

matrix

July/Aug 2003



No. 162

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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

The machine is not the artist

Martin Sketchley interviews the two-time BSFA Award winning artist Dominic Harman.



D.E.H. 99

**Stephen Palmer interviewed
Jeff Gardner against "science fiction"
Bye Bye Buffy
Ang Lee's The Hulk reviewed
Maureen Kincaid Spellar on SF awards
PLUS film, DVD, television, comics, magazine and web reviews**

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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Welcome,

“Science fiction is gloriously flexible, and I still have a sense of it as a largely unexplored land,” Brian Aldiss said in an interview with *Future Life* back in 1980. And this issue, *Matrix* reflects that glorious flexibility.

We look at the Marvel phenomenon reviewing the movies *The Hulk*, *X-Men* and Marvel comics’ recent output, which is often timely and relevant. A recent *Avengers* story, for instance, explores post 9-11 paranoia, bioterrorist threats and conspiracy theories. Stephen Palmer’s latest novel, the subject of this issue’s author interview, merges African myth and hi-technology to yield a unique and compelling vision. We feature the work of BSFA award winning artist Dominic Harman and run the first fandom column from Mark Plummer – who co-edits the wonderful fanzine *Banana Wings*, with Claire Brialey, the new awards administrator.

At *Matrix* we want to celebrate sf’s diversity. That’s why we agree with this issue’s “Rage”. As Jeff Gardiner, author of *The Age of Chaos: The Multiverse of Michael Moorcock*, notes there is a “patronising tendency within sf fandom to consider fantasy to be a lesser and slightly embarrassing distant cousin”. We should celebrate the fact that sf encompasses Aldiss and Doc Smith, Moorcock and Bova, *X Men* and *Intacto*, and yes even Tolkien and Howard.

We might not like it all. Mark gets enough science during his day job to want to read really hard SF for relaxation and Martin hates *LOTR*. But we can celebrate SF’s diversity; it’s glorious flexibility and our on-going adventures in this “largely unexplored land”.

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RAGE against the... ...term science fiction

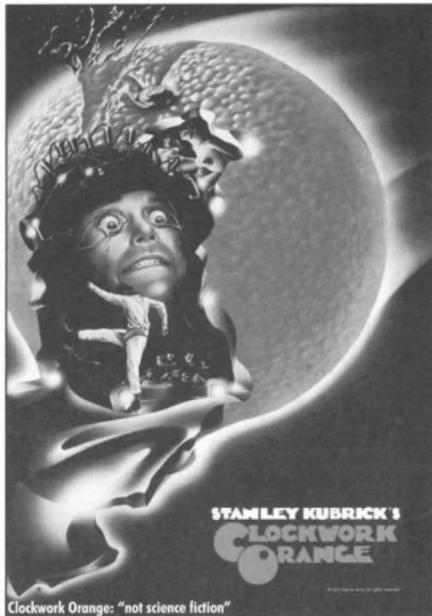
It is time that science fiction fans stopped looking down their noses at "fantasy", argues **Jeff Gardiner**. Science fiction is dependent upon fantasy and its time we got used to the fact. Science fiction, he says, is a misleading and silly name for what we read and attempts to claim books like *A Clockwork Orange* for the genre are misguided.

Now I'm proud to belong to the BSFA, so don't get me wrong. But one thing that really bugs me is the patronising tendency within sf fandom to consider fantasy to be a lesser and slightly embarrassing distant cousin that has to be acknowledged from time to time. I am aware of all the column space that has been wasted over the decades about generic terms and definitions, but I thought that this particular column was the appropriate place to renew this important discussion.

Let's face it – the name 'science fiction' is crap. I quite like the paradox it creates, but basically the word 'science' is the stumbling block. I have nothing against science, which helps us to understand and appreciate the miracle of creation and the world around us, bringing us a much needed sense of wonder. It's just that science suggests technology, laboratories, space travel and boring lessons at school. Science has nothing to do with the supernatural, in fact it attempts to disprove it, so any book that accepts the supernatural cannot by definition be science fiction.

Irritates

It irritates me when sf critics try to claim the likes of Mark Twain, E M Forster, Virginia Woolfe, J B Priestley, Italo Calvino and William Golding as sf authors. I'm sorry, but *Lord of the Flies* is simply not sf. Likewise off-cited texts, *The Old Man At the Zoo*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Riddley Walker* are not sf just because they are set in the near future. They are just great books about people and the tag 'science



A Clockwork Orange: "not science fiction"

fiction' is a misnomer. In fact, they have more in common with fantasy than with sf. It's probably a question of semantics, but the term science fiction is misleading, unhelpful and too narrow to be of any real use.

Speculative fiction

When Michael Moorcock edited *New Worlds*, he understood that speculative fiction should not just interrogate science, but also art, religion, psychology, sociology, history and so on: after all that is the purpose of all literature. The point to be made, though, is why call it 'science fiction'? This is the lesson of the so-called New Wave, which decised traditional sf and moved on. It is silly to call Moorcock an sf writer when he plainly isn't, as much as it would be silly to call Dali an sf artist.

While the term sf is limiting and exclusive, 'fantasy' is far-reaching and inclusive. Fantasy is not a genre, but rather an impulse within literature. In fact, all literature can be divided into two impulses: Fantasy and Realism. In this way fantasy embraces myths and legends, fairy tales, heroic romance, Gothic romance, Romanticism, science fiction, horror, sword and sorcery, magic realism and so on.

Sub-genre

Fantasy can claim authors like Homer, Ovid, Shakespeare, Blake, Keats, Dickens, Hardy, Yeats and Peake. They wrote fantasy and science fiction. Sf is a sub-genre of Fantasy and it's something we've known for years and need to start facing up to. Science fiction is dependent upon fantasy but not

vice versa. To state that fantasy is sf is nonsense, but sf is certainly a type of fantastic literature.

It still baffles me why the term science fiction has stuck and, if anything, become the dominant one. Within the mainstream, people laugh at sf, and then within our arcane walls some sf fans seem to look down on fantasy and treat it with an undeserved disdain. *Foundation* magazine, for example, has made an editorial decision to edge out fantasy. Their definition of sf must either be completely bizarre or very limited indeed. Does this mean they are now stuck with only 'hard sf' or will they continue the absurd claim that Mervyn Peake wrote science fiction?

Acknowledge

I am begging the BSFA to never do the same. It is important that we acknowledge fantasy as a major element of literature in general. Without fantasy we would not have the likes of David Lindsay, TH White, Mervyn Peake, Michael Moorcock, Angela Carter, Tim Powers, Terry Pratchett, Gene Wolfe, Jonathan Carroll, Graham Joyce and China Miéville.

It's good to see books like *The Scar* on both the BSFA and ACCA shortlists for best novel, as well as authors such as Neil Gaiman deservedly receiving accolades. Cinema would be all the poorer without the plethora of fantasy films that bring magic and splendour to our lives.

I like the fact that the BSFA discusses and reviews fantasy and horror with equal relish, and if it ever becomes an 'sf only' zone then my membership will lapse.

About the author

Jeff Gardiner is the author of *The Law of Chaos: the Multiverse of Michael Moorcock* (BFS Publications; ISBN: 0953968117).

His article on Dali's museum was printed in *Vector* 227.

RAGE against the...

Got something to say? Don't hold back, let us know. Letters are always welcome or, if you're really angry, let rip with your own 'Rage against' whatever you loathe in SF in 750 to 1000 words and send it to Mark at the address opposite. Get it off your chest, it'll do you good.

2002 BSFA Awards winners announced

This year's BSFA Award ceremony took place at Seacon '03. If you weren't there don't worry, *Matrix* has all the details.

The winners of the BSFA Awards of 2002 were announced at Seacon '03, during a ceremony hosted by John Jarrold.

Christopher Priest won the award for "Best Novel" for *The Separation*. The award for "Best Short Fiction" went to Neil Gaiman for the novella *Coraline*.

Winner of the award for "Best Related Publication", David Langford, told *Matrix* that his win was "completely unexpected. After all, the other nominees included two full-length books!"

Describing his work on *Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek* he said it was "was a strange, exhausting and rewarding experience."

"I thanked an awful lot of people in the *Maps* acknowledgements (when Langford takes on a project, everybody else has to get behind and push), but I'm particularly grateful to John Sladek for writing all that fine material and to Ben Jeapes of Big Engine for publishing it."

Re-issue

With *Big Engine* no longer in business, *Maps* has been taken on by Cosmos Books/Wildside Press and will be reissued soon.

Elsewhere in this issue (pages 26&27) we have an in-depth interview with Dominic Harman who won the "Best Artwork" award for the second time.

Dominic told *Matrix* that the prestige and recognition of winning the BSFA Award was fantastic and said: "I'm pleased the BSFA members vote for me, and it means I must be doing something right! Thanks folks."

Nominations for the 2003 Awards (which will be presented at the 2004 Eastercon) are now being accepted. And we have a new Awards Administrator: Claire Brialey takes over from Tanya Brown. We'd like to thank Tanya for all her work.

For more details about next year's awards and for Claire's ideas on how they can be made even bigger and even better, turn to page 29 of this issue of *Matrix* for the first column from our new awards administrator.



Dominic Harman receives his award for Best Artwork from Christopher Moore.

BSFA 2002 Awards

Best Novel

Christopher Priest's *The Separation*, published by Scribner - presented by Christopher Evans

Best Short Fiction

Neil Gaiman, for *Coraline*, published by Bloomsbury. The award was accepted on Neil's behalf by Chris Bell - presented by Jon Courtenay Grimwood.

Best Artwork

Dominic Harman, for his Interzone 179 cover - presented by Christopher Moore.

Best Related Publication

David Langford, for his introduction to *Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek* published by Big Engine - presented by Ken Macleod



Winner: "Best Related Publication" David Langford



Winner: "Best Novel" Christopher Priest

Alien on-line wins Wooden Rocket

Alien Online (www.thealienonline.net) recently won a Wooden Rocket for best on line magazine as voted for by readers of SFCrowdnest. Ariel, Alien Online's Site Editor, told Matrix: "I'm absolutely delighted that we've won this award, mostly for the contributors to the site, all of whom are volunteers who put in their time and effort for the same reasons I do; because we love genre fiction and we love being able to tell other people about the great stuff we read. Without their hard work on such a regular basis, the site wouldn't be much more than a blog and a few links..."

Other winners include:

- Best Print-to-Web Magazine: Locus Online
- Best Author Site: Alan Dean Foster
- Best Artist Site: Michael Whelan
- Best Print Publisher Site: Baen Books
- Best Official Movie Site: The Lord of the Rings
- Best Fan Movie Site: TheOneRing.net
- Best Official TV Site: Farscape
- Best Fan TV Site: Who Central
- Best Fan Site Home Page: Lost Car Park
- Best Convention/Society Site: The Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists (ASFA)

Check out the full list, with hyperlinks at: <http://www.computercrowdnest.com/wooden/index.shtml>

Charles L Grant: Living Legend

Charles L Grant is this year's International Horror Guild Living Legend Award recipient. The award reflects this author and editor's "meritorious and notable contributions" as well as those that "have substantially influenced" the field of horror/dark fantasy". Grant follows in the footsteps of, among others, William F. Nolan, Alice Cooper, Ray Bradbury, Clive Barker, Richard Matheson, and Harlan Ellison. See www.ihgonline.org.

Charity event in Braintree

A charity SF/fantasy event in Braintree Essex on the 9th of August 2003 will denote all profits to the Mid-Essex-News-Tape-Association. Confirmed guests include Warwick Davis, who appeared in the *Harry Potter* movies, *Willow*, *Return of the Jedi* and *The Phantom Menace* as well as *Red Dwarf*'s Hattie Hayridge. There will be a raffle and auction on the day including items linked to *Farscape*, *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*. See www.geocities.com/okindomagic03

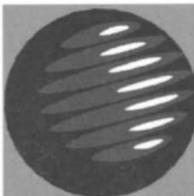
Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentleman

Alan Moore: *Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentleman* will be published to mark his 50th birthday. Written by Gary Spencer Millidge all the profits and royalties go to Alzheimer's disease charities. The biography is backed by comic strips, illustrations, poems, personal recollections and so on, created for the book. We will review this book in our next issue. Source: *Comics International*

New Orbiter Co-ordinator

The BSFA has a new co-ordinator for the postal writer's groups. Anyone interested in joining a group should contact Gillian Rooke, Southview, Pilgrims Lane, Chilham, Kent, CT4 8AB email: animart@leasant.finet.co.uk

There are currently six Orbiter groups. Mark's a member of one and they're not only invaluable for honing your fiction, but also great fun. In the meantime, we'd like to thank Carol Ann Kerry-Green for her sterling work over the last few years. Gillian sets out her plans for Orbiter on page 19 of this issue of Matrix.

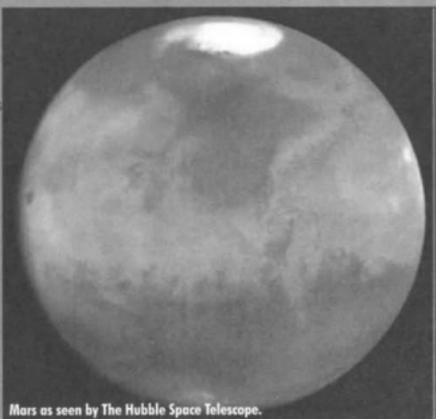


RODERICK GLADWISH'S WORLD OF SCIENCE

Mars under investigation

As you read this, Mars Express with Beagle 2 are on their way to Mars. Two US space vehicles with their own rover/landers are a few weeks behind. Where Beagle 2 looks directly for life, these will search for conditions suitable for life. Their destinations are craters. One contains a possible lakebed. The other shows a mineral outcrop that usually forms in the presence of liquid water.

Before the explorers touch down, science is being developed for future missions. NASA scientists are drilling near a Spanish river,



Mars as seen by The Hubble Space Telescope.

Rio Tinto, for subsurface exotic life forms. Bacteria may dwell there that survive on iron and sulphur bearing minerals. The river's biology may result from chemical reactions fuelled by organisms that do not need oxygen gas to survive. The Rio Tinto region has the world's largest deposits of sulphide minerals. But similar deposits might well be found on Mars. Source: NASA

Nanotech breakthrough

US and Belgian researchers claim they have made a nanotechnology breakthrough by trapping clay particles on a crystal. They start with a process called "The Langmuir-Blodgett balance", which involves adding insoluble organic molecules with positively charged tips to a slurry of clay particles in water. As positive molecules float on the water, they attract and bind the negatively charged clay. Langmuir balance forces the combined particles into a line. The crystal is coated with a clay film when it is placed in the water and attracts the floating molecules. The clay can then become a structural support for organic molecules such as dyes, enzymes, proteins and polymers. Ultimately, this may lead to smart materials. Source: sci.NewFactor.com

Defence technologies

Funded by \$50 million from the U.S. Army, MIT opened The Institute for Soldier Nanotechnologies to develop technology to improve their soldiers' chances of surviving combat. MIT's stated goals are to lighten loads, treat wounds and protect the troops from injuries.

Defence against projectiles and blast may come from the investigation of fluids that stiffen when exposed to a magnetic field. Protection from chemical and biological weapons includes highly sensitive sensors and protective coatings. Presently Nuclear, Biological and Chemical protection suits are bulky and in places like the Arabian Gulf are uncomfortably hot to wear in action. The hope is that nanotech will reduce the negative elements.

Medical monitoring and first aid on the battlefield being provided by the soldier's battle suit are under consideration. Release of chemical healings aids is one possibility, another are automatic tourniquets from electrical stimulated polymers. So if the defences fail the soldier may still survive. Source: MIT

DC buys Elfquest

DC recently bought all rights to WaRP Graphics' *Elfquest* saga, marking the end of 25 years of self-publishing. DC plans to publish the saga as black and white manga style digests - which are proving an increasingly popular format. DC also plans a series of *Elfquest* Archives as hardbacks. Wendy Pini will begin drawing the series she co-created with her husband towards the end of this year. Source: Comics International

Old guard keeps going

Arthur C Clarke sold a new novel - *The Last Theorem* - to Gollancz... Fred Pohl sold a new Heechee novel to Tor... EC Tubb sold *Footsteps of Angels* and a collection *Mirror of the Night* to Gryphon and Sarob respectively... Ursula K Le Guin is editing a collection of HG Wells for Modern Library. Source: Locust

Most significant SF

The Lord of the Rings is the most significant SF and fantasy book published in the last fifty years, at least according to the editors of the US Science Fiction Book Club. *The Foundation Trilogy*, *Dune*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, and *A Wizard of Earthsea* make up the top five. *Neuromancer*, *Childhood's End*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, *The Mists of Avalon* and *Fahrenheit 451* complete the top ten. Check out the entire list at www.sfbcc.com.

Small Beer winner

We covered Small Beer Press in Matrix 159. And Carol Emshwiller's *The Mount*, published by Small Beer Press, won this year's Philip K Dick Award for US paperback original. Her collection *Report to the Men's Club and Other Stories* was also nominated. China Miéville's *The Scar* received a special citation. Source: Locust

Bram Stoker Awards

This year's Horror Writers Association Bram Stoker award winners were:

- Novels: *The Night Class* (Tom Piccirilli).
 First Novel: *The Lovely Bones* (Alice Sebold).
 Long Fictions: (tied) *El Dia De Los Muertos* (Brian A. Hopkins) and *My Work Is Not Yet Done* (Thomas Ligotti).
 Short Fictions: *The Misfit Child Grows Fat on Despair* (Tom Piccirilli - again).
 Fiction Collection: *One More for the Road* (Ray Bradbury).
 Anthology: *The Darker Side* (John Pelan editor).
 Nonfiction: *Ramsay Campbell, Probably* (Ramsay Campbell).
 Illustrated Narratives: *Nightside 1-4* (Robert Weinberg).
 Screenplay: *Fauly* (Brent Hanley).

Christopher Priest receives his award from John Clute



Work for Young Readers: *Conaline* (Neil Gaiman).

Poetry Collection: *The Gossamer Eye* (Mark McLaughlin, Rain Graves and David Niall Wilson).

Alternative Forms: *Imagination Box* - Multimedia CD (Steve and Melanie Tem).

Lifetime Achievement Award: Stephen King and J.N. Williamson
 Source: www.darkecho.com

Clarke and Baxter deliver

Arthur C Clarke and Stephen Baxter's *Time's Eye* has been delivered to Gollancz and Del Rey. It's the first in a series: "A Time Odyssey". Source: Locust

Lights List out

All authors take note: the latest edition of *Lights' List of Literary Magazines* contains the names, addresses, price, frequency, page count and a brief note of interests (e.g. "Traditional: poems to 30 lines, fiction to 2000 words, reviews, artwork" of over 1400 UK, US, Canadian, Australasian, European, African and Asian small press magazines publishing

Priest completes award double

Following his success in this year's BSFA Awards, Christopher Priest went on to complete a rare double when he also scooped the 2003 Arthur C. Clarke Award with his alternate history novel, *The Separation*.

It is a particular triumph because the novel had a difficult time with first publishers Simon and Shuster and was picked up by Gollancz after Priest expressed discontent at the lack of marketing effort on *The Separation's* behalf.

Following *The Separation's* critical acclaim, Gollancz have announced plans to republish Priest's backlist. Only *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell and *Take Back Plenty* by Colin Greenland have previously won both awards.

creative writing and artwork in English. The 18th annual edition contains some 70 pages and costs £3 inclusive of postage (US\$7 surface, US\$8 air). Make cheques or British postal orders payable to John Light. Photon Press, 37 The Meadows, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland, TD15 1NY, British Isles. e-mail: photon.press@virgin.net

BFI do SF TV at NFT

The NFT will screen some classic British SF this August in a joint celebration of John Wyndham's centenary, 50 years of Quatermass and 40 years of Dr Who. As well as two TV adaptations of Wyndham's work (*No Place Like Earth* and *Day of the Triffids*) there will be surviving material from *The Quatermass Experiment* and unfinished *Dr Who* story "Shada" plus the *Out of This World* version of Asimov's "Little Lost Robot."

The first programme, featuring *No Place Like Home*, will take place on 19th (at 6:20) and 21st of August (8:40) while the second, with *Day of the Triffids*, will be

shown on 27th August (6:20) and 30th of August (4:00). Both screenings will take place at NFT2.

Keep an eye on www.bfi.org.uk for more details.

DarkMarkets.com back

The DarkMarkets.com newsletter and dark fantasy markets is up-and-running again. To subscribe click to www.darkmarkets.com.

Martin's plug

On the basis that if Mark can do it, so can I, allow me to direct your attention to www.forteanbureau.com. This fine magazine has seen fit to publish my story "One Step Forward," it should be online as you read this. *The Fortean Bureau* also published my earlier story "A Banshee Sang on Tottenham Court Road Tube Station" in issue 2 published in September 2002 - also still online.

Please note that my address has changed. My new address can be found at the front of the magazine. Mail sent to the old address will continue to be forwarded for the moment.



Interaction announces

installment plan memberships

Interaction, the 63rd World Science Fiction

Convention, to be held in Glasgow in August 2005 has announced that those wishing attend the conference will be able to spread the cost of membership over a twelve month period.

Interaction is introducing an installment plan which will enable pay an initial fee and then pay the rest of the cost quarterly. Under the plan,

fans will buy a Supporting membership first (£30 or \$45) and then pay the fee for conversion to Attending membership in quarterly installments of £20 or \$30. The total cost of membership will be frozen at the time of signing up to the plan.

The Installment Plan is open to all new members of Interaction and to those who already hold either a Supporting membership or who Pre-Supported Interaction. Interaction will be raising its

membership rates from 1st June 2003 but those joining the Plan before this date will continue to benefit from the current rates despite not having to complete their payments until January 2004.

Further information on the installment plan's terms and conditions, and application forms to sign up for the deal, are available from the Interaction website at <http://www.interaction.worldfan.org.uk/installplan> or from the Interaction Agents around the world.

Mighty Marvel marches on

Marvel Comic's domination of cinema screens looks set to continue. X2 (reviewed on page 8) surpassed the box office takings of the first X-men movie within a fortnight of its release in America making a third film in the series a certainty and possibly launching a number of spin-off franchises. The Hulk's more cerebral approach to superheroics (see review page 9) means it may not do so well at the box office, but seems certain to garner critical acclaim.

With the Spider-man sequel already shooting and with both a Daredevil sequel and an Elektra spin-off in the works everyone wants a bit of Marvel at the moment, and some of the company's lesser properties are being eyed up for big screen appearances.

The movie that started this Marvel renaissance was Blade. The high-octane vampire movie has already had one sequel and will get another. David Goyer, who wrote the first two instalments in the series, and has scripted the third, will also direct the movie. Wesley Snipes returns as the vampire slaying hero.

The Punisher has appeared on screen before in a truly awful picture "starring" Dolph Lundgren. The new version will feature Thomas Jane (Dreamcatcher) as Frank Castle, a man whose family is gunned down by organised crime. John Travolta (Battlefield Earth) will take the role of the lead villain and the film will be directed by first timer Jonathon Hensleigh.

Talking about *The Punisher*, Marvel chief executive Avi Arad told MTV that the film draws heavily on Garth Ennis' acclaimed "Welcome Back Frank" storyline - "It's great characters. It's going to be obviously a hard movie, but there were also great scenes [in the comics] that were almost funny... We'd like to take the Punisher saga and turn it into a real interesting film about emotions, about punishment, and deal both with the hero and the villain even-handedly as people first and see what happens when the shoe is on the other foot."

Dreamworks have begun production work on *The Hands of Shang Chi* to be directed by Woo-ping Yuen whose CV includes fight direction on *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Matrix* trilogy. The script will be written Bruce McKenna, the writer behind the television mini-series *Band of Brothers*. At least part of the film will be shot in China. Shang Chi began life as Marvel's answer to the popularity of Bruce Lee movies in the 1970s and recently returned in an excellent mini-series published last year and now collected together as a graphic novel.

Three more of Marvel's minor league.



Ghost Rider, Iron Fist and Deathlok also seem likely to get onto the big screen. Nicholas Cage is still slated to star in much delayed *Ghost Rider* with Jon Vaught claiming to Sci-Fi Wire that he was in talks to play the villain. Mark Steven Johnson (*Daredevil*) has been confirmed as the director. The director of *Daddy Day-Care* and *Dr. Dolittle 2* Steve Carr will direct *Iron Fist*, though it is not clear whether Ray Park (*The Phantom Menace*) is still on board to star. Bond director Lee Tamahori (*Die Another Day*) is said to be Paramount's first choice to direct *Deathlok*, about a man who is made a test subject for research that turns him into a living computer, according to IGN Filmforce.

Other, bigger name, Marvel stars remain locked in development hell with *Iron Man*, *Namor: The Sub-Mariner* and *Werewolf by Night* all at various stages of development. It now appears unlikely that *Dr Strange* will ever be made following Marvel's falling out with Sony over *Spider-man* money.

Potentially the biggest untapped Marvel characters are *The Fantastic Four*, the film recently secured a director and a new script writer and now appears to have one foot on the path to production. Rumours persist that George Clooney has signed up to be Reed Richards but prospective director Peyton Reed (*Down With Love*) has denied that anything has been settled, pointing out that they don't even have a completed script for the film yet - *Twin Peaks* writer Mark Frost has recently been signed up to have a go. Clooney's previous diversion into superheroics, the career threatening *Batman* and Robin suggests the current king of Hollywood might want to think twice before stepping back into spandex, even if his new suit would have unstable molecules.

Code Red

Production on Michael Winterbottom's science fiction love story, *Code 46*, almost fell apart when Pathe pulled out of the financing of the project at the last moment. The project was rescued by BBC Films and the UK Film Council's Premiere Fund and principal photography went ahead as scheduled in January in locations all across the globe.

Robert Jones, head of the Premiere Fund said, "It is exciting to be supporting Michael on this feature, especially as it is a genre rarely seen in British cinema. Above all, the original quality of the script and talent involved demonstrates the level of creativity the UK has to offer."

G'day smegheads

Red Dwarf: The Movie has finally taken a decisive step towards production with preliminary design work now underway in Australia ahead of a late September shoot. "Australia's the sci-fi capital of the world right now," *Dwarf* creator Doug Naylor told the show's official website (www.reddwarf.co.uk), "It's the ideal place for *Red Dwarf*." The current script features Lister, Rimmer and the rest battling the Homo Sapienoids, a Borgish race who've wiped out humanity.

Zombie love story

Spaced alumni Simon Pegg and director Edgar Wright have started work on *Shaun of the Dead*, a romantic comedy with zombies. Described by Wright as "Richard Curtis shot through the head by George Romero," the story features a group of friends enduring a hellish night in their local pub. A recent "casting call" for volunteer zombies hints at the relatively low budget of this Working Title/Big Talk production - but the chance for the best zombie actor to have their head blown up on screen suggests that the spirit of *Spaced* lives on. Filming on *Shaun of the Dead* started in May.

Prestigious development

Chris Nolan (*Memento*, *Insonnia*) with direct *The Prestige*, an adaptation of Christopher Priest's novel about, among other things, the relationship between two stage illusionists.

Big blue World

The news that a big Hollywood movie, *World of Tomorrow*, starring Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow and Angelina Jolie had been written and would be directed by first-timer Kerry Conran caused considerable surprise when it was announced. More remarkable, however, is that Conran not only wrote the script, he also wrote the software that will make the film possible.

Currently in production in London, *World of Tomorrow* is being entirely shot against blue screen backgrounds and all the sets will be added digitally in post-production. Such techniques have, of course, been used before but never on such a scale. The result is that this independently financed film can attract big stars and realise ambitious script yet cost a relatively small (for Hollywood) \$50 million.

Conran spent eight years developing his software and ideas for the film in his own home and was snapped up by experienced producer Jon Avnet (*Inspector Gadget*) on the basis of a six minute promo reel.

Bruce above

Marlin McGrath finds God and he looks a lot like Jim Carrey. Shudder!

What you make of Bruce Almighty will very largely depend on whether or not you can cope with Jim Carrey in full gumming, slapstick mode.

I'll admit that I have a soft spot for the gormless American, having laughed at *Ace Ventura*, *The Mask* and *Dumb and Dumber*. His recent efforts have been poor but *The Truman Show* buys him a lot of leeway.

Bruce Almighty is not a return to the form of his earlier work but it's a step up from his most recent films.

Carrey plays Bruce Nolan an ambitious television reporter stuck doing the "...and finally" moments in Buffalo. Failing to get the promotion he wants leads to an onscreen breakdown, a row with his girlfriend and sets him off on the path to discover the true meaning of love, life and faith. He loses his job and the girl, meets God, gets endowed with the powers of the creator and becomes the god of Buffalo.

It doesn't sound promising, but the film never descends into the really messy sentimentalism of some romantic comedies.

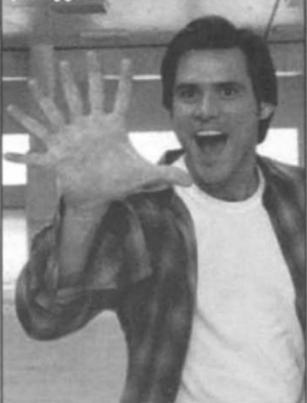
Three things save *Bruce Almighty* from itself. First, Jim Carrey constantly undercuts the schmaltz with a mean spirited aside or a dumb joke. Second, it features at least four good jokes, three more than a lot of recent "comedies." The best of the bunch is a scene in which Carrey divides a bowl of tomato soup like the biblical Red Sea - though the arse monkey got a guffaw as well. But

Bruce Almighty's real card up its sleeve is the presence of Morgan Freeman, playing God. Freeman lends the whole exercise far more weight than it deserves and his likeable screen persona contrasts nicely with the manic Carrey.

There are going to be moments when all right-thinking people cringe with embarrassment. Carrey's enthusiasm can still get the better of him and his performance descends into spasms and irritating twitches. And, of course, the delivery of the moral will have most people grinding their teeth. It also makes the mistake of referencing *It's a Wonderful Life*, a much better film with a similar theme - leading to comparisons that can only be damaging for the newer movie.

If you can't stand Jim Carrey, romantic comedies or obvious moralising, stay away from *Bruce Almighty*. I didn't laugh out loud often enough but I found it worth seeing if only to discover the name of God's ISP.

by finding gloves for one of these!



A fastball special

Ian Simpson reviews *X-Men 2*.



Snikkt! Bub.

The trailer for *The Matrix Reloaded* was quite literally jaw dropping. Pause for breath.

So, *X-Men 2* has a lot to live up to. The original was a moderately enjoyable sleeper hit. But sequels (as opposed to the current vogue for trilogies) often follow the law of diminishing returns. Then there's the matter of the Wachowski brothers' up-coming little flick.

But it's not often you can say this: "*X-Men 2* is better than the original." While the first one was a nervous toe-dipping in a vast ocean of possibilities, *X2* (as it were) is a high dive with double pike!

X2 is all about evolution and so the comparison naturally applies to Singer and his cast. This film has everything; action, suspense, romance (both teen and adult, neither straight forward), journeys of self-discovery (not only Wolverine's), wit and depth. The director has clearly demonstrated how he has evolved in his talent from the original. He is now comfortable in this action based Marvel universe.

The bible quoting Nightcrawler, played with joy by the excellent Alan Cumming, opens the show with a sequence that would happily sit alongside the best of those in *The Matrix*, without appearing like a cheap rip off, as he battles the President's security force in the Whitehouse. It is astounding. The same directorial skill can be witnessed in the other action sequences; the dogfight with the X-jet, Wolverine's battle with Lady Deathstrike and the attack on Professor X's school.

The plot is fine, as a vengeful William Stryker (a well chosen role

for Brian Cox) seeks to destroy mutants. Our heroes must join forces with Magneto, and the marvelously underhand Mystique to stop him. The repression of a minority, always powerfully emotive when portrayed in science fiction, is particularly relevant today.

Meanwhile, Wolverine continues his search for his origin. Unfortunately, Anna Paquin's Rogue has a less of a marquee role this time, but this leaves more room for focus on Jean Grey (Famke Janssen) as her powers develop towards a brave and unexpected climax. Halle's Berry's Storm becomes less two-dimensional, and the new teenaged characters (Pyro and Iceman) shine. Poor James Marsden receives another bum deal, but his 'absence' is handled well, and he does have pivotal moments to make up for lack of screen time.

It is testament to Singer's achievement that you become engrossed in all of the characters' stories as the plot moves along at a fair pace. It can't be easy to juggle such a large ensemble cast, and so Ian McKellan and Patrick Stewart get little screen time, but the film does not lack anything because of it.

No complaints with any of the actors, and Singer knits it all together well, and like all the current Marvel movies, he includes plenty of references to the comics and fan pleasing cameos (Jubilee and Colossus to name just two).

Unfortunately, and oddly inexplicably, what it all adds up to is a very good film, not a great one. It's an honour, however, to belong to a small club of sequels that are better than the original.

Hulk smashing

Martin McGrath has seen Ang Lee's *The Hulk* and discovers that it is possible to have an action movie with a brain and a film about emotions that doesn't descend into a tedious orgy of cod psycho-babble. Hulk good. Hulk smash puny humans.

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby are a tough act to follow. Lee had a knack of creating archetypal characters that were both immediately recognisable and yet were also real people with a depth that, as history has shown, can continue to be mined for forty or fifty years and still seem fresh and relevant. And no one ever imagined labs full of scientific equipment with quite the same style as Jack Kirby. He created worlds with a pencil.

But, Ang Lee's *The Hulk* does a very good job of getting to the essence of the character and of deepening the psychological drama that is inherent in the Hulk's comic book incarnation. And, in a movie blessed with a good script and some very strong performances, *The Hulk's* cinematography and production design stand out as high points.

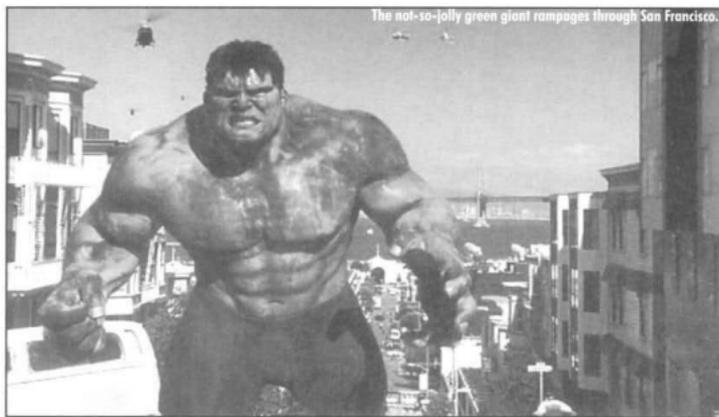
The Hulk won't please everyone. If you enter the cinema expecting an action-packed superhero movie like *X2* or *Daredevil*, *The Hulk* might just disappoint you. There is more to this movie than explosions and green giants. That's not to say that there isn't action or that there aren't moments when you'll grip the arms of your chair, but this film isn't about just about action and for long stretches there is no Hulk at all, just people trying to work out their problems.

Adult drama

That's what makes this such a good movie. Ang Lee has taken the comic book source material and seen in it the core of a truly adult drama. That is a tribute to the director, the producers and to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby who created these people forty years ago. In the same way that Sam Raimi had the guts to concentrate on the character of Peter Parker not just the heroics of Spider-Man, Ang Lee devotes himself not just to the power of the Hulk but the turmoil in Bruce Banner that creates the Hulk.

This is a film about people, not monsters. There is a concern with the relationship between fathers and their children and the tension that exists between the desire for closeness and the need for children to make space for themselves.

There is also an odd commentary on the relationship



The not-so-jolly green giant rampages through San Francisco.

between men and women. As we first meet the adult Bruce Banner, played by Eric Bana (*Chopper*) he has been dumped by his girlfriend Betty Ross – Jennifer Connelly (*Beautiful Mind*) – because she feels he is too emotionally detached and distant. She wants him to show more emotion, which (of course) he does, in green coloured spades. Terrified by his rage, she phones her father (an army general) for help. She spends the rest of the film trying to teach Bruce to be more emotionally detached and to control his anger.

Women, the film appears to say, might want men open up emotionally – but they can't cope with our true nature. And maybe, when Bruce reveals to Betty that he likes becoming the Hulk, that it is a dream of "rage, power and freedom," the film is saying that men can't cope with our nature either. We are too drawn to violence and destruction for our own good.

Triumph

Technically *The Hulk* is a triumph. The film is brilliantly edited. The use of split-screen, comic book style panels throughout – and especially in extended montage sequences – is effective. The cinematography is of the highest quality.

An enormous green giant is never going to look realistic striding through corridors and standing on a San Francisco street but I can

honestly say that, once the film got underway, I wasn't looking for the joys in the special effects. Within the confines of the film the monster works fine.

Fathers

The acting is of a good quality, in particular the performances of the actors playing the fathers. Sam Elliot (*The Big Lebowski*) is a near perfect on screen incarnation of General Thunderbolt Ross. Nick Nolte (*48 Hours*) is suitably obsessive and dangerous as David Banner, Bruce's mad-scientist father. Eric Bana's Bruce Banner doesn't particularly convince as the brain-trained scientist he's supposed to be but the actor does a good job of portraying the depth of emotional turmoil his character is experiencing without crossing the line to hamming it up.

However, the film isn't perfect. Not all the actions scenes work – in particular the conflict with the "hulk dogs" seems contrived. It feels as though someone thought that the second act didn't have enough action and patched this sequence in to pep things up. It doesn't work.

Indeed, while the action sequences are technically strong, I had the feeling throughout that neither the script nor the director were particularly engaged by them.

That said there are a few moments when the Hulk cuts loose and you can only gasp. This is

emphatically not Lou Ferigno (who appears briefly with Stan Lee) dyed green. The sense of power in the monster is breathtaking. It is hard to imagine how this film could have been made even just ten years ago.

Some diehard fans may complain at the liberties taken with comic book's origin of the Hulk, but it seems churlish. Ang Lee is faithful to the spirit of the Stan Lee story, including both the self-sacrificing element of Bruce Banner's actions and the Frankenstein/Mister Hyde theme.

Blockbuster

The Hulk is not a summer blockbuster in the traditional sense. It is a clever, thoughtful movie that happens to feature a giant, angry green guy throwing tanks over the horizon. It might not appeal to small children and it seems unlikely to sell many toy figures but, as with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Ang Lee has shown that action films don't have to be brainless and that films about emotions don't have to be boring. A special mention too for Danny Elfman's score, with interesting Arabic touches it is, I think, his best work yet.

And yes, Bruce Banner does tell someone not to make him angry because they won't like him when he's angry. And he does it in Spanish. All in all, *The Hulk* is highly recommended.

Matrix is one dimensional

Martin McGrath gets disappointed and bored by the overblown *The Matrix Reloaded*.

I have found *The Matrix Reloaded* an exceptionally difficult film to review. My reaction to it has ebbed back and forth. I am both furious at having been forced to sit through two hours of such pretentious nonsense and impressed that the Wachowski Brothers had the nerve to take such risks with their big budget action franchise.

Perhaps this ambivalence stems from the film's position as the second in a trilogy. We may not know the full significance of some of the material until we have seen the final chapter, *Matrix Revolutions*, in November.

Even allowing for this, however, I'm afraid *The Matrix Reloaded* is often a tedious film, full of pretentious speech-making and po-faced posing. It features dialogue so bad that it makes one long for George Lucas and the whole thing is terribly structured and badly paced so that long, long periods of dullness divide up the precious few exciting moments.

The film's greatest flaw, however, is that it takes itself too seriously. *The Matrix* may have included its share of cod philosophising but at least it was leavened with a healthy dose of humour. And the speechmaking was never allowed to get in the way of the action.

In the sequel, sadly, it appears the Wachowski Brothers wanted to write a piss-poor undergraduate essay on philosophy and threw in some action sequences for the sake of the studio executives and the geeky fans. Don't be conned, however, this is not a profound or insightful film.

The Merovingian (Lambert Wilson) waffles on for ages about the illusion of choice but the only remotely clever thing he says is that swearing in French is like wiping your arse with silk - by far the film's best

joke. Sadly the waffling goes on and the pointless jibbering of Councillor Hamann, The Oracle, Morpheus and The Architect all lack a joke even half as good as the Frenchman's. And if anyone can explain the point of devoting five minutes of screen time to a music video, send your answers on a postcard, please, to the usual address.

God knows its not as though I object to a film making an effort to engage the higher brain functions as well as appealing to gut reactions, but the Wachowski Brothers appear to have forgotten that they are working in a visual medium. Truly great filmmakers would be aware that the what appears on the screen can be as effective in delivering political, religious or philosophical points as the words that come out of the THX surround sound speakers.

While the special effects are stunning, this remains one-dimensional filmmaking. There is no sense in which the images on the screen connect with the words in the script. Not that the film doesn't look pretty, it is deliciously designed and, as with the prequel, technically flawless. And, once or twice - for example Neo's battle with the multiple Agent Smiths - *The Matrix Reloaded* proves that it still has the power to take your breath away by ramping up the action far beyond your expectations. Sadly, though, the images on the screen are simply eye-candy, adding nothing to stream of the words spewing forth from the actors.

The Matrix Reloaded is a frustrating, disappointing movie. Had this been the first in the series, I doubt whether a sequel would have seen the light of day. I hope there is time in the sixth months until the third installment for the Matrix to be resituated.



Neo in action, at last.

Fake Dick

Martin Lewis believes less would have been more for the lightweight Phillip K Dick adaptation *Impostor*.

Impostor was given only a desultory cinematic release in America. Over here it was shelved due to its poor quality and similarities with *Minority Report*, the big budget Dick adaptation that completely stole its thunder. After all Gary Sinise isn't Tom Cruise and Gary Felder isn't Steven Spielberg.

Like much of Dick's work *Impostor* is set in a quasi-fascist bureaucracy during a Cold War analogue conflict. Spence Oldham (Gary Sinise) is a weapons scientist working on a doomsday device that will spell defeat for the Centauris. Just before the project is completed he is arrested by Major Hathaway (Vincent D'Onofrio, complete with evil magician beard) who informs him that he is not in fact Spence Oldham but a Centauri assassination device, identical to Oldham in every respect except that it is primed to explode when coming into contact with a VIP. Needless to say, Oldham does not believe him and runs because, as John Anderson might say, everyone runs. To its credit it does have a recognisable version of Dick's ending, but it is too little to late.

This is a fundamental problem with the film: Dick's fifteen page story provides perhaps forty-five minutes worth of film. Miramax originally conceived *Impostor* as the middle section of a trilogy of short films. They loved the short version, so decided to expand it into a feature length movie. It was a foolish decision.

The quantity of filler makes the film incredibly dull. The actors are competent but have little to do. It is depressingly routine - there is no wit or sparkle, no good lines, no interesting set pieces, nothing. The direction hardly registers apart from a bit of shaky *NYPD Blue*-style camera work that was interesting ten or fifteen years ago. It is by far the worst of the PKD adaptations. Despite the fact that in terms of plot *Minority Report* is incoherent I would much prefer to re-watch that than *Impostor*.

However I can learn from others' mistakes and instead of continuing to lambaste the film I shall end my review here.



Talon-**ted** television

Mark Greener watches *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*, perhaps the Doctor's finest moment.

I know that it's not an especially pleasant thought: but get three or four *Dr Who* nuts together in the same room. Then try to get them to agree on the merits of any particular story. Trouble awaits. I think that "Trial of a Time Lord" is a neglected classic, for example. I've yet to find anyone that agrees. On the other hand, I find much of the Hartnell era irksome. I can watch it in only small doses.

However, most fans agree that the "Talons of Weng-Chiang" is one of the best – perhaps the best – *Dr Who* story. So it's a fitting DVD release in the 40th year since "An Unearthly Child" first materialised on TV.

The Doctor and Leela arrive in Victorian London. After being attacked by Chinamen, they are arrested for disturbing the peace. The Doctor becomes friends with pathologist Professor Lifesteal. Together they recognise that that the hairs taken

from a body dragged from the Thames could only come from a giant rat.

Meanwhile, the East End fears that Jack might be back: several young women are missing. But this time, the stage magician Li H'sen Chang is kidnapping young women for his master, Weng Chiang. H'sen Chang believes his master to be an ancient Chinese God. In fact, Chiang is Magnus Greel, a war criminal from the future. While Greel looks for his lost time capsule, now owned by Professor Lifesteal, he needs the women's



life-force to survive...

Two of "Talons of Weng-Chiang's" supporting characters – Lifesteal and theatre owner Henry Jago – are among the best loved in *Dr Who's* history. Both are wonderfully characterised and believable, staying just this side of cliché. And it has one of the

most genuinely spooky monsters: Mr Sin, a homunculus with a pig's brain that makes Chucky look like a toy. It's a real pity that Lifesteal, Jago and Mr Sin didn't make a return appearance. John Bennett's H'sen Chang is a compelling, inscrutable Fu Manchu-like villain, creating

a sense of menacing 'yellow peril' without being even faintly racist.

Despite the constrained TV budget, there is remarkably little to break the atmosphere developed carefully by the writer Robert Holmes. This is the London of that other Holmes and Jack the Ripper, all cobblestones, rolling fogs and dodgy East-End accents. Many six-episode *Dr Who* stories lose their way a bit in the fourth and fifth episodes. Not this time. "Talons of Weng-Chiang" remains engaging, compulsive viewing throughout.

Even the giant rat doesn't look too silly – with the exception of a single scene.

The dual disc set contains some interesting extras. But it's the story that stands out. You really can't fault "Talons of Weng-Chiang." It's about as close to perfection as you get.

It isn't just good *Dr Who*. It's not just good SF. It's simply good television.

Hunting hidden levels

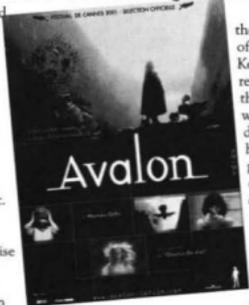
Martin Lewis reviews *Avalon*, a live feature from anime genius Mamoru Oshii.

Mamoru Oshii is the well-known Japanese director of anime films such as *Patlabor* (1990) and *Ghost In The Shell* (1995). *Avalon* marks his first venture into live action filmmaking and rather unusually it was shot in Poland, in Polish. While this was presumably done with an eye to costs and free loans of Polish Army hardware, Oshii makes interesting and subversive use of the East European setting.

Avalon is an illegal virtual reality game: the next stage of first person shoot 'em up, available in single player or multiplayer modes, and awarding D&D style experience points. Veteran player Ash (Malgorzata Foremniak) is one of the best. She earns her living from the game and *Avalon* is literally her life. When she is not playing the game, her life is depicted as a looping, pointless series of mundane events. This is further emphasised by Oshii's use of an

extremely muted colour palette; battle scenes are rendered in dreamy sepia, the real world in muddy browns and greens to the extent it is virtually monochromatic.

Ash seeks to escape her existential malaise by finding a hidden level in the game known as Special A or Class Real. At the same time, she becomes aware of another, better, player identified only by his character type, Bishop (Dariusz Biskupski). He is involved with this secret level as is her old comrade Murphy (Jerzy Godejko), one of the Unreturned (players who have become lost in the game).



This ties in with the literal meaning of *Avalon*. As Kenji Kawai's score reminds us, it is the mythical island where the souls of departed Arthurian heroes rest. The parallel legend of Odin and the crown of oblivion is also recounted and is of even more relevance to the story.

At times, it can seem like the

film is deliberately alienating the viewer with its wilfully oblique story, dreamlike pace and monosyllabic heroine. What saves it from this is the obvious intelligence that lies behind the picture and the fact that we never feel we have been cheated by its ambiguous nature, that everything is there for us if we can

only unravel it.

The film is larded with symbolism, recursive images appearing again and again: a pair of stone cherubs, Ash's dog, the ghost of a little girl. Food in particular is vividly fetishised, bursting from the screen in full colour (though pointedly the heroine is never seen to do more than nibble on a dog biscuit).

We are never sure whether we have even seen the real world. In the final section of the film it is implicitly suggested then explicitly denied that this is in fact reality. In fact, serious arguments can be made either way. In this way, as with all good puzzle pictures, *Avalon* demands immediate re-watching and it's about time you could say that an SF film.

• *Avalon* received a limited UK cinema release. This review is based on the Chinese DVD, available from www.moviefyme.com.

Lowry-ing standards



Brazil is a great movie and it deserves a great DVD. The UK release isn't it says **Martin McGrath**.

The release of *Brazil* on DVD in the UK has to be one of the most disappointing in the history of the medium.

It isn't that the film is any poorer today than it was in 1985 - it should go without saying that *Brazil* is Terry Gilliam's finest film and certainly belongs in a list of the top dozen science fiction movies of all time. The print is beautifully transferred and the director's cut included here is probably the definitive version of the film. There is nothing wrong with the film.

What is disappointing are the extras or, to be more precise, the absence of extras. All you get is a thin, thirty minute "documentary" - little more than some stitched together interviews - and the trailer.

Such treatment certainly can't be because of a lack of material. I own the American Criterion edition of *Brazil* on DVD. That version comes on three discs. It includes a director's commentary by Gilliam that is fascinating, production notes that deal with the way in which the script developed and changed,

a lengthy documentary entitled *The Battle of Brazil* on the struggles Gilliam had in getting his film released in America, an interview with Tom Stoppard that makes it clear what a complete pain Terry Gilliam must be to work with and, to top it all off, a print of the version of *Brazil* that the studio executives wanted to release. This "Love Conquers All" version also comes with a commentary by a film historian. That is the treatment a film of this quality deserves.

I know there is an argument that that extras are just fluff and that we really only buy DVDs for the film. And to an extent that is true.



But *Brazil* isn't just important because of the undoubted quality of the film itself, Gilliam's struggle to get the film that he made shown in cinemas reinforces the themes in *Brazil*.

Everyone should have to watch the "Love Conquers All" version of *Brazil* at least once (you won't want to watch it twice) if only to demonstrate the diametric opposition between art and profit.

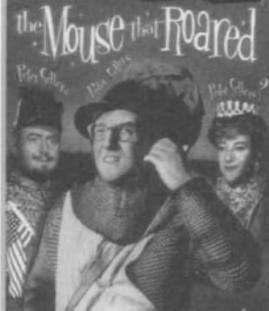
It beggars belief that, faced with a film of this quality, studio executives really wanted to release their version. Yet watching *The Battle of Brazil*, which includes interviews with the major players in

this drama, the studio executives are still trying to justify their actions by arguing that the film did not do well on its original release.

What also comes across in the Criterion version is the sheer bloody-mindedness of Terry Gilliam. He reveals that he could have avoided the whole struggle over *Brazil* if he'd agreed to release a version practically identical to the earlier European release - the studio, he casually reveals, would have been bound by their contract to put out the film he gave them. It is a miracle Gilliam ever completes a movie but, in this as in *Lost in La Mancha* and *The Hamster Factor*, it is entertaining watching him try.

If you absolutely have to have the film, then the UK version might suffice but, if you can, I recommend spending a little extra on the Criterion edition - it isn't even region one encoded so you don't need to tinker with your DVD to watch the American version.

Brazil is a great film. It deserves a great DVD release. Sadly the UK version doesn't deliver.



Martin McGrath on the Cold War satire about nuclear weapons that features Peter Sellers in multiple roles but that isn't directed by Stanley Kubrick, *The Mouse that Roared*.

Is that the one in which the smallest nation in the world takes on the United States in an unconventional war and wins? That's it.

And the conflict is caused by a trade dispute over a dark coloured liquid? Precisely.

Ridiculous. Quite.

Wait a minute, Peter Sellers plays multiple parts in a satire about the Cold War, that sounds just like *Dr Strangelove*. Don't say it.

What? *Dr Strangelove*? I'm warning you! Don't.

Why? Because *The Mouse that Roared* is decent enough little film but it doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as *Dr Strangelove*.

Like you just did? Damn.

So it is a sharp satire of American foreign policy in the Cold War era, then?

Well, Leonard Wibberley's books might have been, but this script, or perhaps the emphasis put on it by Peter Sellers, William Hartnell, Leo McKern and the rest of the predominantly British cast make it seem like a gentle poke in the ribs for down-at-heel, post-imperial Britain. The Duchy of Grand Fenwick is genteel but bankrupt.

Proto-typical Brit-bashing from the yanks then.

Hardly, but there is a sense that Europe with all its old-fashioned ways and ancient traditions is the subject of this satire. Reinforced by the way people keep turning to the camera and saying how much they love America and Americans.

In 1959 it probably wasn't wise to appear un-American. True.

So, is it any good?

Not bad. There are some nice moments, especially near the start. The mouse chasing the Columbia logo woman off her perch is funny. So is the discovery that everyone looks so alike (Sellers plays three parts) because "the founder was, in every way, the father of his country." Sellers' shifty Prime Minister announcing that: "There isn't a more profitable undertaking for any country that to declare war on the United States and to be defeated," raises a wry smile today.

And the DVD?

Dismal. The only extra is the trailer though the print of the film is clean enough. I know this isn't a classic but there must be something out there on Leonard Wibberley, his books were best sellers in the 1950s. *The Mouse that Roared* is still in print. And this film was a big enough hit for there to be a sequel - the Sellers-less *The Mouse on the Moon*.

Visitors return



Eighties TV event, *V*, will have another sequel. *V: The Second Generation* will be a three-hour television movie produced, written and edited by the creator of the original series, Kenneth Johnson. NBC, the channel that broadcast the original, are also backing the new project and promising more if it is a success.

Johnson has said that he hopes that the stars of the original show – Marc Singer, Robert Englund, Jane Badler and Faye Grant will return for the sequel set twenty years after the original programme.

It appears that Johnson will be wiping from continuity the “star child” story from the lame “The Final Battle” because he told *Variety* that the alien Visitors are firmly in place as masters of the Earth.

“The Alien force is deeply entrenched, has turned many Earth people into followers and is sweeping them towards a dangerous new conquest,” Johnson said. “The Resistance seems to be fighting a losing battle when suddenly Earth gains a powerful and mysterious new ally.”

The original series, an sf commentary on World War Two, was broadcast in the UK by ITV in 1984 to combat the BBC’s coverage of the Olympics. Shown every night for a week it became a major television event.

The sequel is expected to be broadcast in America in the Autumn 2004.

Lost in the Triangle

Sadly not a remake of the infamous British soap-opera set in the glamorous world of North Sea ferries, the Sci Fi Channel have given the greenlight to an eight hour mini-series called *Triangle*.

Brian Singer (*X-men*) and Dean Devlin (*Independence Day*) will create and produce the show about the Bermuda Triangle. The deal follows on from the channel’s huge success with the Stephen Spielberg-produced *Taken*, which scored record ratings for a cable show in the US.

Hurd instinct on Mars

Gale Anne Hurd, producer of *Aliens*, *Terminator* and *The Hulk*, will produce *Red Mars*, a six hour mini-series based on Kim Stanley Robinsons political thriller for The Sci Fi Channel. The show will be scripted by Gregory Widen (*Highlander*) and will be broadcast in America late in 2004.

Mekon beware

Dan Dare: Pilot of the *Future*, currently broad-

cast on Five, is now available on video and DVD. The computer animated show features a number of well-known voices including Charles Dance, Robbie Coltrane and Tim Curry. Sadly you also get to hear the theme tune by Elton John.

Fandersons dismayed

Gerry Anderson has said that he is “unlikely” to go back to working with puppets. Anderson, who is currently working on a 26 part *Captain Scarlet* series made using CGI, told *Radio 4’s Today* programme that the new technology was superior to his old ways of working.

“It is now possible to recreate the puppets exactly as they were in the original series but they will now behave just like human beings,” he said. “They will have expressions, the mouths operate in the same way as we speak, they will be able to run, hop, skip and jump – you know the whole thing will come to life.”

CGI *Captain Scarlet* should be ready in 2005.

Boldly go away

Martin McGrath on the latest *Star Trek* franchise.

If ever one needed proof of the wickedness of modern capitalism, look no further than the continued existence of *Enterprise*.

This show continues to get made despite abysmal artistic standards and terrible viewing figures simply because it comes from the *Star Trek* fold and that ensures that Paramount can sell it abroad with ease. That guarantees profits and while better shows fall by the wayside (*Firefly* and *Farscape* to name just two) this thing rumbles on.

Two seasons in and I can’t decide whom I hate more. Is it the Paramount and their producers Berman and Braga for making such an awful show? Or do I hate myself for continuing to watch the thing even though I know it is rubbish!

I have become increasingly convinced that *Enterprise* will be the death of the *Star Trek* franchise.

I am neither a *Trekker* nor one of those who feel the need to bash *Star Trek* just because it is successful. I have a soft spot for *The Federation – Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* were probably the two television programmes that introduced me to sf and, as a very small boy, their novelisations led me into written sf.

But enough is enough. *Enterprise* fails to deliver a single episode graced with anything like originality.

It may have seemed like a good idea at the time, but setting the series in *The Federation’s* past has proven the show’s Achilles heel. While there might be a momentary thrill for fans to see the “historic” moments (even I chuckled at the “invention” of tactical alert) the truth is that *Enterprise* is trapped in ever decreasing circles of repetition.

Those episodes that don’t feature Captain Archer (Scott Bakula) getting captured by aliens seem to feature the engineer, Tucker (Connor Trinneer) catching an alien illness or Vulcan science officer (and post Seven of Nine tight uniform wearing totty) T’Pol (Jolene Blalock) getting narked in the decontamination chamber.

A fundamental problem is that these actors, who form the triumvirate at the heart of *Enterprise*, don’t have any chemistry. Alone they are likeable enough, but they do not combine to make more than the sum of their parts.

The “arc” plotline of a “temporal war” fizzled out in the season two. The promised change of direction for season three has set Archer and his crew off on a gung-ho militaristic response to a 9-11 style terrorist attack. Could anything be further from Gene Roddenberry’s original vision! I fear things will get worse.

The truth seems to be that those behind *Enterprise* don’t seem able to come up with any genuinely new situations in the *Star Trek* universe. *The Original Series* and *The Next Generation* did exploration and first contact to death. *Deep Space Nine* worked over *The Federation* at war theme and *Voyager* has done the isolated explorers far from home. *Enterprise* appears to want to be all four at once and it has failed.

Is it possible to save *Enterprise*? Perhaps. But the truth is that many casual fans, like myself, no longer care. With two duff movies in a row and both *Voyager* and *Enterprise* having performed poorly, perhaps this really is time for *Star Trek* to boldly go away.



The crew of *Enterprise*, no chemistry.

Farewell Buffy, slayer

After seven seasons of battling evil, slaying demons and spouting some of the cleverest dialogue since *Star Trek*, Michelle Gellar is leaving *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the show is coming to an end. As Sky One's *Supernatural* (a spoiler-free – even for BBC viewers) look back at the Buffy phenomenon and explains why she'll

Buffy was about beautiful, wise-cracking people kicking arse on a regular basis. That, in itself, was enough to entertain me for an hour on a Thursday night after work. Dig a little deeper and you could find more going on, but one of the reasons I liked *Buffy* so much was that it always returned to this basic premise. Unlike, say, the *X-Files*' shuffle towards termination, *Buffy* never lost sight of the need to entertain its audience as well as challenge them.

However, arse-kicking alone doesn't make a successful and long running show. One could gripe about an occasional lack of originality in plot arcs (just how many times can the world nearly end?) but the dialogue in *Buffy* could not be bettered. This is often the worst element in sci-fi/fantasy (*Star Wars* - 'J'accuse!) so the quality in *Buffy* remained a delight.

Anchor

Sarah Michelle Gellar anchored the show as Buffy Summers and it is her decision to leave that, properly, has led to the ending of the series. Nonetheless, one of *Buffy*'s key strengths has been the ensemble cast. This meant that it could lose or downgrade major characters without losing momentum and create wholly unexpected (for those who eschew spoilers) plot twists. The introduction of new foes and other new characters each season allowed for different interactions and chemistry to develop. The acting was genuinely good – again not always a given within the realms of sci-fi/fantasy (*Andromeda* anybody? Thought not.). So good, in fact, that I can almost forgive the more than occasional Dick van Dyke-esque 'English' accent.

It is often said that successful drama series confine characters to a narrow situation and uses the tensions this creates. *Buffy* ignored this dictum. While the vampires stayed eternally young, the 'Scooby' gang grew up and moved on. The girl got the boy and lost the boy in seasons two and three, but rather than destroying the chemistry (we thirtysomethings remember the last series of *Moonlighting* only too well)

it has been the making of it.

I guess there are those who say that the series hasn't been the same since Angel left and that none of Buffy's loves since have matched up. I don't subscribe to this – despite his physical absence, Angel has remained a (literally) brooding presence in the series. The existence of Angel as a separate series reminds us that Buffy and Angel have parallel lives but an underlying connection. We are meant to contrast the men in Buffy's life with Angel and find them wanting, as she does.

Not perfect

Not that *Buffy* was perfect. Like *Star Trek* franchises, there can be a feeling of déjà-vu in plot lines – world ending, souls regained and lost, boy/girl friends not being what they seem *et cetera*. To

be fair, however, the *Buffy* team have had the grace to recognise and reference this through in-jokes. Indeed, one of the great joys of *Buffy* has been the way the writers poke fun at their audience and themselves with sci-fi in-jokes and reference. The otherwise very dark sixth season was lightened considerably by the rise of the three super-geeks, Andrew, Jonathon and Warren.

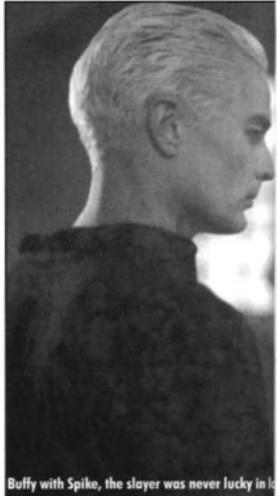
Nor have I been entirely convinced by Willow's transformation from geek to super powerful witch. I felt that Xander and Willow's

ordinariness contrasted well with Buffy's strength and supernatural abilities. These characters grounded Buffy and reminded her of her humanity. This scepticism is not a reflection on Alyson Hannigan's portrayal of the character, which has remained absorbing, nor of the key plot arcs which have developed.

My biggest disappointment with *Buffy* was the way in which Dracula was introduced and disappeared in just one below-par episode at the beginning of season five. I may be missing some deep irony intended by the writers/producers, but it seemed like a complete waste of a potentially intriguing foe.

One of the things that kept *Buffy* going as a series for so long was its use of powerful themes and contrasts. The exploration of good and evil is core to the programme – humans versus their inner and outer demons, the darkness at the heart of Sunnydale, what it means to have a soul or a gift or a curse.

Buffy started as a metaphor for the pain and difficulty of the teen years projected into fighting corporeal demons. The adults in the series ignored or seemed unaware of the Hellmouth (gateway to hell and source of



Buffy with Spike, the slayer was never lucky in life

Sunnydale's attraction to vampires and demons) while the teenagers had all the knowledge and acted to protect their elders. As the show moved on, this theme developed into an examination of what it meant for the central characters to get older and grow up – in contrast to the vampires who can never get old and thus will never move on.

Parents and children

The most striking theme in *Buffy* was that of parents and children. There was not one successful parent-child relationship in the series. Buffy's father left his wife and child(ren) and, when he appears, he lets Buffy down. In the first two seasons, Buffy is the 'parent' to Joyce who must be protected from the demons. Their relationship develops greater understanding, but is always uneven. Eventually Joyce dies and Buffy must then be mother to her own sister.

Buffy also acts as a protective mother figure to the Scooby gang and the people of Sunnydale.

Giles acts as a father and teacher - he has a brief fling with Joyce, takes over from her father in tak-



of vampires

on television (or film or stage for that matter) Sarah
broadcast the final episodes, **Maira McGrath** takes
miss her hour of arse-kicking every week.



ing Buffy to the Icecapades (!) but must leave to allow Buffy to grow up and face the future. Even in her relationship with Angel and attraction to Spike, Buffy could be seen as seeking a (much) older father figure. (Too Freudian? Perhaps.)

The parent-child relationships are played out with other characters: vampires sire other vampires and act as dysfunctional parents, Faith and the Mayor, Adam and Maggie Walsh (and Riley and Maggie Walsh), Xander's parents are never seen but constantly argue and the only episode in which we see Willow's mother she tries to kill her daughter. Even Spike's relationship with his mother becomes important in season seven.

Refreshing

Buffy was refreshing in that it featured a number of independent, interesting and strong female characters from its inception. Yes, they were all young, beautiful and thin, but Sarah Michelle Gellar's short skirts soon disappeared and for sci-fi/fantasy there was a pleasing lack of coarseness and over-enhanced cleavage. What we got were some

well-written, rounded characters who could hold the story in their own right – not just as foils for men. The success of the show has, I'm sure, paved the way for the TV networks to support other sci-fi series with leading female characters such as *Alias* and *Dark Angel* (though James Cameron can fairly argue that his films have never lacked strong female characters).

Feminists

It isn't that *Buffy* has bred a generation of militant feminists, nor that it has heralded a new dawn (no pun intended) for women in the media. Judging from sci-fi magazines the physical attractions of SMG, Alyson Hannigan, David Boreanaz, Nicholas Brendon and James Marsters have a greater appeal than the nuances of complex themes. At most, perhaps, it has helped make martial arts cool for girls.

In the end, I, and many others, loved *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* because the engaging characters, clever dialogue and smart plotting took me somewhere else for an hour a week for seven years. What higher praise can you give a TV show?

Buffy's best

When *Buffy* is good, it's very good. But, when it's great, well, very few television shows have been willing to take as many risks with the format or with fan's expectations. Here is a brief look back at some of the highlights.

Graduation Day parts 1 and 2 – season three

Perhaps still the best end-of-season finale as the snake of a mayor gets his comeuppance in true style and Buffy moves on from high school. Exciting, fun and touching. Like all the best *Buffy*.



Jonathon, Superstar

Superstar – season four

Take a background character and, literally, make him the star of the show for an episode. Of course it must all end in tears but the surprise of seeing Jonathon in the title credits, before the viewer has any idea of what is happening, is a great touch.



Communication breakdown in Hush

Hush – season four

Buffy is best known for the snappy dialogue, so Joss Whedon created an episode in which almost no one talks. A disturbing and inventive hour of television that still finds room for some truly funny jokes. Obviously the only episode of the show to be nominated for an Emmy for best writing.

The Body – season five

Buffy's mother is dead and a quiet, reflective, slow episode lets the shock sink in. Brilliantly directed – the camera moves in long slow movements, pausing on odd, distracting details – and poignant.

Once More With Feeling – season six

Perhaps the best example of a show willing to take risks with the audience. "Once More With Feeling" is a one-hour musical *Buffy*. It doesn't matter that not all the cast can sing or that not all the songs are great. Brave, entertaining and witty.

And the winner is...

Do you know your Hugo from your Nebula? What is a Phillip K Dick or a James White? **Maureen Kincaid Spellar** takes a look at the world of awards and reports from Eastercon on the wonders that accompany the presentation of the Tiptree Award for work in science fiction that explores and expands gender roles.

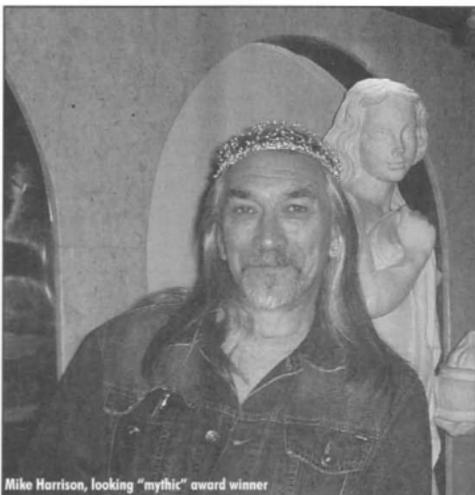
A quick glance along the shelves in the science fiction section of any bookshop will soon show you that there are a lot of awards given out each year for the 'best' novel or work of short fiction. Some are well-established awards, like the Hugos, the BSFA Awards, and the Arthur C. Clarke Award. Others are less well-known, in the UK at least. What's the Tiptree Award? Or the Philip K. Dick Award? Others, unfairly, receive less attention than they warrant, because they focus on short fiction rather than on novels – the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award – or because they're new: the James White Award is an example of a recently established award just beginning to attract notice. And some are just plain mysterious: how do the Nebulas work, exactly? And why is the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer (not to be confused with the John W. Campbell Memorial Award) included on the Hugo ballot when it's not a Hugo?

How does one make any sense of those little flashes on the covers of books? What do they mean?

There are really only two basic mechanisms for handing out an award; a book is chosen as the product of a popular vote or else the choice is made by a jury. There are odd variations and complications, but most awards fall into one of the two categories. The devil is always in the details: who votes, who chooses the jury, what are they looking for, and which kind of award is perceived to be better.

Popular vote

Popular-vote awards, such as the Hugos and the BSFA Awards, draw on the perceived expertise of a group that's assumed to be knowledgeable about the literature, be they the members of the World SF Convention or the British Science Fiction Association and members of the UK Eastercon. Each constituency naturally brings its own bias to the matter in hand. The Hugo shortlists, nominated by the members of the preceding and forthcoming Worldcons, tend to be biased towards North American writers while the BSFA Awards are, unsurprisingly, rather more UK-centric. Some argue that popular-vote awards have very little to do with the quality of the novels and short stories selected, everything to do with whether the voters happen to like this author or that one. This may or



Mike Harrison, looking "mythic" award winner

may not be true, but I don't think that's actually the point. These awards are about who and what people are reading and enjoying at a particular moment. This was shown very strikingly in 2001 when *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, a book many people argued wasn't even science fiction, won the Hugo for best novel, (incidentally giving the lie to that US bias I mentioned earlier). Given the fact that the Hugos are popular-vote awards, it is fitting that the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer is voted on alongside them. A writer is eligible to be nominated for the Campbell for two consecutive years, and the award has an excellent track record when it comes to highlighting new writers. The most recent winner was Jo Walton, a familiar face at many recent British conventions, now resident in Canada and published by Tor.

Juried

The best notion of the juried awards, in Britain, at least, is the Arthur C. Clarke Award. Founded in 1986, its judges are provided by the British Science Fiction Association, the Science Fiction Foundation, and more recently, the Science Museum. The jury's brief is simply to find the best of novel published for the first

time in the UK in the preceding year, but over the years the award has become characterised by the judges' willingness to look well beyond the heartland of the genre and to work with a very broad definition of science fiction, indeed to what some regard as the point of wilfulness. Having been a judge myself on several occasions, I'd prefer to think of it more as operating with an inclusive rather than exclusive definition of science fiction. An award that can one year select *Bold as Love* by Gwyneth Jones and choose *The Separation* by Christopher Priest seems to me to be fairly catholic in its taste.

Tiptree

The same might be said of the James Tiptree, Jr. Award, which, for the first time, held its award ceremony outside the US this year, at Season '03, the Eastercon. The short definition of the award's purpose is that it is 'an award for works of science fiction that explore and expand gender roles', but it's up to the judges each year to define exactly what every word of that statement is going to mean. Their definitions of 'science fiction' in particular are famously elastic, to the point where they make the Clarke Award's working definition seem almost conservative by comparison. The Tiptree judges,

aided by a huge group of supporters who recommend books they've come across, range far and wide in their reading, and their final choice is as likely to be a book that few people have heard of as it is to be a genre mainstream title. This is graphically illustrated by comparing last year's winner, Hiromi Goto's excellent *The Kappa Child*, published by a small Canadian press, with this year's winners, *Light* by M. John Harrison, from a mainstream genre publisher, and John Kessel's 'Stories for Men' from *Asimov's* (Oct/Nov. 2002).

The Tiptree is quirky in other ways, not the least being that it really does fund itself in part by bake sales and auctions – and I know this from personal baking experience, but also because it does not put out a shortlist ahead of the final announcement of the winner, but instead releases a list of other recommendations when the winner is announced. This is always well worth taking a look at (www.tiptree.org has the full set of shortlists).

Here I declare my own interest in the Tiptree Award as I shall be chairing the 2003 jury, and would like to encourage people to recommend novels and short fiction they think the jury should consider. You can do this through the website, or directly to me.

Paperback

And still the awards go on. The Philip K. Dick Award for the best original paperback publication each year is judged by a group of writers and academics, and seeks to honour those whose work, for whatever reason, first appears in paperback in the US rather than hardback. Surprising numbers of well-known SF writers do not always enjoy the luxury of hardback publication, and the PKD does a valuable job in drawing attention to their work in paperback. This year's winner was Carol Emshwiller for *The Mount*, but the shortlist was also fascinating, including the UK's Liz Williams with *Empire of Bones*.

And short fiction, still the quintessential sf form to my mind, is recognised not only among the Hugos and BSFA awards but with several specific awards. The Theodore Sturgeon Award, in particular, springs to mind, commemorating a master of the short form. Here, short stories are nominated by editors and reviewers in the field, with the final selection being

made by a small committee. The most recent award went to Andy Duncan, for 'The Chief Designer'. The James White Award, created in memory of Ireland's most successful writer, is for non-professional writers of sf short stories, and again is judged by writers and editors. The most recent winner, Julian West, received his award at Novacon 2002 for 'Vita Brevis Ars Longa'.

Confusing

The Nebulas are perhaps the most confusing awards for many people. Voted on, in four categories, by members of SWFA (Science Fiction Writers of America), it's hard to determine whether they're a popular vote or a peer review, and what about this jury which can add an extra title to the final ballot. Eligibility of works is also often obscure as authors can elect to put forward the mass-market paperback edition of a title, rather than the first hardback publication. And there are frequently dark mutterings of lobbying for particular titles and horse-trading behind the scenes. Of all the awards I've mentioned in this article, it is the one I find it most difficult to actually see the point of - to me it lacks the sense of impartiality of the juried awards, and smacks uncomfortably of clubbishness - but I suppose that disaffected commentators could make the same case for any of the other awards I've mentioned. I'd be lying if I said there weren't years when the Hugo shortlists have reduced me to tears of despair, because work from popular authors has won out over better-written but less familiar stories.

So, are awards any use, do they mean anything, does anyone care about them? The short answer is 'yes', 'yes' and 'yes'. Whatever the casual observer may think, most authors are genuinely thrilled to have some recognition of their work, be it through the popular acclamation of readers or the considered decision of the 'experts'. Many get a buzz just out of being shortlisted for an award. And for readers who want to explore science fiction in greater detail, looking at lists of award winners, and shortlisted titles, is still one of the best ways to get a feel for what's good in the genre at any given moment, what's interesting, which books you should be paying attention to. Myself, I am admittedly more interested in juried awards - I like to know what I ought to be reading - but one should never underestimate the importance of those annual snapshots of what people are actually reading.

If you're interested in finding out more about science fiction awards, www.clarkeaward.com includes a full list of Clarke Award shortlists/winners, but also has a section of links to other award websites and is probably as good a place as any to begin your exploration.

Photographs on this page courtesy of Tanya Brown.

Tiptree in tune

Maureen Kincaid Spellar reports on the big splash made by the Tiptree Award at Eastercon. Tiara anyone?

The preceding article was originally written for 30F, to mark the fact that for the 2002 James Tiptree, Jr. Award would be presented at Season, the 2003 Eastercon, the first time the ceremony had been held outside the UK. At the time it was written, no one, myself included, knew that there would be two winners, one British, one American, and that there would be an unprecedented two award ceremonies, the other to be held at Wiscon, over the late Spring bank holiday weekend. At the time, I was preoccupied with trying to explain to people what they might expect of a Tiptree Award ceremony, not least because it had been my idea to bring it to this country in the first place.

Apparently I wasn't being very helpful, I kept saying things like 'it's like an award ceremony you've ever seen before' in between wondering how I was going to explain the tiara... and the song written to honour the winner... and the chocolate... and Ellen Klages. Yes, how was I going to explain Ellen Klages?

Mostly, I was worried about how a British audience, more used to the reasonably formal proceedings of the BSFA and the Clarke Awards, would respond to the controlled anarchy that had characterised the Tiptree Award ceremony I'd seen in Madison two years previously, when Molly Gloss, author of *Wild Life*, stood on stage, complete with tiara (the year it first made its appearance, courtesy of the highly talented Elizabeth Mouton), tall like a fairy godmother looking only a wand, and smiled beatifically as chaos raged around her. (I hadn't mentioned this to the Season committee. I thought then, 'we've got to do this at an Eastercon sometime', and made the mistake of voicing this thought loud over breakfast' next day. 'Sure', said the Tiptree Motherboard. 'We've never been abroad. Let's do it!')

In which case, you'll appreciate my trepidation as I sat in the main hall of the Hanover Hotel, Hincley, watching the people gathering on stage, running through last-minute checklists in my mind. Paul Kincaid and I had compiled a brochure listing all previous winners and shortlisted works, and scattered copies of this on the seats. We had artwork - check, we had chocolate - check, we had singers - check, judges - check, Motherboard representatives - check, check - check. Most importantly, we

also had a winner - double check. It all started quite formally, with Pat Murphy and Ellen Klages explaining a little about the Tiptree Award, and introducing Matthew Austern, chair of the judges, who said a few words, then invited two of the judges, Joe Leslie Adams and Farah Mendelsohn, to introduce the two winning stories. Light by M. John Harrison and 'Stories for Men' by John Kessel, and talk a little about why these particular works had won. The audience was still quiet - a Motherboard member told me later they'd been quite worried at this point because the audience seemed so... well, so quiet! However, things began to change once Mike Harrison was summoned onto the stage to receive his award.

The crowning was spectacular. You may not be aware that Mike Harrison has long hair, which is usually worn in a pony tail. However, with his hair let down, the tiara perched on top of his head, he looked mythic, 'like a prince of old', someone said. 'A Man of Numerous', I thought. 'Mythic', though, was the word.

After that, the ceremony began to turn into something more akin to Crackjack. If you're old enough to remember the old game of 'Double or Drop', not a cabbage in sight, but as well as the tiara, there was the check (the cash prize is \$1000), and then the piece of artwork. This year it's an entirely covetable fabric box in the shape of a cake, made by Therrie Wood from San Francisco. When I saw it, my first response was 'wanno', and Mike Harrison is very fortunate that good sense prevailed. (Mike said afterwards it was the best physical award he'd ever received.) Just to make life even more exciting, the box was filled with chocolates, procured by Paul Kincaid, who had the good sense to buy far too many, so assorted Tiptree people road-tested their good qualities. Yum.

Mike read out a list of names, thanking various people involved, and then we reached the song. I'd spent part of the afternoon trying to find people who are known to sing, to replace the usual complement of Tiptree, many of whom were obviously not present, and dodging any attempt to get me up on stage. It was not my doing, but I noticed Dave Langford did not move fast enough. Chris and Penny Hill certainly didn't hide their antipathy, specific credentials so I enlisted their assistance. Meanwhile, assorted people had been lying

to fathom out the tune, which was caught up in transatlantic confusion until, I think, Colin Frie sorted everyone out. Pat Murphy had managed to get the words turned into a PowerPoint slide so the audience could join in.

So there they were: Mike Harrison, author of *Light*, stood on stage, complete with tiara, not quite as tall as Molly Gloss, and like a mythic prince rather than a fairy godmother, and smiled beatifically as chaos raged around him. Except it wasn't chaos, in fact, it was very well organised. You'd have sworn they'd rehearsed it. The Tiptree performed as to the manner born, the audience sang along, and demanded an encore (which has apparently never happened before), and sang along again, even louder. Ellen Klages, the 'complete beyond compare, brought proceedings hopefully to a close' and everyone headed for the bar or swarmed around the winner.

During the proceedings, I'd been watching the faces of committee members with great interest, as their smiles developed into grins.

'Why didn't you tell us it would be like this?' demanded one of them as we left the room.

'I didn't know what it would be like,' I said, 'though I told you it would be like nothing you'd ever seen.'

It's been less than a month since the ceremony, and the tiara meme is already firmly embedded in the British sf consciousness. At the Galanz spring party, Malcolm Edwards presented Mike Harrison with a tiara of his own (the Tiptree tiara is back in the States), and presented another to Christopher Priest, whose *The Separation* won the BSFA award for Best Novel. Paul Kincaid began this year's Clarke Award presentation by explaining that this was the award, which had no tiaras, dancing girls or chocolate, but that's okay, because Chris already has one. I keep hearing people say 'we really must do something like the Tiptree...' in which case, I've at least partly succeeded in my mission, which was to raise the profile of the Tiptree Award in the UK.

But remember, it's not just the award with the tiara. It's the award that honours science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender. That's the important bit. Then we crown it with a tiara, just for fun.

Fandom's stalwarts



Mark Plummer introduces the first in a regular column on fans and fandom. He begins with a look at the winners of some recent fannish awards and promises that he won't descend into a string of in-jokes for those with a too intimate knowledge of 1960s fanzines.

My name is Mark Plummer and I am a science fiction fan.

I like that line, although I freely admit I stole from Greg Pickersgill several years ago. Well, obviously he used his name rather than mine, but you get the idea. Anyway, the reason why I think it's appropriate here is to try to make it clear up front that this column is not some kind of fannish ghetto, a refuge for an in-group where we can safely make jokes that rely on a deep knowledge of 1960s Pete Weston fanzines and nobody ever dares mention that ghastly skiffy stuff. True, I won't be using this column to publish deep and insightful reviews of the new Jon Courtenay Grimwood novel – they belong elsewhere in the BSFA's publications and anyway, if I'm being honest, I can't write deep and insightful reviews – but I won't be filling it with obscure fannish references either. As the old fannish proverb has it, it is better to fill the shoes of Steve Green than to have Steve Green fill your shoes. (OK, some obscure fannish references. But not many.)

Steve, as I'm sure you'll remember, was the last person to provide a regular fannish column for *Matrix*. However, there's been no specific coverage for a while and Mark and Martin have been calling for somebody to step into the breach. Although it wasn't deliberate, their last appeal caught me at a vulnerable moment, full of fannish enthusiasm in the wake of Eastercon and Corflu, so here I am.

FAAn Awards

Corflu 20, this year held in Madison, Wisconsin, saw the distribution of the FAAn (Fanzine Activity Achievement) Awards for 2002. This year's winners were fanzine: *Chunga* (edited by Randy Byers, Andy Hooper, Carl Juarez); fan writer: Randy Byers; fan artist: Steve Stiles; letterhack (the Harry Warner Jr Memorial Award): Joseph Nicholas; new fanzine fan: John Teehan; Number 1 Fan Face (established by a tally of votes in all other categories): Randy Byers.

Randy had only recently arrived back in the US after attending this year's Eastercon as a TAFF delegate.

Seacon '03 in Hinckley had seen its own distribution of awards, including the BSFA Awards which I trust are covered elsewhere in *Matrix* (please, please, let this be true). However, I'd like to mention the Doc Weir Memorial Award which this year went to Bill Burns.

It might at first be thought that this award is some kind of recognition of longevity; Bill's attended every Eastercon for the last 39 years – a record so far as anybody can work out – which is all the more remarkable for the fact that he's lived in the United States for the last 31 of them. But the Award, which has been in fandom for slightly longer than Bill, is actually intended to recognise the unsung heroes of fandom. There are, of course, many people who do Stuff, who make fandom happen. Some are doing high profile and visible tasks like editing *Matrix*: a tough job for sure, but one that brings its rewards in the form of an endless stream of publishers' parties, champagne breakfasts, and club class intercontinental travel. (*Greener told me he was only going to Bognot*

- Martin ed.) But there are also the others who do the less visible jobs, the people who sit in the back room sticking mailing labels on envelopes so that convention progress reports actually go out to their members. And that's what the Doc Weir is all about.

Bill's an excellent and very appropriate winner, I think. He's been an active worker on conventions for years, but I suspect that this award is as much as anything for setting up and maintaining www.efanzines.com. This is a deceptively simple idea: a one-stop-shop website where you can download fanzines in PDF form, either to read online or print out. It's an ideal starting point for anybody who's unfamiliar with fanzine culture: it's relatively easy to dip in and find the things that appeal to you, and it also carries Ted White's monthly review column. Ted's an sf author and editor (*Amazing and Fantastic!*) but is also a fan – perhaps first and foremost – and his column is deliberately designed to be entry-level and tries not to make too many assumptions

about the readers' knowledge. Worth a look, and not just because a couple of the columns say nice things about me.

But there's a lot of stuff on this site. Check out the FAAn Award-winning *Chunga* (four issues, most recent added 15 May) or *Littlebrook* from Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Thompson. And, if you're one of these people who think that fanzines never say anything about sf, have a look at Earl Kemp's *et al*. Earl is one of the founders of the legendary *Advent*: Publishers of Chicago who produced classic critical works on sf by Damon Knight and James Blish (material which, incidentally, first appeared in fanzines) and *et al* has loads of material about classic sf and pulp publishing. Or, scrolling back further into the past, you'll find Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary* which is an ideal complement to *Vector*.

Stalwarts

One of the stalwarts of electronic fanzine publishing, and one of the few who actually designed his fanzines to be read on screen, was John Foyster who died on 5 April. John had been one of the pivotal figures in Australian science fiction and science fiction fandom since the 1950s. When speaking of him as a critic, it's virtually impossible to avoid using the word 'acerbic', but then again we're talking about the guy who assembled contributions from Samuel Delany, James Blish and Brian Aldiss and then only distributed twenty copies of the resulting fanzine – and won an award for it anyway. He was central in bringing the Worldcon to Australia in 1975 and again in 1985; he created the Nova Mob, Melbourne's sf discussion group, and then moved to Adelaide where he set up Critical Mass. A good bloke, as Corflu recognised this year when it made John the Past President of the Fan Writers of America. I should of course clarify that John got to be presidential over the year 1975 and I feel another obscure fannish reference coming on so as we've come back to Corflu – and have thus gone full circle – this seems like an appropriate place to stop.

Bill Burns with the Doc Weir Memorial Award.



Albedo one, decade one - an honorable draw

Albedo One, Ireland's only science fiction magazine, is ten years old. **Bob Neilson**, one of the founding members of the collective that run the magazine, takes a look back at the inspiration behind the magazine's creation and the things that have kept it going when other magazines have folded.

Albedo One is ten years old this year. How many magazines have come and gone in that time? Why is *Albedo One* still going? Why has it been worth it to us to grind out issues for the past decade? Why did we bother in the first place?

For our detractors, the latter was always a valid question. But ten years is a fine age for a magazine in this part of the world. And here I must include us in the UK scene, as unfortunately there's no-one to compare us to in Ireland. The last Irish SF magazine prior to *Albedo* was *FTL*, which was the official magazine of the Irish SF Association. When it went belly-up, it left a vacuum - not that we rushed to fill it at once.

Albedo One is run by an editorial collective. When we kicked off there was an ex-editor of *FTL*, John Kenny, an ex-managing editor (thankfully short lived), me, an ex-Chairman of the ISFA, Brendan Ryder and Dave Murphy. John, Dave and I were all writers and missed *FTL* as an outlet for our expression. Brendan claimed he loved administration and certainly seemed to get a real kick out of cracking his whip in the early days. I guess we did it because we all wanted to run our own magazine our own way.

The editorial in issue one stated our position clearly. We would publish the magazine for as long as it remained fun. There would be no deadlines as we had no wish to exert that sort of pressure upon ourselves - subs would be for four issues and you would see those issues when they came. We wanted to make it clear from the outset that this was a leisure activity for us and we intended enjoying it. Perhaps that is why we're still going after ten years. Sure, we've lost one of our number - Brendan bailed out of all SF-related activities in 2001 - but we had already welcomed Roelof Goudriaan (well-known editor of *Shards* of Babel and proprietor of



Babel Books) onto the team in 1998. Lately, we have acquired a couple of contributing editors in Nigel Quinlan and Frank Ludlow who read some submissions and write reviews. But most importantly, and despite the changes, we're a team, and surprisingly ego-free (or at least ego-lite) and we're still struggling to avoid pressure and deadlines.

We're also striving to improve with every issue and critics have said some very nice things about us over the years, as well as some bad. Personally, I have always felt it to be preferable if a story elicits strong reactions - either negative or positive - than for it to get a lukewarm response all round. At least a story that people hate has affected them enough to stir an emotion. In many ways that is better than a workmanlike piece that gets the job done, quietly and efficiently. I don't think we've ever published a story that nobody disliked and I doubt (hope) we ever will.

For a piece of fiction to be accepted it needs to be given a green light by two readers and as we are a collective

sometimes the first time a given editor reads a story is when it is published in the magazine - so there are times when not even the full team is behind a piece. And maybe that is part of our charm (assuming we've got some). We publish what we like, but there are four distinct personalities involved in the process so the content will always be varied. So don't complain about the fiction to us; we publish the best stuff we can get our mitts on. If you can do better, send it to us. That's what we're here for. We have published pros like Brian Stableford, Norman Spinrad, and Esther M. Freisner, but we have published far more debutants and future superstars.

Right now the magazine is progressing nicely and in the past year we launched Aeon Press, which has published a novel and a short story collection to professional standards. Over the years we have published several side projects including Chapbooks and a Graphic Novel. Our latest ventures are the culmination of the experience gained

over a decade in publishing and an indication of our continued determination to grow and publish quality fiction. We would love to produce a fully printed magazine with a full colour cover but, unlike the situation in the UK, our Arts Council does not feel that either science fiction or magazine publishing are worthy enough to be considered for support. Maybe there's a philanthropic SF nut out there who would like to become involved with *Albedo One*? A rich nut, naturally.

After ten years we still feel it is worth carrying on. In many ways we feel more relevant to the wider world of SF now than we did when we set out on our journey into the unknown. Professional publishing houses are no longer run by editors; rather they have been turned into marketing operations. One of our contributors had a career (more than ten novels) terminated by WH Smith who told the publisher his books would no longer be stocked. He was not a bestseller and solid mid-list performances were of no interest to them. Another of our contributors was informed by the commissioning editor at a major publishing house that his dark fantasy novel was one of the best that editor had ever read. However, it was not commercial and he knew the sales department would be unable to sell it. Naturally, the novel was rejected. Excellent writing is no longer enough. It is not even a priority. Commercialism is the first and only consideration. Possibly literary works escape this treatment but then when has SF ever enhanced a publisher's reputation?

So maybe there's a place in the scheme of things for *Albedo One* and other small press publishers like us. Maybe in the future this is where the quality SF and the experimental work in the genres will be done. If that is so and we can contribute, then we are ready. Do you think there's a chance there might be a few bob in it for us?



Stand-up comics

Mark Greener rounds up some of the highlights from the Mighty World of Marvel.

Wolverine 188-189

In this two-part story, Lester Brown, an internal affairs cop investigates the shooting of a drug dealer by a narcotics officer, Scott McLawry. It's not the first time that McLawry's been involved in dirty deals and he now seems to have kidnapped the only witnesses to the murder. Although he's called off the case, Brown resolves to get his man. Unfortunately, Brown's credibility is shot: he's a notorious alcoholic.

This is a gritty, tough drama – reminiscent of *Judgment Day*. Wolverine doesn't make an appearance until the last page of the first issue. But this builds the tension remarkably well. The characterisations are excellent and the plotting taut. Ultimately, Wolverine uses his mutant powers to bring justice and offer Brown the chance of redemption. Excellent.

Human Torch 1-2

And now for something completely different. The Human Torch is, of course, one of the Fantastic Four.

He's always been an arrogant jerk. But the Human Torch explores this Jackass side of his character in some detail. Johnny Storm comes over as unpleasant. However, the story is done with some zest and humour.

In the second issue, he begins to act as a hero rather than a jerk. You actually, by the end of the second book, begin to like this guy. This has some potential and could be one to watch for the future. Nowhere near as gritty as the other books, it offers some light relief.



Avengers 480-1

A strange fog envelops Mount Rushmore. And everyone caught in the fog dies from a virulent, flesh-eating bacterium. Not surprisingly, the US government evacuates the area. The Avengers arrive to help, but their new UN status as a world power means that the US is suspicious. Disobeying the government's orders, Captain America leads a team of Avengers into the cloud. They make a startling discovery. This isn't a terrorist attack. The bacteria is the product of US weapons research.

These are the first two issues in a four part miniseries: 'Red Zone'. It's a reflection of our times. The comic cleverly picks up on post 9-11 paranoia, bioterrorist threats and X-Files-type conspiracy theories.

But The Avengers' strength remains in the protagonists' characterisations. These are flawed heroes often with their own agenda and they squabble – incessantly. Iron Man and the Black Panther seem to actively hate each other. Meanwhile, The Vision struggles to come to terms with his ambiguous humanity. This is a timely story. And if it maintains the quality established in the first couple of books, could be one of this year's highlights.



Daredevil 46

This wins my award for best artwork of the month. Alex Maleev's work is stunning and complements a compelling story by Brian Bendis.

A newspaper unmasked Murdock as Daredevil, which he denies. Meanwhile, the Kingpin – recently usurped as New York's crime lord – is back with a taste for violent revenge. With all this happening, you wouldn't think there was time for love. But Murdock's relationship with Milla, who's also blind, is developing nicely.

This is only the first book in a five part series. But all the elements are in place for an excellent story. The murder of one of Kingpin's cronies is tough and unrelenting. The characterisations are believable and the tension is building nicely. I'll reserve final judgement until I've read more of the series. But at first sight this is shaping up nicely.



New X-Men 139

New X-Men's current plot line looks at the fall out of the psychic affair between Scott Summers and Emma Frost. Jean Grey-Summers is not too pleased. And hell hath no fury as an X-man scorned. Especially, when she has the power to turn into the Phoenix. Then the Beast finds Emma – literally – shattered. As you'd expect from Grant Morrison, this is a fast moving, hugely enjoyable story, with some real emotional feel to the characters and their predicament.

Ultra cool

Martin McGrath reads *The Ultimates* issues 8-10



Depending on your position, Marvel's Ultimate line is either the most creatively adventurous thing the company has done in decades or a desecration of their best loved characters.

What no one can deny is the quality of the creators Marvel has chosen for the Ultimate line. With Brian Michael Bendis writing *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Ultimate X-Men* they have one of the best writers currently putting pen to paper in the comics medium.

So Mark Millar's *The Ultimates*, a reworking of *The Avengers*, had a hard act to follow. But Millar was a perfect choice. He does this kind of widescreen team book perfectly. There is something cinematic in the way he paces his stories with a blockbuster action sequence or a huge reveal punctuating concise moments of character building. The art team of Hitch and Neary are the perfect complement. They work brilliantly together to deliver wonderfully detailed, sickly glossy panels.

The arc in these issues of *The Ultimates* deals with the discovery of an alien conspiracy to take over the world and preparations to strike at the alien's base. Each issue delivers big action moments but the quality of the writing shows best in the intimate details such as the revelation that hard-bitten soldier Hawkeye phones his children before each mission to say goodbye in case he doesn't return. Or Tony Stark's mixture of pride in the creation of his armour and fear of putting it on. Or, best of all, Captain America's visit to The Wasp – she's been beaten up by her husband and he's taken revenge, but things don't go the way he'd hoped.

This is quality writing, beautiful artwork and smart contemporary storytelling. It might not be *The Avengers* that some of us have known and loved but if you're not reading it, you're missing out.

Growing Up

Foundation
favourites
Number three: *Childhood Ends*
by Arthur C. Clarke

Andy Sawyer continues his trawl through the gems from the shelves of the Science Fiction Foundation Collection. This issue, he examines a very rare book - the limited edition *Childhood Ends*, a collection of school magazine writings by a young man who would grow up to be quite well known.

No, this is not a spelling mistake. In fact, it's a very rare book indeed, a limited-edition collection of the very earliest surviving writing by Arthur C. Clarke, culled from the pages of his school magazine *The Hutsh Magazine* by editor David Aronovitz, whose "Portentous Press" published the book in 1996. The author's brother, Fred, donated it to the Science Fiction Foundation.

Anyone's "school magazine" offerings can be a source of much embarrassment, as I discovered several years ago after reading a short story in which I obviously thought "contretemps" was a cool way of saying "counterpoint". Fortunately, there's nothing of that magnitude here.

The contents of *Childhood Ends* are a collection of skits, essays, and the occasional semi-fictional piece that flesh out the picture of Clarke given by his brother in his biographical essay "Foundation 41". They are obviously the work of a bright youth with an interest in matters scientific, and already that science-fictional imagination is at work. A series of spoof "letters from Old Boys" is set in increasingly bizarre and exaggerated climates, including "Mt Hiasell" which projects into the stratosphere and allows the author some speculation on space-like conditions and "British Malaria" where the description of intense heat is, as the author suggests, obviously based upon descriptions of other worlds in science fiction magazines.

Literary ambitions

Literary ambitions are already in place. In "The Fate of Fu-Manchu" that wily oriental evil genius comes up against Conan Doyle's Great Detective. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is transposed to New York, where tough-guy gangsters shoot it out.

There's also biographical interest. An affectionate description of Clarke himself is given by one of

his schoolmates in a piece in which "Professor Larke" is working on an epoch-making experiment through which "we shall either be transported into the future or onto the Fourth Dimension. You see, my notes got rather muddled..." According to the Professor, the School Organ "could be greatly improved by attaching one of my patent electro-static, super-magnetic, hyper-heterodynic, electronic Wattmotophones".

In another piece, (inspired by the film of Wells's *Things to Come*), a far-future version of the school is visited and "one of the speakers, Klakh 15, is very learned and appears to be instructing the other." Clarke appears again as "Clericus", the name with which many of his pieces are signed, in a mock-Shakespearean play entitled *The Mystic Potion* in which his learning and willingness to share it is sent up:

*When yonder star that's eastward from the pole -
I mean of course, N. B. G. one-two-seven*

*Of spectral type/or thereabouts
Has moved through forty six point seven degrees*

Our rites commence.

Eccentric professor

In contrast to this "eccentric professor" image, an unusually serious young Sir Arthur (or perhaps it was his co-writer, R. B. Canaver) laments in a Brendon

"a bright youth with an interest in matters scientific..."



© 1990 Charles Adams

House report that "We are sorry to say that the House is bottom in the Keeness Competition."

Fannish

This is enjoyable but fannish stuff, which we smile at because this schoolboy with scientific ambitions is now extremely famous for both science and writing while at the same time we wonder how many other local geniuses appearance in their school magazines was the height of their careers.

But later pieces show us a Clarke more recognisably the one we know. "Interviews with Notorieties no. 1", signed with Clarke's familiar fannish pseudonym "Ego" gives us a self-portrait of a Professor with a fascination for setting off space-rockets and a huge collection of "weird-looking magazines" with titles like *Fantastic* and *Science Stories*. This piece, Clarke reminisces, was written after he joined the British Interplanetary Society, as was "Into

Space", a more serious article signed "Arthur C. Clarke, Treasurer, British Interplanetary Society", which argues seriously that space travel is no idle fantasy but is simply a question of time, experience and money. Its beginning is recognisably the style of the Clarke we know, in which his argument is based upon a detailed description of the earth as seen from space, or at least from a balloon in the stratosphere taken in 1935. Both romantic and realistic, it's a sign that we can see the world in a different way. A similar article is entitled "The Greatest Adventure". For untold ages, Clarke says, we have looked up at the stars and speculated about them. Now we are beginning to know what they are. Is it possible that, at last, we could build upon our knowledge of space to travel in it?

Wildly optimistic

Although in some ways wildly optimistic (and certainly, as the Clarke of the present wryly observes, less based on cold fact than the Clarke of the past recognised) these are closer to the work of the mature writer. The bright fourteen-year old who contributed the early articles for a readership of schoolmates has become the visionary 19 year old writing to argue a case to a wider audience. *Childhood ends*.

Included with the book are a number of photographs. One is an often-reproduced image of the 17-year old Clarke, head bowed in concentration, at work on some electrical apparatus (perhaps to improve the school organ?) But there is also the frontispiece; a two-year-old Clarke with the most glorious head of curls I've seen since - well, since my own childhood photographs - staring at the side, away from the photographer. It's not, perhaps, fanciful to wonder whether he is considering the world before him, not sure what he will do next.

But he will think of something.

The Science Fiction Foundation Collection is the largest collection of English language science fiction and material about SF in Europe. Administered by the University of Liverpool, it is a resource for anyone with a research interest in SF. It has been developed thanks to the generosity of publishers, writers, and fans who have donated books, magazines, and money to buy them. For new purchases, and for the preservation and conservation of the existing collection, it depends entirely on such generosity. If you would like to support the collection in any way, contact Andy Sawyer at The Sydney Jones Library, University Of Liverpool, P.O. Box 123, Liverpool L69 3JA (asawyer@liv.ac.uk).

Science Fiction Foundation Collection: www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/SFFhome.html Science Fiction Foundation: <http://www.sf-foundation.org>

We are grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Board for funding the "Science Fiction Hub" project, which will develop and enhance our catalogue.

Bleak poetry and Gobshites

Roderick Gladwish travels from the periphery of science fiction to the very heart in this month's magazine reviews. Gobshite Quarterly might not be quite as good as its name but *Spectrum SF* is as strong as ever and *Strange Horizons* proves there are quality sources of fiction on the internet. And then there's the poetry.

Out to challenge from the start, Issue 1 of *Gobshite Quarterly* began with a rambling editorial rant on censorship. There was a clearer mission statement for contributors about honouring an author's

vision and intention by not editing for sexual or political content, or by political correctness in any form. It is not a SF magazine. That said, there is a strong SF flavour to the writing.

There is horror (domestic violence), alternate history (a supposed poem by John Lennon written from prison after murdering someone at the Cavern club) and a short story 'Time Stands Still' by Karel Capek. A pre-war SF writer, Capek coined the word 'robot' in 'Rossum's Universal Robots'.

Everything is printed in the author's first language and English making the magazine thick despite content, this also breaks up what little structure it had. Sprinkled with poems there are too many incomplete excerpts of fiction, social commentaries and even a page from *I, Papatuzzi* a Vertigo graphic novel. The story on violence against women was weakened by not telling it straight, one on the blood price of greed was confused whereas others stopped instead of concluding. *The Third Alternate* does it better. Much of the magazine content is repeated on its website (www.gobshitequarterly.com) so you can judge for yourself.

Whereas *Gobshite* is out on the periphery, *Spectrum SF* is mainstream. An A5 book, thicker than most of its competitors, it concentrates on fiction. Apart from the stories there is a brief editorial and the archive, described as 'a list of material of interest to SF readers'. It is a personal review of recently read books and magazines. That's where a dichotomy lies. The editor, Paul Fraser, is wary of the trend

to larger books, feeling the story, not bulk matters. However, in his magazine he supports larger short fiction and carries the serialised novels ('Concluding 'The Atrocity Archive' by Charles Stross in this issue). Perhaps it's not a dichotomy, giving tales enough space is what matters to him.

Spectrum SF carries familiar names such as Eric Brown, Stephen Baxter and Mary Soor Lee. Issue 8 was reviewed in *Matrix* 158 and

9 is up to the same high standard. —*Thursday's Child* from Eric Brown with aliens offering immortality and religious obsession was predictable. 'Imperial Army' by Adam Roberts was dry, but had a clever use for teenage male sex-drive. 'Faster, Higher, Stronger' by Chris Lawson, was an extrapolation of drugs in sport. Sarah Singlestone 'The White Devil' is a story that leads you in.

I was fortunate to have been given every issue and an beginning to see each *Spectrum SF* as a personally inspired anthology. Expect tales given enough room to tell a decent story.

Due to workload, the publishing schedule is getting sporadic with only two issues this year issue 10 being due out toward the middle of this year. After the demise of 3SF, I am happy to wait for his next issue. He can take as long as he likes as long as he manages to do it.

Web magazine *StrangeHorizons* is issued every Monday. So this review is roughly eight issues out of date already. In

each issue there is an editorial, a non-fiction article or interview and a short story. Added every month is an art gallery featuring one of their illustrators. *StrangeHorizons* uses its computer foundations to the full and is a growing SF database. Access to this archive is through a proper database search system with filtering so types of fiction, or non-fiction can be found, even by date. A personal dislike is that you can select stories containing 'people of color', perhaps I should be glad there isn't a filter to avoid ethnic groups.

This is a minor niggle because *StrangeHorizons* is a sound publication, read it on the website or download collections of tales as an ebook for free. They pay professional rates and get professional work. How do they make a profit? They don't. They are a registered charity.

Using the archive filter for the half-dozen most recent issues, I found the fiction was all solid material. 'Start with Color' by Bill Kte'pi, a haunting tale about if dreams come true that lingered in the mind. 'Snow Day' by Jennifer Pelland was a comic robot story, which was vaguely sinister. 'The Book of Jashar' by Benjamin

Rosenbaum was a biblical alternate history vampire story, sadly trying to use biblical styling silted it. 'A Chromepunk Anthology' by M. Bennardo was more experimental. 'Visit the Sins' by Cory Doctorow was originally published in *Asimov's* June 1999, although it now comes with an

interview. He was prophetic about the slow demise of the paper media and how he's used the Internet to

help sales of his first novel *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* by making it available on the web for free.

Articles are varied from 'Cosmic Rope Tricks: Space Tethers and Rotovators' to 'The 2002 Tiptree: An Inside Look at a Juried Award' by Mary Anne Mohanraj, *StrangeHorizons'* editor-in-chief.

Visit the site, use the archive to find what you like, if I catch you using the POC filter, you'll hear from me.

Coming out sporadically since 1986, *Dreams and Nightmares* is a dedicated genre poetry magazine. I am no poetry-lover, but having received issues 63 and 64 I feel duty bound to review them, you have been warned. A slim 20 page A5 pamphlet, it gives each verse clear space. There is a bleakness to the poems, loneliness of vampirism, death of civilisation or humanity, lots of tears, regret, blood, ruins and death, but that's where most genre poetry seems to go. Some tell stories or have twists without tales. Maybe I'm avoiding the wrong texts, but I have never seen any positive SF poems. What of the grandeur of galactic empires, the rush of pushing humanity close to the speed of light or the beauty of quantum foam. I wonder where are the joys of SF poetry?

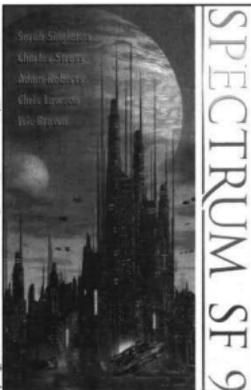
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Turning back the clock

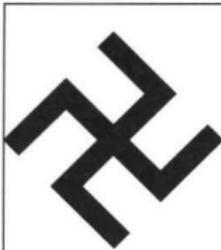
Just 200 years ago it was generally believed that our planet was only six thousand years old. James Hutton debunked that theory and, as **Stephen Baxter** discovered, asked some interesting questions about the very nature of time itself. Is time circular? And, if by being very, very late, we could actually be early, does that explain Virgin Trains' timetables?

In April 2003, I travelled with a party from the venerable British Interplanetary Society to Germany, heading for the V-2 development site at Peenemünde. In Berlin, I was very struck by the Commonwealth War Grave, which contains the remains of British and Allied air crew, shot down over the city. Many of them were terribly young and the simple messages from bereft mums and dads were moving.

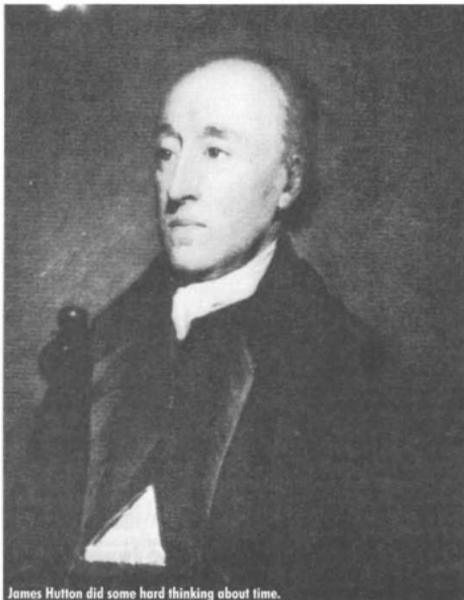
We are all shaped by the great events of the past, like the Second World War. But if our destiny is onwards and upwards, the most significant events of human history surely lie in our future. Is it possible that we could somehow be influenced by immense triumphs and disasters to come, as well as those past? Not if time is linear. Not if we are all working through a long cosmic narrative, from the Big Bang to an entropic end. But it ain't necessarily so.

Six thousand years

A few centuries ago, most educated westerners thought the world was just six thousand years old, only days older than humanity. But in 1788, Scottish amateur geologist James Hutton proved that the Earth is vastly older. I've long been intrigued by Hutton's story, enough to write a biography (*Revolutions in the Earth*, Weidenfield and Nicolson, June 2003). And I discovered that



The swastika, symbol of "eternal return" appropriated by Nazis



James Hutton did some hard thinking about time.

Hutton did some hard thinking about time.

The notion that time is linear is a legacy of Judaism and Christianity. In scripture, the history of the world was a simple story, from God's creation all the way to the end of things. But most ancient civilisations viewed the universe as eternal.

Cyclical

Time was cyclical, with events repeating over and again – like the beating of a heart, the waxing and waning of the Moon, the cycling of the seasons. The Babylonians developed a Great Year lasting 424,000 years based on periodicities of the planets. Perhaps, the Greek Stoics argued, events repeat exactly from one cycle to the next: the 'Eternal Return'.

Much later the Eternal Return

became an integral component of Nietzsche's philosophy, and was developed by the Nazis with appalling results. The concept could be used to justify racism - if there is no progress, the highest product of humanity is its best specimens in the present day. The Nazis' symbol is known by its old Sanskrit name – Swastika - but it was once a symbol for the Eternal Return.

Experience

Through his own experience of a bounteous Earth as a geologist and a farmer, James Hutton rejected scripture's story of a young but ruined world. Reaching back to old ideas of cycles he described the land rising and falling, rocks cycling like blood, a world renewing itself – a remarkably Gaia-like vision and the foundation of our modern geological story. Hutton didn't

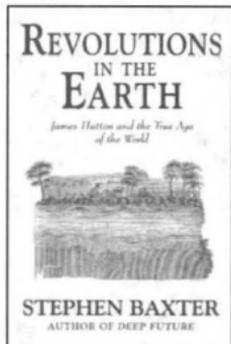
believe the world to be eternal, but it had to be much older than a few thousand years, and such were its powers of recovery that its great age had left no trace visible to Hutton's science. As Hutton declared, stirring, Earth shows 'no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end'.

But if time is linear after all, the future can't influence the past – can it?

One page

Some physicists now say our universe is just one page in a great book of possibilities, stacked up in higher dimensions. When the great book is closed, a Big Bang is generated, the pages wiped clean, a new history written. And that tremendous slamming can happen many times, history rebooted to start from scratch.

And if so - if time is circular after all - is it possible that influences could be passed around its great orbit? By reaching into the furthest future, would you at last touch the past?



Revolutions in the Earth by Stephen Baxter is published by Weidenfield and Nicolson (ISBN: 0297829750) and is available now priced £16.99

Out of Africa

Author Stephen Palmer would rather read about beggars and shopkeepers than princes and kings. His work has been described as "greenpunk." **Mark Greener** talked to him about his recent novel, *Muezzinland*, and about how his concern with Africa and development, his broad interest in environmental and political issues have influenced his writing.

Muezzinland, Stephen Palmer's new novel, is – Dave Roberts noted in the last *Vector* – a hybrid of myth and the hi-tech world of biochips, AI and morphic tools. There's nothing new in that mixture, of course. And there's nothing new in *Muezzinland*'s narrative structure – a journey.

Yet Palmer succeeds when many other similar attempts to fuse the mythic and the modern fail. All too often the hybridisation of myth and technology withers and dies as you read. But in *Muezzinland*, the hybrid thrives, creating a compelling and cohesive vision. And the narrative structure counterpoints the external and internal journeys during which the protagonists – two sisters – discover much about themselves, their relationships and their country. It's an unusual and successful combination.

Unusual

Muezzinland is unusual for another reason. It's set in Africa. But Palmer doesn't just use the Dark Continent as locale. And it's more than 'just' a metaphor for the psychological 'dark continents' that the two sisters need to conquer. The story seems to arise from Africa rather than being simply set against an exotic backdrop. Indeed, in an interview with *Matrix*, Stephen commented that the best SF has "that indefinable combination of strangeness, mystery and beauty that, for me, means *The Future*". And that combination encapsulates the feel of *Muezzinland*. So I asked Stephen where his interest in SF originated.

"I've always had an interest in the future," Stephen told *Matrix*. "I must have been about 9 or 10. Our teacher asked us to vote on whether we would like to live in the past, the present or the future. The vast majority of kids wanted to live in the past or stay in the present; only four out of thirty, me included, wanted to go into the future. I can still remember how surprised I was that only four people wanted to explore what lay ahead. Then in my teens I began reading SF and fantasy, and that passion has remained with me to this day."

However, Stephen also read more widely. "My parents had a friend in the village next to where we lived – which was in deepest, darkest Shropshire near the Welsh border – who used to work for Puffin. She and her husband owned a gigantic library of Penguin books, which I was allowed to use as a library. I'd cycle over to their house and they would recommend things for me to read. Thanks to them I discovered the ancient classics, PG Wodehouse, Mervyn Peake and lots of other great stuff."

Gene Wolfe

Stephen cites Gene Wolfe as a major influence – and you can spot this in his work. "For me, *The Book Of The New Sun* is the greatest SF novel ever – that combination of an intensely imagined landscape, the characters that populate it, and of course the story itself," he said. "Reading *TBOTNS* made me realise how important mystery is in a good book. I hate it when everything is explained. I like to believe that there are currents underneath the narrative of a novel that readers have to work out themselves – sometimes in a 'Eureka!' moment. For instance, there is a 40-year time loop lurking in my previous book *Memory Seed* that explains some of the more mysterious events. Placing mysteries like this gives a novel extra depth, by referring to things 'off camera'. There's a mystery in *Muezzinland* to do with the conception of the Princess Mnada."

Stephen also cites several other influences: Jack Vance – especially the *Dying Earth* and the *Star King* series – the *Lyonesse* series, early William Gibson, Robin Hobb, John Wyndham, Mervyn Peake, Gwyneth Jones, Robert Holdstock and Ursula Le Guin. And he believes that China Mieville's *Pedro Street Station* is the best novel of recent years. "I



“ I hate it when everything is explained.

I like to believe that there are currents underneath the narrative of a novel that readers have to work out themselves – sometimes in a 'Eureka!' moment.

”
Steven Palmer

read half-and-half fiction and non-fiction. Anybody who gets the same train as me might see me reading popular science (I did a degree in physics), anthropology, archaeology, or philosophy. I'm a sucker for anything on consciousness: Nicholas Humphrey especially."

Helliconia

In particular Stephen cites the *Helliconia* trilogy as epitomising the combination of factors that, to him, define the importance of the future in fiction. "There's something about those books that makes them stand

out a mile; *Helliconia* is certainly in the top five best SF novels ever written. Even today I can't work out what it is about the trilogy that is so mesmerising, but it is something to do with the beauty and majesty of the setting and the mystery of the wonderful life-forms (you have to admit that the phagors are superbly created aliens). And perhaps the strangeness of the characters. It's interesting that Aldiss was influenced by James Lovelock's *Gaia* theory, which at the time of writing was beginning to make waves in the scientific community. That theory exudes the same satisfying sense of coherence and wonder as do the *Helliconia* novels."

Fertile Ground

So how, from this fertile ground, did *Muezzinland* grow? "You may be surprised to hear that Princess Diana started the ball rolling," Stephen said. "Well, in terms of the characters anyway. I'd already decided that I wanted to write a novel set in Africa and I wanted it to be in the form of a journey of discovery. I was inspired (if that's the right word) by that period in Diana's life when she was anorexic and fighting the royal family. As a republican, I'm no fan of the repulsive Windsors, but what really stood out for me was how Diana was battling them and at the same time trying to control her own life and carve out some sort of role. It led to the concept of an autocratic mother – the Empress of Ghana – and her two daughters, Mnada and Nshalla, both of whom needed to create their own lives beyond stifling royal protocol. Once I had those characters, the plot almost unravelled by itself."

"I can't remember where the idea for the aether came from, but it was probably influenced by the cyberspace scenes in the first three William Gibson novels. I particularly like the idea of abstract entities being made real," Stephen adds. "In *Muezzinland*, symbols and concepts are reified into visual forms. Often they take cultural forms. I didn't want the aether to be a bland template; I wanted it to have a cultural identity. So some of the episodes in

the novel take the form of African tales – for example, the West African tale of Anansi the Spider, the Saharan tale of the epic Dausi song, and so on. Now that *Muezzinland* has been published, I find myself wondering what happens next. I don't want to give away the ending, but I can't help wondering how Mnada's life continues. Maybe one day I'll catch up with her." Certainly, Stephen's carefully crafted world could form the source of, I think, at least a trilogy.

Nevertheless, an African setting might be something of a double-edged sword for a writer. On the one hand, the cultural and geographical distance augments the sense and wonder. On the other, it might be difficult for people to relate to the narrative – although I admit I didn't have that problem. "I knew it was an unusual setting in SF, which to me seemed an advantage, but because the setting came first, then the main characters and then the plot, I was fairly sure that there was a solid emotional heart to the story that would carry it along," he told *Matrix*. "So all in all I felt the right thing to do. To me, the advantages of the setting outweighed the possibility of people finding it difficult. Besides, readers of SF and fantasy are routinely exposed to weird and wonderful environments; they won't be fazed by the African-ness of *Muezzinland*."

Contemporary issues

And like all the best SF, *Muezzinland* offers insights into contemporary issues. "I find it disappointing that media coverage of Africa is biased towards the negative. Africa seems to be a continent of famine, AIDS, dictators, war and genocide," Stephen comments. "Of course, those things are present, I wouldn't deny it, but I wish more effort was made to present the other side of Africa: the fabulous music, the rich and diverse culture, the positive way in which many Africans support themselves in the face of monumental European arrogance. Debt cancellation is crucial here. Offering aid and then taking away ten times as much in debt repayments is no way to proceed. The single most used

ful thing the West could do to help Africa is cancelling debt. As many commentators have pointed out, this is no pipe dream, it's economically viable. I think the main reason it doesn't happen is the arrogance and greed of Western companies and politicians. For this reason I decided that, in *Muezzinland*, the West should be a fallen part of the world, a place that has suffered economic collapse; a petty revenge, perhaps, but it makes the point."

Dangers

Muezzinland also raises the issue of cyberspace dangers. So does Stephen see cyberspace as a means to raise us to the next step of evolution? or is it just a tool?

"Well, evolution doesn't work by raising or dropping steps; not does it have a goal. I don't see the characteristics of the brain and the mind being altered by cyberspace at all," he says. "There's a whole sub-genre of SF in which aspects of personality can be 'downloaded', minds can 'travel' through virtual space, dreams

can be 'made public' and so on. I don't think any of that is going to happen; the nature of the brain, the mind and consciousness make it impossible. That's not to say that human culture, and, thus, human perceptions, aren't going to be changed by virtual realities. I think cyberspace acts, and will act, on human society, on human culture. Since we're all immersed in culture, and dead or mad outside of society, this is how we will be affected. And that's why, in *Muezzinland*, I wanted my version of cyberspace, the aether, to be culturally varied, and even active as an entity in its own right. I didn't want

it to be grids and rectangles, as in the film *Tron*. Cyberspace is a tool, nothing more. Computers are tools too, though to listen to some people you would think they were artificial minds in the making."

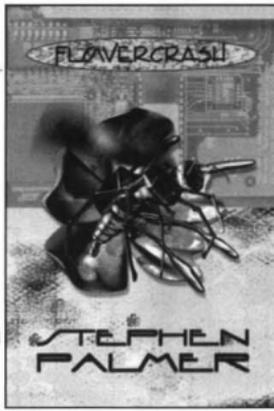
Stephen's next plans include a book he admits is "difficult to describe" – *Hallucinating* from Cosmos Books. And it brings in his other passion – music. His 'chilled out collective' Moch released five albums of ambient space psychedelia. His solo project, Blue Lily Commission, released some CD-R's fusing Middle Eastern and African music, with modern forms. *Hallucinating* emerged from this milieu.

Cross-pollinate

"Music and writing are always going to cross-pollinate for me. *Hallucinating* is a synthesis of music and SF that began as a short story on my website. Then Sean Wallace at Cosmos Books encouraged me to complete the novel that this early section came from. The original audience for *Hallucinating* was fans of British underground, alternative music, particularly those people who love the free festival spirit. Soon an SF element came in, followed by a new plot that enveloped the whole scenario. Basically, UFO-style aliens invade Earth through dance music.

The main characters have to respond, also by means of music," he says.

"It's nothing like any of my earlier books. One of my ideas was to offer real bands cameo appearances, and this expanded into a whole section featuring the bands that said yes – which was pretty much all of them. So there are



appearances by Ed Wynne of Ozric Tentacles, Steven Wilson of Porcupine Tree, Toby Marks of Banco De Gaia, Eat Static and many others. I was surprised, actually, by how positive these people were. Having said that, UFO-mania is a key feature of the festival underground, so I suspect the scenario intruded

them..."

In conclusion, Stephen notes that the deepest themes in his books are environmental. "As someone brought up in Wales and in rural Shropshire – someone who loves nature and all things leafy – I can't help but think green. My recent novel *Flowercrash* is infused with the same green themes as was my first book *Memory Seed*. In *Flowercrash*, though, the emphasis is on biodiversity and the more positive aspects of environmental concern. *Memory Seed* was very much a dystopia."

Injustice

"As somebody who views any form of injustice with horror, I'm also interested in what you might call oppression themes," he notes. "I'm happy to do what I can to help tear down patriarchal and racist culture, for instance. I always side with the underdog, the small fry, the forgotten. Nothing annoys me more than a lazy fantasy novel that focuses on kings and dukes questing for this, that and the other, when they're not busy fighting each other. I'd much rather read about the beggars and the shopkeepers. I also have an instinctive distrust of themes that are Big for the sake of being Big. I prefer to scale things down – it helps keep human beings in focus. I think the technophilic, hierarchical, capitalist, militaristic West could do with reminding that the point of society is human beings."

Muezzinland (ISBN 1587154501) is published under the US imprint Cosmos Books, which is owned by The Wildside Press. It can be ordered from any UK bookshop. His website is: www.stephenpalmer.co.uk

Art in the age of mechanical reproduction



Martin Sketchley interviews BSFA Award winning artist Dominic Harman about his influences and about the impact of technology on producing his artwork.

There's currently a lot of talk about a resurgence in British SF, with lots of new writers producing very high quality work. And it seems that this renaissance extends to other aspects of SF. Take up-and-coming Brighton-based artist Dominic Harman, for example – he's young, good-looking (my wife tells me), and very talented. Harman won the BSFA Award in 2001 with his image *Hideaway*, and repeated this achievement by winning the BSFA Award in 2003, presented to him at Seacon '03. It was there that I met him, and asked him about his art, and how the internet fits in to the scheme of things.

Apart from possibly being able to increase his fees, I wondered just what winning the BSFA Award meant to him. "The prestige and recognition are fantastic," Harman says. "I mean, I've been nominated every year since I started six years ago, and to win it twice and be runner up is great! I love attending Eastercon, and being nominated for an award makes the weekend that much more exciting. I'm pleased the BSFA members vote for me, and it means I must be doing something right! Thanks, folks!"

Internet presence

As far as an internet presence is concerned, one website's more than enough for most people to manage, but Harman seems to have more sites than you can shake a stick at – well, three anyway. What's going on there? I wondered; is he greedy, insecure, or what? "Eric Brown very kindly offered to showcase my work on his site some time back, after we met at a convention," says Harman. "It was a nice tie-in to his SF writing, and as I'd illustrated his work before, it worked really well. I had an increasing amount of hits on the site, although I think that was probably more due to Eric's popularity! Later, I thought it'd be good to have a larger site featuring the majority of my work and with my own domain name, but to keep the other site going as well. Anyone starting up in this business needs a website these days: it really helps."

To get his new site up and running, Harman hooked up with

Dominic Harman's 2003 BSFA Award winning art.



Paul Brazier as the web designer, and the two of them worked out what they wanted to achieve. "It's a good way of showing of Paul's talents," commented Harman, "and for me to exhibit my work

in a virtual gallery accessible from anywhere in the world! We've had a lot of positive reaction to it since it was launched. It needs updating now, though, with a more substantial biog for one thing – four



“As well as creativity, a clear understanding of colour sense, composition, and possessing the ability to draw in first place are all essential. The machine isn't the artist, after all.”

Dominic Harman

lines isn't really enough! I'd also like to add some photos of people I've met at conventions."

I asked Harman if the internet figured much in the course of producing his artwork. "The internet's an enormous help when looking for reference material. Its like a massive library, only it's instant. Well, more or less! You can also contact people if you have any questions – say you need to get a detail right in a historical piece – or you can buy stuff like rare and out of print CDs and films." And the medium has certainly played a key role in his bid for global domination. "I'm certain I wouldn't have as much work as I do from the US and Germany if I wasn't online. It's closed the gap, made it so much easier to communicate and work with other people."

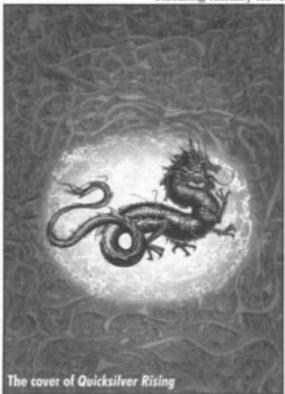
Style

When I asked about Harman's distinctive style, it turns out that like the majority of his contemporaries, be they writers or artists, SF and fantasy in all its forms has been important to him from very early age. "I was always drawing fantasy, horror and science fiction as a kid. An early influence was the work of Derek Riggs, who designed the album covers for British rock band Iron Maiden. I remember studying the details of his pictures and trying to work out the techniques he'd used." His influences also include more classical work, however. The work of painters such as Salvador Dali, Sassoferrato, Turner, Casper David Friedrich and Velazquez have been particularly important to his development. "When I studied in oils, I spent ages trying to work out how they achieved different effects. Then when I discovered the SF and fantasy work of Boris Vallejo, Frank Frazetta and The Brothers Hildebrandt, it was like a revelation, and it was then that I knew what I wanted as a career."

After finishing a Foundation college course in Worthing, Harman honed his skills over the course of the following few years, and eventually, having gained the confidence necessary to show his work around, made his first

professional sale to *Interzone* in July 1997, aged 23.

Since then, he hasn't looked back, and has recently produced several pieces for major publishing houses, such as the striking cover of Stan Nicholls' *Quicksilver Rising* [Voyager]. Initially he worked using oils, acrylics and traditional painting techniques, but now his work's mainly a composite of different media: pencil, charcoal, photography, oil and acrylics, as well as scanned images and textures, with designed elements in 3D software, plaster, resin and metalwork being used to create striking, evocative images. The final piece is then finished on a Mac. "For freehand drawing on a Mac I use a Wacom Pad (a flat pad you draw on with a pen). It's just like putting pen to paper," says Harman. "It's a fantastic device that's enabled me to draw and sketch on the machine, and gives me so much freedom to try different things and get various results." Harman has no



The cover of *Quicksilver Rising*

make the Mac such a useful tool. Then I can send it straight to the Art Director..."

I asked Harman about something I'd once overheard a respected fan say at a convention: that producing art electronically was easy, and they didn't see the point because anyone could do it. "The Mac's only a tool," Harman affirms. "I often see artwork created by people who have just bought a Mac or a PC and got hold of some 3D or photo manipulation software, and they think there's nothing else they need, that they can produce a masterpiece in five minutes." However, Harman says that while the Mac's a great piece of kit, there's more to it than that. "As well as creativity, a clear understanding of colour sense, composition, and possessing the ability to draw in first place are all essential. The machine isn't the artist, after all."

As well as images, written SF has always been important to Harman. Reading fantasy novels from an early

age, the work of Robert E. Howard was particularly important. "[Howard's] material had explosive action that was an immediate hook for a kid with a colourful imagination. Later on, I started to read classic SF writers such as John Wyndham and Paul Anderson,

and they were a great source of inspiration."

Indeed, one of the most striking things about Harman's portfolio is its diversity, covering all aspects of SF, fantasy and horror. While this is partly to do with the different artistic styles that have influenced him, a wide range of other influences also impact on his work.

Harman says that films – *Star Wars* and *The Dark Crystal*, *Hellraiser* and *Vanishing Point* to quote just a few examples – and even music – anything from classical to metal or film scores – have all been important. Harman also says that the sculptures of Henry Moore and Philip Jackson have played their part, as has the work of prosthetic effects artists such as Rick Baker, Rob Bottin and Steve Johnson. "I think almost anything that I react to strongly can be an influence on my artwork," he says, "and that can literally be anything."

When he's not creating images, Harman enjoys watching old SF and horror B-movies and can frequently be found poking about at car boot sales and antique shops. "They have so much character, and can be a great source of inspiration – honest!" He's also in the process of building up a visual reference

Hideaway, winner in 2001



library with photography and anything that catches his eye. Give him a jumble sale and an Instamatic and he's a happy man.

In terms of work in progress, Harman says he's currently producing covers for HarperCollins [Voyager], Macmillan Books and Analog. "I'm also working on more

cover designs for record companies, as well as a 3D sculpture," he says. "That's always been a passion, and helps with development of my 2D illustration."

Finally, I broached a possibly sensitive issue: someone calling himself John Meaney has been going around telling people he's Harman's dad; I asked whether there was any truth in this rumour and, perhaps more to the point, did his mom know... "For the life of me, I can't remember how this got started," laughs Harman. "It's been a running joke with John and myself for quite a while now, and a few people have questioned it before, which is funny. I'd be proud to have John as my dad, but there's already a long-suffering guy who has that job!"

Having cleared that up, I suggest Harman should count himself lucky that Meaney's not trying to force him to follow in the family tradition of doing the splits at SF conventions!

Son of a Meaney

Funnily enough, John Meaney has updated his website with a "brief bio" in the form of the "Official Meaney Bio: Nearly everything you always wanted to know". This is one of the longest brief bios you're every likely to come across. And there's no mention of him having a son who's an artist!

Ansible Archive

Since it first appeared in August 1979, Ansible has become the essential newsletter for the SF community. It's all on line somewhere. But Dave Langford recently issued the entire run on CD-ROM. You can even search the collected works.

The Ansible Archive CD also includes the TAFF, GUFF

Spinnerets

and FATW (Fans Across The World) newsletters. The latter complements Ansible's UK focused coverage. Finally, there's *Cloud Chamber* – a newsletter Dave's contributed over the years to various APAs.

Inevitably some of the content seems dated – the Con listings and so on. And some of it seems sad when you take it together: the amount of talented people who'll write no more, for example. But it's also a fantastic source of humour and wit. As Others See Us; Thog's Masterclass; and, of course,

the letters. Even if you get Ansible by e-mail or small mail it's still worth getting the CD. You forget how much good stuff Ansible published over the years.

The Ansible Archive CD could be an invaluable document for anyone wanting to write a history of British Fandom. Or a sociological tract for that matter. But it's more than that. It's fascinating: a new dimension on your PC. One you could lose yourself in this for hours. Highly recommended. Ansible Archive is available for £11.75 from Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. Make cheques payable to Dave Langford.

Additional Spinnerets material by Mark Greener.

URLs of relevance to this issue

<http://www.dominic-harman.com/>
<http://website.lineone.net/~iamw/ericbrown/harman.htm>
<http://www.dominic-harman.com/CDissite/frameset.htm>
<http://www.derekriggs.com/>
<http://www.sfsite.com/interzone/>
<http://johnmeaney.tripod.com/>
 Thanks to Dominic Harman, Artwork © Dominic Harman
 This Inning Band was written to the sound of PJ Harvey.
 Funniest thing I've heard this week: "In front of us we have some simulated buttocks."
 [Radio 4]

Changing Orbits

New Orbiter writing group co-ordinator, **Gillian Rooke** introduces herself and sets out her plans for change.

Greetings from your new Orbiter co-ordinator. I have just taken over the Orbiters writing groups from my friend Carol, with that burst of enthusiasm that we all have when we start... So here I am, calling BSFA members who write, to come into the orbits.

They are free for heavens sake! All it'll cost you is the postage (preferably first class) of one package every ten weeks - and any delusions of grandeur you might have.

I think you can get just as much help with your writing from an orbit as you can from expensive classes or any other sort of writers' group. I have been in many orbits for a long time and I have seen people whose work I thought (privately, of course) was hopeless, improve beyond all recognition within four or five orbits. Many published writers continue to orbit. So even they value the criticisms.

But as a New Broom, I don't want to sweep anything away. But I want two changes in mind. Firstly, Online Orbits. Now, I have no intention of suggesting that any regular orbit should go online. There are still big advantages to circulating hard copy. But if any orbiter or other BSFA member would like to try an online orbit, I am busy getting one running. Online orbits can include foreign members, members who have moved abroad, or those who move around a lot. Online orbits would 'circulate' faster than regular orbits, but the work sent can be in shorter chunks.

Which brings me to the second changes: Whole Book Reading. Even a fairly long short story can go round a regular orbit in one go, but you'd normally send a couple of

chapters (printed single space and preferably on both sides to spare the weight) from a novel. Even in a good regular orbit, ten weeks is a long time to go between readings and although the general wordsmithing and the business and effect of the scenes can be dealt with; pace, continuity, and plot handling can only be looked at properly in an uninterrupted full reading. So, I am looking for volunteers from the orbits to read books. Since the writer foots the cost of P&P both ways, readers must be conscientious about the crit.

I have also had queries for orbits for things like poems or plays or articles. I don't think there is any rule against circulating these in your orbit very occasionally, although warn people first. Again, if anyone wants a specialist orbit let me know, but be prepared for a long wait before one can be made up!

Finally, SF is really two categories, Science Fiction and Fantasy, and there are plenty of people who only like one of these. I think a lot of orbiters get discouraged by finding themselves in 'the wrong kind of orbit', and if this is the case please don't feel trapped. Change orbits.

And remember everyone that you are not restricted to one orbit. There is no extra charge for being in four or five! The only thing you have to consider is time. Would you be able to meet the deadlines if five luscious parcels dropped through your letterbox simultaneously? Of course you would. Go on. Give it a try.

Contact: G Rooke, Southview, Pilgrims Lane, Chilham, Kent CT4 8AB
E-mail: animarito@leasant.fsnet.co.uk



BSFA workshops for writers



by Simon Morden

I finally bit the bullet and decided it was time that I attended my first convention. I'd been to writers-only bun-fights before, where the usual deal was to drink vast quantities of ale, adjourn to the nearest curry house, then return to the hotel and drink yet more beer. You got to swap news about other writers, markets, and who's publishing what. You also got to hear lots of great, but unrepeatable, anecdotes - writers obviously being good at telling a story.

So, where to dip my toe in the pond? Eastercon? Maybe next year. For reasons that still aren't overly clear, I flew several thousand miles to Kansas City (which isn't in Kansas, but Missouri) and the World Horror Convention 2003.

Going to a con in the USA is, of course, not a proposition to be taken lightly. Firstly, the vast cost of it all is enough to make most people fall at the first hurdle. Return flights to the US don't come cheap. Then there's the cost of the hotel - a Hilton, no less - which even at discounted rates isn't a B&B in Scarborough. In fact, it's just B on the other side of the Atlantic. Food money, beer money, book money, a little for sundries, add the \$80 for the actual convention, and you're facing a hefty bill. Which is probably why I discovered that, for all the talk of World Horror, the only foreigners were six Brits and handful of Canadians.

Second problem is the sheer distance involved. Flight time from Newcastle to London and from Chicago to Kansas City is equivalent, roughly an hour. Heathrow to Chicago is a solid nine hours in the air, and it's hard work. Modern airlines try and take your mind off the fact that you're 10km up and flying over Greenland. But let's face it, if you don't like flying, you're never going to get there.

The third problem is more difficult to define, but comes under the rough heading of America and Americans. Even if you're steeped in US-made television and films, it can be a disconcerting experience to be on the same continent as three hundred million

American citizens especially while there's a war going on. Putting up with bizarreness of having to take your shoes off for a security check is okay - if a little paranoid. But it's something that UK customs don't do.

Lots of other little things remind you that this isn't home. The money is all the same size and the same colour (sorry, color). The beer is sufficiently weak that you can drink it all day and all night, and not get drunk. There are fries with absolutely everything. Tracking down a really good cup of tea is akin to Raiders of the Last Ark. And they hadn't heard of the Fast Show.

However, once I'd got over the jet lag, forgotten about the expense and adjusted to the quirks of a different culture, I found that it was great fun. Aside from the Dealers' Room, which carried enough books to make a grown man weep, there were panels, readings, and parties. I'd volunteered to do a panel about reviews, which I managed to successfully bluff my way through for an hour. The next day I was on another panel about 'What scares you?'. I'd been in the audience, but when three well-known authors and editors didn't turn up, the lone panellist asked for volunteers. We ended up with four Brits entertaining the crowd.

But what made the convention wasn't the organised activities. It was the spontaneous meetings that took place, the putting of faces to names, the sharing of ideas and thoughts, of sharp questions and wily answers, the camaraderie of people with a common interest coming together.

Talking with fans and writers who were genuinely and sincerely impressed that in these troubled times, someone had made the effort to visit them. Those people who after ten minutes conversation would say, "You know who you just have to meet?" and be right. On balance, definitely worth it, and I'd encourage you all to at least think about it too.

Awards update

Claire Brialey has taken over as administrator of the BSFA Awards. In her first column for *Matrix* she asks what do we think the awards are for and can we make them better? Got an opinion? Let her know.

The first thing I should do is extend my congratulations to the winners of the 2002 BSFA awards (see news) and thank everyone involved in making the awards a success. In particular, I want to thank my predecessor, Tanya Brown, for all her work as BSFA awards administrator and for her help in handing over the job to me. So, by now, you may have realised that what I really needed to do first was to say, 'Hello.'

I'm Claire Brialey and I am a science fiction fan. I have piles of books, fanzines and good intentions all over the house. I'm also a civil servant and being the awards administrator is less like my day job than most of you might think.

I've had some queries passed on about the awards, so this seems a good time to clarify a few things. Firstly, a reminder of how the whole system works. We have four awards at the moment: best novel; short fiction; artwork; and non-fiction. The awards are made by a (proportional) popular vote and are usually presented at the Eastercon. All BSFA members can vote, either in person at the convention or by post or email in advance. Attending members of the Eastercon can also vote. However, only BSFA members are entitled to nominate works for the short lists - and that's what I'm about to encourage you to do.

Eligibility for nominations in each of the awards categories is set out below. My contact details are on the inside front cover of the magazine; you can contact me by post or by email (towards@fichtre.com) but nominations need to be in writing. It will help if you include as much relevant information as you can for each nomination, including publication details. Don't worry if you can't track down everything; I'll check out the details, but if I can't confirm the eligibility of a particular nomination either I may have to rule it invalid.

The rules set out here (see *Ruling the roost*) are inevitably, a summary of a more extensive and potentially more bureaucratic definition of eligibility (I warned you I'm a civil servant). There are slight differences in some categories from eligibility criteria used in the past. But these are the criteria we're using for the 2003 awards. The summary below is intended to be clear and helpful; if it isn't in a particular case and you want to check before nominating, then please get in touch with me. Tempting as it may be to frustrate the workings of bureaucrats, please don't nominate something only to bring a test case on the basis of the simplistic definitions set out here!

I'd strongly encourage you all instead to nominate things because you think they're good, should be on the short list and should be brought to everyone's attention. Which brings me to nominations. If you see something on the list that you like too and want to nominate, please do so. If something isn't on the list that you think should be there, nominate that.

The final short lists will be determined on the basis of the number of nominations each work receives. You can nominate as many items as you like and you can nominate in any category. Tanya has passed on the nominations to date (and will continue to forward nominations that come in via the BSFA web site), but if for any reason your nomination isn't included in the list, or if you're not sure whether you've nominated something, get in touch.

The nomination deadline is 31 January 2004, the short lists will be released as soon as possible after that.

However, I don't just want your nominations. I'm interested in feedback about the awards and what you think they should be for. You may have noticed inconsistencies between the categories in terms of eligibility. We're aware of that

in 2003.

Best Non-Fiction: Open to any single piece of critical writing about science fiction or fantasy first published in 2003. This includes a review or an article in a magazine or journal (on paper or online), an essay included in an anthology or collection, or a book-length work.

There is a general rule that anything published by the BSFA itself is not eligible for the BSFA awards. However, work by members of the Council, committee, or Association generally, which is published elsewhere is eligible.

All works need to have been published at the time of nomination, not just to be due for publication later this year.

too. But rather than adopting changes this year we wanted to do find out what you think first.

What should be the principles underpinning the BSFA awards? There's one school of thought, for instance, that the BSFA awards should be about championing the best science fiction and fantasy that appears in Britain (or the UK, at any rate). Another approach would be to make the awards about works that are accessible to as many people as possible. And there's another theory that the BSFA awards should be about whatever works of science fiction BSFA members are reading and are interested in.

My personal concern is to ensure that the awards are credible: that they are awarded on the basis of a high turnout of well-informed voters expressing their opinions about strong short lists arising from a broad range of nominations by a large number of BSFA members. As the awards administrator I want to help to achieve all of those things.

But what do you think? If you have any views about the awards in general, about the eligibility criteria set out here, or about how to encourage more people to get involved in nominating and voting for the awards, I'd like to hear from you. Please let me know whether you'd be willing for all or part of your letter to appear in a future issue of *Matrix*, as if there's enough interest and a sufficient range of ideas it could be useful to bring the discussion into a wider forum.

That's all for this time. I look forward to hearing from you.

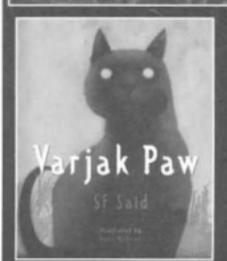
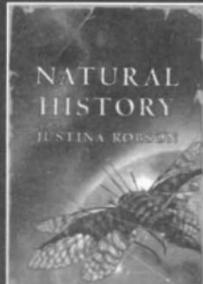
Nominees

Novel:

The Reliquary Ring, Cherith Baldry (Pan)
The Iron Chain, Steve Cockayne (Orbit)
Singing the Dogstar Blues, Alison Goodman (Collins Voyager)
Feltheen, Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthling)
Dark Heaven, Roger Levy (Gollancz)
Natural History, Justina Robson (Macmillan)
Varjak Paw, S F Said (David Fickling Books)

Artwork:

The covers of:
Varjak Paw by S F Said - Dave McKean
Cities, edited by Peter Crowther - Edward Miller
Polystom by Adam Roberts - Sonar
Natural History by Justina Robson - Steve Stone
Feltheen by Jon Courtenay Grimwood - The Whole Hog



Ruling the roost

This is a summary of the rules for nominations in each category.

Best Novel: Open to any novel-length work of science fiction or fantasy first published in the UK in 2003. Serialised novels are eligible provided that the publication dates of both the first and last part are in 2003.

Best Short Fiction: Open to any shorter work of science fiction or fantasy, up to and including novellas, first published in 2003 (in a magazine, in a book, or online).

Best Artwork: Open to any single image of science fiction or fantasy artwork that first appeared

Convenience stores

What should you take to a convention? Headache tablets? Check! Sonic screwdriver? Check! Tee-shirt featuring rock band who were big in the Seventies? Check! Forgotten something? No? Of course you have. What? Yourself. Take yourself to a convention.

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

27-8 Sep 03 Phoenix Con (P-CON)

Ashling Hotel, Parkgate St, Dublin 8. Registration: £20 (€30), €35 at door; €10 supp. Contact: Yellow Brick Road, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland. Website: www.slovobooks.com/phoenix

4 October 03 NewCon2

Roadmender, 1 Ladys Lane, Northampton, NN1 3AH 11.00 am to 6.00 pm NewCon2 will have a single-track programme featuring a talk by Stephen Baxter, interviews with Dominic Harman and Ben Jeapes, panels, etc. Membership: £8 (or £5 students & unwaged) in advance; £9 (or £5) on the door. Cheques made payable to "Northampton SF Writers Group" to Ian Pursey, 16 Albany Road, Northampton, NN1 5LZ. igpursey@ipursey.freereserve.co.uk. An art show featuring the work of Dominic Harman will be displayed in the Roadmender gallery for the month leading up to NewCon2.

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.

24-6 Oct 03 They Came And Shaved Us

Fairways Hotel, Dundalk, Co. Louth, Ireland. £35/€55 Sterling to 13a Bridge Rd, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 2QW; punts/Euro to 123 Carnlough Rd, Cabra West, Dublin 7, Ireland. Master of ceremonies: Robert Rankin. Website: www.theycameandshavedus.com

30 Oct - 2 Nov 03 World Fantasy Con.

29th WFC takes place in Washington DC, Oct 30 - Nov 2 2003. Guests of Honor - Brian Lumley, Jack Williamson (in absentia, probably), W Paul Ganley, Allen Koszowski; master of ceremonies Doug Winter. Reg \$120 till July 31, then \$150. World Fantasy Convention 2003, 7113 Wayne Drive, Annandale, VA 22003-1734, USA; info@worldfantasy2003.org www.worldfantasy2003.org

Take note:

Are you attending a convention?

- 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 confirming the details in advance.

Are you organising a convention?

- Please forward updates, corrections and any information on new events to: martimg@matrixworld.com



31 Oct - 2 Nov Armadacon 15

Cophorne Hotel, Plymouth. Contact 88 Knighton Rd, St Judes, Plymouth. Phone 0780 1492114.

7-9 Nov 03 Novacon 33

Quality Hotel, Walsall. £35 Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Guest of Honour: Jon Courtney Grimwood. Email: x15@zoom.co.uk Website: www.novacon.org.uk/2003/index.htm

21-23 November 2003 Fantasycon 2003

The British Fantasy Society presents FANTASYCON 2003 at the Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford (www.tillingtonhall.co.uk) Registration: £45 for BFS members and students, or £50 for non-members to 31st August 2003, £55 for BFS members and students, or £60 for non-members thereafter. Cheques to be made payable to Fantasycon. Guests of Honour Christopher Fowler and Catherine Fisher (more to be announced). Further details and booking forms can be obtained by sending an SAE to FantasyCon 2003, Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire CW9 8PQ or email fcon@britishfantasyociety.org.uk

20-23 August 04 Discworld Convention IV

To be held at the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leicestershire. Guests to be confirmed. Website: www.dwcon.org

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.

4-8 Aug 05 Interaction (63rd Worldcon)



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



Glasgow, UK. Guests of Honour: Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Shekley, 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

Books and magazines for sale

Recent donations and bequests mean that the Science Fiction Foundation has 100s of sf/fantasy books and magazines for sale. Income from this goes to support the work of the Foundation, including its sf library at Liverpool. For further details look at the website at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/~oswyer/sale.html> or contact Andy Sawyer, Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA, UK ([email oswyer@liv.ac.uk](mailto:oswyer@liv.ac.uk)).



Hermits keep out!

We admit it, putting Martin in charge of the meeting lists was a mistake. He's a hermit. What the hell does he know about going out and having a good time with friends who share a common interest. Thank god for **Del Cotter**, who has volunteered to take over this page. Now Martin can go back to building a nest from paper soaked in his own saliva. Take it away Del.

Basingstoke

Genesis SF Club
Meets Every four weeks on Thursday, starts 7:30pm
The Hop Leaf, Church Street, Basingstoke RG21 7QQ
Contact: Mark Sinclair genesis@rovision.demon.co.uk
Web: www.genesis-sf.org.uk

Belfast

Belfast Science Fiction Group
Meets Alternate Thursdays, starting at 8:00pm The Monico Bars, Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB
Contact: Eugene Docherty linman@technologist.com
Web: members.forthcity.co.uk/linman/monico.htm

Birmingham

Birmingham Science Fiction Group
Meets 2nd Friday, starting at 7:45pm The Old Joint Stock, Temple Row, Birmingham B2 5NY
Contact: Vernon Brown (no contact details known)
Web: bfsg.freereservers.com

Birmingham

The Black Lodge
Meets 2nd Tuesday, starting at 8:30pm The Hoghead, Newhall Street, Birmingham B3 3PU
Contact: Steve Green ghostwords@yahoo.co.uk

Cambridge

Cambridge SF Group
Meets 2nd Monday, starting at 7:00pm The Cambridge Blue, Gwydir Street, Cambridge CB1 2LG
Contact: Austin Benson austin@ocm.org

Colchester

Colchester SF/F/Horror Group
Meets 3rd Saturday, starting at 12:30pm The Playhouse pub, St. John's Street, Colchester CO2 7AA
Contact: Des Lewis (01255 812119)

Croydon

Croydon SF Group
Meets 2nd Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm The Dog and Bull, Surrey Street, Croydon CR0 1RG
Contact: Robert Newman (020 8686 6800)

Didcot

Meets 2nd Wednesday, starting at 7:30pm The Ladygrove, Cow Lane, Didcot OX11 7SZ
Contact: Nigel and Sabine Furlong furlong32@aol.com

Dublin

Dublin Sci-Fi Club
Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm Upstairs bar in Bowes Pub, Fleet Street, Dublin 2
Contact: Frank Darcy stclub@losttopark.com
Web: www.lostopark.com/stclub/

Edinburgh

FORTH
Meets Every Tuesday, starting at 9:00pm The Doric Tavern, Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DE
Contact: Jim Darroch (no contact details known)

Edinburgh

Meeting in K. Jackson's
Meets Every Thursday, starting at 8:30pm The Jackson's pub, Lady Lawson Street, Edinburgh EH3 9DW
Contact: Charlie Stross charlie@ontopope.org

Hull

Hull SF Group
Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull HU2 8DE
Contact: Mike Cross mike@mickoh.demon.co.uk
Web: www.mickoh.demon.co.uk/hullst.htm

Leicester

The Outlanders: The Leicester Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Group
Meets 1st Friday, starting at 8:00pm The Globe, Silver Street, Leicester LE1 5EU
Contact: Mark E. Cotterill theoutlanders@hotmail.com
Web: www.outlanders.fsnet.co.uk

London

London BSFA meeting
Meets 4th Wednesday, starting at 7:00pm The Rising Sun, Cloth Fair, Smithfield, City of London EC1A 9EJ
Contact: Paul Hood elaine-hood@ntworld.com
Web: www.bsfa.co.uk

London

East London fans
Meets Tuesday after the first Thursday, starting at 7:00pm The Walnut Tree, Leytonstone High Road, Leytonstone, London E11 1HH
Contact: Alex McLintock

London

The City Illiterates
Meets Every Friday, starting at 6:30pm The Red Lion, Kingly Street, off Regent Street, Westminster W1B 5FR

London

The Ton
Meets 1st Thursday, starts at 7:00pm The Barley Mow, Long Lane, Smithfield, City of London EC1A 9EJ
Contact: Ian Brown red42uk@yahoo.co.uk

Manchester

FONT
Meets 2nd and 4th Thursday, starting at 8:30pm The Crown and Anchor, Hilton Street, Manchester M1 2EE
When there are five Thursdays in the month, also meets 5th Thursday, starting at 8:30pm Fab Cafe, Portland Street, Manchester M1 4RJ
Contact: Arthur Chappell arthurchappell@clara.net
Web: www.arthurchappell.clara.net/sf.font.htm
www.ganval.demon.co.uk/fontzine/font.html

Norwich

Norwich Science Fiction Group
Meets every fortnight on Wednesday, starts 8:00pm (the web site says 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, this is apparently wrong) The Cellar Bar, Ribs of Beef, Fye Bridge, Norwich NR3 1HY
Contact: NSFG@twom.net
Web: www.nsfq.nw.net

Oxford

North Oxford
Meets Last Thursday of the month, starting at 7:00pm The Plough, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8BD
Contact: Steve Jeffery peverel@aol.com

Peterborough

Peterborough Science Fiction Club
Meets 1st Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm The Blue Bell Inn, St. Paul's Road, Dogsthorpe, Peterborough PE1 3RZ
Meets 3rd Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm Goodbarns Yard, St. John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD
Contact: Pete Secretary peter@btinternet.com
Web: www.psfclub.btinternet.org/psf.htm

Portsmouth

South Hants Science Fiction Group
Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday, starting at 7:00pm The Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth PO1 5BX
Contact: Mike Cheater mike.cheater@ntworld.com
Web: www.pompey.demon.co.uk/shsf.htm

Preston

Preston SF Group
Meets Every Tuesday, starting at 8:30pm The Grey Friar, Friargate, Preston PR1 2EE
Contact: Dave Young dby@hairyl.demon.co.uk
Web: www.hairyl.demon.co.uk/psfg/

Reading

Reading SF Group
Meets 3rd Monday, starting at 7:30pm The Corn Stores, Forbury Road, Reading RG1 1AX
Contact: Mark Young enquiry@rfsf.org.uk
Web: www.rfsf.org.uk

Sheffield

Meets Every Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm The Red Lion, Charles Street, Sheffield S1 2ND
Contact: Fran Dowd fdowd@shu.ac.uk

St. Albans

Polaris: The St. Albans SF Group
Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm The Plough, Tyrenhanger Green, St. Albans AL4 0RW
Contact: Martin Stewart polaris@pobox.com
Web: www.polaris.org

Del Cotter

Thanks to the recent increase in UBE, I will soon be ignoring email sent to del@bronto.demon.co.uk. Please send your email to del2@bronto.demon.co.uk instead.

Contributors

All material remains © 2003 individual contributors.

News: Andy Butler, Roderick Gladwish, Mark Greener and Martin McGrath.

Flicker, Goggle Boxes and Crossword: Martin McGrath

Martin had his turn last issue. So now it's my turn to fill this blank space... This matrix was put together to the sound of Morbid Angel's re-released *Bleed the Soul*, Ice-T's *Honor Show*, The Streets' *Original Prank Material*, Audiotoad's and The Damns' first albums, System of a Down's *Steal This Album*, Naglfar's *Shed*, Mardell's *Beyond the Valley of the Mardells*, Dimmu Borgir's *Spiritual Black Dimensions*, Rotting Christ's *Genesis and CoF's Damnation and a Day*.

Ultimate prizes

Modern classics from The House of Ideas.

To go with our review of *The Hulk* and *X2* in this issue, we've got a selection of graphic novels from Marvel's Ultimate range of comics to give away in this issue. *Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimate Spider-man*, and *The Ultimates* bring together some of the comic's industry's finest talents to revamp Marvel's best-loved characters.

Simply complete the crossword below, which features clues linked to the Marvel universe. When completed the shaded squares will spell out a phrase. Send that phrase with your name and address to Martin at: matrix.competition@ntlworld.com by noon on Friday 15 August 2003. First name selected by the random number generator, wins the lot.



Across

- 1 Bobby Drake, he cometh (6)
- 5 Lorna Dane, The North Star (7)
- 9 Eric Magnus Lehnsherr, electric generator (7)
- 10 Robot creation of 20 (6)
- 11 Norrin Radd, an elderly web browser? (6,6)
- 14 Richard Rider, this boy's a very bright star (4)
- 15 Walter Newell, fish with a surprising tail (8)
- 18 Peter Parker got to grips with his first career choice (8)
- 19 Muir ____, X-men's Scottish offshore retreat (4)
- 21 Hank Pym, an American wasp or Butlin's red coat competitor? (12)
- 24 The people's voice (3,3)
- 26 Tony Stark, tough guy (4,3)
- 27 Alison Blaire, she's a looker (7)
- 28 Inferior, like a cheap saucepan (6)

Down

- 2 Arrived (4)
- 3 Very famous people (9)
- 4 This point annoys (6)
- 5 X-Men's founder, enemy of 9 across (9,6)
- 6 ____ Ferrigno, Hulk actor (3)
- 7 Spinning blade (5)
- 8 Delays an American general (10)
- 12 Transport by sea (4)
- 13 A long way behind the winner (4,6)
- 16 The fellow that did it (6,3)
- 17 Crab limb (4)
- 20 Spread a little a long way (3,3)
- 22 Bolivian city (2,3)
- 23 Journey ____ Mystery, Marvel comic featuring Thor (4)
- 25 Mate (3)

Congratulations to the winner of last issue's crossword competition, MJ Simpson from Leicester. A copy of the 28 *Days Later* on DVD and the soundtrack CD is on the way. The answer we were looking for was: TRACY ISLAND

Crossword 161 Solution

Across: 1 Thunderbirds 9 UFO 10 Shrug 12 No air 13 Essay 14 Brotherly 15 Captain 18 Tempest 21 Reached 23 Scarlet 24 Mysterons 26 Error 28 Debug 29 Mayor 30 Win 31 Electrifying
Down: 2 Hoods 3 Nasty 4 Bigfoot 5 Ranch 6 Stairwell 7 Supercar 8 Troy 11 Robin 16 Plausible 17 Ash 19 Mea 20 Tutoring 22 Doormat 23 Sissy 24 Mode 25 Eagle 26 Early 27 Rowan

Timewasters

S	M	S	L	E	H	S	B	O	R
E	A	B	O	N	O	R	A	R	O
G	L	I	B	O	D	N	N	I	M
O	R	L	E	G	I	O	D	R	A
L	O	G	A	O	M	R	F	O	R
A	U	N	I	L	L	U	R	A	G
R	W	E	D	A	E	A	O	N	M
R	I	I	R	O	L	F	S	A	A
G	N	E	E	G	M	A	G	M	N
L	I	D	A	B	M	O	B	O	T

- | | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Aragon | Frodo | Mordor |
| Arwen | Gandalf | Ring |
| Balrog | Gimli | Sam Gamgee |
| Bilbo | Gollum | Sauron |
| Boromir | Gondor | Shelob |
| Elrond | Legolas | Smeagol |
| Faramir | Lorien | Tom Bombadil |

This list of names can each be found in the square reading up, down or across in either direction or diagonally or in any combination of these. Letters may be used more than once. The unused letters spell out another name from *Lord of the Rings*. Send this name within three weeks of receipt of this mailing to John Ollis, 13 Bernshaw Close, Snatchill, Corby, NN18 8EJ.

Competition 160

As there have been no entries for this so far, the first correct entry wins.



Cover

The artwork for this issue's cover is "Searching" by Dominic Harman.

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