapes on Christian responses to the religious right's censorship of *sf/f*. After that, Liz plans science articles from NASA insider Geoffrey Landis and stresses that *3SF* will support, encourage and promote SF fandom.

The media columns will cover several topics, including, Liz says, “the way so much US science fiction is full of aliens that are really just stereotyped foreigners; the kickass female hero on tv – feminist icon or sad male fantasy; shows that say they aren't *sf*, but are; and militarism in media science fiction,” Liz adds.

By this mix of fact, fiction and media runs an inherent danger of being almost too eclectic, a



I believe that science fiction and fantasy should be expansive, provocative, and stimulating

Liz Holliday, Editor, *3SF*

each influence the other. That's an area we want to be in. Compare and contrast with some other reviews whose idea of informed critique is to watch half an episode on Sky and then descend to levels of erudition like *Fartscape* and *Tuaddeleon 5* ...”

“We're going to be publishing media coverage that goes beyond the easy options of star interviews and spoiler sections that you get in most of the media oriented magazines, but which doesn't condescend to the shows, their creators, or the fans

most of the *sf/f* magazines out there – both British and American – seem to have gone the route of closing in on themselves, publishing narrower and narrower subsections of the genre or allowing only certain styles of writing. The more I talk to people who read short fiction, the more I realise that quite a large proportion of them find this as limited as I do. I want to provide a magazine that will genuinely surprise – so that you do get high fantasy rubbing shoulders with hard science fiction, with most



The emphasis will always be on the fiction!

Ben Janes, Publisher 3SF

magazine that falls between the stools currently occupied by SF, New Scientist and Interzone. (Although, of course, Analog's run a blend of science fact and hard SF for years.) However, Big Engine says that they're aware of the risk.

"The emphasis will always be on the fiction," Ben comments. "You have to plant your flag somewhere. But from there you can send forays out into unexplored territory. I'll stop now before this metaphor gets too silly." Liz offers a more emphatic defence of their editorial policy. "I think the mix will be our strength. That isn't to say we won't vary it a bit according to the feedback we get, but what we won't be doing is going down some tight little groove that says that people who read sf/fiction don't watch tv or films, or read comics, or game - because I know for a fact that isn't true."

In five years, Ben wants 3SF to be "Paying for itself, and Liz, and at the top of the Hugos list for best pro-mag. Then Liz and I will just have to slug it out as to who goes up on stage." Liz wants to share the honours: "I think we should both be up, just so I can do the line about how I've always looked up to him (he's 6 ft 6; I'm 4ft 10...)"

It's difficult to judge any magazine on its first issue. And having sneaked a look at a preview copy, 3SF certainly seems to be distinct from TTA, Interzone, Spectrum and the American SF magazines. Time will tell whether it's distinctive enough. Nevertheless, based on the first issue it wouldn't surprise me if 3SF, once it matures and editorially finds its feet, isn't at least challenging for the odd Hugo.

3SF is published six times a year and costs £3.50 (£20 annual subscription) from Big Engine Co. Ltd, PO Box 185, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 1GR

WWW.3SFMAG.CO.UK

BSFA members get a 10% discount - include membership number with order.

Enough chat! Is it any good?

Expectations are a funny thing. I have been excited about Big Engine's plans for a magazine covering all forms of science fiction for some time. In my mind's eye I conjured images of Empire but with fiction. I was thinking of something stylish and different.

Well, 3SF is reasonably stylish, but it isn't that different. It is a perfectly good magazine. I am confident that it will quickly develop a reputation the equal of anything in the field. It isn't, however, a radical break with the traditions of sf publishing.

The editorial sets as the magazine's goal "to show those who generally only read sf that the media form can have something to offer them." It's a laudable aim. But how could a magazine with such a goal go to press without a column on film? It does contain welcome pieces on role-playing and tie-in novels but media coverage is limited to one column on television. In this, despite the magazine's stated aim, it actually offers less coverage than existing magazines.

3SF stands for science fiction, speculative fantasy and strange facts. On two of those three the magazine can safely claim to meet its remit. The fiction line-up is strong.

I am not a fan of traditional fantasy, so I didn't expect to enjoy the two pieces in this issue featuring heroes, swords, magic and mysterious rings. Of the two, Cherith Baldry's "The Ring of Ankh" is the better written with characters that feel like humans, but Darrel Schweitzer's "The Third Way" is more interesting as it uses the fantasy tropes in a more allegorical way. Neither story converted me to the fantasy genre but they weren't as painful to read as I had feared.

More to my taste was "The Angle of My Dreams" by Jay Lake, a sweet, modern fantasy with a premise that reminded me of the line from *Hitchhiker's* about the "art to flying, or rather a knock." It is poignantly written and enjoyable. Also very good were "Sweet Waters" by Sharon Lee and Steve Miller, about a space-traveller amongst a stone age people and featuring some neat anthropological slants, and "Volunteers" by Lawrence Watt-Evans about the arrival of aliens with a mysterious request. My only complaint about "Volunteers" is that the final revelation of the aliens' intentions left me wondering why they hadn't told everyone their plans in the first place. Still the journey of the central character makes



this story and I can forgive it a slight flaw. "Making Fields" by Mary Soon Lee was an interesting, well-written, but brief piece. The final story, Richard Parks' "Punishment" was more controversial. It features a woman who torments prisoners with their crimes so that they can suffer more before they are executed. As if death row wasn't enough! Despite the unpleasant premise, it is a technically good story though, perhaps, it lacks the moral depth to deal with the issues it raises.

Also worth a mention is an interesting interview with Ian McDonald, a short

piece by George RR Martin on writing and the Readers' Guide which, in this issue, gives a brief overview of the Alternate History sub-genre. The book review columns are also strong, particularly Gwyneth Jones' reviews.

So science fiction and speculative fantasy are covered, but what of strange fact? Well that resides in Eclectica. And what strange facts they are! John Whitbourn begins the piece by discussing the adventures of a Saxon band that fled England after the Norman invasion. However, the article quickly descends into a curious appeal for the rewriting of English history as the story of a people oppressed, England and the English, so Mr. Whitbourn has it, were written out of history by the victors of Hastings and live under a foreign yoke. As an Irishman, I have some understanding of long-held grudges but, even to me, it seems stretching a point to blame the French invasion in 1066 for what ails England today. While to suggest that the Saxons were somehow the original English people while ignoring those who came before (Vikings, Romans, Celts, Picts and even the Beaker People) and after (from every continent) isn't strange, it's perverse. Worse, it's dangerous because it pampers to a myth that nationally and race are somehow synonymous.

Overall, the first issue of 3SF is a success. The fiction is good. The reviews are good. The design and production values are good. There is room for improvement, of course, but this is more than a promising start. The slight disappointment is that it doesn't break the mould for science fiction magazines, but you can't blame 3SF because my expectations were too high. As a magazine in the traditional sf-style, it is a welcome addition to the ranks and I'm already looking forward to issue two.

Present and correct

What does Christmas shopping mean to you? If you're like me it means cold sweats, hopeless fumbling and snatching random objects from the shelves at the last moment. This year **Marlin Sketchley** has done the hard work for us and picked out the best presents for a science fiction fan this Christmas. I want one of those, and one of those, and one of those, and...

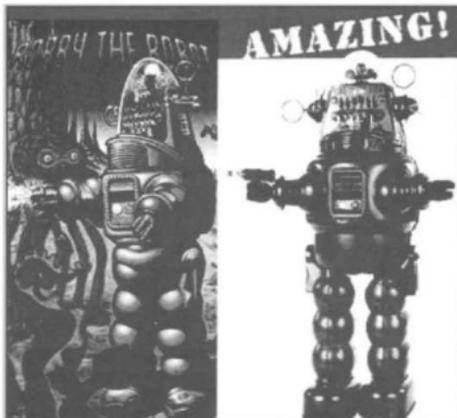
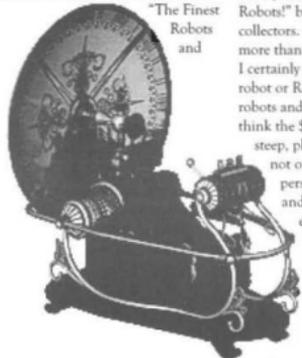
Yes, believe it or not it's that time of year again, when folk throughout the land realise that they haven't got the faintest idea what to buy their nearest and dearest for Christmas. Well, in my ongoing endeavour to bring to your attention the choicest of internet morsels, in this Ironing Board I'll try to make a few suggestions for possible gifts for the SF fan who has everything.

Sci-Fi Station offers a great variety of SF-related merchandise. There's a fine selection of robots, and one that particularly catches my eye is "Robby the Robot with Blaster! Finest Robby Yet Made!"

Illuminated dome

This tin plated Robby the Robot — of which there are only a thousand, folks! — walks, has an illuminated dome lamp and "brain" voice tubes that flash blue, scanner rings that rotate, and numerous other electronic functions and movements. Robby's blaster light pulsates and makes an appropriate sound as his arm moves with a "spraying action" (presumably this means his arm waves around while the gun's going off rather than that he starts watering the lawn). He's just under 33cm high, weighs 692 grams, and is powered by two AA batteries. Almost life-size, then.

This version of Robby is apparently considered to be one of "The Finest Robots and



URLs of relevance:

www.scifi-station.com — a lot to offer, including posters, animation art, soundtracks, DVDs and videos and all manner of other goodies. Well worth a look.

www.cyberdungeon.com — games, miniatures and all sorts of other wonders too numerous to list.

www.scifikit.com — scientific kits and educational value galore!

www.scifi.com/sfw/issue71/cool.html — review of a Star Wars version of traditional board game Monopoly. It looks good, but is PC-based, the idea of which I'm surprised to discover irritates me no end. But, hey, it might be right up your street.

Robbys made in the History of Robots!" by certain unnamed collectors. Well, who could ask for more than such a recommendation? I certainly can't think of a finer robot or Robby in the history of robots and Robbys. And, hey, if you think the \$595 asking price is a bit steep, please bear in mind that not only do you get your own, personal source of whiskey and lead shields, but also an exclusive colour brochure and Robby the Robot Club membership card, as well as an "enameled [sic] pin" (a badge to you and I).

If this particular Robby

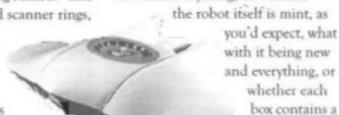
is a bit pricey, the site also offers the "new Osaka wind-up Robby the Robot". And what's more, this one walks, has a "Sparking Action!" and rotating nickel-plated scanner rings, while the rotating lithographed drum under the dome simulates the appearance of his "mechanical brain". He also has "realistic rubber bands" that are more than capable of holding the "highly scaled blaster" that's included in the asking price of \$292.95. However, buy two at the same time and they'll cost you a mere \$579.95! Hey, they'll even send you matched numbers on the

two robots if that's what you want.

If you're looking for something cheaper still, then there's the limited edition red Space Walkman Robot. This is, perhaps, the kind of thing that springs to mind when thinking of a toy robot. It certainly does in my case: I once bought a robot just like this when aged about five years old, while on a day trip to Rhyd with my Auntie Grace (she wasn't really my aunty, just the lady who lived next door). I played with it so much during the day that smoke began to rise rather alarmingly from the chest panel when we got home. I was somewhat traumatised by this, and haven't been able to look a robot in the eye since.

Chest flies open

Again, there are only a thousand of these 12-inch tall, battery operated figures, each of which comes with its own certificate, although just what this certificate isn't stated. Perhaps it's a declaration that smoke won't come from the chest the same night as you receive it. The site proudly proclaims that this is "A Very Cool Action Tin Robot" and that it walks and stops, its chest flies open and illuminated guns spring forth and flash as his upper body rotates through three hundred and sixty degrees! Somewhat cryptically, it is also stated that each one "Comes Mint in Box". Now, whether this means the box is in mint condition, as you'd expect, what with it being new and everything, or whether



the robot itself is mint, as you'd expect, what with it being new and everything, or whether each box contains a complementary After Eight, which you might not expect, I really don't know. Why not buy one and find out? This particular robot is cheaper than the aforementioned examples, costing \$79.95.

Also available on the Sci-Fi

Station site are some really wonderful model kits of SF vehicles, ships, monsters and such like. These include the Time Machine, which is available pre-built or as a model for your own constructing pleasure.

Approximately fourteen inches long by twelve inches high, the pre-built version is to 1/6th scale, but is limited to 500 units. This is presumably reflected in the price, which is a particularly healthy \$1,039. All the lights work, though, so that's worth bearing in mind. If you can't afford this, then the build-it-yourself alternative will set you back only \$185.00. Again, all the lights work and the disc turns. Just don't place it on a tabletop and push forward the little lever: it might just become indistinct, and vanish into futurity!



would suit. There's a good selection on CyberJungle.com, such as Awful Green Things from Outer Space, in which the exploration ship Znutar is invaded by, well, Awful Green Things. It's a two-player game, one player controlling said Green Things, the other commanding the crew. This edition apparently includes "Outside the Znutar" rules and counters, for going through the airlocks and fighting on the ship's hull. Fabulous. There are lots of other games on the site, too, including Ricochet Robot, featuring robots that have no brakes – surely a design flaw.

Scientific kit

For children, the Science Kit Centre offers, as you might expect, a range of scientific kits and educational toys, including chemistry sets, dinosaur models and more robots! In the See for Yourself Science

range, basic scientific principles are demonstrated by performing safe, simple and fun experiments. Each kit costs less than \$11.00, too.

There are Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced robot kits, and magic science kits, in which the laws of physics and chemistry are used to induce gasps of admiration from any audience. They fall under such categories as Pressure, Buoyancy, & Chemistry, Magnetism, Elasticity, & Friction and Force, Motion, & Balance.

Adults might find learning more about some of these principles handy in the bedroom department, I couldn't possibly say.

Have a great Christmas!

Thanks to Arnold Leibovitz, Director of www.scifistation.com for the photographs that accompany this article.

SPINNERETS

Blake's Seven, currently showing on UK Gold



That nice Lindsay Jackson sent me an e-mail or two suggesting Blake's Seven-related sites. I haven't had time to look at these, but she tells me they're great.

The unofficial Blake's site is at www.b7net.net/~blakes-seven/main/. It includes background information, episode transcripts, images, and heaps of other stuff. Apparently some of the links don't work though.

The BBC's Blake's Seven pages are at www.bbc.co.uk/cult/love/tv/blakes7/. These include a "Servalan shrine" (she was never my cup of tea, personally), and some instructions on how to make your own ray-gun. Splendid.

Those of you with access to digital television might like to know that Blake and the crew can currently be seen on UK Gold on weekend mornings.

Robert Holdstock, author of, amongst much else, the Mythago Wood cycle and the Merlin Codex, has a particularly nice website at www.mythago.husha.org.

Back Brain Recluse is Back! Have a look at what's on offer at www.bbr-online.com/catalogue or www.bbr-online.com/catalogue/welcome.shtml — you won't regret it, especially if you're a new writer looking for places to sell your work.

If you have any specifically web-related news that might be of interest to Matrix readers, or ideas for future articles, please send me an e-mail at the address below. Be sure to include the relevant URLs.

This Ironing Board was written to the sound of Ramshackle by Beck.

Martin Sketchley
www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk
msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

Martian war machine

Also available are a sixteen-inch model of a Martian War Machine, as seen in *War of the Worlds*, and examples of *Seaview* and the flying sub from *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*; the former is thirty-two inches long and includes the diving bell and mini-sub, while the latter has a twelve-inch wing span.

There's also Discovery One from 2001: A Space Odyssey, and a Ferring Marauder from *Star Trek*. There's even a C57-D Blaster from *Forbidden Planet*. This does cost \$144.95, but apparently "looks and feels just like the real thing". How would they know? I find myself asking...

There are a great many models here, be they single pieces or scenes. However, I suspect they're not for the novice modeller, and that a great deal of patience, skill and dexterity will be required to reach the standard of those examples on the site. If you're used to building Airfix Lancaster bombers and getting glue all over the cockpit canopy, then this might not be ideal.

If you'd prefer something more traditional, then perhaps a good old-fashioned board game



When unicorns walked the earth

Stephen Baxter examines the scientific truth behind myths of unicorns, sea serpents and the beautiful, gigantic roc. Will the endangered species of today fill tomorrow's children with the same wonder and the same sadness when they realise that such fabulous beasts no longer walk the earth?

Once a unicorn roamed the steppes of Europe and Asia.

Actually, it was a type of large rhino called an *Elasmotherium*. Because it lived on temperate, open grasslands, for a rhino it was oddly graceful – horse-like, with long legs – and it had a horn that could grow to two metres long. It surely looked like a beefy unicorn.

Elasmotherium is thought to have gone extinct some half a million years ago. But Eurasia is a big place, and until recently much of it was very sparsely inhabited – and as I discovered when researching my novel on evolution, the story of life on Earth is somewhat complicated, with few neat endings. Isn't it tempting to wonder if sightings of remnant populations of this marvellous beast by early humans could have prompted its recording in myth? Is the unicorn legend a kind of race memory?

Fossils in the desert

Adrienne Mayor, in *The First Fossil Hunters* (Princeton UP 2000) makes a convincing case for some myths being inspired by creatures much more deeply lost in time. The Greeks and Romans told tales of the griffin: a legendary monster of the eastern deserts, four-footed, and yet with a head like a great bird's, and a propensity for laying eggs in nests on the ground. Mayor believes all this was based on chance observations of fossil creatures eroding out of sandstone in those very deserts. Each had a body as long as a human's, big hind-limbs, short forearms, a tail something like a crocodile's

The bones of *Basilosaurus* fuelled the nineteenth-century beliefs in sea serpents.



© Colin Swait, www.digitalsciences.com

– and a huge, powerful jaw hinged under what looked like a bird's beak. Here and there in the desert you could even find traces of eggs and nests.

These fossils were actually of *Protocentops* – late-Cretaceous dinosaurs that died trapped in sandstorms, to be preserved for humans to marvel at. Given a dinosaur's peculiar mix of animal and bird features, perhaps the Greeks' reconstruction of the griffin's lifecycle wasn't so bad. Similarly, the bones of the archaic whale *Basilosaurus* – narrow-bodied, some sixty feet long – fuelled

nineteenth-century beliefs in sea serpents.

Even animals known to have survived into the human era have inspired legends.

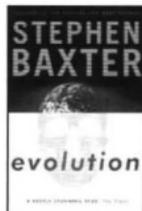
Madagascar, an island off the African coast, was isolated enough to evolve its own fauna, with functional equivalents to everything in the great animal communities in Africa itself, just a few hundred kilometres away. There were giant land tortoises, and lemurs the size of gorillas. And there were elephant birds – bizarre flightless creatures two metres tall and weighing a tonne. None of this

fantastic assemblage lasted long when people arrived – but the elephant birds would live on, after a fashion, in the tales told by Arab traders of the beautiful, gigantic roc. We wanted to have our legend and eat it, it seems.

It would be marvellous to believe that some of our other intriguing legends might be true. Could tales of the yeti have been inspired by sightings of the last Neandertals or *Homo erectus*, trapped in Himalayan retreats – and could the elf mythos be based on encounters with remnant *Australopithecines*, real-life small, hairy people?

Remarkable beasts

And what of the future? Perhaps our remote grand-children will tell tales of tremendous fish-like mammals that once swam the sea – and great hunting beasts orange as sunset and with stripes like shadows – and immense four-footed animals, bigger than you can imagine, with great white teeth that thrust out of their mouths, and noses so long they could reach the ground and pluck a blade of grass ... And perhaps they too will wonder if there is any reality behind such marvellous stories, and how such remarkable beasts can have been allowed to vanish.



BSFA Awards

What's hot in the race for this year's BSFA Awards? Only **Tanya Brown** knows, so, without further ado, the nominations are...

Ottaker's, one of Britain's finest independent bookstore chains, has instigated a series of awards, voted on by readers of *Outland*, Ottaker's in-house SF and fantasy magazine. Terry Brooks picked up the Best Overall Title for *Anrax: Al Reynolds' Chasm City* won the award for Best SF Title: *American Gods*, by Neil Gaiman, won (rather surprisingly) the award for Best Horror: George R. R. Martin's *A Storm of Swords* was voted Best Fantasy Title. Also honoured were Laurell K. Hamilton, Richard Morgan and Alan Moore.

I mention these awards because I'm intrigued by those categories, and how a book is allocated to one or another. A few years back, the term 'slipstream' was slapped onto every novel that defied instant categorisation. Genre boundaries became blurred as mainstream novelists wrote what appeared to be SF, and claimed it in the name of *Literature*: an unholy alliance of fantasy and horror spawned the marketing phenomenon known as dark fantasy: cyberpunk mutated into a post-modern experiment ...

The BSFA Awards have never been genre-specific. While there's been a certain tendency to give the award for Best Novel to a novel from the more science-fictional end of the spectrum, fantasy novels have won. The 'Short Story' award is even more likely to be awarded to a story with fantastical elements – possibly reflecting *Interzone's* eclectic editorial policy. In theory, our award is limited only by what you, the membership, deem worthy of recognition. By all means take this as a challenge!

Nominations for the 2002 BSFA Awards (which will be presented at next year's Eastercon, Seacon '03 in Hinxley) as at 10th October 2002 are listed below. Items nominated since the previous issue of *Matrix* are marked with an asterisk.

Novel:

Schild's Ladder - Greg Egan
Effendi - Jon Courtenay Grimwood
Taylor Five: The Story of a Clone Girl - Ann Halam (Gwyneth Jones)
Light - M John Harrison
The Iron Gull - Robert Holdstock
Castles Made of Sand - Gwyneth Jones
The Scar - China Miéville
Altered Carbon - Richard Morgan
The Years of Rice and Salt - Kim Stanley Robinson
Fallen Angel - Kim Wilkins

Short Story:

'Singleton' - Greg Egan, *Interzone* 176, Feb 2002
 *'Social Dreaming of the Frin' - Ursula Le Guin, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Oct/Nov 2002
 'If Lions Could Speak' - Paul Park, *Interzone* 177, Mar 2002
 *'The Drive-In Puerto Rico' - Lucius Shepard, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Oct/Nov 2002
 *'Five British Dinosaurs' - Michael Swanwick, *Interzone* 177, Mar 2002

Related Publications:

**Age of Chaos: The Multiverse of Michael Moorcock* - Jeff Gardiner,

British Fantasy Society, 2002

**Lost in Space: Geographies of Science Fiction* - Rob Hitchen and Edward James, Continuum, 2002
 *'Introduction to Maps - Dave Langford, Big Engine, 2002
 *'The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction' - Justine Larbalestier, Wesleyan University Press, 2002
 Lucius Shepard's review of *The Time Machine* (2002), at www.electrictory.com/reviews.times.asp
 *'Once There Was a Magazine', by Fred Smith (Becon Publications, 2002)

Up-to-date news on the contenders can be found on the

BSFA web page (www.bsfa.co.uk), and there'll be an update in each issue of *Matrix* between now and the deadline at the end of next January.

Nominate

You can nominate a piece of work for the award just by sending me an email (awards@amoronoth.aviators.net). There's a handy link on the web page too. Nominate early and often! Remember, the items with the most nominations appear on the final shortlists in the spring: unlike the jury-based Arthur C Clarke Award, the BSFA Awards are democratically bestowed. If you like something, nominate it for the relevant award - even if others have already done so.

Rules

The closing date for nominations is 31st January 2003. The rules of eligibility are as follows:

Best Novel, for the best novel first published in the UK in the calendar year 2002. This award is (in theory, at least) open to any work of fiction - not just adult-oriented science fiction.

Best Short Fiction, for the best short fiction that first appeared, regardless of country of origin, in the calendar year 2002. Stories in non-UK magazines, anthologies, and even on the web are eligible. Let me know where the story appeared (anthology title and editor, magazine name and number, URL) as well as the author and title of the short story.

Best Related Publication, for the best single piece, anthology or full-length critical work to appear in the UK in the calendar year 2002. Please give author or editor, title, and magazine/journal details if applicable.

Best Artwork, for the best single piece of artwork that appeared in the calendar year 2002. Where possible, please give the artist's name and the title of the work, and where the item appears (magazine name and number, website URL, and so on).

Please note that 'advance votes' are not eligible: the book, short story, critical essay or piece of artwork must actually have been published, not just be due for publication.

If you're not sure whether something qualifies, send in the nomination anyway: I'll check eligibility and let you know.

Nominations for best artwork



Peter Gric:
 "Experiment 1"

The Third Alternative No. 30, Spring 2002



Dominic Harman:
 "Five British Dinosaurs"
Interzone No. 177, March 2002
www.dominic-harman.com



Fraser Irving:
 "Judge Death: My name is Death"
2000AD Prog 1289, May 2002



Joachim Luetke:
 "The Routine"
The Third Alternative No. 31 Summer 2002

Event Horizon

Future conventions and other gatherings.

14 December 02 Dreddcon 2002



The Brewery, Chiswell Street, London EC1Y 4SD (nearest tube: Barbican). The third annual Dreddcon, a celebration of everything 2000 AD and Judge Dredd. Visitors will get the chance to mingle with artists, writers and editors from all points in 2000 AD's 25 year history. Events include talks, panel discussions, masterclasses, 2000 AD artists sketching for attendees, films, slide shows and much more. There will also be an extensive dealer room. Regular event tickets will cost £15 in advance. VIP tickets

giving access to the post event party cost £25 in advance, from Tharg's Future Shop at www.2000adonline.com or by phone on 01865 791 153 (credit card facilities available). Children under 12 years of age will be allowed in to the daytime event free of charge, though there is a strict over-18s policy for the post event party.

21-23 Feb 03 Redemption (B5/B7)

Ashford International Hotel, Ashford, Kent. £45 reg, rising to £50 on 1 September; £55 at door. Day: £30, £35 at door. Children £15 or £10/day. Concessions 10% off weekend, 5% day. Contact 26 King's Meadow View, Wetherby, LS22 7FX.

18-21 Apr 03 Season '03 (Eastercon)

Venue confirmed as the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leics (same as 2001 Easter event). Guests of honour: Chris Baker (artist known as Fangorn and involved in Spielberg's AI), Chris Evans, Mary Gentle. £40 full attending membership. Contacts: www.seacon03.org.uk or 8 The Orchard, Tonwell, Herts, SG12 0HR, UK



9-12 Apr 04 Concourse (Eastercon)

Blackpool Wintergardens. GoH Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Danny Flynn, Christopher Priest, Philip Pullman, Sue Mason. £25 register, £15 supporting, £15 children (5-17), infants (0-5) free. Rates to rise in June if not before, except that full reg for the unwaged will be held at £25 until the con. On-line credit card payment facility

planned. Contact 479 Newmarket Rd, Cambridge, CB5 8JJ.

1-3 Aug 03 Finncon X Eurocon 2003

Turku, Finland. Contact Turku Science Fiction Society, PL 538, 20101 Turku, Finland.

5-6 July 03 ConStruction (Convention running con)

Cardiff. Info: ConStruction, 37 St Peters Street, Duxford, Cambridgeshire, CB2 4RP, ConStruction@DragonEvents.ltd.uk, www.dragonevents.ltd.uk

28 Aug-1 Sep 03 Torcon 3/ Worldcon 61

Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Canada. Guests of Honour: George R. R. Martin, Frank Kelly Freas, Mike Glycer. Membership: C\$200. Info: Torcon 3, Box 3, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1A2, Canada, info@torcon3.on.ca.



10-12 Oct 03 Grissecon 1 (Wraeththu)

Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford. GoH: Storm Constantine. £40 reg to 30 Dec 02, £50 to 31 Aug 03 (booking closes). Contact 6 St Leonards Ave, Stafford, ST17 4LT.

2-6 Sep 04 Noreascon 4 (62nd Worldcon)

Boston, Mass. Guest of Honour: Terry Pratchett, William Tenn, (fan) Jack Speer and Peter Weston. \$120 reg (kids \$85), \$85 supp conversion, \$35 supp. Mastercard and Visa accepted. Contact PO Box 1010, Framingham, MA 01701, USA.



INTERACTION!

The 63rd World Science Fiction Convention
4-8 August 2005, Glasgow

4-8 Aug 05 Interaction (63rd Worldcon)

Glasgow, UK. Guests of Honour: Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Sheckley, Lars-Olov Strandberg, Jane Yolen. £75 attending, £30 supporting. Contact Interaction, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S2 5HQ, UK, www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk, info@interaction.worldcon.org.uk

Notes

For those attending:

- Always include a stamped, self-addressed envelope when contacting conventions by post.
- Please mention Matrix when responding.
- We do our best to ensure the accuracy of this information, but always check the details with the conference organisers. Never make a journey to a convention without checking first.

For those organising:

Please forward updates, corrections and any information on new events to the main editorial address.

Get out more!

Local groups and other gatherings.

Belfast Science Fiction Group

Alternate Thursdays, 8:30pm at the Monaco Bars, Rosemary Street, Belfast. Contact Eugene Doherty: 02890 208405; finman@technologist.com; www.terracon3000.org.uk/sfgroup.htm

Birmingham: Brum SF Group

Second Friday of the month on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New St. Membership is £15/year. Contact Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, W. Midlands W/W13 1HX. bsfg@bortos.demon.co.uk

Cambridge SF Group

Second Monday of the month in The Cambridge Blue, Gwydir Street, Cambridge.

Cardiff SF Group

First Tuesday of the month 7:30pm in Wellington's Café Bar, 42 The Hayes, Cardiff.

Colchester SF/F/Horror Group

Third Saturday of the month at 12:30pm in The Playhouse pub, St John's Street. Contact Des Lewis 01255 812119.

The Croydon SF Group

Second Tuesday of the month, 8pm in The Dog and Bull, Surrey Street (by the market), Croydon, Surrey. We are sometimes upstairs or out in the garden. Contact Robert Newman on 020 8686 6800.

Glasgow SF/F Writers' Circle

Alternate Tuesdays at 8:00pm, The Conference Room, Borders Bookstore, Buchanan Street, Glasgow (actual dates are publicised in Borders' events guide, available in store, or ask at the Information Desk). All genres and standards of proficiency welcome. Contact: Neil Williamson 0141 353 2649, or e-mail: neilwilliamson@btinternet.com

Hull SF Group

Second and Fourth Tuesdays, 8.00 to 10:30pm at The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull. Contact Carol & Steve on 01482 494045 or Dave and Estelle on 01482 444291. Please note that the pub room is not always available so if you intend to come along, please phone first to check on venue, or see: www.mjclsh.demon.co.uk/hullsf.htm for the current list of events.

London BSFA meetings

Fourth Wednesday of the month (except December) from 7:00pm at the Rising Sun, Cloth Fair (off Long Lane), EC1. Barbican/

Farrington tube. Check Ansible for details and guests, or organiser, Paul Hood on 020 8333 6670; paul@ouden.demon.co.uk

London Circle

Changed: First Thursday of each month from around 5:00pm (downstairs bar booked from 7:00pm) at the Silver Cross, Whitehall opposite the Whitehall Theatre, thirty yards south of Trafalgar Square. Nearest tube stations are Charing Cross (the closest), Embankment, Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus and Westminster. Charing Cross rail station is nearby. Waterloo is about ten minutes' walk away (over the new Hungerford footbridge).

Manchester: FONT

Changed: FONT meets on the second and fourth Thursday of the month now at the Crown & Anchor, Hilton St from about 8.30pm onwards. Info 0161 355 0599.

North Oxford

Last Thursday of the month at The Plough, Wolvercote from 7:30pm. Irregular and just starting, so contact Steve and Vikki on 01865 371734 or peverel@aol.com for details.

Norwich Science Fiction Group

Second & fourth Wednesdays from 8:00pm at the Cellar Bar, Ribs of Beef, Fye Bridge, Norwich. Contact 01603 477104; NSF6@cowcom.net

Peterborough SF Group

First Wednesdays at the Bluebell Inn, Dogsthorpe and third Wednesdays in the Great Northern Hotel, opposite station Contact Pete on 01733 370542.

Portsmouth/South Hants SF Group

Second and fourth Tuesdays at the Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth.

Reading SF Group

Changed: Now at nine o'clock every Monday in the Brewery Tap in Castle Street, except for the third Monday of the calendar month, when we meet at seven thirty in the Corn Stores in Forbury Road. See www.rsfg.org.uk for details or contact: M.Young@twinklair.co.uk

Southampton: Solent Green

Every third Thursday, 7:00pm, at The Duke of Wellington, Bugle Street, Contact Matt 01703 577113 werkhaus@tgp.co.uk

Please forward updates, corrections and any information on new groups and gatherings to the main editorial address.

Magazine contact details

How to get hold of copies of the magazines reviewed on pages 9, 10 and 11. Go on, treat yourself, buy them all!

Albedo One

homopage.nircon.net/~goudrian
2 Post Road, Lusk, Co Dublin, Ireland

Ambit

17 Priory Gardens, London, N6 5QY

Cemetary Dance

www.cemeterydance.com
PO Box 827, Abingdon, MD 21009, USA

Fantasy and Science Fiction

www.sfsite.com/fsf
PO Box 3447, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

Interzone

www.sfsite.com/interzone
217 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6FL

Roadworks

www.roadworksweb.free-online.co.uk
T. Denyer, 7 Mountview, Church Lane West, Aldershot, GU11 3LN

Spectrum SF

www.spectrumsf.co.uk
Spectrum Publishing, 53 Waverley Park, Kirkintilloch, Glasgow, G66 2LB

The Third Alternative & The Fix

www.thopress.com
TTA Press, 3 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs, CB6 2LB

Contributors

All material © 2002 contributors.

News: Mark Greener, Simon Morden and Roderick Glad-wish

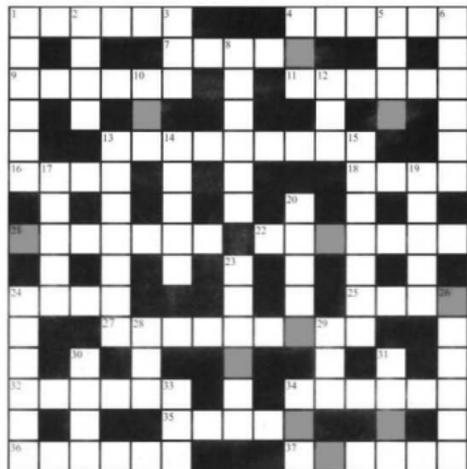
Flickers: Martin McGrath
Cover illustration © Colin Smith

Thanks to everyone who contributed.

Win The Stone Tape DVD

For years Nigel Kneale's *The Stone Tape*, a great ghost story from the creator of *Quatermass*, remained unseen. This tale of strange goings on in a stately home is, for the first time, available on DVD from the BFI. The disc features a pin-sharp picture and a fascinating commentary track with Kim Newman and Kneale himself.

To win, complete the crossword below and e-mail the name spell out by the shaded boxes (with your name and address) to matrix.competition@ntlworld.com by noon on **7 December 2002**. First out of the proverbial hat wins this great DVD in time for the 30th anniversary of its first broadcast on Christmas Day 1972. Post Office strikes willing.



Across

- 1 This ____ Earth, 1955 alien invasion film (6)
- 4 Winner of war in *The Man in the High Castle* (6)
- 7 Time and ____ novel by Jack Finney (5)
- 9 Io and Ganymede, for example (6)
- 11 Menaded, like a sock (6)
- 13 Creator of Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler and Gaspode the Wonder Dog (9)
- 16 Son of Odin (4)
- 18 *The Ivory and the ____* short story collection by Charles de Lint (4)
- 21 Stretchable (7)
- 22 Marsupial (7)
- 24 Hitchcock movie (4)
- 25 The ____ Code, novel by Paul Levinson (4)
- 27 Mars (3,6)
- 32 The ____ Box, story by Edgar Allan Poe (6)
- 34 Make a statement or change a price (6)
- 35 Exceedingly (5)
- 36 ____ 3, 1980 movie starring Kirk Douglas (6)
- 37 Freeholder farmer (6)

Down

- 1 Inset (6)
- 2, 5, 4 & 13 Au revoir, in Vulcan (4,4,3,6)
- 3 ____ Dare, plot of the future (3)
- 4 See 2
- 5 See 2
- 6 The ____ Fortress, 1958 Kurosawa film, inspiration for *Star Wars* (6)
- 8 The first hand held computer? (6)
- 10 We breathe it (3)
- 12 Pretend (3)
- 14 ____ Goldfinger, Bond villain (5)
- 15 ____ Starfighter, 1984 kids adventure (3,4)
- 17 Welcome (5)
- 19 Luke, for example (5)
- 20 Prince of the Fallen (5)
- 23 ____ Running, 1972 Douglas Trumbull film (6)
- 24 Robbie and K9, for examples (6)
- 26 The ____ Awakes, John Wynham novel (6)
- 28 One confused time (3)
- 29 ____ of Cal, Zelazny novel (3)
- 30 Dirty mark, on the landscape? (4)
- 31 Ointment (4)
- 33 See 34
- 34 & 33 Spaceman's weapon of choice (3,3)

157 Xword solution

Across
 1 Ape 3 Olaf Stapledon 9 Light year 10 Detmos 11 Leo 14 Nova 15 Era 16 Allele 17 Steam 19 Enid 21 Curse 23 Star 24 Triffid 27 Lathe 29 Titan 30 Eta 31 Blade runner 37 Jabberwock 39 Janus 41 Ugh 42 Metropolis 45 Orc 47 Oberon 49 Corpse 50 Null 4 51 Not

Down
 2 Phlebas 4 Stainless Steel Rat 5 Poul Anderson 6 EE Doc Smith 7 HG Wells 8 Golem 12&44 Paul Park 13 Black hole 18 Eloi 20 Net 22 Clear 25 Flint 26 Dune 28 Terminator 32 Nick 33 Laser 34 Tachyon 35 Bolu 36 Parsec 38 Bomb 40 Cugel 43 Roc 45 Omen 46 Curt 48 Nu

Winners

Competition 156 results

Quite a wait this month for a correct solution, early entrants having got question seven wrong. The winner is Peter Redfern.

1 zlotsy, 2 "Catch the Zeppelin", 3 Marion Zimmer Bradley, 4 "Zero Hour", 5 Yevgeny Zamiatin, 6 In a 2000, 7 Zealand (Not New Zealand), 8 Zero Population Growth, 9 Lee Zavitz, 10 The Twilight Zone, 11 Stand on Zanzibar, 12 Ziff-Davis Publications Inc., 13 Zaphod Beeblebrox, 14 Roger Zelazny, 15 Zanquon, 16 Zarnitwood

Mega 2000AD Result

Winners Andrew Boulton, Runners up: Nigel Parsons, Peter Coleman 1 Perpetrator, 2 'Mind the Oranges Marlon' From *DR & Quince*, 3 Ace Trucking Co, 4 Nemesis the Wurlack, 5 Skitz, 6 Halo Jones, 7 Mel-Quake, 8 The Gronk, 9 Sam Slade, from the strip

Robo Hunter, 10 His massive nose, 11 Rover, 12 Cassandra, 13 Joe (Not Joseph - that's the film), 14 A *Tyrannosaurus Rex* from the strip Fish and others, 15 Rowdy Yates Concepts, 16 Death, Fire, Fear and Morris, 17 Judge Fish (a goldfish), 18 Judges who work undercover in Judge Dredd, 19 Slaine, 20 Jimmy Carter, 21 The Space Spinner

UFO Competition

Answers *Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation*. Winner: Nigel Parsons, Cardiff

The Protectors Competition

Answer: Robert Vaughn played Harry Ruler. Winner: Ben Jaeps

Competition 158

Have a look at these picture, from *Matrix* 156, and tell us what the bouncer (left) or The Protectors (below) are thinking or saying. Answers to John Ollis, 49 Leighton Road, Corby, NN18 0SD. Closing date is three weeks from receipt of this mailing.



Cover Art

Colin Swift is a British-born Canadian working as a freelance graphic artist in Toronto. His work often combines his 3 passions: speculative fiction, zoology, and paleontology. Catch his illustrations via his website, "Digital I Designs" www.digitalidesigns.com.

