

matrix

July/August 2004

No. 168

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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

The New Interzone

Andy Cox talks about the future of *Interzone* and TTA Press

Affinity rap

Martin Sketchley interviewed about his novels and the mysterious Nitram Nodrog

Smart Alex

Stephen Baxter on the many lives of Alexander the Great

I hate writers

Magazines deserve better from authors, says Frank Ludlow

STORM WARNING

Will *The Day After Tomorrow* blow you away? Geneva Melzack has the answer



Claire Weaver interviews Jon Courtenay Grimwood



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Welcome

What is *Matrix*? Two months ago we asked ourselves that question and started coming up with an answer: a harder task than you'd think, even after a weekend spent browsing stacks of back issues.

While a diverse range of people have worked on *Matrix*, it's always had the same goal: to be a bi-monthly magazine that brings news and media reviews to the widest possible subscription of fans. A magazine that reflects a deep affection for SF as a genre – whatever the medium – without sliding towards the darker side of fandom. Fresh opinions. A down-to-earth outlook. Something you'd want to read.

So with two new editors on the team, what happens to *Matrix* now? While there's no straightforward answer, we're beginning to understand the question. We've plenty of new ideas for *Matrix* but also an understanding of what's made it work for so long.

We'd like to thank all the people who've supported us so far, our regular contributors for their ongoing efforts; all those new people who've been in touch with ideas; and especially Martin McGrath for his undying efforts in producing the *Matrix* we all know and love. We look forward to working with you all.

Tom Hunter & Claire Weaver

matrix

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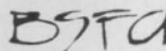
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the arthur c. clarke award

2004

Beneath the stars

Claire Weaver reports from this year's Arthur C Clarke Award Ceremony.

Whether it was the funding trials or the shock of finding itself homeless, you'd be forgiven for thinking that 2004 seemed like a bleak year for the Clarkes.

Would the UK's premier genre award slide away into the starry night?

Word of mouth spread, press releases were issued and an appeal for help went out at Novacon 03. The result was an outpouring of support and offers of aid that proved that not only was the Clarke award a vital feature of the SF world, it was also one of the best-loved.

With a new management committee – the Serendip Foundation – in place, and bolstered by cash donations from the Science Fiction Foundation and the BSFA, preparations were made to ensure the 2004 awards ceremony took place and to secure the Clarke's long-term future.

Roll on the presentation ceremony, and if you didn't know the background story already you'd never have figured it out from the smoothness of the event on show.

Emerging into the limelight, the newly re-housed Arthur C Clarke Award 2004 proved conclusively that it still packs a genre-busting punch. Scaling back from the lofty halls of the Science Museum to the more intimate setting of the English Heritage Lecture Theatre allowed the very real sense of affection (and good-natured contention) that the award inspires to shine through.

Speaking on behalf of the organising committee, Maureen Kincaid Speller said: "After several anxious months searching for a new venue we are delighted that the English Heritage Lecture Theatre has proved such a hit with attendees

this year, and are already looking forward to next year's ceremony."

A large and well-turned out audience, including nominees Stephen Baxter and Gwyneth Jones and past winners Christopher Priest, Paul McAuley and Pat Cadigan gathered under a ceiling lit by scenes of outer space. The talk was of the fantastic commitment shown by the organisers and, of course, a certain shortlist.

With as strong a line-up as the Clarkes have ever seen, intense discussion from the judging panel was guaranteed. The shortlist included *Colescent* by Stephen Baxter, *Darwint's Children* by Greg Bear, *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson, *Midnight Lamp* by Gwyneth Jones and *Maul* by Tricia Sullivan, but it was Neal Stephenson's alternate history *Quicksilver*, part one of his Baroque Cycle trilogy, that won.

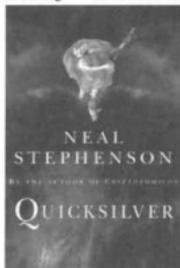
Stephenson was unable to attend

the ceremony itself, but was happy to tell *Matrix* how chuffed he was to receive the award:

"I couldn't be more pleased to be the recipient of this honour. It's most encouraging to receive such a vote of confidence from the likes of the BSFA and the SFF. And I'm especially delighted by the link between the Clarke Award and the Science Museum. It would have been nearly impossible to produce *Quicksilver* if I hadn't spent many hours in the place!"

His publishing director William Heinemann added: "We are immensely pleased that

Quicksilver has won this award and are confident that the other books in the Baroque Cycle will be received just as enthusiastically. This well respected and high profile award will attract a new legion of Neal Stephenson readers when the paperback of *Quicksilver* is



published in October this year."

Elaborating on the judges decision in his speech Paul Kincaid said: "After a two-and-a-half hour judging meeting, the consensus among the judges was that *Quicksilver* is a book that opens up a radical new approach to science fiction, and establishes a new perspective on how science fiction describes our world."

Despite short notice on the date, the event was still well attended and the response extremely favourable. Liz Williams praised the efforts of the organisers, "Kudos to Paul Kincaid and the team for making sure that this year's awards happened at all. The award ceremony itself was admirably swift and efficient, and congratulations to Neal Stephenson."

Past winner China Miéville enjoyed himself thoroughly: "I had a blast. Especially given what the Clarkes have been through in the last year, I'm mightily impressed with their organisation, professionalism and seriousness."

And Jon Courtenay Grimwood found the company and the wine to his taste. "I still get a kick out of being in a room full of writers whose work I'd happily buy in hardback and that the Clarke Award took place at all is a tribute to the sheer determination of Paul Kincaid. As for the winner... I admire Neal Stephenson enormously but whether *Quicksilver* is actually SF is another matter. That said, it was a great evening and I've still got the hangover to prove it."

It seems that despite its recent upheavals the Clarke Award still retains that vital quality to impress, and remains a crucial voice in the British SF industry and beyond.

Neal Stephenson's editor Ravi Mirchandani (right) accepts the award on his behalf from Paul Kincaid (left) and Christopher Priest (centre).



NEWSBITS

Clarke judges announced

Mark Greener, recent *Matrix* editor and long-time *Vector* reviewer, is to represent the BSFA as an Arthur C. Clarke judge, alongside Carol-Ann Kerry Green (BSFA), Mark Bould, (SF Foundation), Justina Robson (SF Foundation) and Dave Palmer (Science Museum). See www.clarkeaward.com.

Bradbury flaming mad

Author Ray Bradbury has ripped into filmmaker Michael Moore for using the title *Fahrenheit 9/11* for his new Bush-bashing movie, an obvious takeoff on the 84-year-old's SF classic *Fahrenheit 451*. Bradbury insists it has nothing to do with Moore's politics – he simply thinks Moore's an "asshole." (Source – www.thedodotheuniverse.ca and www.worldnetdaily.com).

Garratt award announced

A new award is to be created as a memorial to writer Peter T. Garratt. The exact nature of the award is to be decided but organisers hope to acknowledge published writers whose work slips between the categories of other genre awards.

The award is being administered by Peter's girlfriend Helen M. Rees and Deirdre Counihan.

Deirdre said, "We have had a very good response in terms of donations so far, for which Helen and I would like to express our sincere thanks. Plans are also advancing for an anthology of Peter's work. If anyone has anything written by Peter, it would be great if they could contact me."

To contact the award organisers write to Deirdre Counihan, 42 Hamilton Road, Brighton BN1 5DL. Please make donations to the award fund payable to the 'Peter T. Garratt Memorial Fund.'

NewCon seeks new members

Ian Watson, Stephen Baxter, Steve Cockayne & Ben Jeapes signing for fans at NewCon 2



The Northampton SF Writers Group, organisers of NewCon, have opened their doors to new members in the Northampton area. The group meets once a month to workshop members' writing under the erudite eye of author-in-residence Ian Watson, and until recently has run to full capacity.

The group was established in 2002 and went on to run NewCon One, a half-day convention in April 2003 with Colin Greenland. In October 2003 they hosted NewCon Two, a one-day con with Stephen Baxter, Ben Jeapes and Dominic Harman. Both were a great success and drew fans from both Northamptonshire and across the UK.

NewCon Three, originally scheduled for October 2004 with author guests Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Liz Williams, has been moved to 2005 due to funding and venue issues (where have we

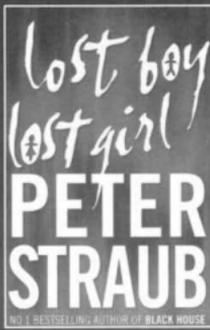
heard that before?). The group's host venue of Northampton's Roadmender withdrew its invaluable support of both the cons and the writing group, leaving the NSFSG homeless and NewCon an unlikely event as new funding and partners were sought.

Ian and the group have now secured a location for the regular meetings, held on the third Wednesday of every month, and the organisation of NewCon Three is back on track for 2005. Jon Courtenay Grimwood is confirmed as an author guest of honour for the new date.

The group saw an unfortunate dip in numbers over the last twelve months as some members moved away from the area. Several places are currently available. For information on how to join the group, contact Susan on Susan5@olbion.to.uk. To hear more about NewCon Three, contact Neil Bond on neilbond250@hotmail.com.

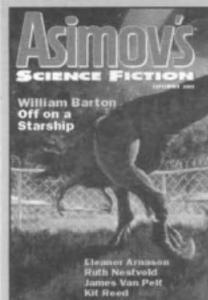
Stoker Award winners

The Horror Writers Association announced the winner of the Bram Stoker Award for Superior Achievement on 5 June. Winners included *Lost Boy*, *Lost Girl* by Peter Straub for best novel, *The Rising* by Brian Keene as best first novel and *Borderlands 5* edited by Elizabeth & Thomas Monteleone for best anthology. Other category winners included Don Coscarelli who won best screenplay for *Bubba Ho-Tep* (see review in issue 167) and *The Sandman: Endless Nights* by Neil Gaiman for illustrated narrative. Anne Rice and Martin H. Greenberg were both awarded lifetime achievement awards.



Sturgeon Award Finalists

The finalists for this year's Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award have been announced. This juried award recognises the best short science fiction of the year. The winner will be announced in Lawrence, Kansas, at the Campbell Conference to be held in Lawrence, Kansas, July 8-11, 2004.



Shortlist

- "Bernardo's House", James Patrick Kelly (*Asimov's* Jun 2003)
- "Dead Worlds", Jack Skillingstead (*Asimov's* Jun 2003)
- "Dry Bones", William Sanders (*Asimov's* May 2003)
- "The Empire of Ice Cream", Jeffrey Ford (*Sci Fiction* 02.26.03)
- "The Empress of Mars", Kage Baker (*Asimov's* Jul 2003)
- "The Fluted Girl", Paolo Bacigalupi (*F&SF* Jun 2003)
- "It's All True", John Kessel (*Sci Fiction* 11.05.03)
- "Looking Through Lace", Ruth Nestvold (*Asimov's* Sep 2003)
- "Off on a Starship", William Barton (*Asimov's* Sep 2003)
- "Only Partly Here", Lucius Shepard (*Asimov's* Mar 2003)
- "The Tale of the Golden Eagle", David D. Levine (*F&SF* Jun 2003)
- "The Tangled Strings of Marionettes", Adam-Troy Castro (*F&SF* Jul 2003)

Marvel expands

Marvel Comics has announced plans to create their first prose imprint – Marvel Press – with books based upon characters from the Marvel Universe.

Ruwan Jayatilake, formerly of Scholastic, has been hired to oversee an aggressive launch list with three prose novels scheduled for 2004, and a minimum of twelve for 2005. The first three announced projects are a follow-up to last year's juvenile novel *Mary Jane*, an adult Wolverine novel and a "middle grade" Spider-man tale.

"The primary purpose of Marvel Publishing is to create great fiction. Marvel Press is an exciting new way for us to do this, and we are enormously happy to have Ruwan on board to lead the way," said Dan Buckley, Publisher.

Gui Karyo, Marvel's President of Publishing added, "Marvel Press is an important milestone for our publishing division, as it is a new tool for expanding the world of our characters and stories, while also bringing them to new audiences."

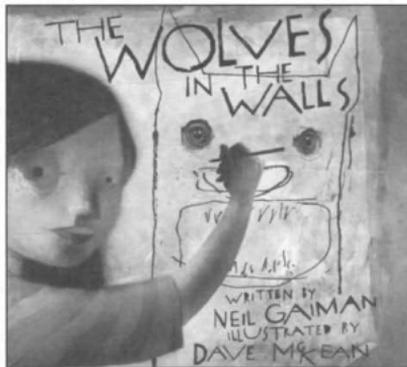


Wolves at the stage door

Plans are afoot to bring BSAF short fiction award-winning *The Wolves in the Walls* to the stage. On a recent trip to the UK, author Neil Gaiman held several meetings with British producers and directors to discuss possibilities for creating a stage version of his illustrated children's book.

It's early days yet, with the rights still to be cleared, but Neil is already drafting lyrics for a proposed opera-style script, noting in a recent blog (www.neilgaiman.com/journal/) that one song is called *Smash Something Breakable*.

Advance word suggests that top UK director Vicki Featherstone will be signed up to direct the play. Featherstone established herself on the modern theatrical scene with highly successful productions at West Yorkshire Playhouse and Soho Theatre as well as through her work with company Paines Plough, who specialise in championing new writing for the stage.



The Improbable Theatre company will provide the performing muscle for the production. Their reputation for innovative stagecraft, physical performance and puppet-wizardry bodes well for translating Dave McKean's gorgeous artwork into three dimensions.

Other Gaiman/McKean projects in the pipeline include the movie *MirrorMask*, now in post-production at Jim Henson Studios, and a Broadway adaptation of *The Vampire Lestat* to be directed by McKean. Gaiman's Marvel series 1602 is collected in hard back in July.

Brits storm US

Following the American release of his novel *The Skinner*, top UK author and regular *Focus* contributor Neal Asher has been getting rave reviews in the US. *The New York Times* book review led the volley of praise, stating that "Asher keeps raising the stakes so that despite the repetitive nature of the violence, it never becomes merely formulaic. You may not relish your stay on Spatterjay. But you won't easily forget it."

Sullivan shortlisted

After achieving nominations for both the Arthur C Clarke and the BSFA Awards, Tricia Sullivan's *Maul* has been announced as one of just ten literary works from 2003 on the James Tiptree Jr Award shortlist.

Events upheaval

The London BSFA meetings are in a somewhat turbulent time at the moment, with shifting dates and venues. The June meeting changed from regular location The White Hart pub near Liverpool Street to The Star in Belgravia. Due to karaoke programming at the White Hart, July's meeting has been ousted to Tuesday 27th July. The venue for 25th August is still to be confirmed at time of going to press.

The SF night hosted by Pat Cadigan at Borders on Oxford Street has also switched dates, and is now on the second Tuesday of each month.

So a word of warning! Make sure you double-check the date and venue for meetings before you set off or you may end up suffering the horrors of a karaoke night with ghastly renditions of 'Only You'. See www.bsfa.co.uk for more information.

Timewasters Competition 168

Starting at zero and going consecutively upward, what is the longest list of SF book titles that you can find that contain numbers, either in alpha or numeric? Titles starting with the number will rate more highly than those where it is the second or subsequent word. Large numbers, such as 2001, do not count as "2" but follow, (in this case) 2000.

Answers within three weeks of receipt of *Matrix* to John Ollis, 13 Bernshaw Close, Snatchill, Corby, NN18 8EJ

Competition 166 result

1. Louis Wu is a Niven character; the rest are Heinlein's.
2. All but Baxter comprised the shortlist of the 2002 Arthur C Clarke Award.
3. *Blade Runner* is based on a PKD novel; the others on short stories.
4. All appeared in films, Leiber as a professional actor, several times. Nobody got them all right; one person had 3 correct answers and... it's **Theo Ross** again.

Crossword 166 solution

Across: 2 Brave, 6 Echo, 10 Antic, 11 Bellini, 12 Delaney, 13 Tremble, 14 Orate, 15 Adjutant, 18 Dreadful, 19 Okapi, 21 Denari, 23 Cajoles, 24 Soldier, 25 Imbue, 26 Male, 27 Bathe. Down: 1 *Do Androids Dream*, 2 Battle-axe, 3 *A Scanner Darkly*, 4 *Embryo*, 5 Yuletide, 7 Climb, 8 *Of Electric Sheep*, 9 *Time Out of Joint*, 16 Available, 17 Judicial, 20 Scarab, 22 Nasal.

Congratulations to winner Andy Mills of Leeds.

RODERICK GLADWISH'S WORLD OF SCIENCE

X Prize within reach

The first private astronaut took to the skies on 21 June, 2004 as Burt Rutan's SpaceShipOne, piloted by Mike Melville, reached 100 kilometres (62 miles).

However an attempt on the Ansari X Prize – which demands two launches within a fortnight carrying three astronauts (or equivalent weight) – will have to wait as a serious problem with the flight control system occurred during the flight.

Other teams haven't given up the X Prize chase. Romanian team ARCA have successfully fired its hydrogen peroxide engine. According to them it is the first reusable monopropellant propulsion system integrally constructed from composite materials. Canadian Arrow will begin four months of unmanned test flights beginning in August. Their rocket will fly an experiment, produced by students at the Canadian Arrow Science Club at John Dearnish School in London. **Source:** XPrize.com

Rudi Podgornik and his team at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, have calculated that photons exert a force on moving objects. Like atmospheric wind, the flow of photons in space apply drag. It is an extremely weak effect that would take billions of years to have an impact; however, it may have something to do with post-Big Bang clumping, says team member Wayne Saslow. Still not fully understood, this clumping of matter is the key to galaxy formation and ultimately our existence. **Source:** Astronomy Now Magazine

Fruit and vegetables should top the list for every astronaut venturing beyond the protective magnetic field of the Earth. Once beyond our home world's shield radiation levels increase considerably and the risk of neurological damage increases accordingly. Shielding alone cannot provide enough protection.

Researchers at the Neuroscience Laboratory, Tufts University in Boston,



200,000 feet above SpaceShipOne

Massachusetts have exposed laboratory rats to radiation then tested them in mazes. Rodents fed on fruit and veg could still solve the puzzles where the non-veggie fed ones couldn't. Radiation effects can be compared with accelerated ageing. Brain damage due to the ageing process is reduced by increasing antioxidants (fruit and veg) in the diet. **Source:** spocce.com

Lasers have the potential to cool semiconductors, or so the U.S. Air Force suggest in a recent paper on the hotly researched topic. The concept is based on a laser pumping photons into a semiconductor to excite electrons in the crystal lattice. These electrons produce photons that carry away energy hence there is a net loss of energy ('cooling' in English). The USAF research has discovered that it works best when the laser is low-powered and the semiconductor is relatively hot. As the conductor cools the cooling benefit reduces. **Source:** NewsFactor.com

Review was "disgraceful"

Farah Mendlesohn writes: Matrix is not a lad magazine and material should not be published in it that makes it appear so. The review of *Sticky Fingers of Time* in the "Tapes from the Crypt" column is disgraceful. It is Matrix's role to review material in contexts that make sense to readers and watchers of science fiction – who happen to come in more than one sex in case you hadn't noticed – and not to complain because there is no hot girl-on-girl action for the lads.

Sticky Fingers of Time is a time travel movie in the spirit of Jack Finney's *Time and Again*. It is slow, complex, rather lyrical. Its heroine's sexual orientation is what creates the modern heroine's dilemma. If she chooses the past, she chooses oppression and a hidden life. A reader can't tell any of this from Martin McGrath's "Tapes from the Crypt".

I quite understand this is supposed to be a humorous column, but apart from doing a disservice to an interesting (although not brilliant) movie, Martin McGrath's column is really insulting to your female readers.

Martin replies: Sorry you were offended by the "Tapes from the Crypt" review of *Sticky Fingers of Time*. I found it tedious and pretentious – and thought I made that pretty clear – so we shall have to agree to differ on our estimation of this film.

As for my references to the lesbian elements in *Sticky Fingers*... I made two comments: The first made clear that there was no overtly sexual content in the film (and mocked the idea that anyone might buy it for that reason); and the second mocked the use of the quote ("Lesbian Pi-like sci-fi film" - Total Film) that the DVD's distributors put (in large letters) all across the publicity material. This, to me, an obvious attempt to lure "lads" (and "lasses") to buy the movie in hope of titillation – it is, of course, a disservice to the film and a stupid piece of marketing that underestimates the audience.

Re-reading the review I believe that, taken in context, it is obvious that these comments are ironic and that the review doesn't seriously judge the film as an aid to masturbation. I am happy to stand by what I have written.

However, I do take such

accusations seriously. If I have offended our female readers I would certainly consider my future as a contributor to Matrix.

Ross Lewis writes: You may have already seen the trailers for *I, Robot*, the latest movie starring Will Smith. It looks to be a superb movie for this summer... Nonetheless it is a travesty.

I, Robot itself was essentially an academic flound, in a fictional/literary context, at the impact of robots on society and, more specifically, the psychology of robots programmed with the three laws necessary to safeguard humanity from its creations.

The Will Smith character is almost a surrogate Lije Baley from much later in Asimov's timeline

(and) the trailer itself is littered with evidence of this pillaging. By far the worst crime though, comes later in the trailer, when we see the "Sonny" robots apparently rising up against humanity. This is something that never, EVER happened in Asimov's novels. In fact the robots were the secret shepherds of our race, helping us finally come to a peaceful galactic state.

I should imagine you will find none of this grand-scale storytelling in *I, Robot* the movie, none of the academic genius that gave us the laws of Robotics, their failings, and the concepts of Psycho-History, because Asimov is in his grave, his works defenseless to the ravages of Hollywood. The only hope is that it stops with one movie and Asimov does not become the new Philip K. Dick.

The terrible thing is none of this will matter, because at the end of the day *I, Robot* will probably be a good movie, but this does not make up for the shameful lack of respect it shows for its origins.

Tom replies: Apologies to Ross for the necessary cuts we've made to this letter, but we think his point still comes across loud and clear. We all know Hollywood has no scruples (let alone laws) when it comes to the indiscriminate plundering of SF ideas, but at the time of going to press it's still too early to tell whether *I, Robot* will prove to be a travesty, turkey or triumph. We'll have a full review in issue 169, but don't wait for us. Is Ross right? Opinions, observations and rants all welcome at matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk



Send letters and comments to: The Editor, Matrix, 46 Saltwell Street, London, E14 0DZ
matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk

Raising a storm

Geneva Melzack warns us to wrap up warm, because eco-disaster movie *The Day After Tomorrow* has great special effects and something important to say about the state of the world. Careful, you might get blown away.



The *Day After Tomorrow* starts with the dramatic melting of the polar ice caps, under the very feet of our protagonist scientist, Jack Hall (Quaid).

This sets the scene for Jack to go around delivering dire warnings about the effects of global warming on climate change to international conferences and American politicians. Naturally, his prognostications are ignored, even when Jack's theories about the disruption of ocean currents due to the melting ice floes indicate that the mother of all storms is about to demolish the northern hemisphere. Soon the storm hits and there's not much that can be done.

This is when the personal story kicks in. Jack's son Sam (Gyllenhaal) is away on a school trip and becomes trapped in New York when the bad weather prevents travel. Taking shelter in the New York public library, Sam calls his father, and Jack promises to save his son from the imminent ice age.

For a summer blockbuster, *The Day After Tomorrow* delivers the goods. The effects are visually stunning. You're bound to find yourself gasping at the spectacle of towering tidal waves and cities buried in snow. There are also some fabulous shots of a space station's view of the storm from orbit, which really is an incredible vista.

As a blockbuster should, *The Day After Tomorrow* also manages to create some genuine tension and excitement, depicting this natural catastrophe as the most formidable foe that mankind has ever faced. There is no stopping this storm. All people can do is try to run from it, but many can't even do that. It is this sense of inescapability that

makes the wild weather such a threat. We truly fear for the safety and lives of the characters, who do all look very small in the face of such vast forces of nature.

The ferocity and overwhelming power of the storm could have been problematic, in that there's no opportunity for the characters to attempt to really fight this natural disaster, which is the traditional plot route for these kinds of films. If the characters are impotent to stop the storm, what more is there to be said? Well, plenty. There are the individual survival stories.

There's the story of Sam's attempts to survive in the public library in New York, and the story of Jack's attempts to survive as he treks through the storm to find his son. These personal stories do get more than a little sentimental in places, (particularly the sub-plot about Sam's mother and a cancer-ridden kid) but on the whole we do care about Jack, Sam and the other characters, so the unfolding events remain reasonably compelling.

The Day After Tomorrow is a very American film. It's made from the American perspective and is aimed at an American audience.

I suspect that the on-screen destruction of American cities will have much more emotional impact for audiences familiar with the geography of the US. Footage of familiar Los Angeles and New York landmarks being flooded and frozen are probably a whole lot more significant to those who recognise the landmarks in question. Though of course, the excellent special effects mean that the scenes in question will still pack a punch for all viewers.

Even though the film is primarily entertainment, it also has important points to make about the way we are affecting our planet's climate. Yes, the science in the film isn't entirely accurate or even believable, but at heart it has some vital points to make about global warming and climate change.

At one point Jack challenges the Vice-President of the United States (Welsh) over his failure to uphold the Kyoto agreement. This is good to hear coming from an American film, and good to hear aimed at American audiences. *The Day After Tomorrow* might manage to raise awareness of climate change issues in the States, and elsewhere.

But *The Day After Tomorrow* has more to say to American audiences than its environmental message. It's also got something to say about global responsibilities and the way in which all countries around the world must come together to tackle global issues. The message of the film is that there are problems that exist on a global scale, which can only be solved on a global scale, and that we all have responsibilities in that regard. And that's a message we should all think about.

The Day After Tomorrow is not a perfect film by any means. The characterisation is minimal and some of the casting choices are a little dubious. Asking us to accept Jake Gyllenhaal as a 17 year old, for example, will probably be a step too far for most viewers to take. A lot of the acting is rather wooden and the script is best described as functional. But let's face it, none of that matters in a film like *The Day After Tomorrow*. We're not going to see it for the characterisation and the acting; we're going to see it for the huge visual effects extravaganza. We're going to see it to be wowed by the incredible computer-generated weather. And a fantastic visual display is indeed what *The Day After Tomorrow* gives us.



Sam (Gyllenhaal) about to get damp in New York.

The Day After Tomorrow

Director: Roland Emmerich
Screenplay: Roland Emmerich & Jeffrey Nachmanoff

Cinematographer: Ueli Steiger

Starring: Denis Quaid, Jake Gyllenhaal, Emmy Rossum, Dash Mihok, Jay O. Sanders, Selçuk Warden, Austin Nichols, Ajay Smith, Tamlyn Tomita, Shoshino Roiz, Ian Holm, Kenneth Welsh

124 minutes

Showdown

And finally the second half of Tarantino's epic, *Kill Bill*, arrives. Uma Thurman as The Bride, now named as Beatrice Kiddo, is back to complete her 'roaring rampage of revenge'. After Thurman's introduction to get us back into the plot we flash-back to the church for her wedding practice. Bill turns up, not too happy with The Bride for leaving him. We only saw Bill's hands and boots in *Volume One* - now we see him in all his glory, as personified by David Carradine, filled with oily charm and charismatic menace. Thurman asks him if he's going to be nice. "I'm never nice," is his chilling reply. The camera pulls out from the church as Bill's assassins enter and the massacre begins.

Back to the present and Thurman now has only two more names on her 'Death List' before she gets to Bill. The first is Bud, played by the excellent Michael Madsen. Brother of Bill, a once-proud warrior, he's been reduced to a drunken bouncer working in a sleazy strip bar. Although his combat skill are dulled, Bud proves to be still mean and vicious and gets very close to killing The Bride. Another flashback to an hilarious chop-sucky training sequence with the legendary Pai Mei allows her to summon the resources to get out of it. Once Bud is out of the way The Bride confronts Elle Driver - an extraordinary performance against type by Daryl Hannah - in a slam-bang fight that just about demolishes Bud's trailer. Then it's on to Bill for a very satisfying conclusion that's as much a duel of words and personalities as it is of swords. The fact that this involves one of my personal movie pet hates, a cute kid, and that I still enjoyed it

shows how good this film is.

I do, however, have to admit that *Volume 2* is not as tightly worked as the first part. There is some slack - a scene showing how bad Bud's job is and another near the end in a Mexican brothel seem to be there just to include some favourite B-movie actors from Tarantino's video-store days. However these are minor faults compared to the films strengths. Tarantino brings out career best performances from Hannah and you have to wonder where Carradine has been since *Kung Fu* given his appearance here as Kane turned bad. There is also some dazzling direction - one of the best scenes takes place in total darkness with immense tension being built from sound effects only. As in *Volume One* we get another melange of genres, though this time the emphasis is on Spaghetti Western and Chinese Kung Fu instead of the more Japanese Yakuza and Samurai and 70s Exploitation films of the first part.

Possibly, if you think too hard about certain plot details, it will all start unravelling but like *Volume One*, this film is a fantasy post-modern construction, with gunslingsers using swords. *Volume Two* may not be the punch in the face of the first film, more the slow warmth from sipping a well chilled tequila. This is the best film I've seen since ... well, *Volume One* obviously.

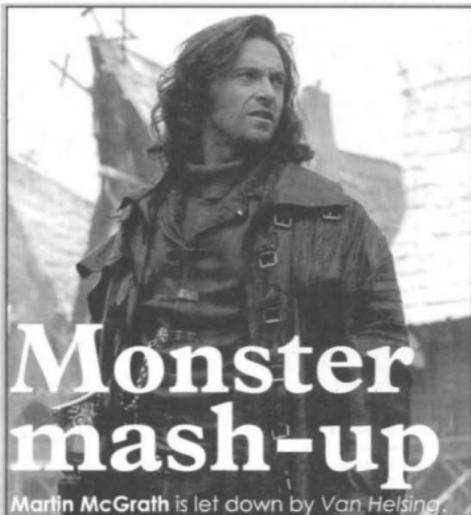
Kill Bill Volume 2 (18)

Writer/Director: Quentin Tarantino.

Cinematographer: Robert Richardson

Starring: Uma Thurman, David Carradine, Daryl Hannah, Michael Madsen, Chia Hui Liu, Michael Parks.

111 mins.



I wanted to like *Van Helsing*. It has everything going for it - classic monsters, an interesting idea, handsome and engaging leading actors, and a high geek factor. And the first ten minutes or so are tremendous. A black and white homage to the great Universal horror pictures of the past, the film begins with the mob, flaming torches and all, storming the gates to Dr Frankenstein's castle and, for extra entertainment, chucks in Dracula as well.

Sadly, as black and white gives way to colour and we are introduced to Van Helsing (Jackman) the film falters and never recovers. It isn't that I mind modern film-makers playing fast and loose with the legacy of classic tales - but if writer/director Sommers (*The Mummy*) is going to continue to loot old films for future projects, then he is going to have to do something about the quality of his storytelling.

The central characters, though undeniably pretty, are flat and uninteresting with no sense of a powerful relationship blossoming between Van Helsing and Anna (Beckinsale) and no chemistry between the hero and his villain, Dracula (Roxborough).

This failure to create meaningful and engaging relationships means that the story rather passes the viewer by, leaving us not particularly caring what happens.

This problem isn't helped by the fact that the film runs too long to be sustained by the slight story at its heart and that the director pads everything out with overblown stunt work - nobody walks or runs, everybody swings and things seem to catch fire and explode for no easily discernable reason.

The film is also let down by some barely acceptable computer generated effects. Someone really needs to tell Hollywood that, by and large, CGI still isn't up to the job they're asking of it. Here monsters shift size constantly to fit into shot - one moment appearing to be giants, the next looking barely bigger than (the admittedly substantial) Jackman. They fit poorly against the real sets and, up close, look terribly fake. For some reason the werewolves and bat-creature vampires suffer particularly badly.

There are spectacular moments in *Van Helsing*, and it is probably worth seeing on video for the opening sequence alone, but overall, it cannot be recommended.

Van Helsing

Writer/ Director: Stephen Sommers

Cinematographer: Allen Daviau

Starring: Hugh Jackman, Kate Beckinsale, Richard Roxburgh, David Wenham, Shuler Hensley. 132 minutes



Gary Wilkinson on the best film since *Kill Bill Volume One* - *Kill Bill Volume Two*, obviously.

It comes close, but *Hellboy* falls just short of being a really good film, says **Martin McGrath**.



Hell be back

Another issue of *Matrix*, another comic book adaptation. This time it's *Hellboy*, based on the Dark Horse comic of the same name written and drawn by Mike Mignola.

The story is simple enough, as these things go: during World War Two allied troops interrupt an attempt by Rasputin (Roden) and his Nazi allies to enlist hell as an ally in their struggle to dominate the world. American forces, led by a young occultist named Broom (Trainor), stop the Nazi threat causing Rasputin to be dragged into hell and a young demon to be stranded in this world.

The Americans call the demon Hellboy (Perlman) and we rejoin the story in modern times when Broom (now played by Hurt) has used Hellboy and the fish-like Abe Sapien (Jones) as the foundation for a demon-fighting organisation working to protect the world from things that go bump in the night.

And, of course, things very rapidly start going bump very loudly as Rasputin's old allies work to return him from hell and make him all-powerful. Tangled amongst all this is a nicely done love story between Hellboy and Liz Sherman (Blair) and the misadventures of Hellboy's new assistant, FBI Agent John Myers (Evans)

What is most remarkable about *Hellboy* is the quality of the images on screen and the way in which they so perfectly mimic the look and feel of the *Hellboy* comics. The close cooperation of Mignola in the design of this movie is obvious, but director del Toro (*Blade II*) has surpassed himself here. The film's muted palette and sensible use of computer-generated imagery creates an interesting and original

look for this film. Hellboy himself is a triumph – with his sawn-off horns, one massive fist and twitching demonic tail he looks as though he was walked right of the page of one of Mignola's drawings.

Hellboy is also blessed with a well-written script and some good acting. Perlman revels in the one-liners he is allowed to spit through cigar-chomping teeth and appears to be enjoying himself in a role that must have demanded enormous dedication, given the make-up and prosthetic requirements. But he is also excellent in *Hellboy*'s quieter moments when, like all good comic book heroes, he watches the world from outside – distanced from a normal, happy life by the very powers that make him strong.

Inevitably Hurt too is very good, lending a broken grandeur to Professor Broom and providing a instemable gravitas. Evans and Blair do a nice job of giving a human perspective to the madness going on around them.

However, *Hellboy* isn't as successful as it should have been. One reason that it falls short is that the villains are largely overlooked. Early in the film a lot of time is devoted to the "soap opera" elements of Hellboy's life and the villains, who we glimpse early on, are largely sidelined as a new monstrous threat is introduced. The result is that, as the film approaches its climax, we don't know enough about the villains to fear them or understand their relationship to their heroes.

The neglect of the villains is a shame because otherwise the film does a pretty good job of creating three-dimensional characters from its two-dimensional source material. In the first hour

Hellboy creates an interesting world inhabited by people with recognisable problems and likeable characters. By the end of the second act we have a hero we can cheer for, a set of supporting characters we can care about and a threat we understand.

Sadly, the momentum is not maintained. The last act feels rushed and we gallop towards an unlikely final showdown without any real conviction. Some of the villains are disposed of too easily, the internal logic of the story is allowed to unravel and the final confrontation against a CGI version of a Lovecraftian demon is a terrible, predictable let down.

Had the final act lived up to the first two, then *Hellboy* would have been a smash hit. As it is, I couldn't help leaving the screening disappointed, though knowing that I had enjoyed a great deal of the film I'd just watched.

It seems as though del Toro and the cast of *Hellboy* will be reunited for a sequel and, while I can't really enthuse about this movie, I'm looking forward to *Hellboy 2*, because, if they can get the balance between character and action right, it could be a cracker.

Hellboy is a beautiful-looking film with an excellent opening hour let down only by a disappointing conclusion.

Hellboy

Director: Guillermo del Toro
Screenplay: Guillermo del Toro
Cinematographer: Guillermo Navarro

Starring: Ron Perlman, John Hurt, Selma Blair, Jeffrey Tambor, Rupert Evans, Karel Roden, Doug Jones

122 minutes

God, end!

Godsend, short, but still too long for **Martin McGrath**.

One could write a book about the stupidity of the "science" of cloning in *Godsend*, but what would be the point? That this film gets its science wrong is the least of its problems.

Godsend tells the story of Paul and Jessie Duncan (Kinnear and Romijn-Stamos) whose son Adam (Bright) is killed aged eight. Distraught at the loss of their child, they succumb to the advances of Dr Wells (De Niro), who promises that they can have their son back as a clone. But as the new Adam passes the age at which the original died, strange things start to happen and it becomes clear that Wells is up to something sinister.

Director Hamm (*Soldier, Soldier*) has created an unbearably one-paced film, without drama or tension and, in the end, no real pay-off as the final confrontation is a damp squib. There might have been an interesting film here about parental grief and how no one, not even a genetically identical replacement, could fill that gap. But none of the interesting elements are pursued.

De Niro is entirely wasted but I cannot understand why a man who can lay reasonable claim to being the greatest living screen actor would agree to do nonsense like this.

Without any emotional depth or significant action *Godsend* is a tough movie to sit through – even though it is only just over 100 minutes long, you'll be praying for it to end far sooner.

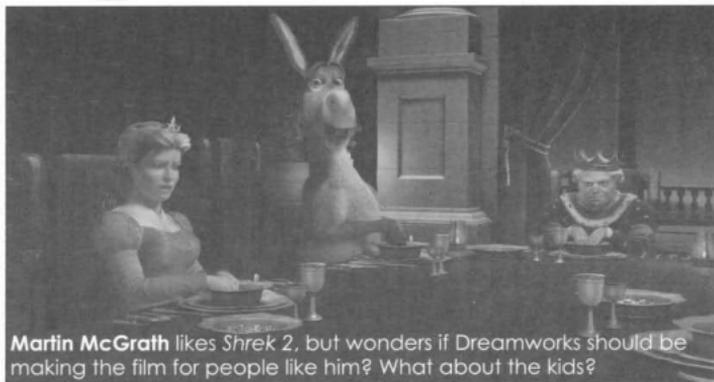
Godsend

Director: Nick Hamm
Screenplay: Mark Bomback
Cinematographer: Kramer Margenthou

Starring: Greg Kinnear, Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, Robert De Niro, Cameron Bright

102 minutes

Happily ogre after



Martin McGrath likes *Shrek 2*, but wonders if Dreamworks should be making the film for people like him? What about the kids?

Shrek 2 is a magpie of a film. It steals the shiny bits from traditional fairy tales, movies and pop music and it lines its own, rather plain, nest with them hoping that it will make it look modern and flashy. That's not to say that *Shrek 2* isn't funny or clever or that it isn't an entertaining film. It's just that under all the flashy stuff that *Shrek 2* pinches from other sources, there isn't a lot of substance.

Now I know what you're thinking, why is he looking for substance in a kids' animated comedy? And you're right, it doesn't matter that *Shrek 2* has a paper-thin plot or that the characters do stupid things, the film is enjoyable on its own terms. There are some terrific jokes and I like the sly references to other movies – the *Spider-man* upside-down kiss rip-off was a personal favourite – but while I enjoyed watching *Shrek 2* I found that, half-an-hour later, I couldn't really remember a lot about it.

There are some good performances amongst the talent lending their voices to the production. Banderas stands out as Puss... in Boots but both Saunders and Cleese deserve honourable mentions. Only Myer's continual mutilation of the Scottish accent grates slightly, but despite the billing he isn't the star of this show. Murphy's Donkey once again steals

every scene that isn't nailed down, especially when he is magically changed into a white stallion.

The animation also remains hugely impressive. I don't think that Dreamworks' animation has come as far as rival Pixar in the time since the release of the original *Shrek*. For me, in both *Finding Nemo* and in the preview material released for *The Incredibles*, Pixar has once again established itself as top dog in the field of digital animation. But, that said, what is on screen here is often spectacular and sometimes beautiful and Dreamworks do pack a lot of visual jokes into their films, so it is always worth keeping an eye on the background.

The script, too, is full of witty one-liners and smart dialogue. One can't fault it and while the plot is hardly going to surprise anyone – ogre has girl, ogre meets parents, parents don't like ogre, ogre loses girl, ogre gets girl back – there is always enough going on that the film could never be accused of being boring.

The problem, for me, is that the makers of *Shrek 2* have spent so long polishing the shiny bits that they hope will distract viewers that they've forgotten to do anything new or to make a film that affects people. *Shrek 2* is too calculating and not enough 'from the heart' to work as a great kids' movie. The

film's creators seem to have spent so long factoring in digs at their rivals Disney (*The House of Mouse* seems to get a visual or aural poke about once every five minutes) that they forgot to make their own film emotionally or intellectually engaging. There were too many moments when sad geeks like me were grinning knowingly at another jibe at Disney or some other aspect of Hollywood and the children in the audience were shrugging their shoulders and wondering what that was all about?

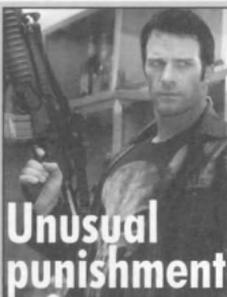
I liked *Shrek 2*, it made me laugh, it has a great soundtrack full of ironically twisted pop-songs, fine performances and lots of jokes for people like me. But as a children's film I think it fails. And, ironically enough, I think Dreamworks could learn a thing or two from their Disney-stabled rivals Pixar – who would never have made a film that talked over the head of their core audience, kids, in the way that *Shrek 2* does.

Shrek 2

Director: Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury, Conrad Vernon
Screenplay: J David Stern, Joe Stillman, David N Weiss

Starring: Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, Julie Andrews, Antonio Banderas, John Cleese, Rupert Everett, Jennifer Saunders

93 minutes



Unusual punishment

Ditching any of the superheroics sometimes associated with the comic book character, *The Punisher* is a soft-boiled revenge flick.

Lacking the nastiness of films like *Death Wish* and without the black humour of outings such as *Commando*, it falls flat. It is also too simplistic – the comic book Punisher is interesting chiefly for the juxtaposition of his "bad" vigilantism against the "good" vigilantes of the Marvel Universe's spandex clad heroes. In this version Frank Black (Jane) wipes out vast numbers of bad guys but never comes into contact with the forces of law and order.

The film's most serious mistake is to relocate Castle's story from New York to Florida; this story belongs on dangerous, preferably rain-soaked, streets, not tropical beaches. Jane's casting is also an error. He's not convincing as a man who loses everything and lives only for revenge. The villain Howard Saint (Travolta) also lacks menace.

However, the action scenes are well done, there is a good fight with 'The Russian' (Nash) and an over-the-top finale almost delivers. This *Punisher* is better than the 1989 Dolph Lundgren version, but at best it's only suitable for a sloppy night in with beer and pizza with a brainless video. (MM,CG)

The Punisher

Director: Jonathan Henleigh
Screenplay: Jonathan Henleigh & Michael France
Cinematographer: Conrad Hall
Starring: Thomas Jane, John Travolta, Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, Kevin Nash
124 minutes

Teenage kicks

Harry and his friends are getting older and scruffier, and it's looking good, but *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* takes the best book in the series and makes it slightly dull, says **Martin McGrath**. Though the fault isn't just with the film. **WARNING:** Spoilers ahead!

Harry Potter and the *Prisoner of Azkaban*, the most exciting of JK Rowling's books and the most effectively written (marking that point when she'd mastered the world she'd created but before the Potter books descended into bloated self-parody) has been turned into a slightly dull film.

On reflection there are some mitigating factors for this dullness. In part it must be due to the fact that most of the audience already know that Sirius Black (Oldman), the supposed villain of the piece, represents no threat to Harry (Radcliffe). Though the fact that director Cuarón makes precious little attempt to build up the tension in this part of the plot is a disservice to those new to the story.

Further mitigation might also be found in the fact that the conclusion, which read so well in the book, turns out to be rather anti-climactic when seen on screen. The showdown in the "Shrieking Shack" is a talkie affair without any real dramatic impact and the subsequent rescue of Sirius feels rather like an extended postscript.

Again, however, Cuarón does himself few favours – doing nothing to find ways to dramatise the wordy exposition. Surely it would have been better to show the Sirius Black/Peter Pettigrew (Spall) betrayal of the Potter family through the judicious use of flashbacks – varying the point of view as Harry learns more of the facts. Not only would it have allowed overlooked plot points to be clarified (we never learn why people blamed Sirius or how Pettigrew survived) but it would have lent the whole film a dramatic twist that it severely lacks.

There are, however, a number of things to enjoy in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*.

Radcliffe's Harry seems to really shine in the sequences where he gets to be more physical – he's turning into a proper action hero, which bodes well for the adaptation of the later books. Hermione blossoms here, she's tough and clever as she leads Harry through the conclusion of the story. Emma

Hermione leads the way; Emma Watson is the best thing in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*



Watson is excellent in the role, she has gone from being the most annoying thing in the first film, to the best thing in this. Meanwhile Ron (Grint), reduced to silly gurning in *Chamber of Secrets*, also shines. He gets most of the best jokes (Watson just pips him with: "Does my hair really look like that from the back?") and his growing, awkward, relationship with Hermione is excellently handled.

I don't think Gambon quite works as Dumbledore but the other additions – particularly Professors Trelawney (Thompson) and Lupin (Theuwis) and Sirius Black (Oldman) continue the franchise's tradition of excellent casting.

One area where Cuarón scores highly is in his portrayal of the kids as teenagers. Their school uniforms are scruffy, their ties knotted too tight and always skew-whiff, and their clothes are crumpled and messy. They are looking like real teenagers, and this simple change suddenly makes them all feel much more human and likeable.

This goes along with the much-vaunted darker look to Harry's world in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, which is only partially successful. The premier look does add something to the sense of reality and danger, but it pervades the whole film so much that I found it becoming tiresome. At some points I couldn't help but long for some of

the earlier films' gloss – Hogwarts, and its fantasy world and doesn't need to be "real." Indeed the grime of the rest of the world might have worked better if had been contrasted with more light and sparkle in Hogwarts.

The special effects are, as one expects from this franchise, spectacular. Buckbeak is a CGI triumph but even the Potter team can't manage a decent computer-generated werewolf, it seems to elude everyone who tries (*Underworld*, *Van Helsing*), and rather lets things down.

The greatest fault with the film is its length. At two hours and twenty-two minutes it is stupidly long for a children's film – especially one without wild thrills. The audience of mostly children at my screening gasped once or twice (the first entrances of a Demeter and of Buckbeak, the hippogriff) but sat pretty sullenly through the rest of it, getting increasingly restless after the one hundred minute mark.

The Prisoner of Azkaban is an example of a film-maker striving to be too faithful to the material they are adapting. This would have been a better film if a few more liberties had been taken with the original plot, if more material had been excised and if someone had pointed out that the ending – while fine in print – simply wasn't working on the big screen.

I still have high hopes for the adaptations of the later books – which, though less successful as novels, seem better suited to film adaptation. With much less plot and a lot more padding, the people responsible for the adaptations (Brit director Mike Newell is taking on *The Goblet of Fire*) will have to trim more, and both stories feature endings that seem to offer more cinematic possibilities – with the wizarding tournament and the shoot-out at the ministry offering real prospects for on-screen excitement – and emotional punch.

I have two demands of the next film. First, make it shorter. Second, don't cut Ireland's victory in the Quidditch World Cup.

The Prisoner of Azkaban isn't a bad film, it looks spectacular and has some good performances, but it lacks dramatic punch at key moments.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Director: Alfonso Cuarón
Screenplay: Steven Kloves
Cinematographer: Michael Seresin

Starring: Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint, Michael Gambon, David Thewlis, Gary Oldman, Alan Rickman, Robbie Coltrane, Robert Hardy, Emma Thompson, Timothy Spall
142 minutes

We, Robots first, Foundation to follow?



Will Smith indulges in some Audi product placement in *I, Robot*. We hope he gets a nice car.

It's already stirring up controversy on our letters' page (see page 6) but *I, Robot* director Alex Proyas (*Dark City*) is bullish about his new project – hoping that it will be the first in a series of films based on the works of Isaac Asimov.

Describing this film as a prequel or “early days at USR” take on Asimov's robot universe, Proyas argues that a literal translation or combination of the 9 stories into a single movie was unfeasible.

Talking on the official *I, Robot* website (www.irobotmovie.com) Proyas said: “*I, Robot* was created with the intention of it being the first in a series of films – early on I decided there was no way a single 2 hour movie could do justice to all the ideas Asimov explored in his collection of stories. Will there be more films? – we'll have to wait and see”

And if the cinematic mauling of one Asimov property wasn't enough, Jeff Vitnar, the screenwriter who wrote the *I, Robot* script has been hired to condense Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy into two films for 20th Century Fox.

Will Fincher Button up?

David Fincher (*Seven*, *Fight Club*) has a “holding deal” with Warner Bros while he decides whether *Benjamin Button* will be his first directorial outing since 2002's *Panic Room*.

Based on the short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald (one of the “Fantasies” in his *Tales of the Jazz Age* collection) “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” is the story of a man born “aged” 72 who grows physically younger as he gets older. *Benjamin Button* has been in development for some time, with a number of writers working on drafts and directors such as Spike Jonze and Ron Howard coming and going from the project.



David Fincher: decision

Comics in love Hayter relationship

X-Men scribe David Hayter has been dumped as director of *Watchmen*. Hayter, who wrote the script and drove the long-gestating project to the edge of production, couldn't persuade Universal to let him, as a first-time director, helm the \$75 million dollar project. On the upside, however, Hayter has landed the job of writing *Iron Man* for Marvel, pocketing a “seven figure deal,” and will direct the adaptation of Marvel's femme fatale, and former KGB agent, *The Black Widow* (right) with Rebecca Romijn-Stamos (*X-Men*) in the role.



FLICKER

Fight the parasites

Michel Gondry, (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* – *Matrix* 167), has signed up to direct another science fiction film. *Master of Space and Time*, based on the humorous sci-fi thriller by Rudy Rucker, has Jack Black (*School of Rock*) on board to star. Rucker's novel, published in 1984, tells the story of a scientist and his friend who discover the means to travel to another dimension where humanity is controlled by brain parasites.

Future tale “not sf”?

Harry Potter and *The Prisoner of Azkaban* director Alfonso Cuarón will return to genre material for his next film, *Children of Men*, although he and original author PD James claim it isn't sf. Cuarón told *50-film.com* that his new movie is “not really science-fiction. It's the world 30 years from now, [...] for 18 years no human child has been born, for unknown reasons. England is the last remaining civilization as we know it, because it's an island that's insulated itself from Europe, which is in civil wars and complete pandemonium.” It sounds like sf to me, but what do I know?

Ford back in space?

Harrison Ford and James Cameron are teaming up to deliver *Godspeed*, a thriller set in outer space, but Cameron will only produce, through his company Lightstorm Entertainment, and won't direct. It will be Ford's first space travel since 1983's *Return of the Jedi*. Set in the near future aboard the International Space Station, Ford's character must avert a disaster on board, then discovers a bigger conspiracy. The plot sounds very similar to that of *Cosmonaut*, the novel by Peter McAllister, which we reported was under development at Warner Bros in *Matrix* 161 but which has since floundered in development hell.

Genre-bending

Donnie Darko (originally reviewed in *Matrix* 158) will return to American cinema screens in a Director's Cut version this July (no news of a UK release) but director Richard Kelly is already moving on to other things with *Southland Tales*, of which he says “it's thirty percent comedy, thirty percent musical, thirty percent

thriller and ten percent science fiction. And those percentage levels could fluctuate.”

The cast, which includes Sarah Michelle Gellar (*Buffy*), Seann William Scott (*Evolution*), Kevin Smith (*Clerks*), Tim Blake Nelson (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) and Jason Lee (*Clerks*), suggests that this is going to be something unusual.

The film's official website www.southlandtales.com, doesn't shed much light on matters just yet, but Kelly says the site's tagline, “the Internet is the future”, is relevant and that everything added to the site will have some link, even if it is tangential, to the film's plot.

Rodriguez going to Mars?

We reported in the last issue of *Matrix* (167) that Robert Rodriguez decision to quit the Directors Guild of America (DGA) had placed his involvement in *The Princess of Mars* in jeopardy. Rumours raced around the web suggesting that, because Paramount have a pact with the DGA, Rodriguez would be sacked. Then it appeared that the studio had offered the job to *Hellboy* (review page 9) director Guillermo del Toro – who, it was reported, turned them down three times.

After a period of silence and apparent confusion Rodriguez, who is building a studio and special effects house in New Mexico to enable the production of the film and its sequels, confirmed that he will indeed be going to Mars. “I can still do that movie,” claimed Rodriguez, “because I was assigned to it before I left the DGA.”

Bubba goes large

Bubba Ho-Top (*Matrix* 167) will, after all, be getting a limited UK cinema release. No firm date yet but the distributors are aiming for September, according to *Empire*.

Looking dodgy...

Knight Rider, starring the bloke who was rubbish in *2 Fast, 2 Furious* and directed by “martial artist” Sammo Hung (*Martial Law*)... *Superman* as long as McG (no relation) is still connected to the film as director... *Constantine*, Keanu looks bad in crappy teaser at www.constantinemovie.warnerbros.com and news that the studio want a PG-13 rating... *Catwoman*, this was a bad idea to start with, then there was that costume, now? Worst... trailer... ever... www.movies.yahoo.com.

What a day! rewind

Went the Day Well? Ealing's wartime "what if?" is claimed for sf by **Martin McGrath**.

These days Ealing Studios has a rather cosy image. The comedies seem quaint and have become attached to a rather nostalgic view of post-war Britain. Which is curious because, when one looks at their films, many have sharp edges and serious, rather bitter, social commentary. A few also have a speculative fiction element.

The Man in the White Coat can most clearly be claimed for science fiction, and its story of a well-meaning scientist caught up in the machinations between corrupt businessmen and corrupt trade unionists retains its teeth. *Dead of Night* is one of the earliest anthology ghost stories, and is still very effective. The adaptation of JB Priestley's *They Came to a City* as well as *Fiddlers Three*, *The Ship that Died of Shame*, *Meet Mr Lucifer* and *The Night My Number Came Up* are all either out and out fantasies or have fantastic elements.

But it is *Went the Day Well?* that I wish to claim for sf. Made in 1942 and set in a not-too-distant future, it is clearly speculative in proposing

what would happen to the people of a Britain if the Germans invaded. The book-ending of the story by a "survivor" (Johns as the gravedigger) of the incidents portrayed in the film marks it as definitively sf as opposed to the similarly-themed *The Eagle Has Landed*.

Went the Day Well? is not the story of an invasion covered up but one told from a future perspective where invasion is an historical fact. To a modern viewer, the film has the feel of alternative history, like *It Happened Here*. The invasion, of course, never happened, but if it had, this feels like a convincing portrayal of how it might have felt, if not how it would have taken place.

This was director Cavalcanti's first English language film and he does a very good job of building tension and keeping the viewer surprised in what is often a startlingly brutal movie. Cavalcanti



is helped by a script based on a Graham Greene short story, which is intelligent and rarely surrenders to easy point scoring – making a point of the fact that the Germans aren't monsters – remarkable considering the date of production.

The little community of Bramley Green is, of course, the whole English nation in microcosm, and it is interesting that the "lord of the

manor" is a traitor, that the "plain folk" are the ones who first suspect the treachery while their "betters" are hoodwinked and that the most obviously heroic acts are all done by women and children. Though I'm not entirely convinced by the director's claim that this was a pacifist film (there's just too much violence) its *Archers*-like bucolic setting can't disguise the film's politically radical leanings.

Went the Day Well? is propaganda, it could hardly be otherwise, but it is well made propaganda and it seems to me to belong firmly to the sf canon.

Went the Day Well?

Director: Alberto Cavalcanti
Screenwriter: John Dighton
Cinematographer: Wilkie Cooper
Starring: Basil Sydney, Elizabeth Allan, Leslie Banks, Mervyn Johns, Thora Hird
92 minutes

Went the Day Well? is available as part of the Ealing Classics DVD Collection with *Dead of Night*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Scott of the Antarctic*.



Martin McGrath digs up *Idaho Transfer*, Peter Fonda's 1973 hippy trip to the future. The fate of mankind is in the hands of people who say "far out" – god help us.

So how does this film start?

We follow a gopher snake crawling across the desert.

Snakes! Why did it have to be snakes?

I think you've got the wrong state. That was Indiana. This is Idaho.

Ah, yes. So what's *Idaho Transfer* all about?

Well, there are these young people travelling through time –

Not another time travel movie, that's the third in a row.

What can I say? There are a lot of rubbish time travel movies...

We got into trouble with the last one. That's not going to happen again, is it?

Probably. So there are these young people travelling to the future and they've discovered that humanity has been wiped out by a terrible (unspecified) ecological disaster and they're supposed to be scientists, but this is America in the early 1970s so they're all hippies –

You know who I really hate?

I've got a sneaking suspicion I do.

Hippies! Why did it have to be hippies?

But I thought you didn't want to offend people?

Hippies don't count. Do they gaze at their navels and pretend their tedious self-obsession is philosophy?

There are some longish passages that could only have been written by someone on serious

amounts of drugs. The things that happen (I can't bring myself to call it a plot) don't really make sense and there's a conversation about the relationship between the beginning, the middle and the end of things that had me suffering terrible flashbacks to my days as a student.

So someone has let hippies time travel – a fat lot of good I bet they do.

True, they don't find out what happened and don't bother trying to save the world. And they say they're going to repopulate the future, but then we discover that anyone who time-travels becomes sterile. Oh and they meet a tribe of survivors who are dumb, deaf, "retarded" (their word) and ignorant. The hippies are jealous of how happy the survivors are, which had this child of the enlightenment screaming at the television.

Why should I watch this film?

Well, at the end, the last remaining hippy gets rescued by some futuristic yuppies (nope, no idea where they came from) who think she's like the survivors and feed her to their car as fuel.

You know, I think I will watch this after all.

How can I briefly describe *Idaho Transfer* to my hippy associates?

A total head-trip about the mess we're making of the world, maan! Err... far out?

And how should I describe it to people I like?

Self-indulgent, nihilistic oddity pretending to be a liberal statement about mankind's destruction of the ecosystem.

Starship droopers

Starship Troopers 2: Heroes of the Federation doesn't just fail because of a lack of money, says **Martin McGrath**.

Depending on your point of view, *Starship Troopers* was either a clever satire on reactionary action movies, a proto-fascist love-in or a load of big-budget cobbles.

Personally, I think I got director Paul Verhoeven's joke, and rather enjoyed the original, though I always found the fake adverts more entertaining than the actual film. *Starship Troopers* had a certain mad energy, bags of style and enough good jokes to win me over. Coming seven years after the original, this direct to DVD sequel, *Starship Troopers 2: Heroes of the Federation*, has none of that energy, little visual flair and no jokes worth the name.

Heroes of the Federation director Tippet has had an illustrious career in special effects with credits that include the original *Starship Troopers*, *Robocop*, *Jurassic Park* and stop-motion work in *Star Wars*. As one might expect, then, the effects in *Heroes of the Federation* are, for the most part, of a very high standard. Even if budget restrictions mean that some brief shots of the aliens are repeated more than once, the quality of the CGI effects in *Heroes of the Federation* is at least the equal of some much bigger productions.

Recognising the limitations of their budget, the filmmakers sensibly do all the usual things to cut the cost of filming and maximise the bang for their buck. They lock their protagonists up in a small location – so reducing the number of sets. They make most of the monsters look human – reducing the special effects budget. And they turn off all the lights – so we can't see how cheap things look.

This might not be original, but done well it can result in a classic film. John Carpenter does it brilliantly in *Assault on Precinct 13* and again in *The Thing*. Sam Raimi does it in *Evil Dead* and it is exactly this formula that makes Ridley Scott's *Alien* one of the best horror/sf films ever made.

But sticking to the formula

Starship Troopers 2: Strong on special effects, short on character.



isn't enough. Once you have your actors isolated in their cheap location, you've got to build tension, you've got to make things feel claustrophobic, and you've got to create interesting characters.

In this regard director Tippet's special effects experience is absolutely no use and he flounders. To be fair, the director is not solely to blame. Experienced scriptwriter Neumeier (*Starship Troopers* and *Robocop*) lumps him with some dreadful prose and his cast aren't up to putting life into the words.

Perhaps a more experienced director could have gotten more out of this group of B and C list actors, but the truth is that none of them help themselves. TV stalwart Burgi (*24. The Sentinel*) is risible as the hard-bitten veteran anti-hero and none of the other cast members really mark themselves out from the interchangeable, expendable grunts that one expects in this kind of film.

Heroes of the Federation is an insipid, slightly offensive film that, in desperation, eventually ups the gore factor and has the actresses pointlessly wander around naked in a dismal attempt to hold the viewers' interest. Tippet, in the commentary track accompanying this DVD, claims he was forced to

do this by the film's financiers who thought it would help the film make more money. Predictably Tippet, and *Heroes of the Federation*, fail even in this respect – utterly unable to provide real shocks and ending up looking more than a little sad.

There was certainly scope for another *Starship Troopers* film, given the open ending to the first and the quality of the original novel. *Heroes of the Federation's* director might reasonably claim that on his tight budget he could never hope to match the original. But judged as a film in its own right, *Heroes of the Federation* still fails – even by B-movie standards – as it proves incapable of delivering drama, excitement or action. Failings that have nothing to do with the budget.

Worth seeing for curiosity value, perhaps, but not much else.

Starship Troopers 2: Heroes of the Federation

Director: Phil Tippet
Screenplay: Edward Neumeier
Cinematographer: Christian Sebalt
Starring: Bill Brown, Richard Burgi, Sandrine Holt, Ed Lauter, Lawrence Monsoon, Drew Powell, Brenda Strong
91 minutes

DISCOVERY
NEW ON DVD



Martin McGrath rounds up some more new DVD releases.

The "30th Anniversary Edition" of *Planet of the Apes* (what next? The 38th anniversary?) offers a pile of extras spread over two discs including commentaries by some of the cast (including Roddy McDowall) and composer Jerry Goldsmith, a two hour documentary, *Behind the Planet of the Apes* and lots more. Plus, of course, there's the movie itself. If you don't already own this film you no longer have any excuse.

Am I alone in not finding *Dark Star* funny? I like Carpenter's other work, but I just don't get this. And the "30th Anniversary Special Edition" DVD is a disappointment too, with no significant extras. Carpenter does good commentaries on *The Thing* and *They Live*, but none is included here.

Blake's 7 is finally available on DVD following numerous delays. The *Series One* DVD set includes three commentaries and other odds and ends, though the stand-out extra is an extract from *Blue Peter* in which Lesley Judd makes a transporter bracelet.

One we missed on its original release is *The Missing*, a Western with some fantasy elements. It stars Tommy Lee Jones and Cate Blanchett while Ron Howard (*Apollo 13*) directs. I liked it, but then I like Westerns, though it is too long. The US DVD features an alternate ending and deleted scenes, UK version (not seen) released on June 21.

'flying high



Marlin McGrath raves about *Firefly* – the best American science fiction television show he's ever seen.

Listen carefully when I say this, for I have not come lightly to this conclusion: *Firefly* is the best 625 minutes of American television science fiction I have ever seen. Watching all fourteen episodes back to back has been a rare joy. If you watch as much as I do, there are times when you become jaded – when you believe that nothing will ever recapture the excitement and pleasure of the shows you loved when you were young.

Firefly thumbs its nose at nostalgia, proving that sometimes things are better than they used to be. This is space opera without aliens or space battles but with strong characters and great writing.

A kind of anti-*Star Trek*, *Firefly* features Captain Mal Reynolds (Fillion) and the ragtag bunch that make up the crew of the battered (and unarmed) *Firefly* class cargo ship *Serenity*. The crew includes a mercenary (Baldwin as Jayne), a prostitute (Baccarin as Inara), a preacher (Glass as Shepherd Book) and two fugitives (Maher and Glau as Simon and River Tam) on the run from the "The Alliance" which has established itself as the unifying power over all humanity. Mal and his second in command Zoe (Torres) are former soldiers, survivors of a rebel force that fought against the creation of The Alliance. Defeated, they wander the wilder edges of human space taking whatever jobs they can find.

The biggest obstacle to enjoyment of *Firefly* is the "Wild West" style frontier imagery. Give the series time, however, and the depth of the setting begins to

become clearer. *Serenity's* crew might look like they've walked off the set of *Rawhide* or *Bonanza* but the worlds they visit display a multicultural mix that suggests significant thought has gone into the background of this show. Little things, like the fact that everyone swears in Mandarin, build up through the episodes to suggest that *Firefly's* universe is more than a reworking of the Old West myths.

But the setting is not the great strength of *Firefly* – that comes from the writing, the characters and, unusually for a TV space opera, the acting.

The writing on display here is, if anything, even slicker than creator Joss Whedon's previous TV shows – *Angel* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The dialogue is sharp and frequently very funny with a particular fondness for snappy one-liners and backchat. Whedon uses this bantering to build an emotional connection between his characters and the audience. The crew, even (perhaps especially) the scurrilous Jayne, are impossible not to like.

The quality of the writing goes beyond the peppering of good jokes. What *Firefly* does especially well is create engaging characters while retaining a certain moral ambiguity. Mal has a neat line in self-deprecating humour, but he has a ruthless streak and can be downright unpleasant at times. Jayne is the butt of many jokes (sporting a particularly fine woolly hat in "The Message") but he remains a mercenary and his loyalty to the crew is always in doubt. Inara's work forms the jumping-off point for many of the episodes,

dragging the crew into conflicts with both gentry and lowlifes. Far more than Mal's love interest, Inara is a typical Whedon creation, a strong female character who can command centre stage. Zoe too gets to prove she's just as tough as her captain in "War Stories". In "Ariel" the crew steal medical supplies from an Alliance hospital and sell them on the black market. We like the crew of *Serenity*, but *Firefly* frequently reminds us that they are not simply "good people."

Firefly and *Blake's 7* (see "Discovery" opposite) have thematic similarities – conflict with an oppressive, Federation-style ruling force, outcasts struggling to survive on the edge of society and a certain cynical viewpoint. *Firefly* is lighter in tone, but only because Fox studio executives got cold feet over Whedon's plans for a much darker show. Still, *Firefly* is no less intelligent than its British predecessor. We'll never know what an untrammelled Whedon might have produced, but even in this form and with only fourteen episodes ever made, *Firefly* is a jewel: enjoyable, entertaining and smart. I loved *Blake's 7* but I had a better time with *Firefly* – even allowing for the gulf in production values.

Firefly's cast and crew will return in the movie *Serenity*, which Whedon promises will tie up many loose ends. But the deal for the film reportedly excludes the possibility of a return to the small screen, so while *Serenity* is a consolation, it is also the final nail in the coffin of the best American television science fiction I have ever seen.

of the BEST

Mrs Reynolds: Trouble



Our Mrs. Reynolds

A story that starts off as a jape – Mal "accidentally" gets married during a party on an unfamiliar planet – quickly turns into one of *Firefly's* most effective episodes as the new Mrs Reynolds reveals that she isn't as innocent as she appears.

War Stories

Serenity's pilot, Wash (Tudyk), gets his moment in the sun. Becoming increasingly jealous of his wife Zoe's relationship with Mal he demands to replace her on a mission. The two men are captured and Zoe demonstrates she can make tough choices.

Objects in Space: Showdown



Objects in Space

The final episode and perhaps the very best as *Serenity* is invaded by a strange bounty hunter. Exciting, touching and clever, it wasn't meant to be the final episode it does provide some sort of conclusion.

Firefly

Creator: Joss Whedon
Screenplay/Director: Various
Cinematographer: David Boyd
Starring: Nathan Fillion, Gina Torres, Alan Tudyk, Morena Baccarin, Jewel Staile, Adam Baldwin, Sean Maher, Summer Glau, Ron Glass
625 minutes

Turn to the back page for a chance to win the DVD boxset of *Firefly*.

Enchanted Fandom



Andy Sawyer hacks through the "Jungle of Inexperience" and braves the "Desert of Indifference" with Jophan in *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

A long time ago, "fan fiction" wasn't rewriting your favourite TV programmes and imagining the characters in undignified and possibly illegal positions. It was, simply, fiction written by, about, and for fans. Granted this, too, had a certain amount of wish-fulfilment, and of fans Of A Certain Age will look upon John Berry's "Goon Bleary" stories (in which photographs of Marilyn Monroe seemed to have a frequent place) with a certain amount of nostalgia. But the classic text remains Willis and Shaw's *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

The Enchanted Duplicator comes out of the phenomenon of "Irish fandom": a group of talented and creative Ulster fans that flourished in the 1950s. Members included Bob Shaw and James White, who became professional authors, and John Berry, who made his career in the police force. The leading light, though, was Walt Willis, a civil servant who was once asked by a superior "By the way, Walter, are you Ghod? With an 'h'?" (Apparently, his boss had been reading Brian Aldiss's *The Shape of Further Things* in which Willis is mentioned.)

Willis was a master of the quip and the humorous column and a perceptive and intelligent writer, probably one of the best science fiction fandom has ever seen. In his own fancies, *Slant* and *Hyphen*, and in other peoples, he raised fanwriting to a high art. *The Enchanted Duplicator* was published in 1954 as a mimeographed booklet. It has been reissued in a number of editions, including serialisation in *Amazing* (1972) and inclusion in the massive *Warhoun* 28 (1980). It is available in at least two "editions" on the web, and has spawned at least two sequels, *Beyond the Enchanted Duplicator* by Walt Willis and James White (1991) and *The Reaffirmation* by Rob Hansen, published in *Blat* 4, (1995). Clearly, it has outlived its generation. As the introduction to the

version posted on the *Glutenberg's Bible* website says; it has become "a significant (if often understated) part of the subsoil of fanish history".

Why? It's an allegory of fandom, particularly fanzine fandom. "Jophan" (Everyfan) finds nobody in "the village of Prosaic in the Country of Mundane" with whom he can share dreams of otherness that are awakened by reading books about faraway places and times. Like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, he is oppressed by his surroundings, awoken to a new life by what he reads, and directed by his vision to quest through a symbolic landscape, populated by people with names such as Plodder, Erratic, or Lettera ("letter-hack, gedit?") in search of "The Enchanted Duplicator" with which he will be able to publish the perfect fanzine and become a True Fan. In other words, this is *Pilgrim's Progress* retold as a manual of how to publish a fanzine, by and for fans who recognise the source and get the joke. (although neither Willis nor Shaw had, apparently, read *Pilgrim's Progress* when they wrote *The Enchanted Duplicator* (*Warhoun* 28, p. 26), it is almost inconceivable that they did not know enough about it to echo its use of allegorical figures).

The frequent puns are (in most cases) accessible to all fans beyond the neo stage, although full comprehension comes with a reasonably detailed knowledge of fanish history. For example, most fans recognise the pun on "Egg o' Bu" ("ego boost"): it's what fans get when they see their work in print.) Fewer may realise that the blonde giantess among the "Magravoos" (mag

Read *The Enchanted Duplicator* for yourself at: www.fanzine.org/fanzines/Enchanted_Duplicator/Enchanted-00.html



reviews) who randomly drenches battered news with egg o'bu is meant to be Mari Wolff who reviewed fanzines in *Imagination* (Chapter 17). It wasn't until I read the handy footnotes to the serialisation of *TED* in *Amazing* (Nov 72 - Jun 73) that I understood the reference in Chapter 13 to the "native bearers", the Subs, who guide Jophan across the Desert of Indifference! (Sometimes the most obvious puns are the hardest to decipher. "Subr" = "subber" = people who subscribe to a fanzine but don't give feedback, carrying Jophan over the "Desert" to regions where he receives criticism.)

Nevertheless, most fans get most of it. This is us, and what we do. And it satirises our activity most lovingly. While the tendencies of some fans to take things too far are mocked, Jophan's quest is the entirely rational one of an intelligent and sensitive mind for something to do. His defence against the brickbats of criticism is his "Shield of Umor", but it is also a defence against criticism of the work itself. *TED* isn't a mighty work of literature, it is a fable consisting of puns and in-jokes distributed among a few hundred

participants in a shared hobby.

But within Fanzine fandom it's an important work. One reason for this is simply that it tells us why we do it.

It is the Egg o' Bu which gets Jophan through the desert of Indifference. But it has to be taken cautiously (Ch 15) or the result is "painless but unsightly swelling of the head". Jophan's true goal in publishing the perfect fanzine is not ultimate egoboo, but self-knowledge. He reaches *The Enchanted Duplicator*, and publishes the Perfect Fanzine, because he can and because he wants to. He can, because he's internalised fanish values (which are not so different from the values of some aspects of Mundane): co-operation, kindness, care. The meeting with *Disillusion* teaches him humility. Meeting *Kerles* and *Perfection* teaches him the middle way between producing splashwork and nitpicking attention to detail. His sojourn among the Subs teaches him perseverance. Other fans such as *Sycolan* in Ch 14, who leaches upon BNF's (Big Name Fans) then fawns upon them as if they were gods (or BNFicent spirits), as Willis and Shaw wonderfully put it, show him the danger of becoming parasitic upon others rather than trusting to his own talents. Jophan symbolically publishes his fanzine, surviving technical difficulties, his own inexperience, criticism and over-kind praise - and becomes a True Fan when he knows himself, when he can automatically give back to others what he has received.

Of course, all this sounds horribly pious. Perhaps we have the model of *Pilgrim's Progress* to blame for that. In considering *TED* as a "linking" text, it's precisely here that we need our Shield of Umor to remind us that Fandom, however vital and creative an activity, is not something to be taken altogether seriously.

Still, it works. It's a fun read and if anything is the defining "text" of science fiction fandom, it's *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

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 3DA (asawyer@liv.ac.uk). Science Fiction Foundation Collection: www.liv.ac.uk/~ssawyer/sffichome.html Science Fiction Foundation: <http://www.sff-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.

Affinity rapping

In the first of a new series of articles featuring the best new novelists in British SF, **Tom Hunter** talks to author and *Matrix* regular Martin Sketchley about character motivation, alien sex, publishing his first novel, *The Affinity Trap*, and why it doesn't feature a character called Nitram Nodrog.

Q *The Affinity Trap* is either a fast-paced, action-packed space opera, with guns, spaceships, cyborgs and a few scenes unsuitable for small children, or the story of one man's struggle with the fact that that's really all he is – a man. Do you have a preference?

A I'm the author, so I don't really think it's for me to say what it is, let alone what it's about, but at the end of the day I know I'd rather have people tell me they found my book a rollicking good read, than that they admired its metaphorical context or socio-political comment.

Q One of the big challenges for any new author is finding time to write; how did this work out for you?

A You speak about this in the past tense: it's still a problem! A writer really needs to build up stamina. I used to think I worked hard at it when I was employed, doing a couple of hours every evening, all day on my day off and several hours on Sunday, but these days I work more than ever. At the moment I'm getting up at 6:45am, working until about 6pm, then doing another couple of hours when the kids have gone to bed.

Now that I'm a published author I find I'm asked for advice myself. When you're starting out, you're always looking for that golden nugget of information that will enable you to gain success. I sat in front of a computer writing for a decade or more before that golden nugget came to me, and, as it turned out, it was simply that you have to sit in front of a computer for a decade or more, writing.

Q What's the worst piece of writing advice you've ever been given?

A "Change your main character's name from Gordon Martin to Nitram Nodrog to give a more 'alien' feel." (This was from a non-SF person).

Q One of the books strongest features is the way that the central characters, Delgado and Lycern, deliberately undercut expectations of what, respectively,



a military SF hero and an alien princess should be like. How have readers responded?

A Several people have said Delgado's an unlikely character, which surprises me to be honest. He's selfish, yes, but he's a guy with a military background. By the time *The Affinity Trap* starts he's fucked off big time and wants some payback.

Some people have perceived these (character changes) as being flaws, that I've wedged Delgado into situations because it suits the plot. But the fact is the book is about him changing. He doesn't like it, resists it, but for various reasons – Lycern's muscain (a powerful alien hormone with addictive qualities), his own natural instincts, and so on – he finds he can't. He is in turmoil, fighting things he has no experience of in his controlled military life.

I also realised that the most effective writing isn't actually made up. Delgado's experiences and situation are based almost completely on someone I used to work with. Once at the top of his game, he has been increasingly

sidelined, replaced by younger, more compliant people prepared to toe the official line.

With Lycern I wanted to write a strong "female" character, someone who is underestimated by the "powerful" males in the book, and I think she fit the bill in that respect. I particularly wanted to avoid the SF cliché of the swooning female who's rescued by the hunk in tight trousers. Lycern's no oil painting, is determined and stubborn and takes what she wants.

Q The book also explores an explicit human/alien sexual relationship that's a lot more complicated than Kirk 'beaming-up' another green-skinned lovely...

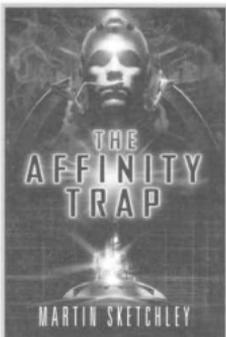
A What I wanted to do with this was explore motivation. I consider the sex scenes in *Affinity Trap* to be anti-sex scenes. They're meant to be something of a turn off. After the first couple of scenes I didn't go into too much detail because the reader's got the picture. The first one is the most important in the book, however, because it's at that point that Delgado's ability to make choices is first compromised, which

is something he's never experienced before, and which is key in later events. Initially he feels he is the instigator, but in truth he's not.

Some people have had a real problem with the human/alien sex thing – mainly because it results in offspring, I think. I can see where they're coming from in a way, but let's face it, if you took all the impossibilities, improbabilities and unlikelihoods out of SF there wouldn't be much left. Is time travel possible? Is FTL travel possible? Are there such things as changelings? Aliens, even? No one knows, and I'm not going to let the fact that a few people can't accept human/alien hybrids as a possibility get in the way of a good story.

Q And finally, can you give us any exciting teasers about your next book, *The Destiny Mask*?

A It's difficult to say what's going to happen in *The Destiny Mask* without giving away the ending of *The Affinity Trap*, but I can say it takes place about 20 years later, and features most of the same characters. They go to Serlatt (Lycern's homeworld) and there's a lot of action. I've enjoyed writing Serlatt.



The Affinity Trap, published by Simon and Schuster, is out now. The sequel, *The Destiny Mask*, has just been delivered to the publishers and is scheduled for release in April 05. Martin promises it is even more action-packed than the first novel.

Foxes' tales

Claire Weaver talks to 2003 BSFA Award-winning author and journalist, Jon Courtenay Grimwood about writing, revealing characters through designer labels, future projects and selling Arabic heroes to Americans. Plus, revealed at last, the truth about all those foxes.

Jon and I meet up in Blacks on Dean Street. For a cliquy, members-only drinking club in central Soho it's remarkably relaxed and – despite the narrow rooms, basement entrance and black-painted front – there are no dark corners from which craggy-faced journalist hacks and wizened authors stare out with hostility.

Not that I'd been expecting that. Jon is, after all, a man of very good taste, despite what his fiction might lead one to believe – it is gritty, violent, often depressing and honest about the worst parts of human nature. And those are the best bits.

This year Jon won the BSFA award for the third book in his Arabesk trilogy, *Felaheen*. It is Jon's favourite out of the trilogy, the one he feels has the most going on. "It's a tragedy: it's Raf's breakdown. It's not a happy ending."

Jon is a freelance journalist and reviews sf for *The Guardian*. Being dyslexic, writing is not an obvious career choice, chosen out of "sheer bloody-mindedness." He got into writing sf because it "lets you fuck with everything from the past to the future in a way that general fiction doesn't – it's open to negotiation in a way that crime and thrillers are not. I can write a thriller crossed with a cowboy novel and call *redRobe* science fiction, or do three Ashraf Bey crime novels, set them in a North Africa that no longer exists and somehow that still counts. The new book, *Stamping Butterflies*, is set during the birth of punk, around now and in the far future and is still sf because sf is so amazingly flexible as a genre."

I ask him about how journalism and fiction might cross over and affect the way he works. "I've never adjusted a book to fit how a critic might think – so much of criticism is subjective. You only have to look at how differently the same novel can be treated across three or four review sections to know that adapting style or content to satisfy a particular critic would only end up pissing off someone else.

"Non fiction is a collection of facts, opinion, statistics and an intro and conclusion... You slam it all



together, shuffle it around and then tidy it up. It's a cross between doing a jigsaw and one of those irritating puzzles found in crackers where you have to move squares around until the picture is right. I can write a three thousand word feature in a couple of days and more or less

guarantee that it will be okay, largely because the first rule of writing non fiction is know the house style. So if I'm writing for a mag I'll read a couple of the most recent issues and take the writing style from that.

"Fiction is something else. It's nightmares and carrying characters

around behind your eyes and looking at the world from someone else's point of view. I love writing fiction but I have no illusion that it's addictive and that most people who do it have rendered themselves unemployable by half removing themselves from the real world to live inside their own heads."

And does his personal life affect his novels? "One of the least pleasant things about most writers is that we mine everything and almost nothing remains sacred. Arguments and reconciliations, lovers and enemies, it all goes into the mix. And most of the time it's not even conscious."

In all his books, Jon tells us very little about his characters – instead he uses their reactions, decisions and even brand names to give us a feel for their personality. "I don't like books that give a description of the character. It's too easy – life's not like that! People walk into your life... walk out of your life... and sometimes they'll walk back in again later. You don't know everything about them – that's the way life is. It's unreasonable to expect the reader to know everything about a character.

"Designer labels are excellent shorthand for defining the different layers to any society. I use labels to indicate someone's character. What we wear and eat and drive say something about us... Even if that something is that we don't give a fuck about what we wear and eat and drive. Brand names make objects specific. I'd far rather a character cleaned his nails with an Opinel lock knife and checked the time on a gold Omega his father once took from a dead Russian general, than he cleaned his nails with a knife and checked his watch. The reader ends up knowing more.

"As for designer labels and me, I long ago worked out I was happiest buying five identical articles of clothing at a time and wearing them to death and, as one black t-shirt is much like another in that it goes grey and falls apart after about five washes, designer labels play little direct part in life."

Jon obviously has a very real



“SF lets you fuck with everything from the past to the future in a way that general fiction doesn't – it's open to negotiation in a way that crime and thrillers are not.”

Jon Courtenay Grimwood

The Greatest

Alexander the Great conquered the world but died at the age of just thirty-two, leaving his empire to fracture and fragment. But what if Alexander had lived? The question has fascinated historians throughout the ages and, as **Stephen Baxter** reveals, it has been a fertile source of ideas for writers of alternate histories.

Once again I cautiously dip my toe into the murky waters of alternate history. In my new novel with Sir Arthur C Clarke, *Time's Eye* (Gollancz), we take a look back at Alexander the Great, whose early death is a classic historical 'turning point'. Genre explorations of Alexander's impact include Melissa Scott's *A Choice of Destinies* (1986) and Greg Bear's *Eon* (1985) and its sequels; see the Uchronia website (www.uchronia.net) for more examples.

Alternate history can be surprisingly controversial. The current vogue for mainstream counterfactual speculations came under attack recently by historian Tristram Hunt (in *The Guardian*, April 7th 2004). The argument even made it onto *Newsnight!* Hunt criticises the 'ragged bunch[es] of rightwing historians' who produce not so much 'what if' but 'if only' exercises, in which context is ignored and strong individuals are emphasised: 'the contribution of bureaucracies, ideas or social class is nothing compared to the personal fickleness of Josef Stalin or the constitution of Franz Ferdinand'. Indeed I've criticised 'great men' theories myself in these pages (*Matrix* 153); much history is surely determined by such huge factors as geography and climate.

Fair enough – but Alexander, a giant on an empty stage, is surely proof that sometimes one person can make a difference to history. And Alexander is also an example of a strange phenomenon I've noted before (November 2003): that many alternate historians, like Voltaire's Pangloss, end up arguing that ours is the best of all possible worlds.

Alexander's real-world career was spectacular. His father Philip was assassinated when Alexander was just twenty. In a series of rapid campaigns, and a purge of irksome relatives, he consolidated his position in his native Macedonia and Greece. Then he turned on Persia, a brooding eastern power that had come close to annihilating Greek culture altogether. After six short years Alexander had overthrown an empire.

Statue of Alexander in Thessalonika



That should have been enough for any man – but not Alexander. Perhaps he wanted to imitate his hero Achilles, or perhaps it was all rivalry with his dead father. Whatever the motive, Alexander launched his battle-hardened army into India. At last his exhausted troops rebelled, and even a god-King could go no further. Alexander returned to Babylon – and there, on June 11th 323 BC, he died, aged thirty-two.

How did he die? There are many theories. Alexander's body was weakened by many wounds, and perhaps by heavy drinking. He might easily have succumbed to malaria caught in the Babylonian marshes, or perhaps something more exotic such as West Nile Fever. Or perhaps Alexander simply rushed his recovery from some

minor ailment, resulting in an overdose of some such purgative as hellebore.

But was it murder? By the end he had plenty of enemies; even his troops were mutinous. Macedonian courtiers had killed kings before, including Philip – but their way of murder was not poison.

Whatever the cause of his death, Alexander's empire quickly fell apart. But Alexander had spread Greek culture throughout the Middle East and central Asia. That was why, when the Romans came east, they found Greek-speakers, on which they built their empire. If not for the medium of Alexander's gift of a common Greek vernacular, Jesus' message could not have travelled out of Judea, and without the context of Christianity Mohammed's career would surely have been very different. Thus

Alexander's legacy shaped Roman history, Christianity, Islam, and ultimately the rediscovery of Greek culture in the Renaissance: the world we know is a product of Alexander's conquests.

But the mystery of Alexander's death has fuelled counterfactual speculation ever since. What if he had lived on? There was much more he might have done. At the time of his death Alexander had been planning moves west, even as far as Gibraltar, and eastward to the Black Sea. Alexander was even the subject of counterfactual speculation by a Roman historian. In 35 BC Livy speculated on Alexander living to take on Rome – he would have lost, of course, said good Roman Livy. And in a famous counterfactual essay (in *Some Problems of Greek History*, OUP 1969) Arnold Toynbee wondered if a united Eurasia under Alexander's heirs might have made faster progress towards civilisation and technology.

Alexander's postponed death is explored in two recent books by American authors. Steven Barnes, in *Lion's Blood* (Warner Books, 2002), suggests that a longer-lived Alexander might have resulted in the world's domination by Africa, not Europe – and in which case, as history is written by the winners, Alexander would probably be



“But the mystery of Alexander's death has fuelled counterfactual speculation ever since. What if he had lived on?”
Stephen Baxter



Alexander's bust in Istanbul

remembered as black ... This book is a role-reversal fable, about the keeping of white slaves in a black America; it is meaty, well thought out, and remarkably brave: an example of alternate history at its best.

More problematic is SM Stirling's *Conquistador* (Roc, 2003). A longer-lived Alexander founds a Greek-speaking empire that reduces Rome to a footnote. The Jews are assimilated by the Greeks, Christianity and Islam are still-born. As the Macedonians move east, Iranians and others are pushed into central Asia, in turn displacing many other peoples; even 'our' China never emerges. But we view this fascinating history through the narrow prism of an alternate California, a peculiarly American utopia unspoiled by the messy intervening history that actually happened. This is the frontier myth revived, but the result is morally confused – although Stirling namechecks me on page 76!

Not everybody agrees with the rosy assessments of the Toynbee type of the impact of a longer-lived Alexander. While he had an instinct for empire-building – and in his time order derived only from empires – Alexander was also a brutal and enthusiastic warmaker. He committed atrocities; Persepolis was burned after a drunken night with his generals. And each new campaign had to be financed by plunder from the last. If Alexander had lived, would he have consolidated – or chosen to go on and on, as he had wanted to in India, in the end draining his new conquests of wealth and vitality, much as he exhausted his native Macedon?

And anyhow, in Alexander's day thirty-two wasn't actually such a terribly young age to die, especially for a man who had lived, and played, so hard. What if Alexander had died, not older, but younger?

See for example 'Conquest Denied' by Josiah Ober in *What If?*

(Penguin Putnam 1999). Alexander came close to death early in his Persian campaign, on the river Granicus. If he had died then, leaving no heir. Or her. Or her suggests, Macedon would probably have disintegrated into feuding factions. Persia would have survived, to become a mirror of rising Rome: patriarchal, dominated by ritual, duty and a veneration of ancestors. Perhaps the world would have settled into a bipolar form, split between Roman and Persian spheres. It would have been stable but stifling – and without the Hellenistic tradition Alexander left behind, perhaps not to our liking.

As I noted, it's an odd fact that many works of alternate history seem to describe worlds that are worse than ours. These counterfactual studies appear to support the Goldilocks theory of history. Alexander didn't die too early – or too late – but at just the right time to ensure his long-term legacy.

God and resurrection

Roderick Gladish reviews a Christian sf magazine and one that's back from the dead.

Gateway SF is a Christian sf magazine. To me it seems peculiar linking religion to any one thing, be it a magazine, a novel or a war. Shouldn't faith permeate life like the sound track of a movie? Present in all things and yet not obviously apparent. Having announced itself as the magazine of science and faith it then backs off.

The guidelines warn not to put off an unbelieving audience. If that's the case why proclaim you're a Christian mag in the first place? Those that turn away at the C-word won't get to the stories and Christians who want a strong theme will be disappointed. Themes I would expect are about sacrifice, forgiveness and redemption, all good stuff whether Christian or not, but they're missing.

War is hell in 'Valkyries' by Brue Corbet. A Riverworldesque tale of endless fighting and dying, it seemed to imply redemption for murder was possible through more killing.

'A Matter of Perspective' uses two views of an event that's either an angelic visitation or an alien abduction. Jarret W. Buse doesn't give the answer in his tale. Apart from a statement at the end Nina Munteanu's 'Angel's Promises' is another one that wasn't particularly Christian. Feral children in a shopping mall, one with a talent for interacting

with AIs who run things.

'A Single Point' is a short by Daniel L. Naden. God-like power was involved, but not God.

A war-widow cop investigating a serial slasher killer who can create realities from dreams, is at the core of 'Harvesting the Wounds'. Maybe Forrest Hunter is describing heaven and hell, but then hints at a government conspiracy. Can we have fewer conspiracies and more governmental incompetence?

Despite the title 'Holy Alliance', Ahmed Khan doesn't show anything holy in it. An unremarkable seismologist stops an alien takeover.

'Let it be Forever' did confront organised religion head on. Robert R. Shelsky explores the implications of an immortality drug as high-ranking Catholics argue over a Papal diktat on whether to take it.

Gateway SF has both a web presence and a print one. The sixth edition of the physical version is out and the web companion is small, which is surprising given that it was at issue nine. On the whole the stories aren't bad, but they don't strike out as boldly as they claim to. If Gateway SF wants to be unique it needs courage to achieve that aim.

If anyone knows of other religious (or openly atheist) sf

magazines let me know.

Webzine *Scifantastic* fell into hiatus last September. Unusually for this type of site it recovered. Turning from a monthly into a quarterly and declaring itself as Volume 2, Issue 1, the Easter 04 edition saw its re-emergence.

A further surprise was that the cover picture was one of mine.

Scifantastic is evolving into a proper small press magazine, only without a press. Originally a showcase where the readers would vote on what they did or didn't like, with every story submitted getting published, editor Sarah Dobbs now applies her judgement.

There are magazine, book and film reviews and competitions to win the reviewed items. I loved the idea of entering a competition to win a well-thumbed month-old *The Third Alternative*. The democratic principle remains with the writer that wins the readers' poll being the only one to get paid.

'Afterlife' by Kevin Ahearn, immortality via virtual reality, but sometimes that's not enough. A truly humorous tale as opposed to 'The Bar' by T.R. Nunes was a dark story of alien sushi.

Christian R. Bonawandt looked at the fight game with cybernetic augmentation and a failed fighter's search to provide for his family in 'Certain Benefits'.

Kendra Renaud's 'The Cost of Freedom' was a sub-Tolkien fantasy and felt long. A female elf mercenary pursued a runaway humanoid-cat woman slave the elf fancied. Apart from a sideline in cross-species lesbianism with brainwashed slaves, she was a human with pointy ears.

A post-apocalyptic world in 'Cycle' (George Steele) contained a monster of our own making.

Confident in its own survival *Scifantastic* presented its first serialized novel 'Pack' by Kieran Larwood. Chapter 1 began a grim modern day werewolf tale.

Kevin Ahearn's article 'On Writing' says a novel should be stripped of anything that doesn't contribute to the story. I liked his story 'Afterlife', however; isn't it nice sometimes to enjoy the view during a journey?

Not a slick site like *Strange Horizons* or *Quantum Muse*, *Scifantastic* is definitely a British magazine. Not all contributors are UK-based, but the editorial vision gives it the feeling that it comes from these small islands.

By the way, Kieran Larwood got paid this time.

Gateway SF

www.gateway-sf-magazine.com
GateWay S-F Magazine, PO Box 469
N.Hollywood, CA 91603-0469

Scifantastic
http://scifantastic.co.uk

There is no Alternative

AN IRONING BOARD
ON A DUCK POOD

A word of advice to new writers – be nice to Andy Cox. As editor of *Interzone* and *The Third Alternative* he's now officially "the man" in genre short fiction in the UK – **Martin Sketchley** finds out whether he intends to use his new-found power for good or evil.

In a recent Ironing Board with Chris Reed we talked about the small press and speculative fiction magazines in general. Moving on from that it seemed a good idea to talk to the editor of one of – if not the – finest independent magazines out there: *The Third Alternative*.

I've subscribed to TTA since its inception back in the 1990s, and have seen it grow from being just another A5 small press magazine that was a cut above the rest to the superb work of art that it is today. What's more, TTA Press has an equally stylish online presence, so I talked to TTA's editor, Andy Cox, about this magazine amongst magazines, and what the internet's got to do with it...

So how long has the TTA website been live now? "I really don't know! We've had some sort of web presence for ages, but the current site has been live for about three years, I guess. Now I just update the pages whenever a new issue is out, or when any other worthwhile piece of news comes along, then ftp them to the server. There's a page linked to a publishing newsfeed, too, so that's updated constantly. I also do a lot of incidental updating on the discussion forum, posting recent acceptances, answering questions, etc."

"The TTA message boards are a great place for readers to have some direct contact with authors that's largely unavailable elsewhere; how did he feel they benefited the magazines?" "The forum acts as a realtime letters column for the magazines, where readers post feedback and responses to other people's feedback. There are numerous boards on the forum, so people can discuss what they like, when they like, and they can communicate directly with authors such as China Miéville, M. John Harrison, Justina Robson, Graham Joyce, and many others."

I asked Cox if he thought



the website has boosted his subscriptions. "Yes, definitely. Getting all the necessary information out there as professionally as you can, and the interactive aspect of the site, can only encourage people to take that next step. And that's only a click away, as the site can take credit card payments. Most of TTA's new subscriptions now come via the website."

There are frequently guest

editorials in TTA, most recently from Graham Joyce (TTA38). I asked Cox what the thinking was behind this. "TTA guest editorials offer an opportunity to get more varied voices and interesting opinions into the magazine. After all, nobody wants to listen to me droning on and on..."

I interrupt Cox's incessant droning to ask about interviews. "We're always trying to expand TTA's non-fiction content without

sacrificing story space, and now have at least two interviews per issue, in addition to the guest editorial. Contributors of regular columns include Christopher Fowler, Allen Ashley, John Paul Catton, Jaspre Bark, Peter Tennant, Sandy Auden and Iain Emsley. All this means we cover pretty much the entire waterfront: fiction, non-fiction, films, comics, graphic novels, Japanese material, critical comment, artwork – you name it."

One of *The Third Alternative*'s unique attributes when first launched was the fact that its editor would consider submissions of any length; I asked Cox if this was still the case. "As long as it still counts as short fiction, yes. We have no set minimum, and the longest story we've published is Lucius Shepard's *The Park Sweeper* (TTA36), which was about 20,000 words. *The Third Alternative*'s stories often seem to read shorter than they actually are," says Cox, "which is a good thing. For example, I was recently going through a list of stories from *The Third Alternative* that were nominated for the Stoker award, having been asked to confirm that they were all under 7,500 words; it turned out that only one of them was. As long as the story is the right length for itself, that's what matters."

At this point the conversation was joined by one of *Interzone*'s assistant editors Jette de Vries, as I asked Cox how he had come to take the helm of this longstanding British SF magazine. "One dark and stormy Saturday night, David Pringle called me and asked if I was willing to take over *Interzone*, as he was about to step down as publisher/editor. I said yes straight away, not only for the challenge of it, but also because *Interzone* was the magazine that kept the UK SF scene out of the dark ages in the 1980s, and was an inspiration and guiding light for *The Third Alternative*."

I wondered if there will be any changes to the criteria for



Let the others be conservative, we'll try to make *Interzone* the fresh breeze it once was, the wind of change that SF used to be.

Andy Cox

submissions, or the artwork or the general style of the magazine? "With all due respect to David Pringle, and all others involved with *Interzone*, we – the editorial team – feel that a certain fatigue had crept into the magazine in recent years. Most of the stories didn't quite have the spark and inventiveness of those in the 80s and early 90s. Furthermore, the whole design and layout hadn't changed very much in over a decade. Basically, *Interzone* looked like what it was: a magazine with an 80s sensibility. So, for better or worse, we're trying to infuse it with a 21st century sensibility, both fiction – and presentation-wise."

I wondered whether, like *The Third Alternative*, *Interzone* would now be open to fiction submissions of unlimited length. "The original 2,000-6,000 word limit is gone. *Interzone* now accepts stories up to around 20,000 words in length. Furthermore, we don't wish to burden authors with a whole list of do's and don'ts. Basically, our guidelines are: read a few issues of the magazine, then send us your best. If you know what we publish, you have a better feeling for what we're likely to accept. Having said that, the ideal story – if such a thing exists – would relate a breathtaking experience in a tight, internally consistent plot with compelling characters, using beautiful language, with a sense of humour where appropriate, and be infused with that certain something extra: call it the X-factor, call it the ineffable, even call it a soul. Hey, we told you we wanted the very best!"

"Edward Noon – a young and talented artist – has designed a new cover, while continuing to work with us on a revamp of the interior, as well as supplying most of the original artwork so far (he's very versatile!). Of course, with *The Third Alternative* and *Crimewave*, TTA Press has a reputation to uphold when it comes to production values. We fully intend to maintain that reputation with the new *Interzone*."

"However, it's most definitely not our intention to turn *Interzone* into a copy of *The Third Alternative*. In fact, *The Third Alternative* can now move even further away from *Interzone* in terms of content, which will absolutely remain a magazine dedicated to quality SF and fantasy stories. Favourite columns such as David Langford's "Ansible Link" and Nick Lowe's "Mutant Popcorn" will continue, as will book reviews and interviews. But without sacrificing space for stories, which will remain the creative heart of the

magazine, we'll be adding some new features such as Mike O'Driscoll's commentary Night's Plutonian Shore, Peter Crowther on graphic novels, Paul Barnett's The Painted Snarl (a bit like Ansible except about art and artists, with a featured artist per issue), Andrew Osmond on manga/anime, and we'll also be sneaking in things like videogame coverage and DVD reviews. These changes will make *Interzone* a magazine that will excite and thrill people once again, and plant it firmly in the new century."

Will the team keep the *Interzone* website going? "The *Interzone* website is being integrated into the TTA Press website – all the most useful information is already there – and *Interzone* has been added to the website's secure online shop, via which we can take credit/debit card subscriptions and renewals. Also, because we already have a message board up and running on the site's discussion forum, any *Interzone* reader is invited to express his or her opinions, both positive and negative. We welcome any kind of feedback, and you will get a quick answer from us."

Given *Interzone*'s history and heritage, I wondered what plans the team has for *Interzone*'s future. "We plan on expanding that heritage by showing that a modern SF magazine can and will grow with the times, something a lot of other major SF magazines don't seem to do. Let the others be conservative, we'll try to make *Interzone* the fresh breeze it once was, the wind of change that SF used to be. Also, we hope to maintain the magazine as both a showcase and breeding ground for new talent, both in fiction and art. We want to make our readers proud of reading us."

URLs of relevance to this issue

Information on all the TTA press magazines - including online subscriptions - can be found at:

www.ttopress.com

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

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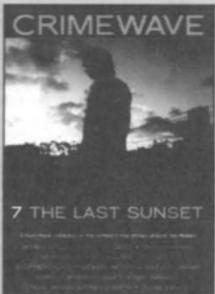
Three alternatives

Martin McGrath runs the rule over *Interzone*'s new stablemates at TTA Press.

If *The Third Alternative* (TTA) isn't the most beautiful independent press speculative fiction magazine on the market then someone's got Michelangelo and Leonardo (not the turtles) on their art staff and no one has told me. But TTA has more than just good looks; it's smart and strange and packed full of good stories. With a distinct preference for dark urban modern fantasies, TTA has never run stories that reread science fiction tropes and I know some science fiction fans find it too dark (Roderick Gladwin reviewed TTA in *Matrix* 163 and said: "All of it is excellent, especially the writing, but... the fiction is no pleasure for me.") For me, TTA can deliver intense stories that nicely complement my regular diet of "straight" sf and this year's subscription was worth it just to read "The Park Sweeper" by Lucius Shepard.



Another beautifully produced magazine that doesn't just rely on its good looks. *Crimewave* is, as the name suggests, a magazine of crime fiction, but don't expect any of that genre's clichés – hard-boiled private dicks and crime-solving grannies are thin on the ground here – and if they do appear you can be sure there's a twist just around the corner. Many of the stories have a distinct slipstream sensibility, teetering on the edge of fantasy in worlds that don't quite make sense to the protagonists. *Crimewave* is a solid read, too; issue seven packed in fifteen stories in 178 pages with barely a weak link amongst them.



The Fix is small but perfectly formed. A magazine dedicated to magazines – it is to my knowledge the only magazine devoted to reviewing short fiction from around the world. Recent editorials have suggested that TTA Press have big plans for this little magazine, but for now *The Fix* is perfectly filling a neglected niche and is indispensable. My only complaint would be that there has been a long gap between issues seven and eight, but we're promised a return to a regular publishing schedule with the latest issue.



Bacon flies west

CHECK POINT
Mark Plummer on fans and fandom

I first saw James Bacon wrapped in clingfilm. I never found out why, but the subsequent decade has demonstrated that this initial encounter wasn't remarkable and was actually a little restrained. James is the human manifestation of Nigel Tufnell's amplifier: he goes all the way up to eleven, whether as the organiser of anarchic conventions like *They Came And Shaved Us* or founder and administrator of the James White Award.

And now he is going all the way to America, to the Worldcon in Boston this September, as the latest Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFFF) delegate. Histories will tell you that TAFFF was inspired by a one-off fund created to bring legendary Belfast fan Walt Willis to the 1952 Worldcon in Chicago. In 1954 it elected its first delegate, A Vincent Clarke, although he was unable to make the trip due to personal circumstance so it wasn't until the following year that Ken Bulmer made the inaugural fan-fund-sponsored crossing. Since then, TAFFF has funded a trip in one direction or the other in most years, bringing Seattle fan Randy Byers to the 2003 Eastercon.

It's easy to assume that TAFFF sends delegates between Britain and the United States but, as the ballot always makes clear, its western end is North America while the eastern link is Europe. There have been non-British westbound TAFFF winners before – Germany in 1966 and Italy in 1971 – and the current European administrator and last westbound delegate, Tobes Valois, is a Jerseyman, though now resident in the UK. James is the first Irish winner, which seems appropriate in this fiftieth anniversary year. He may not wear clingfilm to the

Beaten candidate Anders Holmstrom (left) congratulates TAFFF victor James Bacon. Convivial guests Helen Wallace and Simon McGrory clearly think it's a jolly good show!



Hugo presentation, but he has told his nominators that I intend to be dignified and respectable, even when I drop my trousers. We can be confident, at least, that said trousers will be neatly pressed.

Closer to home, Eastercon has been and gone and my speculation about BSFA committee members and donkeys proved unfounded – there was an inflatable kangaroo, that inevitably came into contact with James Bacon, but the details, mercifully, elude me.

Concourse tried a new format for an Eastercon, which wasn't entirely a success. Traditionally, organising committees seek out a hotel which can house all the events and most of the attendees under one roof. There aren't that many venues which have all the required features and that are also affordable, especially as many fans seem to believe there has been no inflation in hotel prices since the 1980s and hotels which behave otherwise

are extortionists. Concourse tried using a convention centre – the faded grandeur of the Blackpool Winter Gardens – while fans booked rooms in whichever nearby hotels, guest house or holiday flat suited their pocket.

In practice, most fans weren't keen on this dispersed approach, especially as central Blackpool is a little... lively at the weekend, and worse when the weekend is four days long. For many of us, Eastercon is what we do every year – I haven't missed one since 1988 and others can claim a far longer lineage – so we lose track of what the rest of the world does with its long weekend. On this evidence, a significant percentage go to Blackpool, get rat-rased, and throw up in the gutter. Now I'm sounding like someone's my age again.

It's a shame that these organisational details detract from the content of the convention, which included a diverse guest list – Mitchell Burnside-Clapp, Danny Flynn, Sue Mason, Chris Priest,

Phillip Pullman – and such just-passing luminaries as Jeff VanderMeer and Jeffrey Ford and numerous familiar, but none-the-less welcome, British writers. The BSFA Awards were presented – details last issue – as was the James White Award. The Doc Weir Award, for an unspecified and generally unacknowledged contribution to fandom, went to Robert 'Nojay' Sneddon who has been providing transport and construction services to convention art shows for more years than anybody can remember. There was a particularly good art show this year, featuring the work of guests Danny Flynn and Sue Mason and numerous others.

Then, only a week ago (as I write), was ConVivial, the civilised convention of the scientific romance. Colonising a few corners of Glasgow's Quality Hotel (formerly The Central, of beloved fannish memory), this small gathering had the sense of a late-night drunken idea made reality. This wasn't an in-depth examination of the works of Wells, Verne and Arthur Conan Doyle – although there were a few valiant forays into more serious tales – but an excuse for donning Victorian fashions (it's remarkable how many fans seem to have an extensive wardrobe of this kind) and extravagant beards, many of which seem to have been specially grown for the occasion. There were dirigible races, 'Test the Empire', and we were given the opportunity to marvel at 'Steam!' The Miracle of Our Age. Never let it be said that the second floor function room of a three-star hotel is an inappropriate venue for the construction of a steam launch.

James Bacon was at ConVivial too. I think it may have given him ideas. Look out America...

the cards, and many more where self-preservation really ought to kick in.

With the 'Did you eat the chocolate cake?' experiment conducted by Robert Winston. Small child is told not to eat cake. Small child is left alone with cake. Small child eats cake. Small child is asked if they ate cake. Small child denies all knowledge of any cake-eating activity whatsoever, despite being smeared with cake. To make the lie convincing, the kid should have at the very least cleaned their cake-covered fingers (which they can see), and perhaps even their mouths (which they can't). The more enterprising would have been a hollowing out of the cake, but then again, these were only three-year olds.

Moving on to story writing, lying convincingly is all about being convincing, not about lying. I've read modern-day novels

that lied so unconvincingly they seemed more fantastical than any dwarves-and-elves fantasy. In fact, I'd go one stage further and say that genre fiction has to lie much more convincingly to be believed. If enjoying a book is about a sense of wonder, about the suspension of disbelief, about involving yourself in the character's lives, then anything that jars is going to ruin it.

But surely, speculative fiction is about making stuff up? Yes, but the best of the genre is consistent and rigorous in what it makes up. It's not just following the rules, it's about devising your own self-contained and inviolable rules and then bothering to stick to them – whether you've introduced a particular law of rubber science or you've modified your system of magic. If you break your rules, then your readers will take you round the back of the bookshop and give



Truth is stranger than fiction – it's a phrase that trips off the tongue whenever we hear some bizarre real-life anecdote of the kind that would sound preposterous coming from the pen of a fiction writer. However, story-telling is about the only socially acceptable form of lying: politicians, journalists and estate agents all do it, but they're (rightly) despised for doing so. Authors are feted for their lies, and become famous on

the back of them.

So why is it so difficult to lie convincingly? Before I get shouted down ("Of course it's easy, people do it all the time and get away with it!"), here's an interesting factoid: children have to learn to lie properly. It's a vital part of growing up, as vital as learning to cross the road, catching balls and not sticking small objects up noses. There are a whole raft of situations where telling the truth is simply not

Eligibility criteria

Best Novel

The Best Novel award is open to any novel-length work of sf or fantasy first published in the UK in 2004. (Serialized novels are eligible provided that the publication date of the concluding part is in 2004.) If a novel has been previously published elsewhere, but it hasn't been published in the UK until 2004, it will be eligible.

Best Short Fiction

The Best Short Fiction award is open to any shorter work of sf or fantasy, up to and including novellas, first published in 2004 (in a magazine, book, or online) including books and magazines published outside the UK.

Best Artwork

The Best Artwork award is open to any single image of sf or fantasy artwork that first appeared in 2004. Whether or not an image is science fictional or fantastic is perhaps the most subjective judgement call within these awards (but the more information you can give me about it, the better). Provided the artwork hasn't been published before 2004 it doesn't matter where it appears.

Anything published by the BSFA itself, whether in the magazines, in book form or on the website, is not eligible. But the awards are open to works by BSFA members (including Council and committee members) provided they have been published elsewhere.

you a slapping. *Deus ex* might have worked for the Greeks, but our largely mechanistic world-view doesn't allow such get-outs. Even fairy godmothers have their powers limited.

Soaps are the escapist fantasies of our time. Sex-and-shopping novels are no more than 'squids in space' for all they have to do with modern life. Where are you going to find the big concepts discussed? The issues of the day bisected and satirised? Overpopulation, divisive wealth, runaway technology, climate change, the decay of civilisation, treated as if they were actually important? In books written by the brightest and best liars on the planet, of course. And we're not talking about estate agents.

Simon's first collection of short stories *The Kingdom Come* is available from Lone Wolf Publications (www.lonewolfpubs.com) or in the UK from the author. His second *Brilliant Things* is due out from Subway soon.

Time flies

... but sometimes trains don't. Claire Brialey brings us the latest news on the BSFA Awards.

We science fiction fans are meant to know about time. We read and watch stories about time travel, FTL drives and relative time distortions, alternate histories, far futures, time paradoxes and dimensional warps. Time may fascinate us, but it holds no mysteries, oh no. We are the masters of time.

Which doesn't quite explain why my half-imagined fans a column which dwelt on the new promises offered by spring – new growth, new life, new sheep, new shows, new science fiction to nominate for the BSFA awards – now falter in the face of a sweltering early summer heatwave. (Nor does it explain why this column is being scribbled out on a train that waits, seemingly forever, for half of its crew, on the evening of the day of the deadline. But let's move swiftly on. Unlike the train.) I may be a master of time, but perhaps not quite always its manager.

Then again, I could simply have been caught out by climate change. Professionally I've been prepared for it for about a dozen years, but I was hoping to keep a separation between my personal and professional lives. Yet suddenly

there's a lot of it about, in fiction and in real life; and to give sf its due climate change has been a popular theme since most people thought that 'global warming' was the same thing as the hole in the ozone layer and that it sounded quite nice anyway. Now we have not only summer (boo), but the sensationalist knockabout of *The Day After Tomorrow* in cinemas; and the post-genre sf novel *Forty Signs of Rain* among the first nominations for the BSFA award for the best novel of 2004.

You knew I'd get onto this theme eventually, didn't you? This is, after all, the primary purpose of this column. I'm pleased to have four books already nominated in the novel category, and three pieces of artwork, and it's good to have at least the first nomination in for short fiction too. The rest of you, I'm sure, have just been holding back out of politeness, or saving up the year's stock of magazines and the new books for your summer holiday reading – or just caught out, like me, by the passage of time.

Don't be fooled again. If you've already read a good novel or story or seen a good piece of artwork that's eligible for the awards and that you think deserves to be

nominated, don't wait for the right moment or for someone else to do it: email or write to me, and nominate it yourself. Indeed, even if your own favoured choices so far this year are included in the select band of works already nominated, remember that only the five works in each category with the highest number of nominations will actually appear on the shortlist. So if you don't nominate it too, you could find yourself in a few months lamenting the shortlist and wishing that you could, well, go back in time.

You can nominate as many different works as you like in any of the three categories, but your nomination for each work will only be counted once. And yes, I do check. All BSFA members are eligible to nominate; please include your name and membership number with your nominations. All BSFA members and attending members of the 2005 British national science fiction convention, where the awards will be presented, will also be eligible to vote for the awards next year.

Nominations will close in January 2005; until then, you have all the time in the world. Don't let it slip away...

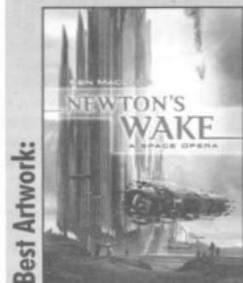
Nominations received

Best Novel:

Forty Signs of Rain – Kim Stanley Robinson (HarperCollins)
Newton's Wake – Ken MacLeod (Orbit)
The Year of Our War – Steph Swainston (Gollancz SF)
White Devils – Paul McAuley (Simon & Schuster)

Best Short Fiction:

'Deletion' – Steven Bratman (Analog, Jan/Feb)

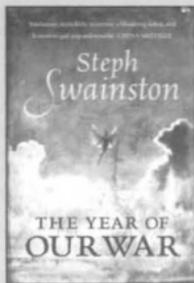


Best Artwork:

Cover of *Newton's Wake* (Tor US) – Stephan Martinière



Cover of *Newton's Wake* (UK) – artist uncredited



Cover of *The Year of Our War* – Edward Miller

incoming

Movies

I, Robot (August 13th)

I, Robot is an amalgamation of plot, themes and tag-lines from the stories of Isaac Asimov and looks to be one of the biggest movies of the summer. Opinions are divided but one cannot deny it will be a blockbuster to remember – outstanding special effects, big-name cast and crew and ideas pinched from one of the best writers in the history of sf.



- July 9th – *Battle Royale II: Requiem*
 July 16th – *Spiderman 2*
 July 23rd – *Thunderbirds*
 August 6th – *Catwoman*
 August 13th – *I, Robot*
 August 20th – *The Village*
 August 27th – *The Chronicles of Riddick*

Events

BSFA Meeting (August 25th)

Wherever the venue, the BSFA meetings guarantee wall-to-wall fans, authors, interviewers and critics, drinks, books and smiles. In August Sean McMullen, author of *Glass Dragons* and *Voyage of the Shadowmoon*, is interviewed by Michelle Reid.



27th July – **BSFA meeting:** Justina Robinson interviewed by Jon Courtenay Grimwood. The White Hart public house, 119-121 Bishopsgate, London (Note: meeting date changed - check website before attending). (www.bsfa.co.uk)

- 5-8 August – **Eurocon**, Plovdiv, Bulgaria. (www.bgcon.org)
 20-23 August – **Discworld Convention**, Hinckley (www.dwcon.org)
 25 August – **BSFA Meeting:** Sean McMullen, interviewed by Michelle Reid. Venue to be confirmed (see www.bsfa.co.uk for more info).

Future Dates for Your Diary

- 16-17 October 2004: **Octocon**, Ireland (www.octocon.com)
 5-7 November 2004: **Novacon**, Walsall (www.novacon.org)
 25-28 March 2005: **Paragon2** (Eastercon), Hinckley (www.paragon2.org.uk)
 4-8 August 2005: **Interaction** (Worldcon), Glasgow (www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk)
 14-17 Apr 2006: **Concussion** (Eastercon), Glasgow (www.eastercon2006.org)

If you have any forthcoming events, publications or other material you think should be included in *Incoming*, then please contact Claire Weaver at matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk.

In Print

Interzone (July/August)

Under new editorship as of Issue 194, this copy of *Interzone* is one to keep your eye on (although not literally, please; that would be nasty). Andy Cox steps into David Pringle's shoes and takes *Interzone* under the wing of TTA Press with new content, bimonthly publishing and an exciting new look.



July

- Recursion* – Tony Ballantyne (Macmillan/Tor UK)
Demonstorm – James Barclay (Orion/Gollancz)
The Treasured One – David Eddings & Leigh Eddings (HarperCollins/Voyager)
The Devil Delivered – Steven Erikson (PS Publishing)
No Time Like Show Time – Michael Hoeye (Viking UK/Puffin UK)
The Limits of Enchantment – Graham Joyce (Orion/Gollancz)
The Charnel Prince – Greg Keyes (Macmillan/Tor UK)
Little Machines – Paul McAuley (PS Publishing)
Trullio – Lucius Shepard (PS Publishing)

August

- Jocasta* – Brian Aldiss (The Rose Press)
New York Dreams – Eric Brown (Orion/Gollancz)
Fine Cuts – Dennis Etchison (PS Publishing)
Something Rotten – Jasper Fforde (Hodder & Stoughton)
The Water Room – Christopher Fowler (Transworld/Doubleday UK)
The Snow – Adam Roberts (Orion/Gollancz)
Edenborn – Nick Sagan (Transworld/Bantam UK)

Comics

Starjammers #1 & #2 (July)

Written by sf author Kevin J Anderson (*Dune* prequels) this is a standalone sf tale that ditched Marvel continuity and completely retools these Z-list characters. Anderson describes it as an epic sf coming-of-age adventure inspired by the British Empire in India.



- July 7th & 21st – *Starjammers #1* and *#2* (Marvel)
 July 8th – *The Maxx Book 3* (Wildstorm)
 July 14th – *The Compleat Moonshadow* (Vertigo)
 – *Technopriests Vol. 1* (DC)
 July 15th – *1602* (Marvel)
 July 21st – *Batman: Hush Vol. 1* (DC)
 July 28th – *100 Bullets: Samurai* (Vertigo)
 August 11th – *Sandman Endless Nights* - soft cover (Vertigo)
 August 18th – *Astro City Special* (Wildstorm)

ENCOUNTERS



The BSFA meetings in London have recently moved to the White Hart in Bishopsgate for a full programme of guest author interviews organised by Farah Mendlesohn. In June Niall Harris wrote:

Two Scottish gentlemen (waistcoats and cigarettes and all), sitting in a smoky, slightly dingy cellar bar, discussing esoteric points of philosophical, political and historical theory: it sounds almost like a scene from a Ken MacLeod novel, and it almost could have been, except for the fact that the event in question was an interview of MacLeod himself (introduced as 'the greatest living libertarian Trotskyist science fiction author', or similar), conducted by Telegraph journalist Andrew McKie, with an attentive audience all around.

Yes, last night was the monthly BSFA event, and if I'm slightly disappointed that there wasn't much discussion of *Newton's Wake* - MacLeod's latest, which I'd borrowed from Andrew and read specially! - the feeling is more than compensated for by the thoughtful nature of the discussion that there was, including a wonderful, visionary quotation that will form the epigraph to MacLeod's next novel (*Learning the World*, from which he also read a brief extract). The quote was written in about 1872, and I'm really hoping someone can remind me what it was.

But the meeting spurred me to read one good novel, which has to count for something, and whilst there I happily acquired three more: a paperback copy of *Maul*; a proof copy of Ian MacDonald's *River of Gods* (woohoo!); and a trade of *Redemption Ark*. The latter came from the raffle. My first pick from the available prizes would have been the proof of Tony Ballantyne's *Reunion* (not published until July; 'will appeal to fans of Michael Moorcock and Stephen Baxter', apparently, which is interesting considering they're not authors I would immediately associate), but of course somebody else snatched that up first.

BSFA London meeting moves

Thanks to some booking screw-ups at the White Hart, the next BSFA pub meetings will now be in the Star, in Belgravia. In July Jon Courtenay Grimwood will interview Justina Robson; see the BSFA's website for future events and news of any further venue changes.

Help update the records

At the Clarke Awards in May a couple of people told me they thought there were some changes in meetings. Oxford is meeting somewhere else, and Leicester may not meet at all any more. Can anyone confirm these?

Super Tuesday

Nigel Furlong tells me that the Didcot meeting is moving from the Second Wednesday to join Birmingham, Hull, Portsmouth and Croxford in the popular second Tuesday of the month slot. Didcot meetings now start at 8:00pm at the Ladygrove pub, Didcot.

'til next time,

Del Cotter

matrix@bronto.demon.co.uk

Basingstoke

Genesis SF Club
Meets every four weeks on Thursday, starts 7:30pm. The Hop Leaf, Church Street, Basingstoke RG21 2QQ
Contact: Mark Sinclair genesis@thorvision.demon.co.uk
Web: www.genesis-d.org.uk

Belfast

Relief Science Fiction Group
Meets alternate Thursdays, starting at 8:00pm. The Monaco Bars, Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB
Contact: Eugene Doherty emum@technodemon.co.uk
Web: members.britainonline.co.uk/techno/monaco.htm

Birmingham

Birmingham Science Fiction Group
Meets 2nd Friday, starting at 7:45pm. The Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham
Contact: Verion Brown blanefgroup@yahoo.co.uk
Web: <http://uk.fsf.org/birmingham>

Birmingham

The Black Lodge
Meets 2nd Tuesday, 8:30pm. The Hoghead, Newhall Street, Birmingham B3 3PU
Contact: Steve Green ghotwork@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 awb@cam.ac.uk

Colchester

Colchester SF/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, at 8:00pm.
The Dog and Bull, Surrey Street, Croydon CR0 1RG
Contact: Robert Newman (020 8686 6800)

Didcot

Meets 2nd Tuesday, starting at 7:30pm.
The Ladygrove, Cow Lane, Didcot OX11 7SZ
Contact: Nigel and Sabine Furlong harling27@aol.com

Dublin

Dublin Sci Fi Club
Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm.
Upstairs bar in Boves Pub, Fleet Street, Dublin 2
Contact: Frank Darcy slab@lostpark.com
Web: www.lostpark.com/slab/

Edinburgh

Meets every Tuesday, at 9:00pm.
The Doric Tavern, Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DE
Contact: Jim Darroch ed@btmail.net

Edinburgh

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

Hull

Hull SF Group
Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 8:00pm.
The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull HU2 8DE
Contact: Mike Cross mike@mphuk.demon.co.uk
Web: www.mphuk.demon.co.uk/hull/hull.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.list.ac.uk

London

ZZZ Plural Z Alpha - the Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Appreciation Society
Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:00pm.
Pendere's Oak, High Holborn, London WC1V 7HP
Contact: Robert Newman meetings@z3.org
Web: www.z3.org

London

London BSFA meeting
Meets 4th Wednesday, starting at 6:30pm.
The Star Tavern, Belgrave Mews West, London, SW1X 8HT
Forthcoming guests: Justina Robson (July).
Contact: Farah Mendlesohn larah@qd.demon.co.uk
Web: www.lbsfa.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 1JH
Contact: Alex McLintock alexmc@yahoo.com

London

The City Illustrates
Meets every Friday, starting at 6:30pm.
The Windmill, Mill St, off Conduit St, Mayfair, W1S 2AT
Contact: <http://london-pm.org/meetings/locations/windmill.html>

London

The Ten
Meets 1st Thursday, starts at 7:00pm.
The Florence Nightingale,
199 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7UT
Web: www.do.co.uk/uk35/Articles/tenable/london.html

Manchester

FOXT
Meets 2nd and 4th Thursday at 8:30pm.
The Crown and Anchor, Hilton St, Manchester, M1 2EE
Contact: Arthur Chappell arthurchappell@compuserve.com
Web: www.arthurchappell.com/news/foxt.html
Web: www.general.demon.co.uk/foxt/foxt.html

Norwich

Norwich Science Fiction Group
Meets every second Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm, people gather from 8:00pm. The Cellar Bar, Ribs of Beef, Fye Bridge, Norwich, NR3 1HY
Contact: Andrew Stitt astitt@comnet.net
Web: <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/astitt/astitt.html>

Oxford

North Oxford
Meets 1st Wednesday of the month, from 7:00pm. The Plough, Wolvercot, Oxford OX2 8BD
Contact: Steve Jeffrey powers@ntl.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.
Goodhams Yard, St. St. John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD
Contact: Pete H. Swetney peter@swetney.com
Web: pshd.britnet.net.co.uk/pshd.htm

Portsmouth

South Hants Science Fiction Group
Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 7:00pm.
The Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth PO1 5BX
Contact: Mike Cheater mike.cheater@ntlworld.com
Web: www.porpspy.demon.co.uk/hjd/hjd.htm

Preston

Preston SF Group
Meets every Tuesday, starting at 8:30pm.
The Grey Friar, Friargate, Preston PR1 2EE
Contact: Dave Young pdyp@btinternet.com
Web: www.btinternet.com/~pdyp/

Reading

Reading SF Group
Meets every Monday, starting at 9:00pm except third Monday, when they start 7:30pm.
The Corn Stores, Forbury Road, Reading RG1 1AX
Contact: Mark Young empire@rtdg.org.uk
Web: www.rtdg.org.uk

Sheffield

Meets every Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm.
The Bell Lion, Charles Street, Sheffield S1 2ND
Contact: Fran Dowd fran@dowd.demon.co.uk

St. Albans

Polaris: The St. Albans SF Group
Meets 1st Tuesday, 8:00pm. The Plough, Tyttenhanger Green, St. Albans AL1 0RW
Contact: Martin Stewart polaris@pubon.com
Web: www.polaris.org

RAGE against... writers!

Frank Ludlow attacks the leeches who submit stories to fiction magazines, but never subscribe, read or support their "markets." It's time to take action, he says.

One type of writer really annoys me. The kind, seemingly in endless supply, who bombards speculative fiction magazines with submissions, but leaves these magazines to rot when it comes to subscriptions, letters and basic support, all the while bemoaning a lack of reliable markets.

Certainly, this is nothing new, though it has probably worsened since the dawn of the email submission. What has moved me to highlight this situation now? Two things. First, I recently submitted a story to a well-known sf magazine. Their response said they had over 1,000 manuscripts awaiting attention and that I would be lucky to get a verdict within six months! I have already waited four.

Consider what this means. A thousand submissions? That must be a successful magazine! True, I enjoy reading it and yes, a magazine needs a reasonable number of submissions to have anything decent to publish. But it also needs someone to buy it, read it, and provide feedback.

Does this magazine have a thousand subscribers to match the submissions? Highly unlikely. And despite the pleas of the editors, I'll wager that hardly any of those 1,000 authors are familiar with magazine's style, hardly any subscribe or even have a sample copy. A fair percentage won't even bother to read the submission guidelines.

If they get accepted, they'll take the payment - if payment can be afforded - and credit for being published. Maybe, if they notice, they'll feel sorry when the magazine closes a few years later, not because a great magazine is gone, but because it doesn't reflect well on their story.

These people, unfortunately, vastly outnumber those who subscribe, write letters and actually read and enjoy sf magazines. They treat magazines as markets, as a means to gain publishing credits. They've missed the reason these magazines exist. They don't consider that these 'markets' are often published by the skin of their teeth by editors and



organisers struggling in their spare time to produce something they think others should read.

Do such writers even care that so few people read their published stories? Evidently not, since they don't even bother to read the magazines themselves, though they will, of course, want their very own glory copy of the issue with their 'masterpiece' in it. If they do read something, it'll only be their own story! What of the others in the issue? Who cares? They're the competition, not things to be enjoyed, or to learn from. All these writers care about are the rules from some 'How to Write' book, telling them that before they get their bestselling novel published, they have to show the big publishers that they can sell something elsewhere, that they are 'professionals'.

There is a second motivation for this little rant. It involves the recent, regrettable, closure of a well respected and reasonably long-lived small press magazine. The apparent reason was a lack of interest and subscriptions, but not a lack of submissions! This has nothing to do with lack of effort on the part of the editor, who's planning a new magazine in place of the old one.

This magazine, like so many others, attempted to survive on minimal support while its door was

probably being battered down with submissions from people that didn't have a clue what the actual magazine was like, and couldn't be bothered supporting it. Writers just after another credit.

Don't be a leech! Read the magazines. Subscribe! Call it market research if you want, but subscribe. You'll benefit in the long run. If more magazines are successful, you'll get paid more. Your name will receive wider attention. God knows, you might even enjoy the magazine and become a better writer for it. Send in letters too. Give your opinions. On anything! Fiction, fonts, other people's letters. Don't worry about pissing the editors off, at least they'll know your name when they finally get around to your story. If you've the balls to write it, give editors credit for having the balls to print it.

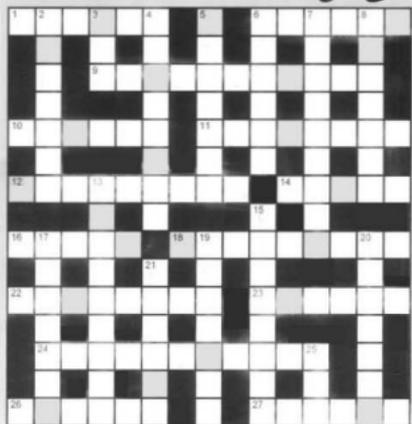
I subscribe to any magazine that accepts a story of mine. Why not do the same? Subscriptions aren't expensive. Most small press rates are less than the cost of a couple of pints. Perhaps, when you become familiar with the magazines, you'll know where to send what story. You might save money on postage in the future! You might even develop some integrity, and take pride in where you will and won't try to place a story!

If things get worse, then maybe it's time for sf magazines to consider their options, and I'll suggest one right here. When considering submissions, be biased in favour of stories from subscribers. Why not? If two stories were of equal merit and I had only room for one... I know which I'd go for.

I realise I may be hitting the wrong audience here. Anyone that reads this probably already supports good magazines. You're much appreciated. But there are precious few of you, despite the quality of the magazines, who, after all, have thousands of submissions to pick from! But there's no point in publishing to a void.

Adapted from a letter published in *Albedo One*, issue 28 on sale now! Visit their new website, subscribe online or download the latest issue for just €2: <http://homepage.ircam.net/~albedo1/index.html>

Win Firefly on DVD



The best American television is ever? Win the *Firefly* DVD and judge for yourself. Complete the crossword and rearrange the letters in the shaded boxes to make the names of two episodes of this great show. Send your entries, by 4 October 2004 to matrix.competitions@ntlworld.com.

Across

- 1 Quickly or stupidly, for example (6)
- 6 Sounds like everyone loves this tree (6)
- 9 Novel by Pat Cadigan (11)
- 10 One of the things In Bru is made from (6)
- 11 Short story collection by Pat Cadigan (8)
- 12 These fishermen catch small fry (9)
- 14 Novel by Pat Cadigan (5)
- 16 Throwaway remark (5)
- 18 Pardon? (5-4)
- 22 Hill, sometimes Calvary (8)
- 23 I'm sage but can be altered (6)
- 24 Of change, especially in rocks (11)
- 26 As one (2,4)
- 27 Returns, as of a debt (6)

Down

- 2 and 13 Novel by Pat Cadigan (7,2,7)
- 3 Tree, won't like splitting the bill. (3)
- 4 :skint (8)
- 5 Everything looks good here (2,5)
- 6 Gets hair in a twist (6)
- 7 Tape in advance (9)
- 8 Gunners and their weapons (7)
- 13 See 2
- 15 Encode (8)
- 17 Abominable, Frosty or Christmas 'treat' (7)
- 19 20 and 25 down, Novel by Pat Cadigan (3,4,2,5,3)
- 20 See 19
- 21 Blondie song, always bombs (6)
- 25 See 19



Timewasters plus the solution to the crossword in *Matrix 166* can be found on page 6. Congratulations to Andy Mills from Leeds who won the 3 books on sf.