

matrix



The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

DARKNESS FALLS

Hollywood is back in
black with Sin City,
Batman Begins and
Revenge of the Sith

GLASGOW '05

Secret life of a Worldcon

BSFA AWARDS

Did you vote?

REVIEWS
NEWS
INTERVIEWS

No. 172
March/April 2005
£2.25

And Much More...

matrix

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Welcome

If you visit www.matrix-magazine.co.uk, you'll discover (as the name suggests) that *Matrix* is now online. You can visit the site for articles and information on both *Matrix* and the BSFA, and in the future we hope to have exclusive online articles that won't appear in the magazine.

We've worked hard on a lot of technical details to make sure it works with all sorts of browsers and, most importantly, is accessible to everyone. If you have any comments or questions then certainly don't hesitate to contact us at matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk.

As always, we're happy to hear from anyone out there with ideas for future features, articles or interviews - if you think you have something to add, please drop us a line at the above address and let us know what you've got in mind.

So whether you're a member of the BSFA, a one-time reader of *Matrix* or a potential contributor, check out the website for articles, reviews and information. We hope you enjoy the site and find it useful!

Claire

DEADLINES

If you wish to contribute to future issues of *Matrix*, the deadlines are:
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ON READING NEW BOOKS

Guest Editorial by Steve Aylett



Enjoyment can be kept sharp by the outrage of others - sadly though, genuinely-felt outrage is as rare today as it's ever been. I rode out of a swirling vortex on a hell-pig the other day and people just stared. It's a world where things created for comfort are used for denial and the dwindling comb-over of culture has led to books in which the protagonist is one or other kind of automated remnant. The inherent advantage of selling limitation is that one size is declared to fit all. Support is minimal for defiance in a world with charity toward none, malice for all and the bland decree that there can be no new ideas under the local sun. When offered a handful of options by a manipulator, we should be careful - in turning directly away to look at the thousands of other options available - that we are not being cleverly positioned to miss the billions more in every other direction. The truly new invents new guts for itself. An angel is unlikely to be boring or

devout. The miraculous should be at least equal to the forbidden. That the two are often the same thing is one of the solitary fucking diamonds of truth.

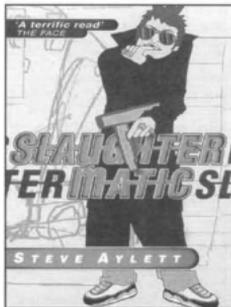
At its shallowest an epigram is merely a sentence which strikes a pose, the sort of prim wisecracking that fades within decades, too flimsy to depend on. There are also stegobromides - very obvious but lightly encrypted truths which, due to people's preference for them in their obscured form, have been left to petrify inside their own code. Then there are sayings which connect up only by ignoring a lot of facts: views with square edges, cropping off bits of reality. These are less useful than the messiest bit of folklore akin to tripping over a ball of snakes.

There are proverbs which are dumb and funny - human, in other words. And finally those sayings born from the compelling notion of a sentence, word or musical note which could cataclysmically open reality to even the most evasive mind. I like the last two varieties and scrawled a bunch for the sayings of Bingo Violaine, whom the citizens of Accomplise use as a sort of epigram.

PeZ. It's fun to drop a profundity into a scene where screaming chimps are attacking a chef, or to bat a balloon dog into a philosophical discussion. In fact I live for it.

Imagine dropping into the world's throat while trusting others' declarations above the evidence of your own senses. Treason is disliked because it reveals the mechanism. In this case the mechanism is that of reality by decree - a mechanism toward which the cosmos is cryptically uncooperative. The truth doesn't actually require our attention - it persists with or without us. It's as indifferent to us as we can ever be to it. But when everyone dodges blame, that stuff remains in the air like radioactivity. Imagine honest, clean regret.

In toxic times an honest eye is bound to result, for several years at least, in a sort of reverse-image horror at what's been perpetrated. The state stripped of crimes - not even a skeleton is left. This resentment is a stain left by clear perception. You become like the philosopher who repeatedly enraged Gurdjieff by shaking him awake at three in the morning. Amid drab masses seething with optimism, any true individual almost by



definition won't be heard of - but they certainly exist and are a vivid, angular joy. You can depart an empire by turning five corners, and of course a one-track god is easily avoided. But as Eddie Gamete once said, the nightmare's likely to renew until the day humanity rests finally in lavender and ruins, becoming one big last outbreath. Patience.

This was originally the introduction to the Tao Te Jinx, a collection of Aylett quotes. Steve Aylett's books include Slaughtermatic, Karloff's Circus, Shamanspace and Toxicology. The new book is LINT, published by Thunder's Mouth/Avalon.

www.steveaylett.com

"Government is like domestic abuse - it manages to make the victim feel guilty."

Karloff's Circus

"When the abyss gazes into you, bill it."

LINT

"Do not hang a man and be surprised at his reaction."

Toxicology

"In regard to bad reviews he said, 'Hopefully such expressions of disapproval are stages in the journey toward being cut loose entirely.'"

LINT

"In books there's nothing of the fish covered in the coldness of the sea, or the feeling of a star touching space. Bad for business."

The Inflatable Volunteer

"The optimist sees the future as a rabbit sees the oncoming truck - getting bigger, not closer."

Horscope story

"Break your own heart - I'm busy."

Atom

"Honesty is the voice that is acceptable in every matter."

Shamanspace



NEWSBITS

Spot The Difference

Casino Royale has been confirmed as the next outing for Commander Bond, James Bond of Her Majesty's Secret Service, although at time of going to press his identity is still a mystery. While the usual furor of speculation continues, with any remotely hot actor being suggested for the role, its good news for the franchise at least with *Goldeneye* helmer Martin Campbell returning to the director's chair.

Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* has been named one of Time Magazine's books of the year 2004, alongside other genre-related titles including *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern 13* edited by Chris Ware and Jeff Smith's *Bone*.

Scientists in Nice are busy developing a real life version of the wicked witch's magical mirror in Snow White. Unlike the fairytale original, this modern version will offer users a stark reflection of their future five years on, employing sophisticated prediction technology to calculate the effects of self-indulgence – binge-drinking, hours sat in front of the TV and take-out diets – and show the effects via the mirror image. *Matrix* suspects a prototype version may already be installed in its bathroom.

And finally, congratulations to *Matrix* regular Martin Sketchley with US imprint Pyr – part of Prometheus Books – recently announcing that they have acquired the rights to publish his first three novels in the United States and Canada.

'I'm absolutely thrilled to have Martin's brilliant Structure trilogy as part of our Pyr line,' said Editorial Director Lou Anders. 'Martin brings a unique approach to military SF in his pen, familiar tropes are reprocessed into something sleek, sophisticated and sexy.'

Martin's second novel, *The Destiny Mask*, is published in the UK in April by Simon and Schuster.

Shortlists for the BSFA and Clarke awards have been announced, with only one novel, Ian McDonald's *River of Gods*, appearing in both selections. The strength and diversity of the nominated books follows a quality year for genre that has been predominantly boosted by established authors delivering noteworthy new works and building on their earlier promise rather than a sudden burst of new writers appearing on the field.

The Clarke's line-up includes two past winners, China Miéville and Neal Stephenson, with Pat Cadigan being the only author to ever actually scoop the award on more than one occasion.

While the Clarke's line-up includes literary works from Audrey Niffenegger and multiple Booker prize-nominee David Mitchell, the BSFA awards reflects a stronger preference for New Space Opera with Alastair Reynolds and Ken MacLeod both gaining nominations alongside last year's winner, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, with *Stamping Butterflies* blending Space Operatic elements with his trademark North African influences.

The Shortlist for the 2005 Arthur C. Clarke Award

River of Gods – Ian McDonald (Simon & Schuster)
Trou Council – China Miéville (Macmillan)
Cloud Atlas – David Mitchell (Sceptre)
Market Forces – Richard Morgan (Gollancz)
The Time Traveller's Wife – Audrey Niffenegger (Cape)
The System of the World – Neal Stephenson (Heinemann)

The judges for the 2005 award are Mark Greenner and Carol Ann Kerry-Green for the BSFA, Dr Mark Bould and Justina Robson for the Foundation, and Dave Palmer for the Science Museum. The administrator and chair of the jury is, as ever, the redoubtable Paul Kincaid.

The Shortlists for the 2004 BSFA awards

Best Novel

- *Century Rain* – Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz SF)
- *Forty Signs of Rain* – Kim Stanley Robinson (HarperCollins)
- *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* – Susanna Clarke (Bloomsbury)
- *Newton's Wake* – Ken MacLeod (Orbit)
- *River of Gods* – Ian McDonald (Simon and Schuster)
- *Stamping Butterflies* – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Gollancz SF)

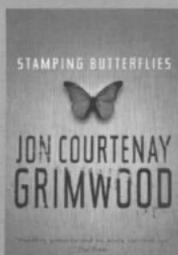
Best Short Fiction

- 'Delhi' – Vandana Singh (in *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Visions of the Future*, ed. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan)
- 'Mayflower II' – Stephen Baxter (PS Publishing)
- 'Point of No Return' – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (New Scientist)
- 'The Faery Handbag' – Kelly Link (in *The Faery Reel: Tales from the Twilight Realm*, ed. Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling)
- 'The Wolf-Man of Akkatraz' – Howard Waldrop (SciFiction, 22 September)

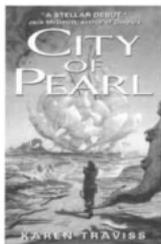
Best Artwork

- *Marine ignuana* – photo by Sebastiao Salgado (Guardian Unlimited website)
- *The Millau Bridge* – photo by Eric Cabanis/AFP/Getty (Guardian Unlimited website)
- Cover of *Newton's Wake* by Ken MacLeod (Tor US) – Stephan Martinière
- Cover of *The Algebrat* by Iain M Banks (original photo credited to NASA!)
- Cover of *The Year of Our War* by Steph Swainston – Edward Miller

The BSFA awards will be presented at the 2005 Eastercon, Paragon2, on the evening of Saturday 26 March, with the Clarke Award ceremony on 11 May.



BSFA Annual Meeting Announced



The official AGM of the BSFA, again joining forces with the Science Fiction Foundation, will take place in Central London on Saturday April 16th.

This is open to all members of both organisations (with members of the public also more than welcome) and will feature talks and guest authors as well as vital committee business; which tends to take place during the lunch-hour while everyone else adjourns to the nearest pub.

The featured authors are Ian MacDonald (*River of Gods*) and Karen Traviss (*City of Pearl*).

The event takes place at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. The Nearest Tube Station is Holborn.

See www.conwayhall.org.uk for venue details.

Prestigious Past, But Future of Clarkes Under Threat

The 19th presentation of the Arthur C. Clarke awards may well prove to be the last. Unless a sponsor can be found by May it is unlikely that the award will be able to continue, at least in its present form. While the prize money donated by Arthur C. Clarke is still secure, additional funding sources to cover administration costs have proved increasingly difficult to source.

This summer, the Arthur C. Clarke award will be publishing an anthology of critical essays on all the previous winners, demonstrating that the value and appeal of the Award is as strong as ever.

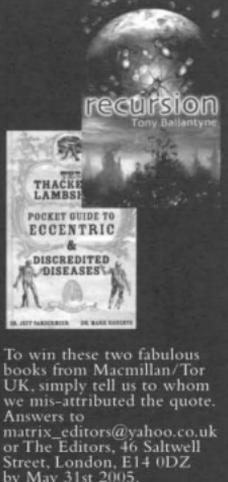
Oops!

Matrix wouldn't be *Matrix* without the occasional deliberate (ahem) mistake.

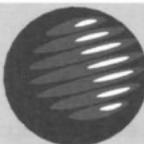
That said, a major one managed to slip into the final copy last issue, despite being caught on two separate proofing sheets.

The mistake in question appears in issue 171's New Blood interview with Tony Ballantyne, in which we managed to mis-attribute a quote of Tony's to a past interviewee by mistake.

Matrix would like to apologise for this error, and as a further effort to promote Tony's excellent first novel, *Recursion*, offer one lucky reader the chance to win both this and a copy of the *Lambhead Disease Guide* to boot.



To win these two fabulous books from Macmillan/Tor UK, simply tell us to whom we mis-attributed the quote. Answers to matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk or The Editors, 46 Saltwell Street, London, E14 0DZ by May 31st 2005.



RODERICK GLADWIN'S WORLD OF SCIENCE

Professor Brian Derby, Head of the Ink-Jet Printing of Human Cells Project at The University of Manchester has announced a breakthrough in cell growth technology. The approach is similar to the rapid prototyping techniques used in industry for 'printing' three dimensional objects straight from a computer model. Layers of resin are stacked to create the shape. By replacing the resin with human cells in 10 micron layers a 3D 'tissue scaffold' can be created to guide further growth. The cells are suspended in a nutrient rich liquid then fed into the printer to seed directly into the structure as it is built. This avoids the major 'sticking to the surface' disadvantage of current methods that infuse the cells into the structure after it has been built.

Professor Derby's view of the future is that one day the scaffolding to create an organ in a day could be printed.

Source: University of Manchester

Late in 2004 the first full-face reconstruction operation was performed on a burns victim. The process begins by creating a single piece of thick skin with its own unique blood supply on the back of the patient. This is done with a tissue expander inserted under the skin that is slowly inflated to increase the amount of growing skin. Once this is large enough to completely cover the face, the scarred facial skin can be removed and replaced with the extra skin. Extra tissue to create a nose is grown at the same time. This also minimises scarring.

The greatest benefit of all is helping with the emotional trauma.

Source: sciencedaily.com and American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS)

Utilising microfabrication techniques similar to those used to produce microelectronics, researchers at the University of Michigan have developed a system that may, one day, radically reduce the cost of fuel cells.

"One could envisage being able to modify an existing semiconductor or microelectronics fabrication plant to produce fuel cells," said Professor Thompson, leader of the group. Thompson's research group is making proton exchange membrane fuel cells in this way with the aim to reduce the cost from nearly \$10,000 per kilowatt to less than \$1,000 per kilowatt. At this price they would become a competitor for lithium ion batteries, the power supply for many portable electronic devices

Source: University of Michigan

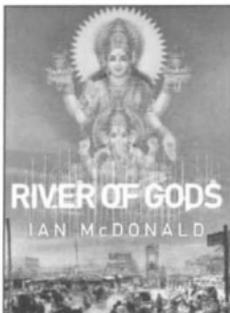
Word for the week: hormesis. This is when a harmful agent can have beneficial effects. A recent study has shown that low, chronic doses of gamma radiation at 50 to 200 times background levels had beneficial effects on natural populations of meadow voles. This was the first and only large-scale, long-term field test ever conducted on the chronic effects of gamma radiation on mammals.

The beneficial mechanism is not yet understood, but this study may lead to an explanation. In the meantime estate agents worldwide can now use naturally occurring radioactive radon gas filling a property as a selling point.

Source: University of Toronto

ELECTION YEAR 2005

BSFA Awards Administrator Claire Brialey on this year's nominations

JONATHAN
STRANGE

Mr NORRELL



by

Susanna Clarke



The diversity of this year's shortlists is very interesting, particularly for short fiction and artwork. We have short fiction from a science fiction website, a magazine, two anthologies and a small press novella, drawn from 30 nominated works. The artwork includes two photographs of real objects, one book jacket design which is similarly based on a photographic image, and two book jacket cover paintings; 17 images were nominated in total.

The shortlisted novels include works by British and American authors from a range of British publishers. This category was very close. I received 119 nominations in total for 35 different novels. As explained, there are six novels in this category because there was a tie for fifth place – but only one nomination behind were another six novels. So remember that every nomination really does count!

There was a significant increase this year in the total number of nominations received (albeit for a similar number of novels) in the 2003 awards, but a

drop both in the number of nominations and the number of works nominated in both the other two categories. This may reflect a quieter year in magazines, a less rapid take-up in browsing SF websites than I'd assumed, a growing lack of information about where to find good SF and Fantasy other than in novels, or just the fact that many of us have less and less spare time to pursue all aspects of our hobbies.

If anyone's got any thoughts about this – particularly if there's something more the BSFA can do to help provide this information – then do let me know.

Meanwhile, keep reading and spotting good stuff that's come out so far this year, with a view to nominating anything you think is good enough to be on the 2005 awards shortlists. I'll make a formal call for 2005 nominations once the 2004 awards have been announced (i.e. after Easter). This will include, from the outset, updated eligibility criteria and a specific deadline for nominations to be sent to me; I'll aim to have that information included

in every issue of *Matrix* alongside awards news and other food for thought about what's good in science fiction and fantasy in 2005, and it will also be available on the BSFA website for everyone who can access that.

The BSFA awards are often the first shortlists to be announced for awards relating to a particular calendar year, and also usually the first to be presented. I always find it interesting to compare our shortlists with that for the Arthur C Clarke Award (which as many of you will know is awarded by a jury – including two judges appointed by the BSFA – for the best science fiction novel published for the first time in the UK in the relevant year) and the Hugo awards which, like the BSFA awards, depend on a system of popular nominations and votes.

I personally find that

awards shortlists can provide some very good recommendations to help me make my way through the piles of unread books; the BSFA and Hugo awards provide a direct incentive because it makes me better informed to be able to vote, but I like to be able to have an informed opinion about the Clarke Award too. This year there's only one point of overlap between the BSFA novel award shortlist and the Clarke Award: Ian McDonald's *River of Gods*. It's the first time in some years that the popular nominations and the jury opinion have diversified so much, which is just one of the reasons I'm looking forward with great interest to see what wins each award.

You may have some other opportunities to cast votes in 2005. In all cases I urge you to use your votes wisely!

The BSFA awards for 2004 will be announced at Paragon2, the British national sf convention (Eastercon) on Saturday 26 March 2005.

All BSFA members and anyone with an attending membership for Paragon2 can vote for the awards (but only once per person!). You can vote by post or by email or in person at the Eastercon, as explained on the form; ballot forms are being sent out to BSFA members, so please contact me if you want to vote in advance and haven't received one by now. Advance ballots need to reach me by Wednesday 23 March to be counted.

ECHOES OF DISTANT MUSIC

Andy Sawyer remembers K.V. Bailey, a talent as big as a galaxy

I hadn't planned to include this in the Foundation's Favourites series. I hadn't thought of doing so, and even if I had would almost certainly have decided against on the grounds of not wanting to embarrass a friend. But things change. On hearing at the beginning of January of the death, aged 90, of Kenneth Vye ("K.V.") Bailey I found myself reading through his poetry in memory of him. And now I rather regret not having included *Distant Music* before, although I am sure the author would have disagreed.

Kenneth was an Oxford graduate, a World War Two veteran (working on the infamous "Burma Railway" as a prisoner of war, an experience he rarely if ever mentioned to friends in the sf world) and Education Officer for the BBC. He wrote several books on education and broadcasting, including at least one children's book about the solar system, *The Earth is Your Spaceship* (Faber 1959). I never came across it until recently, but how wonderful it would have been to have learned from it as a child and then as an adult to have counted its author as a friend (albeit by correspondence: we met, I think, once).

Following his retirement, Kenneth turned to writing critical articles and reviews, appearing in *Foundation* in 1979 and subsequently becoming one of the Science Fiction Foundation and BSFA's

most prolific and respected critics and reviewers. You knew he was a fan: his home was named "Triffids". He also had a deep knowledge and love of literature of all kinds, which he generously shared.

In *Round-tour*, a version of an old rhyme based on the trick of couplets which if read as couplets sound nonsensical but which if you change where the sentence begins make perfect sense, he starts:

*"I saw a black hole
shedding silver rain
I saw a clouddlet dying on
the plain*

*I saw a monster praying on
his knees . . ."*

Leading to a genuinely poetical image of microcosm and macrocosm, as well as a satisfyingly circular motion back to the beginning:

*"I saw a galaxy as small
as man
I saw the black hole where
my tale began."*

In *A Mariner More Ancient Still* he echoes

Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* to suggest, not the original's Gothic supernatural, but science fiction's imaginative spaces. The "Mariner" regales the

"Many of the poems reflect his love of science fiction. Reading them, you understand the sublimity of the sense of wonder."

narrator for hours with the plots of favourite sf novels. We smile at the thought of this picture of the sf fan boring the pants off a mundane, but, like the original, our Mariner is "greater than you seem", truly suggesting wonders.

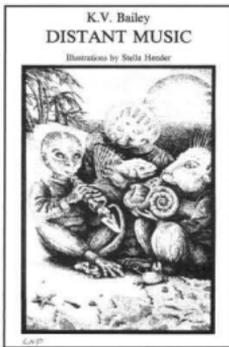
A Regressive Nostalgia recalls the impact of reading Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Barsoom* novels, looking back to days when they collided with "neglected school-books" in his satchel, and trying to re-create the desire and exploration they gave him. Like Keats dipping into Chapman's Homer, the narrator is rapt by the possibilities of the imagination, and Bailey is reminding us that our early reading of sf, whether it's Burroughs, or Frank Herbert, or C. S. Lewis, or Ursula Le Guin, ought to be respected.

K.V. Bailey was a writer with an excellent ear for sound, rhythm and imagery. He wrote free

or doggerel "rhymes", but he also experimented with verse-forms. His poems are technically adept, often using sophisticated devices like the triole, an eight-line verse in which first line is used three times and the second line is repeated once. He also uses sonnet-form, as in *An Alternative Cataclysm*, another humorous poem in which Noah cannot decide whether the coral-polyps are land animals (and thus eligible to board the Ark) or fish. In the end, Noah chooses the latter: wisely, because when the Ark finally runs aground it is on a coral reef.

Many of the poems here reflect his love of science fiction. Reading them, you understand the sublimity of the sense of wonder. However, the best poems here don't so much reflect sf, but allude to it. They incorporate his sense of imaginative place into a response to physical location: Alderney, where he lived for most of his retirement. The book's final poem is *Light from the Casquets: Alderney*. Dusk falls over the island. Light fades. But hints of something vaster appear in the final line: resonant because it has been written by someone in whom sf has called to mind images of solar systems in interstellar space while he contemplates earthly distances and a light from a distant lighthouse offers hints of contact:

*"That flash... that
momentary flash... that
flash again . . ."*



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/~asawyer/sffhome.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.

ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

Stephen Baxter reminisces about the Beatles and discovers what links John Lennon and Copernicus...

In this year (2005) in which Elvis would have been 70, John Lennon would have been pensionable at 65 – and, it seems astonishing to say it, December will also see the 25th anniversary of his death.

I was reminded of the Beatles' global and enduring appeal when, in September 2003, the British Council kindly invited me to Warsaw to launch a celebration of British sf in Poland. The Council struck me as a bit last-days-of-the-Raj, but everybody was competent and friendly, and my various events were well attended. The highlight was a two-minute speech at a (fairly boozy) formal launch in the Council's offices. For my theme, I decided to link a visionary Pole, the astronomer Copernicus, with a visionary Brit – John Lennon.

Born in 1957 in Liverpool, as a kid my life was saturated with them. Around 1964 even my

days seemed to have an impact we recapture now only in certain unifying pop-culture moments, and largely naff ones, such as Pop Idol finals. With the early Beatles, it was like that all the time.

Later, the Beatles were 'banned' from our house for their druggy aura,



but their singles were a soundtrack to the sun-filled late 60s. 'Penny Lane' is a wonderful song when you're nine years old. I always liked the fact that the Beatles stuck to

TV link-up broadcast on Sunday 25th June 1967 – amazingly, a BBC idea. Most contributions, from Swedish canoeists to Australian midnight trams, were worthy but desperately dull – but our bit was the Beatles recording 'All You Need Is Love' in a flower-strewn

studio. How cool was that?

In the early 1970s I holidayed with an older cousin who owned the later albums. I gorged, and have been imprinted ever since. By now I appreciated the Fabs' musical inventiveness; I painfully picked out their complex chord sequences on the piano. Of course I was out of step; the band had already broken up, and everybody else had moved on. But I thought there was room for both Beatles and Bowie.

Later I enjoyed the first 'honest' biographies, which admitted such facts as Epstein's homosexuality. It seemed to me that the elements of the Fabs' legend, told over and over – the Quarrymen, Hamburg, the Maharishi –

were becoming as familiar as the Nativity story. Many dreams died with Lennon's death. But of course the Beatles are still with us now, as is so much 60s culture, endlessly exhumed, repackaged, remade. It suits me fine personally, but it does sometimes seem odd: for Paul McCartney to headline Glastonbury in 2004 is a bit like Woodstock being headlined by Al Jolson!

The Beatles do show up in sf from time to time, notably in alternate histories. In Ian MacLeod's 'Snodgrass' (in *In Dreams*, ed. Paul McAuley and Kim Newman, 1992) Lennon left the Beatles early. The band becomes a sort of endlessly touring Gerry and the Pacemakers, and Lennon a waster back in Liverpool – but he doesn't get shot. My own bit of Beatles fiction is 'The 12th Album' (in *Phase Space*, 2002). You can guess what might have been on the Beatles' next album if they hadn't broken up: my highlight was Lennon singing McCartney's 'Maybe I'm Amazed'. But as Paul McAuley remarked to me at the time, it takes a true fan to end the world just to squeeze out another Fabs album.

Astonishingly, though, the Beatles may have been involved in a real-world counterfactual possibility – for the KGB appears to have believed the Beatles were the west's secret weapon.

Paul McCartney said (in the *Observer Music Magazine*, December 2003): 'We'd heard that the Beatles were massively

"Beatlemania washed away the foundations of Soviet society because a person brought up with the world of the Beatles, with its images and messages of love and non-violence, was an individual with internal freedom."

grandmother's Christmas Day family gathering had a Beatles theme – little chocolate guitars on the tree. The group in those

their Liverpoolianess, but extrapolated it into sparkling, surreal fantasy. I think I remember 'Our World', an early global

Stephen Baxter

popular in the Soviet Union ... We were massively touched, because when we were kids, with the whole idea of the Iron Curtain and stuff, it just seemed like a mystical land of intrigue.' But the Soviet authorities really seem to have believed that Beatle-worshipping kids were being deliberately seduced away from Soviet ideals. Maybe they were right. In

'I'm convinced the Beatles are partly responsible for the fall of Communism.' Russian historian Mikhail Safanov (in *History Today*, August 2003) argues similarly. The authorities banned Beatle haircuts and mockingly nicknamed them 'the Bugs'. But this pillorying merely 'exposed the falsehood and hypocrisy of Soviet ideology', says Safanov.

brought up with the world of the Beatles, with its images and messages of love and non-violence, was an individual with internal freedom.'

Not that it earned the Beatles any gratitude back home. According to former intelligence officer David Shayler, MI5 investigated Lennon as a potential subversive.

Is any of it plausible?

images of the Cold Warriors of his day. Some of his imagining remains utopian – 'Above us only sky', Lennon sings, but religion remains a shaping force in all our lives. But some of it is, arguably, coming to pass. 'Imagine there's no countries ... nothing to kill or die for ...' I'm suspicious of the rickety democracy and legitimacy of the EU,

The next generation Yellow Submarine?



2000 Milos Forman made a film called 'The Beatles Revolution', based on the opening-up of Soviet archives, in which he said:

Evidently the Beatles were cooler than Brezhnev. 'Beatlemania' washed away the foundations of Soviet society because a person

"Lennon has been criticised for the apparent naivety of his lyrics, but (according to Yoko Ono) it appears he knew exactly what he was doing."

Well, it's obvious that the Beatles were a huge presence beyond the Iron Curtain. In Warsaw, I found, there is even a John Lennon street. And Lennon was one Beatle who did try consciously to change the world.

Which brings me back to how I linked Lennon with Copernicus (granted a bit tenuously). Both men showed us new ways of looking at reality. I spoke of Lennon's most famous song, 'Imagine', in which Lennon asked us to envisage a world in which our very psychology has been transformed. It's science fiction!

Lennon has been criticised for the apparent naivety of his lyrics, but (according to recent interviews given by Yoko Ono) it appears he knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted to project a positive future to oppose the fearfully negative

but, if not doing away with nations, it may be superseding them; since 1945 we Europeans have indeed resolved conflicts by jaw-jaw, not war-war.

I'm probably guilty, like so many others, of taking the Beatles too seriously. Lennon himself said they were 'just a band who made it very big – that's all.' But my trip to Poland was a fresh demonstration to me of their reach. And, if they meant so much to so many, who's to say the Fabs haven't shaped the future we live in for the better? After all McCartney played Russia in summer 2003, and got to sing to Putin himself in Red Square: "'You don't know how lucky you are, boy, Back in the USSR!'"

<http://www.cix.co.uk/~sjbradshaw/baxterium/baxterium.html>

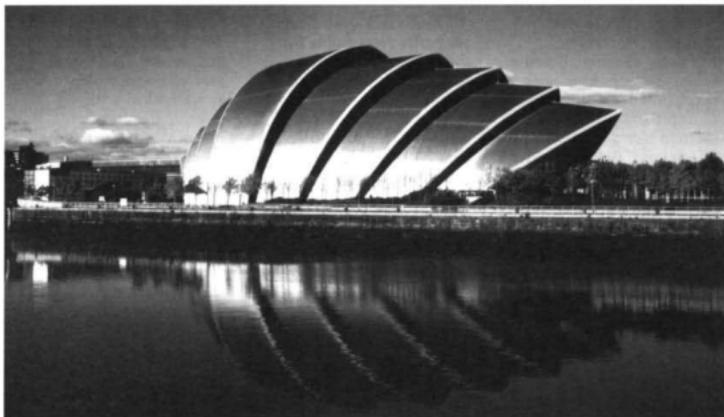
GLASGOW 2005: A SECRET LIFE

Claire Weaver

Interviewing an annual international event is somewhat tricky, especially when it won't reply to your emails and the number you surreptitiously acquired in a dark underground bar near Soho – the number you were promised was a direct line to Interaction's private car – seems to be constantly, persistently, annoyingly engaged.

To kill time between hitting redial, I contacted Cheryl Morgan (Worldcon organiser and editor of *Emerald City*) to find out some background information about how a Worldcon is run, and what happens.

"Each year Worldcon is run by a different group of people because it takes place in a different city and local knowledge is important. Most of the core management is normally from the local area, but their support staff can come



over here. There are groups of American fans who are getting quite competent at it, partially because they have done it several times, and partially because their annual local cons attract over 2,000 people. For a group of British fans the

"Consequently a UK Worldcon gets less US-based help in the planning and preparation process. Some of us would love to see Worldcon in the UK (or at least in Europe) more often, but we have to acknowledge that we need a lot of British (or at least European) fans to help us do it, and if they don't have the enthusiasm and energy the con won't happen.

"The most important awards given out at Worldcon are the Hugos. These are world's premier SF&F awards, and they are voted on by the membership of the convention. A number of other awards are also given out at the Hugo ceremony – these include things like the First Fandom and Big Heart awards which honour people who have been working selflessly for SF fandom for many decades.

"Many organizations choose to announce their awards at Worldcon every year, sometimes also organizing their own ceremonies. The most famous of these are the

Chesley Awards, given by the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists (ASFA). There are also the Spectrum Awards (GLBT SF), Prometheus Awards (Libertarian SF), Golden Duck Awards (children's SF), and more.

"In addition, because we are in Europe, a bunch of local awards will be presented. Ireland's James White Award will be announced at Interaction.

"For someone who's never been to a Worldcon before, there's a lot to learn – from how to sign up for a Kaffeeklatsch to how to use the Voodoo Board. But usually there are three things that Worldcon virgins often forget to do because they are overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the event. If you are new to a Worldcon do not forget to: Eat, Sleep and Bathe."

Still encountering difficulty trying to contact Interaction itself, I reckoned it was time to try a different tack. After a series of lucky guesses, investigative hunches and outright leaps of journalistic

Above: The SECC in Glasgow, where Interaction will be held on August 4th - 8th.

Right: Jane Yolen, the cover of Robert Sheckley's "Pilgrimage to Earth".

Far right: Christopher Priest



"If you are new to a Worldcon do not forget to: Eat, Sleep and Bathe."

from anywhere. There is a core group of people who attend and work on almost every Worldcon. Many of them are British.

"Running a Worldcon is a major undertaking. It is just short of being a \$1 million business in the US, and much more expensive in

step up from a sub-1000 person Eastercon to a 5000 person Worldcon is significant. And while "out of town" Americans find it quite easy to step on a plane for committee meetings in their own country, it is a much bigger ask for them to fly to the



faith, I managed to get in contact with a Mr X (name changed to protect their identity), with whom I could exchange a large quantity of cash for the address of Interaction's personal styling assistant to get some tabloid gossip. A discrete exchange of money later, and the name and address were scribbled hastily in a long, slanting script on the back of a matchbook. *No promises*, I was promised, *but give it a try*.

So en route, with more time at my disposal, I contacted Christopher Priest - one of this year's guests of honour - and asked him to recount some of his experiences at previous Worldcons.

"The first Worldcon I went to was in London, in

some of it is coming back to me now. On second thoughts, maybe all that would be better left inside the blur!

"The 1979 Worldcon was in Brighton, and this was the first truly immense con I'd ever been to, giving a sense of what the big American cons must be like. Gollancz had rented a barrage balloon to publicize their list. It bobbed above the seafont, with the VG logo visible for miles.

"A year later I was at Noreason II, in Boston, my first US con, and the biggest (yet) I've been to. I can't remember having a good time there; I felt it was something to endure or survive rather than enjoy. The immensity of the place was exhausting, as was the constant round of faces

"And the next Worldcon... strewth, it's this year!"

So according to Chris, what makes a Worldcon different to other conventions?

"I think at a Worldcon you are forced to realize just how immense and diverse the sf world has become.

"There's something about Intersection that is going to be a big deal for me.

When I was a teenager, I bought *Pilgrimage to Earth* by Robert Sheckley, and it blew me away. For years afterwards, and still to a great extent today, Sheckley stood for me as the ideal author, the writer of the best kind of sf, the biggest of big names, the writer I most wanted to emulate. The fact that four decades later I find myself as co-guest of honour

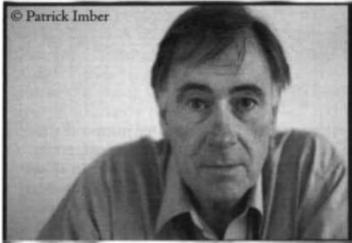
could make out were rats and rubble. "Yes?"

"I have information..." But, the papery voice went on to explain, first I had to go and get fifteen marmalade doughnuts. No more, no less. They didn't say why, and I didn't ask.

Returning three hours later (marmalade doughnuts are hard to get hold of), the sun had shifted and shadows no longer obscured the area. The man, or woman, with whom I had been talking had vanished - but they had left behind a message for me, scrawled in a dark brown ink on the broken, graffiti-covered wall.

With a shrug, I put the doughnuts on the ground and turned to leave the warehouse, and the seafont, far behind. As I walked

© Patrick Imber



1965. It was in a crummy hotel above some shops in Oxford Street, and the rooms cost £7 a night. I'll never forget that, because they seemed wildly expensive at the time and the con plunged me into debt for ages afterwards; I wasn't the only one to complain about the price. I don't remember much about it now, but probably could if I could chat to other people who were there. These things do tend to blur into each other after a while. (Thinks.) Oh yes,

of people I'd heard of but didn't know.

"Where are we up to? I think the next Worldcon I went to was in Glasgow, in 1995. My novel *The Prestige* had just come out in hardback, so in an act of suicidal faith in the selling powers of Rog Peyton and his competitors, the publishers not only flew me up to Glasgow, but paid all expenses too. This was the convention where John Brunner died, an event that cast a long shadow over the con.



with Bob Sheckley is for me just about the biggest compliment anyone could pay me."

The address written on the back of the matchbook turned out to be a disused warehouse on the east coast, with a great view of the sea but completely useless. So much for the deal, and my money.

"Weaver?" A papery voice suddenly hissed out of the grimy, grease-covered shadows. "Claire Weaver?"

I turned, trying to see into the darkness but all I

"Four decades later I find myself as co-guest of honour with Bob Sheckley - just about the biggest compliment anyone could pay me."

away, rats emerged from the corners and started to chew noisily through the box.

I travelled home to London and tried not to think of what my Editor would have to say about my failed interview. And I couldn't get that message off my mind. So late at night and with a half-smile, I switched on my laptop and connected to the internet.

The message had read, simply:

glasgow august 4 - 8
interaction.worldcon.org.uk

NO LIMITS TO ENCHANTMENT

Matrix talks Children's Lit, realities stranger than fiction and a welcome return to the Chrestomanci multiverse with author's author Diana Wynne Jones

Sometimes there are authors you just have to interview. Authors like Diana Wynne Jones. The kind of writer who when you interview other writers they tell you to go interview her instead. Maybe it's because she's the secret answer to a whole generation's worth of "Where do you get your inspiration from?" or maybe it's just because she's gone and written some damn fine books, and then gone on to keep writing more damn fine books. Either way when we heard that Harper Collins were about to publish the first new novel in her *Chrestomanci* series for fifteen (count them) years, we figured there would never be a more auspicious moment.

Beginning at the beginning, David Copperfield style, we first asked what Diana's own childhood encounters with books were like...

"We had a lot of Victorian books in which the heroine was extremely wicked in a mild Victorian way but had a dreadful accident and a change of heart and ended up in a wheelchair good for nothing. There were lots of those, you wouldn't believe how many. And also strange old things like a Sunday school prize that my grandmother won and gave to me which was called *Ethics & Romantics of the Middle Ages*. And there were academic copies of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* and things like that, and just once from the local library which was very small an you could read everything in it in the course of a month I did get hold of "the railway

children", and that was it really."

So was this experience very different from the way children's fiction is regarded now?

"Yes it's a lot more sought after and respected now. For instance one year I judged the children's section of the Whitbread and I was really rather annoyed that they regarded it as so much of a waste of time because it was "only for children", and you certainly wouldn't get that now. People regard it as a respected and skilful

"We had to wait until top brass came and cleared us because they thought that we might be terrorists."

branch of writing."

We didn't want to ask this one, but then again just because it's a familiar question doesn't mean the answer isn't still of interest, and so in the end we mentioned the whole *Harry Potter* branding phenomenon. What we wanted to know was what effect, if any, this might have had on children's literature other than injuring a bunch of postal workers trying to deliver *Order of the Phoenix*.

"It's a bit of a pity really. It's made the sort of thing I do suddenly much in demand and respectful, so I can't really say anything against it, it's just that I do feel there's a touch of the Enid Blyton about *Harry Potter* in that it's really



too easy a read, it doesn't stretch anybody."

And was children's reading really in vast decline before the advent of *HIP*?

"No, obviously people were itching for it or they wouldn't have seized on it with such enthusiasm. There probably just weren't enough books around for those kinds of people to read, so it's a very good thing that they've now got it."

With that out of the way (there we asked it) it was time, as they say, for something completely different. Which brought us neatly round to a rumour that not only was Diana a wizard writer, but also that certain events she'd set down in writing

would later jump off the page and start happening to her in real life. In other words were her fictions starting to influence her real life?

"The house I'm in at the moment is exactly like the house I described in *The Ogre Downstairs*. When I was writing *Witch Week*, which occurs at Halloween in an old fashioned boarding school, I'd just sent it off to the publisher and I discovered that I had to spend Halloween weekend in an old fashioned boarding school.

The most striking though was one that took years and years to come true – and that was a book called *Drowned Ammet* and this concerns guerrilla

Tom Hunter & Claire Weaver

warfare, insurgent activity, together with a lot of sailing off a beach.

I was asked quite abruptly to go to the south coast of England to christen a boat. I was terribly, terribly pleased and I got there with difficulty (I have a travel jinx as well as everything else) and they'd closed the relevant station. In the book you say a certain name of a god and an island rises up out of the sea and breaks the ship in two.

When I got there they offered me two mini-bottles of champagne and said please would I invoke the name of this god, and I said, 'are you really sure?'

They said yes, and I asked yet again and they said yes, so I did it and we all got into this catamaran for its maiden voyage and we sailed for about five minutes. Three of those minutes were standing still because when we looked over the side the boat was standing on an island with grass growing out of the water. We had to get off, so the owner of the boat got into what can only be described as a fibreglass coracle and rode people that had to get home and catch trains like me over to the coast. Lots of us got dumped at different points. We drove up into knee-deep mud and splashed ashore, and were promptly arrested by very superior soldiers. We had to wait until top brass came and cleared us (he did eventually and said 'oh they're just wallies') because they thought that we might be terrorists. That was in fact the other half of the book coming true. It was actually a place where they train the SAS.

So with this kind of inspirational event occurring retrospectively it only seemed fair to ask how much of a role inspiration

played when Diana was choosing to sit down and be creative?

"I wish I knew! It's almost as if I'm doing two completely contradictory things at once. In one way I am letting it all occur, and yet I do know that somewhere underneath there is a fairly firm kind of consciousness that such-and-such must happen."

And after the inspiration, what about the hard graft of the rewrite?

"That's very rigorous. That's when I go do it on my computer and do it very steadily, day by day. Examine every word and every sentence and every paragraph and every chapter."

We wondered if perhaps it was this kind of dedication to craft that had seen her inspire not only generations of readers, but whole generations of writers as well?

"I have friends, and Neil (Gaiman) is one of all sorts of other people who write books, and I thoroughly enjoy writing and talking with them because we can talk writer stuff, we don't need to say very much and we each know what the other means. It's a common

understanding. But I've never really thought of myself as a writers' writer. In fact, when I think about it, I suppose a lot of people have taken up things that I have done probably for the first time and gone and

them into the film anyway! Really it was a very distant thing. Quite suddenly out of the blue, my agent said "I think they want to make a film of *HMC*, is that alright by you? They'll alter it you know."

"I have friends, and Neil is one of all sorts of other people who write books, and I thoroughly enjoy writing and talking with them because we can talk writer stuff."

done them for themselves – I am thinking of *Fire and Hemlock* where I based it on the ballad of Tam Lin, this seems to have caused an absolute spate of Tam Lin adaptations, mostly in America.

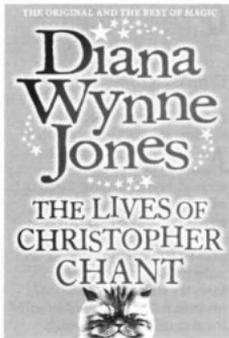
Speaking of adaptations, we asked about the big-screen interpretation of *Houl's Moving Castle* from acclaimed Spirited Away director Miyazaki?

"That came about when the book was translated into Japanese, and Miyazaki got hold of it and read it and when I think about it it's got all his favourite things in, about the only thing it hasn't got is airships, but

And I said well yes, a film has to be different from a book or it usually isn't much good. Then it all went quiet and suddenly a very severe kind of man arrived from Japan with a briefcase with contracts in, and that's pretty much all the contact I had." Contact or no, we hear the results are meant to be superb. "I had to rely on distant rumours really but I think they started along more of the lines of the book than the film actually is, and then decided it wouldn't do, scrapped it and started again. So they were very very conscientious. It's a very good film indeed."

And finally, the interview wouldn't be complete without asking about the return of Christopher Chant (after a fifteen year gap)...

"I love doing things that have various bits in, and the *Crestomani* series has more possibilities in it than anything else I've ever dreamt up. I go back to it whenever anyone encourages me really, and I've had a lot of letters saying we want to know more about it. It was no trouble at all to get back into the world, I just slipped back into it.



ANGELS AND VISITATIONS

Tom Hunter

The author of *Angel Stations* talks about guilt, Glasgow SF and eating books

Q How did you get started on *Angel Stations*?

A The whole thing really grew out of a short story that first appeared in *Interzone* in the early 90s, called 'Touched by an Angel', which gave me the environment of the Stations; the actual plot – the whole galaxy-threatening gamma burster thing – came out of an article I read on possible causes of past mass extinction events. Soon as I read that, the basic plot popped into my head, so it was all really there before I started working on the actual manuscript.

Q How much does the finished novel match with your initial concept and what have you learned in the process of writing it?

A It's fairly close to the original concept – I know this because I found the scribbled basic outline in an old notebook from about four years ago. The lesson I've learned, if anything, is to now think of writing a novel as a quantifiable experience. It's hard to imagine actually writing a book when you've never had that experience, but once you've gotten past that and written two or three of the things, you have a much better grasp of what's actually involved.

Q You've dedicated the book to the Glasgow SF writers group. A group that I understand is doing rather well for itself. How did you first get involved with the group?

A I've been with GSFWC since about '90, and it had been running for about four years at that time.

There's no particular secret to its success outside of the simple persistence of specific individuals within that group. If we had a catchphrase, it would be something like 'persistence pays off', but that's probably true of pro and semi-pro writers everywhere.

Also, it's often the case that people driven towards a common creative goal tend



to clump together in mutual support groups: if you have the same goals and interests, you find each other, and influence each other's creative growth.

Some of us were talking about how much things have changed, actually, since the *Worldcon* in Glasgow in '95. At the time, a few of us had had one or two short stories published in the professional press, and that was about it. Now a good few of us are walking in there with book deals, or signed up to literary agencies. Hal Duncan's 'Vellum' is coming out in time for the *Worldcon*, so is my 'Against Gravity'. Mike Cobley's third 'Shadowings' book'll be out by then as well. Things are definitely looking up for us.

Q Although mostly set in space or on alien planets, one of the underpinning concepts of the book is an Earth ravaged by blight. Do you have any plans to visit Earth in more detail in the future?

A You could say I cover some of that in my second book, *Against Gravity*, which is mostly set on Earth about a hundred years from now, although again it's really part of the background detail rather than being to the fore. It's something that does interest me – I worked briefly for a small environmental

group, doing design work. But I'm not an activist, partly because I disagreed with some of the more extreme attitudes I came across – they didn't seem any improvement on the attitudes of the kind of people who were causing the environmental problems in the first place. But then again, extreme circumstances can generate extreme responses, and although the evidence isn't all in yet, there are plenty of learned people who think there's evidence we're in for a very tough century.

Q The novel walks an interesting balance between hard(ish) SF on the one hand, with a realistic approach to character, consequence and alien technology, and a more fantasy like element on the other, especially in the Kasper sequences...

A Some people said they thought the 'Ursu' sequences were fantasy-esque, but I'm not inclined to agree since a pre-industrial society is not automatically a magical one. On the other hand, from Ursu's point of view, his

on the way words can have different meanings for the same or different cultures at different times, much in the way the word 'gay' has a vastly different meaning now as it did at the beginning of the 20th century. It was intended to be a surreal image, basically, playing on the reader's preformed notions about what constitutes a 'book'. Particularly when you read about someone like Alis 'eating a book'.

As to how they might work ... well, the pixies found out I stole the blueprints for the memory books from them, so they blew magic pixie dust all over me to make me forget how they operate. Rotten pixies!

Q On the subject of writing, and particularly writing techniques, how would you describe your approach and what constitutes your writing day both now and when you were first starting out?

A Guilt is the writer's friend, as much as procrastination is his or her enemy. I guilt myself into writing. I wrote my first unpublished novel

"Guilt is the writer's friend, as much as procrastination is his or her enemy. I guilt myself into writing."

interactions with the God of Nubala are entirely magical, but again the point being made was that he was simply dealing with something he didn't yet understand, as becomes rapidly clear to the reader, who has the advantage of knowing everything else that's going on way up above his furry little ears.

Q One of the stand-out pieces of tech in the story were the 'Books' that people eat to gain access to stored memories. How did this idea come about?

A Calling them 'books' was meant to be a play

when I was signing on for six months, figuring if I only wrote a dozen or so words a day, it was still a dozen more words than I'd had the day before, even if that meant the book took years to write. The trick being, I had to write at least one or two words every day. No exceptions, no ifs, no buts. Usually. Three months later I was hammering out about fifteen hundred words in a couple of hours. By then it I missed a day, I suffered enormous guilt. If I take more than a couple of days off now, it's the same.

Gary can be found online at <http://www.nightshadebooks.com/discus>

UNDER COVER

Roderick Gladwish examines the anonymity of Nonymous and eternal hope in Scheherazade

Labels are important because they save time and make things easier. Many people don't like being labelled because it makes prejudice easier.

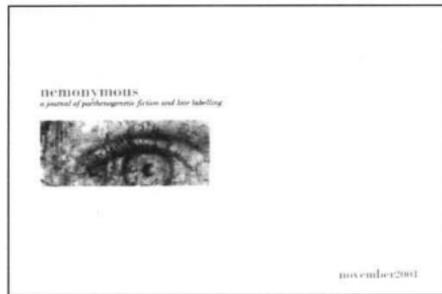
Nonymous tries to beat prejudgement by supplying stories with no indication of who wrote them, hence reading without prejudice.

It's a small A5 booklet, bound like an old software manual. This version had a blank cover. The previous must have had an illustration because the artist is mentioned. Devoid of pictures, editorial or anything to break up the stories makes it somewhat sterile, although the text is far from it. Unless they crammed previous issues with hard science or high fantasy, which is doubtful, this publication is either at the heart of the new or the fringes of SF.

The fiction is based on the here and now or a strange slant on the here and now. The editor's tastes are hard to define, but they like smooth writing. The words flowed in all the seventeen tales whether the content was easy to absorb or not. No story stalled in the reading.

To pick out a few, 'Apologising to the Concrete' was about the classic urban nightmare: you see a crime and do nothing. A blood stain in the street like that on Lady Macbeth's hands reminds an onlooker of his helplessness and destroys him.

The fringes of reality are frayed in some fiction where other works leap with abandon into the surreal. 'The Frog's Pool' described itself as 'a surreal script in three emergences and six resonances' - all I can say is



yes it was. In 'Nocturne for Doghands' a pianist wakes with dogs for hands. His ex-wife turns up with cats for breasts.

Nonymous submissions have to be via anonymous email so even the editor can't be swayed by a name. It tests the myth, believed by many, that it is who you know rather than how talented you are.

My esteemed predecessor Glenda Pringle reviewed their first issue in 2002 (Matrix 156) and her main concern at its inception was having the web as the only route for contact. That's still the case, however, it doesn't seem to have hindered its survival as it's three years on and they are looking for inputs to issue five.

Scheherazade is a perk for doing this job because I get regular review copies which I enjoy. Other publications may print 'cutting edge' tales but these often lose the entertainment value of literature. Much lingers on hopelessness and failure. That's not Scheherazade. It is not mindlessly perky either. Lost love is rarely lost forever and hope seldom dies even if the

outcome is not necessarily a happy one. Often the fiction has a feeling of reworked myths or Victorian mysteries.

Issue 27 was their 'Creature Feature' each story having a strong animal element.

'The Beast that Howled' by David Redd was one of those mythical style stories. A man searches for his wife and child to kill them for running away from his violence. Evading a beast in search of its dead offspring he learns the error of his ways.

'From the Point of View of the Dog' describes failed space exploration and rediscovered life with no spacecraft at all.

'A Matter of Perspective' (Dayle A Dermatis) centres on a joke. How funny it is depends on your universe.

Alexander Glass brought the reader back to the mythic with 'Mr Winter's Hounds'. Uncertainly hounds caught in a dog pound that their owner comes to collect.

As a magazine that supplies a little bit of everything with a light touch, I would make this the first magazine for anyone new wanting to appreciate the expanse of the genre.

Paizo Publishing

announced in January that Amazing Stories and Undeclared (a gaming magazine) will go into hiatus.

"We remain quite proud of these titles, and are presently considering a number of options that should provide a long and exciting future for both magazines," says Lisa Stevens, co-owner and CEO of Paizo Publishing.

Jeff Berkwitz, who in October became editor-in-chief at Amazing Stories, spoke to the SciFi Channel about the magazine saying, "Part of what's happened is that the magazine [has been] unexpectedly successful, and there have been some other opportunities that have come up that the publisher is exploring that would allow us to potentially expand and improve upon the magazine. So rather than move ahead at this point, the publisher has opted to go into what will hopefully be a very brief hiatus and move ahead from there."

It seems odd to step away from the fight when winning, but it's a matter of watching and waiting. You never know, they may have discovered that short-fiction given mass media distribution sells.

Apart from an e-copy in early February, the last issue for a while - Amazing Stories 608 - went on sale in January, so buy it if you see it to slew the stats in the right direction. Didn't I say that last time?

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WATCH THIS WEBSITE

Is the future of fanzines on the web or will traditional fandom resist the online urge? Martin Sketchley asks the Hugo Award-winning editor of Emerald City, Cheryl Morgan.

One of the most important online sources of information regarding science fiction novels and reviews is undoubtedly Emerald City, run by Cheryl Morgan. Furthermore, Emerald City recently won a Hugo, so it's obviously highly thought-of. I thought I'd ask Morgan what it's all about.

Knowing nothing about Morgan other than that she writes reviews and runs the Emerald City website, I first asked her about her background. 'I have a degree in Chemical Oceanography,' says Morgan. 'I've worked as a computer programmer and an economic consultant. My school teachers worked so hard at putting me off books that I almost failed my English Lit O Level.' While wondering what on Earth Chemical Oceanography is, I ask what she meant by teachers trying to put her off books. 'Well, if you manage to make books in general, and literary criticism in particular, seem utterly

yourself doesn't exactly encourage confidence in the discipline.'

So, I wondered, how did she get into SF? 'If you mean reading it, you can blame *Dan Dare*, *Dr Who*, *Gerry Anderson* and *Marvel* comics. If you mean fandom, it's all *Martin Hoare's* fault.' Being an *Anderson* fan myself, I enquired which of *Anderson's* material she particularly likes. 'I have a soft spot for *Fireball XL5*. *Stingray* was good too, but I could never work out why *Troy* kept ignoring



"SF authors are a great bunch. I've had far more negative feedback from fans of authors I've given bad reviews to than from the authors themselves."

boring then the children you're teaching end up learning nothing. The point of teaching literature should be to encourage kids to interact with books. Teaching them set interpretations that you can't explain or justify

an intelligent and capable girl like *Atlanta* for a dumb blonde. This may have been the origins of my interest in feminism.' And what's this *Martin Hoare* business? What's he got to do with it? 'Martin used to be my boss,' she says, 'and

encouraged me to attend conventions. As I recall he said, 'I'll introduce you to my friend Dave, he's quite funny.' That was *Dave Langford*, of course.'

I wondered how long the Emerald City website's been going? 'The first issue to go online was #17 in January 1997, but the zine started in September 1995.' So what was it was that encouraged Morgan to start the fanzine in the first place? 'I'd been to the Worldcon in Glasgow in 1995 and had a wonderful time, making lots of new friends. But I'd also just started a job in Australia. I wanted to keep in touch with lot of people, and I'd done fanzines before, so I came up with the idea of distributing a fanzine by email. That way I could send it to all my friends from Australia without incurring a fortune in postage costs.'

I wondered if Morgan could remember the first SF novel she read. 'No. It was probably someone like *Verne*, *Wells* or *Wyndham*. My father had a copy of *The Time Machine*, so that's a good candidate. I know I had a comic adaptation of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, so that might be a first, though it wasn't really the novel. And of course it was the heavily edited English translation, not the *Verne* original.'

During the preparation for this interview I asked Morgan if there were any questions she'd particularly like me to ask. I was surprised when she came back with 'Why are you the most hated person in fandom?' So I asked it.

'Emerald City broke a lot of established fannish

traditions,' Morgan replies. 'The simple fact that it's not available by post infuriates a lot of people. I'm happy to send someone a PDF they can print, but apparently if you're not prepared to post your zine to people then they don't perceive it to be a real fanzine. And, of course, my winning a Hugo for Best Fanzine made some people incandescent with fury. It's amazing how hidebound some SF fans can be. Of course there's a long list of other people I've offended with Emerald City. People who didn't like my reviews of conventions they ran. People who didn't like the fact that I trashed a book by their favourite author. People who think I have no right to comment on anything in fandom if I don't come from Boston and haven't been in fandom for 30 years. What I would like to say, however, is that SF authors are a great bunch. I've had far more negative feedback from fans of authors I've given bad reviews to than from the authors themselves. And some people I've given a real pasting have been incredibly gracious about it.'

I asked Morgan whether she thought the publishing industry had changed since she first started Emerald City. 'I think the major change I've seen since I started the zine has been the rise of small presses. Publishing is changing. Big publishers are becoming more and more obsessed with trying to produce big sellers, rather than be content with a larger number of profitable but



not spectacularly successful books. To some extent they've been driven to this by the ending of the Net Book Agreement and the entry of companies

the American small press books are hard to come by in the UK, which is a very good reason for going to Worldcon and hunting through the Dealers'

"Around 25% of an Eastercon budget goes on publications. The Finns don't have progress reports, they just have a website."

such as Tesco into the book trade. Most science fiction/fantasy writers are classed by publishers as "mid-list", which means that really good writers such as Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and Storm Constantine are unable to get UK deals these days. In addition, many fine books are being allowed to go out of print. In contrast to this trend amongst major publishers, however, a lot of small presses have sprung up. These are run by enthusiasts happy to publish books that are only just profitable, and although the boom may have been inspired by the Print-on-Demand revolution, many of them now produce high quality books, even collectibles. If you look at the Locus Recommended Reading List this year you will find a lot of the books on it have come from small presses. I've interviewed the people behind many of these small presses for Emerald City and would encourage Matrix readers to go out and find the books these companies are producing. They're doing great work.'

I asked Morgan which books from small/indie presses she'd particularly recommend. 'Oh gosh, loads of them. Of course



Room. Let's pick two. Last year Golden Gryphon published a very intelligent SF book by Ian Watson called *Mockeymen*. Storm Constantine's Immanion Press has just done a UK edition of that. And from this year, Perfect Circle by Sean Stewart, from Kelly Link and Gavin Grant's Small Beer Press. It's a wonderful ghost story, and lots of reviewers have been raving about it. Of course one of the main values of small presses is that they publish novellas, collections and anthologies. You hardly ever get that sort of thing from a major publisher these days. Every single one of that type of book I had in my Best of the Year lists for 2004 was published by a small press.'

A frequent visitor to a wide range of conventions, I asked Morgan which ones she likes most. 'The conventions I most enjoy these days are those featuring a lot of serious discussion of books, so I

try not to miss Wiscon, and I know I need to go to Readercon. But I particularly enjoy the events that feature a cross-over with academia such as ICFA, and the events run by the Science Fiction Foundation in the UK. SF is very fortunate in that many academics who study SF, for example Farah Mendlesohn, Gary K Wolfe and Mike Levy, are also very readable critics and enthusiastic fans of the genre. Of course I still enjoy the more fannish conventions as well. I had a particularly good time at Finncon last year, which attracted 3,000 people. Many of them were teenage anime fans, a fair proportion of whom nevertheless listened intently to talks by the likes of Gwyneth Jones and John Clute. British fandom could learn a lot from the Finns.' I asked Morgan if she wanted to expand on that. 'Firstly their inclusiveness,' she says. 'Finncon is for everyone, not just for lit fans or media fans or anime fans or whatever. And secondly their budgeting. Around 25% of an Eastercon budget goes on publications. The Finns don't have progress reports,

they just have a website. There are other examples of where Eastercons could save money, and thereby make memberships cheaper, but they don't because things are "traditional" and therefore expected.' Perhaps this is why Morgan's on the committee for the 2005 Worldcon and 2006 Eastercon.

I wondered what the future holds for Emerald City. 'The obvious thing for a fanzine to do,' says Morgan, 'is to grow into a semi-prozine. Locus set the standard for that, and Ansible has followed (although Dave [Langford] doesn't seem keen to establish a publishing empire). There's no point my trying to compete with either of them. Both do what they do very well. But if I were able to pay for articles, so that I got top quality contributions, what I'd like to produce would be something more like Bruce Gillespie's SF Commentary: something half way between what Emerald City is now and an academic journal. SF is a genre that thrives on discussion, and I want to help that discussion to happen.'

Martin Sketchley

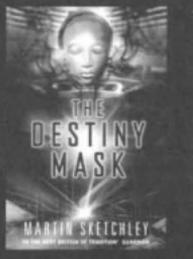
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<http://www.emcit.com/>
<http://www.sf3.org/wiscon/>
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If you have any specifically web-related news that might be of interest to Matrix readers, or ideas for future articles, please send me an e-mail at the address below. Be sure to include the relevant URLs.

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Martin Sketchley's latest novel, *The Destiny Mask*, is out in April.



THE NEW BLACK

Tom Hunter looks forward to the upcoming big-screen releases and concludes that while the future's not be bright, it may be about to get more interesting.



We all know Hollywood has a dark side. Anyone who's ever seen their favourite novel gutted for source material, their top-ten movies debased by a shallow and pointless sequel, or their favourite comic hero played by Ben Affleck, already knows that there's a stain at the heart of tinsel town.

The real surprise is that while these seeds have always lurked in the shadowy committee meetings, multiple redrafts and unholy pacts of the executive boardroom, the big screen picture we've been fed recently has been unrelentingly bright. Unsatisfying, candy-coloured and neutered to the point of offensiveness, the latest breed of crowd-pleasers are sanded-down to a teflon smoothness where all edginess is removed and the resultant product ends up more bland than the accompanying happy meal

tie-in.

Looking back over past classics it's not hard to understand why they still resonate today while modern big-budget efforts like *Van Helsing*, or even more sophisticated fare like *Minority Report* or *I, Robot*, ultimately fail to deliver.

Where genre classics like *The Thing*, *The Terminator* and *Blade Runner* dared the darkness, their descendants have side-stepped the shadows to paint a popular picture of genre as a cartoonish sound and light show that isn't so much dumbed-down as spoon-fed to its willing multiplex hordes.

You could well believe that diabolical cinema chains may soon unveil a plot to deliver plot updates during the movie via text message. Simultaneously answering the 'what's happening now?' question and playing on audiences' stubborn denial that other people might not want to pay to hear them talk

to their mates during a movie. Didn't guess the blatantly sign-posted shock twist ending or figure out the killer's identity from a stock selection of the hero, the heroine and the other guy? Well no worries, just check your phone for an immediate update, and don't worry about the illuminated screen, it's too dark in modern cinemas anyway.

And yet all is not lost. 2005 may well prove to be the year that offers a welcome taint of darkness at the end of the tunnel, with three of the most hotly anticipated movies of the year all mining darker seams of storytelling beneath their big-budget brightness.

Frank Miller's *Sin City*, a collection of classically hyper-boiled noir stories, captures the hardened monochrome of the original comic books and promises to translate not only the graphic violence but the graphic appeal of

its source material. Full marks to director Robert Rodriguez for quitting the Director's Guild in order to share the bill with Miller.

Still in the world of comics, Batman is back for a revised origin story outing from *Memento* director Christopher Nolan that follows a young Bruce Wayne as he begins his quest to strike terror into the heart of Gotham's underworld and ultimately assumes the cowl of the Dark Knight. Unlike other recent superhero offerings which have forced multiple years of backstory into action plots for the benefit of mainstream audiences, the recent Bat-outings should hopefully still prove fresh enough in collective cinema memory to allow Nolan and Bale the opportunity to delve past the mask and explore the psyche of Bruce Wayne as well as the Bat.

And finally there is *Revenge of the Sith* – the culmination of the *Star Wars* prequels and, despite any temporary excitement over Pod-Races or Mace Windu's purple lightsabre, the big one that all true fans have really been waiting for. Surely even Lucas can't fumble the final tragic act of his saga and cinema will finally have its Dark Lord again. Either that or Jar Jar will utter the famous 'I am your father' line to Anakin and fans will turn away from both sides of the Force forever.

Dark Days for your Diary

Sin City is released on April 22nd; May 19th sees the *Revenge of the Sith* (*Star Wars*: Episode III); and *Batman Begins* on June 24th.

meditations

F I L M F I C K E R

Trying to find something to watch amongst the hundreds of shopping channels, I recently paused at a Discovery Channel documentary about the end of the Cold War. Somewhere nearby I could hear my two-year-old daughter doing her best to emulate the East Germans on the television by tearing down some walls of her own.

"Don't do that dear," I cried. "It's a load bearing wall!" She just laughed.

Sitting amidst the rubble and dust of her gleeful demolition, watching the political landscape I grew up with crumbling on the screen, it occurred to me how completely the world has changed over recent decades.

Imagine going back to the summer of 1988 and trying to convince your younger self that by 2005 over ninety percent of people would own a mobile phone so small that it is impossible to press the buttons properly.

Imagine explaining an iPod. In 1988 I owned only one CD, and that was by The Christians. And it wasn't even their better first album.

Imagine trying to explain that the USSR was gone, the Cold War was over, Poland was in the EU, Nelson Mandela was the world's elder statesman, Labour were about to win a third general election and a member of the royal family had recently been caught in full Nazi regalia.

It would all have been incomprehensible to my younger self – except maybe the last one. That would have just confirmed my prejudices.

But none of it, I think, would have been as bewildering to my younger, angrier, self than the fact that I was contemplating all this while eagerly awaiting the final episode of a new series of *Battlestar Galactica*, currently the best sf on television.

The Irish sf magazine *Albedo One* operates under the motto "Things Change" – I'm not sure they realise how right they are.

One of the most hotly anticipated genre movies of the year, Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman's *MirrorMask* premiered at the Sundance Independent Film Festival in January and proved to be one of the hottest tickets at the festival.

McKean's gorgeous visuals have received particularly high praise from those lucky enough to see it and to judge from the brief clips in the trailer, *MirrorMask* looks sumptuous, like a live-action *A Nightmare Before Christmas*, leaving only the question of whether the effects can sustain closer scrutiny and create a convincing fantasy world.

MirrorMask is the tale of a young girl, Helena, who longs to run away from the circus and see the "real" world. Instead she finds



herself trapped in the Dark Lands, a place with two opposing queens, strange creatures and masked inhabitants. The White Queen is ill and Helena embarks on a quest to find the *MirrorMask*, an artefact powerful enough to cure the queen and send her home.

There is no firm date for a UK film release at present although rumours hint it is likely to be close

to Christmas before we see it.

MirrorMask Cast and Crew

Director: Dave McKean
Writers: Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean
Starring: Stephanie Leonidas; Gina McKee; Rob Brydon.
Also featuring Stephen Fry, Robert Llewellyn and Andy Hamilton

Website:
www.sonypictures.com/movies/mirrormask/

The Budget Is Back

James Cameron isn't just planning to make a new science fiction film, he's planning to change the way we see cinema forever. With his latest underwater documentary, *Aliens of the Deep*, currently in Imax cinemas around the world, the creator of *The Terminator* and *Aliens* has announced his next project – a live action version of Yukito Kishiro's comic *Battle Angel Alita*.

Cameron plans to use the 3D process he's pioneered in his huge-screen Imax documentaries, but promises that film will be more than a technological demonstration.

"If I'm making a feature film, like when I'm doing *Battle Angel*, I know I'm making a film for an audience, I can't just please myself," he said, promising "insane" action but a

PG13 rating – "lots of blood, but it's all blue."

Future Fatale

Swedish producer/director collective Traktor (*Chain of Fools*) have optioned a sci-fi thriller called *Siphon* – the story of an obsessed female detective who is hunting a serial killer across a futuristic city using high tech weapons, only to discover that what she's hunting may not be human.

God Not Bothered

God is not disappearing from *His Dark Materials*, according to both the studio, New Line, and Philip Pullman – though the director, Chris Weitz, has stepped down claiming the technical challenges were beyond him. Weitz remains the scriptwriter, however, with both Pullman and,

more crucially, New Line apparently happy with his rewriting of Tom Stoppard's adaptation.

Moon Script Wax On

Production work on *The Moon* is a *Harsh Mistress* continues. Tim Minear (*Buffy*, *Angel*, *Wonderfalls*) submitted a new draft of his script in mid-January.

Looking Dodgy

I don't care if Sam Raimi is one of the producers, it seems stupid to remake *Evil Dead* (again)... Werewolves on the moon might just be the dumbest idea I've ever heard. Renny "Cutthroat Island" Harlin reckons it'll work because "it's the one place where the moon is always full." Form a queue behind me to be the first person to tell him that it's one of the few places where the moon is never full...

DEEP BLUE MUST SEE

Martin McGrath



A lot of people are really going to hate *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*. Some sad, possibly miserable, people are going to walk from the cinema bemused, cursing the director and his cast for wasting two hours of their lives on a rambling, strange and apparently pointless quest for a yellow shark. We should pity these folk and perhaps hold an appeal so that money can be gathered to ease their plight.

The rest of you, my happy friends, are going to walk out of the cinema with huge grins on your faces that will last for days. You will find yourself with an irresistible desire to purchase a red cap and humming the works of David Bowie in Portuguese. You will feel dread at the mention of the fearsome jaguar shark, and yet you will be possessed of a slight but persistent sadness that you may never live to see it in the Technicolor flesh.

You, my allies in the struggle against bland and simple-minded entertainment, my brothers-in-arms in the battle against all that is grey in the world, you are the chosen who will bask in the light of Wes

Anderson's work and see true joy.

And if all that sounds over the top, then I blame *The Life Aquatic*, a film that seems designed to promote extreme reactions.

The Life Aquatic is, undoubtedly, a strange film – a kind of slow-motion slapstick adventure. Steve Zissou (Murray in brilliant form) is an oceanographic filmmaker (think of slightly seedy Jacques Cousteau) who sees his best friend killed by a (possibly mythical) jaguar shark. With the help of the crew of his ship, Belafonte (a reference to Cousteau, whose ship was *The Calypso* – the type of song that made Harry Belafonte famous), Zissou determines to hunt the beast down, prove its existence and gain his revenge. On top of this he must cope with a crumbling marriage to Eleanor (Houston), the arrival of Jane (Blanchett), a journalist set on revealing the seedy truth about his fading career, and the arrival of Ned (Wilson), who may be his long lost son. Or not.

Add declining popularity, the bank meddling in his affairs and placing Bill the accountant (Cort) on board the Belafonte, an intense



personal and professional rivalry with Alistair (Goldblum), mutiny amongst the interns and a pirate adventure featuring a three-legged dog and its easy to see why Steve Zissou might be feeling that the pressures of life are grinding him down.

What I think will appeal most to people who enjoy this film is its determined contrariness and sustained peculiarity. The world created is one of hyper-reality. His characters have extraordinary characteristics taken to

Belafonte, shown in cross-section as we travel through her decks.

While Murray, currently on a career-defining roll of high quality performances, is undoubtedly the star here, he receives some very strong support from the rest of the cast. With Wilson playing his usual, likeable oddball and Goldblum and Gambon obviously enjoying themselves, the women (Blanchett and Houston) though good are largely reduced to playing everyone else's fall guys. Which is perhaps not surprising as *The Life Aquatic* is (in its own, probably drug-induced way) a very Boys' Own sort of adventure. But it is Willem Dafoe as the desperately needy German crewman, Klaus Daimler who almost steals the whole film. It is Dafoe's maddest performance since he played a crazed, gay, cross-dressing FBI Agent in *The Boondock Saints* and he had me roaring with laughter.

The film has a sting in its tail, however, and it is only when things come to a crunch in the final reel that you realise how successful Anderson and his cast have been in making you care for these characters. When the final confrontation with the mysterious jaguar shark takes place there is a real

"A lot of people are really going to hate *The Life Aquatic*. We should pity these folk and hold an appeal so that money can be gathered to ease their plight."

extreme lengths. Nature explodes from the screen with animals and fish given a delirious jewel-like quality (thanks to some wonderfully effective stop-motion special effects). And Anderson seems to take every opportunity to erode or destroy the wall between film and viewer – literally in the case of the

emotional charge.

The Life Aquatic isn't going to be to everyone's taste, but those who really "get it" are going to be made very, very happy. Wes Anderson is one of the very best young directors working in Hollywood and this film cements him as the possessor

COMIC HEROINE DOWN-'SAI'SED

Elektra is a competently made movie. True, the script is bland, even by Hollywood standards, but the direction by *X-Files* stalwart Rob Bowman is solid enough, the acting isn't noticeably rank (indeed Garner's *Elektra* confirms her as American cinema's most convincing action hero) and



the special effects and fight choreography are slightly above average. But what the film utterly lacks is any sense of originality or excitement.

Elektra manages to deliver considerably less than the sum of its parts.

There are a number of reasons for this, not least of which is cowardice on the part of the filmmakers. They start the film with a character who is a tough, ruthless assassin – an almost mythic figure, capable of incredible acts and violent to the core. But almost immediately, presumably in the belief that the audience can't "relate" to such a tough female character, they seek to soften her. That's hardly a surprise, Hollywood films are never comfortable with strong women kicking arse. So we have the introduction of

the irritating American teen (Prout) with parenting issues to stir Elektra's maternal instincts and the handsome hunk (Visnjic) to stir, well, her other instincts.

And of course this wild woman, this Amazon, can't resist the pull of the nuclear family. She casts aside her old life and suddenly begins to fight for the forces of good and justice.

There's some semi-mystical stuff courtesy of Stick (the welcome Stamp, adding some sly humour) and a team of supervillains (including a terrible, throw-away use of one of Frank Miller's landmark *Daredevil* characters, Typhoid Mary) and a lot of Hong Kong movie inspired fight scenes.

The problem with the action sequences is that, in the last few years, the sort

of people who will go to see *Elektra* (geeks and the comics' hardcore like me) have seen rather a lot of real Asian films. And, frankly, this kind of warmed-over plain vanilla wire-fu no longer cuts it. Even if the audience have only seen *Crouching Tiger...* or *Hero*, then all this is going to look rather tame.

As I've said, Garner emerges from this with her reputation intact and Stamp's "grasshopper" philosophising adds some much needed relief from the mediocrity around it. Neither tough enough to appease the hardcore or entertaining enough to drag in the mainstream crowd, *Elektra* falls between two stools and leaves no one happy.

Martin
McGrath

PHOGGY PLOTTING?

How do you follow up a film so successful, it's largely claimed as the reason why anime broke into the Western market, a film of record-breaking cost and complexity for the anime industry? Simple: wait over 10 years to make your next feature and make it cost twice as much.

It's the middle of the 19th Century and Great Britain is being made truly great by the power of steam. In Manchester, the coincidentally named schoolboy Ray Steam spends his time pondering new inventions while his pioneering father and grandfather have gone to America to work for the O'Hara foundation. One day, he receives a mysterious steel ball sent from his grandfather with instructions not to let it fall into the hands of anyone but a man named

Stephenson. Of course, goons turn up and we're off with, if not a bang, at least a chuff-chuff-chuff of pistons and boilers.

This is the most expensive anime ever made and the money shows up on screen as Ray makes his getaway on a steam powered

unicycle, pursued by the villains in their huge and threatening steam tractor. When the tractor plows through the Steam house, you can see individual tiles fall from the roof. Of course, it's not just the small details that benefit from the incredible resources used in



the film. There are plenty of fabulous new inventions and an epic scope but you can't help but wish they spent more time with the script.

What follows on is a fairly standard chase plot, pausing only in the middle while Ray questions the choices we make about science and technology and the uses it is put to. Ray's father wants progress at all costs, ignoring the dark side of his benefactors, and his grandfather demands a philosophy behind all advancement.

Ultimately, the film casts this aside for an overlong climax as the true power of the Steam Ball is revealed and everything blows up. Well, maybe not everything, but it feels that way.

Steamboy is a beautiful film, badly plotted but a must for those who love steampunk or gorgeous visuals.

Andrew Hogg
media:21

SCI-FI LONDON

Martin McGrath visits this year's science fiction film festival



One notable development at this year's Sci-Fi-London film festival was the increased presence of filmmakers at the screenings. By the final festival screening, *Saving Star Wars*, it seemed that half the audience was made up of people who worked on the film – although that might just be because Darth Vader himself, David Prowse, was sitting right behind me and he really is a very large man.

I asked *Saving Star Wars* writer and director Gary Wood why he'd crossed the Atlantic with his film, his partner and their very, very small baby to attend the festival. Gary was keen to praise Sci-Fi-London director, Louis Savvy.

"He's just so enthusiastic about science fiction films. Louis has been one of *Saving Star Wars* strongest supporters," Gary said.

Saving Star Wars is an entertaining but decidedly unpolished film – its low budget and the lack of experience of its filmmakers showing in a weak grasp of the technical side of putting a movie together. However,

Woods' script has real heart and enough fan-friendly jokes to make it work for a sympathetic audience.

Perhaps my favourite film of the festival was *Tempus Fugit*, a Spanish made-for-television movie. Young director and co-writer Enric Folch raised the whole enterprise above its television roots with assured camera movement and clever plotting. With a sweet love story, a sub-plot involving the Champions League final between Barcelona and Real Madrid and a water-tight time travel plot this really has something for everyone. I want the DVD.

Folch explained that, for a film like *Tempus Fugit*, with no publicity budget, festivals like Sci-Fi-London were the only way to reach an audience.

"There's an amazing net of fantasy film festivals around the planet which are really passionate about the genre, this is great. They are responsible for a lot of people being known now because they gave them a chance to show their films. So that's why I'm so grateful to Louis

and his people for selecting the film and giving us the chance to let it be seen here in London."

Sadly it isn't always so pleasant having the filmmakers at the screening. *Recon 2020*, a misconceived and half-baked Canadian "action comedy" (without either action or comedy) is amongst the worst films I've ever sat through. A fact made more uncomfortable by having the writer/director sitting just a few feet away. I couldn't interview him. I wanted to throttle him.

But, even when the films were bad, I was enjoying Sci-Fi-London. It is now an essential date in London's film calendar, providing access to films it is impossible to see elsewhere. Even if it were only for the opportunity to see clever shorts like *The Netherbeast of Berm Tech Industries* or *The Carpenter and his Clumsy Wife*, Sci-Fi-London would have a place in my heart, but each year it seems to offer sf fans much, much more.

The only shame is that we have to wait twelve months for it to come around again.

Sci-Fi London is the UK's only film festival dedicated to the science fiction and fantasy genres. It began life in 2002 and in the first year it managed to screen 12 UK/European premieres, including the first showing of *The Mothman Prophecies* and the world premiere of Ken Russell's *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

In 2003 they screened the world premiere of *Malice Doll*, the UK premieres of *Cube 2: Hypercube*, *Ever Since The World Ended* and *The Inside Story*. It also introduced the documentary strand "stranger than fiction" and had the first ever UK screenings of *The Gospel According to Philip K Dick* and *Life, the Universe and Douglas Adams*.

With an average attendance to every screening in excess of 80% and fantastic media coverage, Sci-Fi London has been truly established as a serious film festival.

The aim was to attract an audience that was susceptible to science fiction, rather than hardened fans of a specific franchise. In the first year they purposely avoided typical and obvious choices – no *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*. Instead, they looked for unique and visually stunning new product for an eager UK audience, balanced against some rarely seen movie classics.

In the last two years it has screened some amazing and very rare classic movies, including the original *Solaris*, George Lucas' first feature *THX 1138* and John Carpenter's sci-fi/horror crossover, *The Thing*.

The festival also includes an international sci-fi short films programme, and screens an "All-Nighter" – a midnight screening of four movies back-to-back.

Sci-Fi London is now on tour around the UK, visiting Edinburgh, Liverpool, York and Exeter.

GLASGOW KITSCH

Glasgow in the near future: five gangs have effective rule over the city, and each one protects the inhabitants within their own territory while punishing those who invade from outside. When Moses, the leader of the most powerful gang, calls a meeting to

suggest a truce between the warring gangs, not all of them agree with his plan to take full control of the city. However, in spurning his offer, the Purifiers find themselves at odds with the other gangs and have to fight them all in order to return home.

The concept of *The Purifiers* is more than a little dubious, but if the Germans can manage a comedy (*Goodbye Lenin!*), then perhaps the Scots can make a martial arts film. Or perhaps not.

With this film, it's not so much a case of picking holes in it as finding a way across the gaping abyss that looms at its heart. If you can get past the idea that five gangs, with about five members each, can run riot over an entire city, without guns, then you'll

probably have no issues with the rather feeble attempts to make Glasgow look futuristic by giving underground stations such great names as BLUE ZONE 2. If this is the case, then you'll probably also be able to forgive the blatant theft from, sorry, homage to Walter Hill's *The Warriors*, the abject lack of Scottish accents, and perhaps even the use of London's Chinatown for a scene that had more in common with a slapstick food fight than properly choreographed action between real martial artists.

The Purifiers features a cast almost exclusively comprised of trained martial artists (the exceptions evidently being McKidd, Monaghan and Grant), and a fight choreographer with less talent than Yuen Woo Ping's left

thumb. The result is a series of boring and occasionally ridiculous fights, not helped by excessive slo-mo and sound effects that are more akin to a bitch-slap than a solid punch to the head. The silliness peaks with the scrap between the hero and two of the villain's minions, involving blue glow-in-the-dark sticks and no lighting.

Perhaps I'm being overly critical. After all, it is a low-budget flick and may even be destined for the kind of cult status reserved for awe-inspiringly dreadful films. In the end, I suspect that the only people that will watch this film are those who are fans of McKidd and/or Monaghan, and those with more curiosity than sense.

Lalith
Vipulananth



BONE MACHINE

The Machinist, a psychological horror movie funded in Spain but made by Americans, is an admirable film.

You can't help but marvel at Bale's physical dedication to his acting. Half starving himself to drop below 63lbs, there is a moment early in the film when he bends over revealing every ridge

and furrow on his spine that caused the whole cinema to sit back in revulsion.

Technically the film is of a very high standard. The direction, cinematography and set design (doing a remarkable job of making Barcelona look like America's rust belt) is all of the very highest quality.

And the script is intelligent,

fiere and unflinching in its portrayal of Reznik's (Bale) descent into his own madness. Screenwriter Kosar does a much better job than his work on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake suggested he was capable of producing.

And yet admirable though *The Machinist* is, it is not a film one can love or even much like. Beyond the initial

shock of Bale's appearance it does not grab the attention or elicit much sympathy. Reznik's problems are too obviously of his own making for his plight to be truly engaging. Perhaps it is because we have seen this sort of story before in *Fight Club* and *Memento*, but the ending comes as no surprise and the journey towards that ending comes to seem unnecessarily fragmented and strung out. Bale doesn't help. Though his physical performance is astounding, he is, at the best of times, an actor who can seem distant, but here seems to have lost any emotional connection with the real world.

The Machinist ends up being an admirable but not particularly enjoyable or revealing film: it is beautiful to look at, but not much fun to be with.

Martin
McGrath

"His physical performance is astounding, but Bale has lost any emotional connection with the real world."



A GLIMPSE OF OUR FUTURE

Common trends in movies leave little hope for our descendants

Control of the way we imagine the future reflects the relations of power amongst nations and peoples in our present era. The imperial age saw writers in Britain and France define a future of gentlemen amateurs tinkering with science and social engineering. As America's power grew they replaced those archetypes with omni-competent Yankee ingenuity and capital accumulation. Most recently, however, another shift seems to have started. It may be just a fashionable blip or a definite shift in the balance of power, but increasingly Asian cinema is doing most to paint our images of tomorrow.

Films from South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong are increasingly escaping from their home markets into wider circulation and science fiction films, in the form of both anime and live action movies make up an important part of that output. In that sense the two films reviewed here, *Appleseed* (from Japan) and *Wonderful Days* (from South Korea) are representative of a trend of growing importance. Of course, Asian influence is not limited just to films that originate in the region – the Wachowski brothers concede the influence of anime on *The Matrix* and its

and the other nations of the Pacific Rim (California?) are really tightening their grip on our future as they become increasingly wealthy, it is worth spending some time familiarising ourselves with the defining features of their vision – and fortunately both *Appleseed* and *Wonderful Days* prove perfect examples of the basic assumptions of Asian sf. In these films (and, generalising wildly, in much Asian cinema) we can identify the following shared themes:

First, Asian science fiction doesn't have high hopes for humanity's immediate future – it tends to take place in a post-apocalyptic world. In *Appleseed*, for example, war has destroyed the world's cities while in *Wonderful Days* an environmental disaster has occurred. The result is that both stories take place in citadel-like cities separated from the land around them and from the past.

Second, they tend not to be optimistic about man's ability to get on with other men. The existence of oppressed groups is a common theme – in *Appleseed* humans despise the "bioroids" (vat grown humans without the ability to reproduce), while in *Wonderful Days* the people of Ecoban are doing their best to wipe the Marrian's from



is untrustworthy and its representatives villainous. It is similar in *Appleseed* with everyone in government involved in some scheme or plot as the whole edifice totters on the edge of a coup. Heroes in this cinema tend to be young and come from outside the mainstream of rigidly controlled societies.

Finally, at least for now, there is the fact that many of these films are determinedly non-rational, including powerful spiritual elements and faith in a transformative moment of salvation. So, for example, in *Appleseed* the secret contained in a pendant can save society, while in *Wonderful Days* the hero actually cleanses the whole earth of pollution, revealing blue skies for the first time in many years. In most instances the attitude towards technology is, at best, ambiguous. Machine and gadgets are ubiquitous but they are often the source of continual threat.

Whether or not the common themes in these films tells us anything about our future, they seem (like all good sf) to be revealing about the societies in which they are formed. Once again applying the sweeping generalization brush, imperial science fiction created worlds that could be explored, measured and rationally ordered. American science fiction saw frontiers to be

conquered and monsters to be battled while Asian sf cinema seems determined to flee the past and start afresh.

Returning to specifics, one other thing shared by both *Appleseed* and *Wonderful Days* is very high quality, extremely beautiful animation. Both combine hand drawn art (and in *Appleseed*'s case motion capture technology) with incredible computer generated effects to considerable success. The robot battles in *Appleseed* are tremendous, while *Wonderful Days* specialises in mesmerizing bike rides through stunning landscapes.

Sadly both also share a fondness for cliché that means that neither film can be wholeheartedly recommended. Characters are shallow, love stories are trite and the action is too predictable, despite the incredible visuals. Neither *Appleseed* nor *Wonderful Days* are a patch on *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (*Matrix* 170) in terms of depth and storytelling, but both are entertaining enough not to outstay their welcome. They are worth seeing as notable and impressive technical achievements, but more effort in ensuring that there was greater originality in the scripts and plots would have served the incredible visuals better.

Martin McGrath

"Whether or not the common traits tells us anything about our future, they seem (like all good sf) to be revealing about the societies in which they are formed."

sequels. And an ever growing number of American films, such as *Elektra* (reviewed on page 21), demonstrate the impact of Asian influences in terms of special effects, fight choreography, design and even philosophy.

If China, Japan, Korea

the planet. In addition human life, whether oppressed or not, tends to be cheap and "ultra-violence" is the norm.

Third, they are cynical about government, corporations and authority figures. In *Wonderful Days* the government of the Ecoban

FAR, FAR AWAY... AGAIN

Keeping the peace with new *Farscape* mini-series



The biggest success of *Farscape: The Peacekeeper Wars* is that someone like me, who has only a smattering of knowledge about the prematurely-axed original series, could still find it a diverting one-off entertainment. While this mini-series, out now on DVD, is obviously working furiously to tie up many of the loose ends left over from *Farscape* to satisfy the show's vociferous fans, it still manages to tell a story that engages the general viewer.

A great deal of the credit for that success goes to the cast – especially central

pairing Ben Browder (John Crichton) and Claudia Black (Aeryn Sun). The sharp, funny dialogue they share gives the plot, with its wild swirl of alien races, spaceships and exotic planets, a human centre that is both immediately engaging and continually entertaining. Thanks to the efforts of both actors there remains the same sense of authenticity in their relationship whether they are enduring some extreme situation (giving birth while being attacked by an army of fierce aliens) or enjoying a (relatively) peaceful moment together as newlyweds.

The support is sometimes patchy. No matter how hard I try I can't quite take *Farscape's* Henson-created puppet characters as seriously as I should, a fact not helped by the tendency to make them the most outrageous characters in the show. Whether it is Rygel, the blustering light-relief aboard *Moya*, or the over-the-top aggression of the Scarrans, *Farscape* has always put a lot of faith in its puppets and, dramatically, it doesn't always work.

That said, *Farscape* has always had a unique look with its mixture of puppets,

CGI spaceships with rather grotty interiors and a propensity for dressing cast members in what appears to be cast-off bondage gear. *The Peacekeeper Wars* looks to have enjoyed a larger budget than the regular series for, while the distinctive look remains, everything is just that little bit shinier than the original outings.

The plot sees the shows two main bad-guy races, the Scarrans and the Peacekeepers at war. Caught in the middle, with a head full of potentially deadly wormhole technology, are the recently reassembled Aeryn, Crichton and the rest of the crew of *Moya*. They get caught up in a quest to reassert the power of an alien race capable of spreading peace throughout the galaxy. Things go pear-shaped, leading to the deaths of a few familiar characters, before the final resolution of the wormhole plot thread leads to the end of the war.

There are a lot of things going on in *The Peacekeeper Wars* that I felt went over my head as a casual viewer, but watching both episodes of the three hour mini-series back-to-back was no chore. The whole thing is fast-moving and never afraid to undercut itself with some sharp humour. Certainly not a classic, *Farscape: The Peacekeeper Wars* is still reasonably entertaining stuff.

Martin McGrath

"A mixture of puppets and CGI spaceships with grotty interiors and a propensity for dressing cast members in cast-off bondage gear."



Farscape: The Peacekeeper Wars

Production / Cast

Producer: Andrew Prowse
Director: Brian Henson
Director of Photography: Russell Bacon
Writer: Rockne S. O'Bannon

Starring:
Ben Browder as John Crichton
Claudia Black as Aeryn Sun
Anthony Simcoe as Ka'D'Argo

SERIES 7: THE CONTENDERS REALITY BITES BACK



It is the logical end point of reality TV: give six people a gun each and the last one alive wins. This is the concept of *The Contenders* and Dawn (Brooke Smith) is the show's longest surviving contestant. Returning to her home town in Connecticut for her third appearance she finds her efforts to win complicated by the fact she is eight months pregnant and in love with one of the other contestants, Jeff (Glenn Fitzgerald).

Writer and director Daniel Minahan's background is in documentary-making and it shows. There is no framing device at all, no backstory; everything we see on screen is presented as a single extended episode of the imaginary programme. The format knows no bounds: as Dawn rests for a moment to

contemplate the life she has been forced to live, it imposes cheesy music over the top and then overlays a montage. This spot on mimicry can make watching *Series 7* an experience as relentless as watching the real thing. At times you feel you need a breather but its subversion of the medium holds your attention.

Although a satire rather than a comedy it is often hilarious. One of the contenders, coked up and egged on, says of Dawn: "God should come down and fuck her mother just for having her." It is a classic example of the 'give 'em enough rope' approach of reality TV. Beyond this, and as with much reality TV, there is a heart of honesty locked inside the gaudy

welter of clichés. In *Series 7* this translates into some surprisingly tender moments when Dawn and Jeff share the screen. This honesty is aided by the actors doing great jobs of pretending not to be actors, with the exception of Marylouise Burke as contestant Coney, who doesn't have quite the same halting naturalism.

It's very clever in its exploration of how reality TV uses editing to impose its own narrative on documentary footage, in this case to create a love story for Dawn and Jeff. The highlight of this is the use of a wonderful high school art project pastiche in which they flounce around to Joy Division's *Love Will Tear Us Apart* dressed like Robert Smith. Brilliantly this song

turns up later on in the film at the most inappropriate moment.

The conclusion is an even more radical example of narrative being controlled in post-production. It is presented as a recreation of the actual events - the real footage having been lost - with the main characters being played by "actors". At first this works very well but unfortunately it jars with the return to "real" footage at the very end, making it seem rather gimmicky.

This is a shame because the extra footage included on the DVD makes clear that the final cut doesn't quite make the best use of the available material. So the ending is a little flat but doesn't detract from the onslaught that has preceded it.

Martin
Lewis



In 1988 *Killer Klowns From Outer Space* cost two million dollars (about ten million dollars in today's terms - or £12.58 given the current exchange rate). Martin McGrath discovers that the amount of money wasted is the both the funniest and scariest things about the film.

What are you doing behind the sofa?

I'm hiding!

What from? Global warming? Terrorist attacks? Michael Howard's crowd discovering you're an immigrant?

No. It's *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*.

You're hiding from a third rate 80s 'B' movie?

Yes.

You're not one of those sad people who think clowns are scary, are you?

Don't be daft! I confess that old people in heavy make-up freak me out a bit - especially Barbara Cartland - but even I could outrun a clown.

I doubt it tubby!

Of course I could. Those big shoes would slow them down then I'd just lead them towards the nearest primary school and let the kids sort them out. They'd have no chance out in the open against sixty screaming six-year-olds.

So you're not scared of clowns. Why not come out from behind the sofa?

Don't want to.

If it isn't the clowns, is it the acting?

No... I mean it is bad - especially that bloke who was Dean Wormer in *Animal House* and the mayor in *Dirty Harry*. He really should know better. And the girl really stank. Oh and those two idiots playing the ice-cream selling brothers were terrible. But that's not why I'm hiding.

Did you know that neither of the ice-cream guys have acted since 1989?

I can't see any evidence of them doing any acting before 1989.

Ba-dum-chick!

I fank yew.

I'm starting to get a crick in my neck trying to talk to you back there, come out, the film is nearly over.

I can't.

Well if it isn't the clowns and it isn't the cast, is it the script?

The script isn't scary, it's just sad. Here's a film that snags Royal Dano, one of Hollywood's great old time character actors. He was in everything from *The Red Badge of Courage* to *The*

Right Stuff. Sure he's old and past his best, but the best this film can do with him is give him a dog called Pooch Bear and the line: "Well I'll be greased and fried!" He doesn't even get a funny death!

Not the clowns, cast or script... Is it the wacky spelling?

That's just proves the producers were an annoying bunch of ku-uh-klots.

Then what's wrong?

Shame.

Shame? You're not in it, are you?

No, but I liked it.

What do you mean you like it?

I don't like it now! But when I was younger, I saw it when it came out. I was eighteen and I thought it was funny.

Oh dear, that is embarrassing.

It was the eighties. I was young. I didn't know any better. I blame Thatcher. And Tebbit. I was only following orders. Please come back! Don't leave me here alone with it. I've confessed, please forgive me...



Enterprise is dead. Falling ratings prompted broadcaster UPN to announce that the current,

fourth, season would be the last. Universal Studios has also let it be known that the development of new *Star Trek* movies has been put on hold. *Star Trek*, perhaps the world's biggest of franchise, is in crisis.

Meanwhile, one time *Trek* contributor Ronald D Moore is celebrating the announcement that his critically acclaimed (not just by *Matrix*) *Battlestar Galactica* is to get a second season. *Galactica*'s first run in the US is trouncing *Enterprise* in the ratings – even



though the Sci-Fi cable channel is available in many fewer American homes than *Enterprise*'s UPN.

Moore however, isn't gloating. In a recent blog entry (<http://blog.scifi.com/battlestar/>) he lamented the decline of *Enterprise* and the *Trek* franchise – especially since it meant the loss of many technical staff and craftsmen whose involvement with the franchise goes back as far as the abortive *Star Trek: Phase II* in 1977.

These were the people, Moore said, "who sweat every detail, who take time to think through continuity and try to make the vast universe consistent." For the first time since 1977 there is no *Trek* project in prep or production and this team would be scattered taking with them "an enormous body of knowledge and talent that cannot and will not be replicated again."

On Moore's own project, as we went to press Sci-Fi confirmed that 20 new *Galactica* episodes will be shot and broadcast this summer. Moore is said to be working on at least six new scripts to tie up the loose ends of season one. Moore has also promised that the new season will delve deeper into his Cylon's religious beliefs and resolve the

search for the "13th tribe" and earth.

Although the BBC will not confirm it, *Doctor Who* looks set to return to television screens on March 26, 2005 – right in the middle of *Eastercon*!

The date may yet change but the BBC certainly seem to be gearing up for an Easter launch, announcing a two-part radio documentary, *Project Who*, narrated by Patrick Stewart (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*) to be broadcast on 22 and 29 March at 8:30pm.

Whenever the Doctor finally makes it onto screen, he will be accompanied by *Doctor Who Confidential*. The documentary series will be broadcast on BBC 3 immediately after the transmission of each new episode. Each edition of *Confidential* will be themed, exploring an element from each new *Doctor Who* episode and setting it in the context of the timelord's history.

Seventies' cult TV show *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, said to have been Chris Carter's inspiration for *The X-Files*, is to be updated and relaunched. Variety reports. US network ABC have commissioned a pilot, entitled simply *Night Stalker*.



The original featured Darren McGavin as Kolchak, the tough investigative reporter hunting down the truth about weird and freakish occurrences, and spawned two TV movies. The new version is to be overseen by *X-Files* and *The Lone Gunmen* writer/producer Frank Spotnitz.

It's pilot season in the US. Amongst the genre offerings hoping to get picked up are: *Briar & Graves* (Fox) about a priest and a doctor investigated "unexplained spiritual phenomena"; *Fathom*, in which humans explore the deep oceans; *Supernatural*, about two estranged brothers encountering ghosts and the uncanny on a trip to Los Angeles; and David "Blade" Goyer's *Threshold*, about a female intelligence analyst recruited to deal with a mysterious alien threat.

BATTLESTAR BURNS BRIGHT

Twelve months ago I reviewed the mini-series/backdoor pilot for this series and, much to my surprise, enjoyed it immensely. Back then I said that if the producers of the new *Battlestar Galactica* could match the mini-series production values and still develop their cast of characters in interesting ways, then I would be watching. Now, after watching the thirteenth and final episode of the first season of the new *Battlestar Galactica* I can safely say that it has far exceeded my expectations.

What has been most exciting has been the willingness of producers

and writers to explore genuinely adult and dark themes while never sacrificing the entertainment. The central relationship between the gravel-voiced Adama (the superb Edward James Olmos) and President Roslin (the equally fine Mary McDonnell) has featured political intrigue that wouldn't have been out of place on *The West Wing*. But the real pleasure and surprise has been the rest of the cast – who I dismissed as eye-candy in my earlier review. Jamie Callis's scheming but craven Doctor Baltar is in danger of stealing the whole series while the performances of Katee

Sackhoff (Starbuck) and Jamie Bamber (Apollo) have been excellent, especially when they've been allowed to explore really meaty aspects of their characters.

The level of plotting has been continually high, with individual episodes standing alone

as enjoyable wholes, but with strong threads of continuity running through the whole season, culminating in a hugely tense, compelling and effective cliff-hanger of a finale. No sf in the English language that I've seen this year on television (and very little on film) has matched the quality of *Battlestar Galactica*. The only thing that might stop you watching, would be misplaced prejudice based on your memories of the original. To that, I say, get over it – you're missing some outstanding television.

Martin McGrath



REMEMBERING
WILL EISNER

Mark Roberts

In 1940, a new breed of crime fighter appeared. *The Spirit* – a unique hybrid of Dick Tracy and Batman – fought crime in Central City in his blue business suit, fedora and gloves – with only a small domino mask as concession to his superhero status.

Appearing every week in the syndicated comics section of the Sunday newspapers, *The Spirit's* adventures encompassed crime, romance, horror and comedy. *The Spirit* transcended his superhero crime fighting roots and introduced a new depth to comic books that continues to influence comic writers and artists today.

The Spirit's creator, Will Eisner, became a giant in the field. Eisner was a master of describing movement using static images. He intuitively grasped how comics were read, how image and text combined to create something uniquely different from

"Eisner was a master of describing movement using static images. He intuitively grasped how comics were read, how image and text combined to create something uniquely different from the sole use of either."

the sole use of either. Just as importantly, Eisner was able to articulate his understanding, and encourage it in others.

Eisner's work on *The Spirit* was interrupted by service in World War II. Despite being taken on by others in his absence, the strip flourished. Eisner returned in late 1945 to reinvigorate *The Spirit* with a retelling of the character's origin, and worked on the strip until 1952.

Later, keen to mature the medium, Eisner spent two years working on four sequential art stories. Exploring his background and experiences as the son of Jewish New York City

immigrants, the sequences went on to be published as arguably the first ever graphic novel – *A Contract With God* (Baronet Books 1978). This was followed by a series of graphic novels including *The Dreamer* and *To the Heart of the Storm*. Eisner's work had cemented sequential art's development from superheroic juvenilia and the 'funny pages' to a mature art form.

Eisner's importance to the field did not end there. His seminal work on writing and illustrating comics arose from his teaching a course in Sequential Art at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. *Comics*



and *Sequential Art* (with its companion volume *Graphic Storytelling & Visual Narrative*) is considered to be the definitive guide to creating comics. Eisner realised he was looking at comics in a new way.

"Traditionally, most practitioners with whom I worked... produced their art viscerally. Few ever had the time or the inclination to diagnose the form itself," he wrote in his foreword. "As I began to dismantle the complex components... I found that I was involved with an 'art of communication' more than simply an application of art." Neil Gaiman says of the book: "If I were starting out today, with all the books on comics and graphics novels out there, I'd still begin with this book".

Will Eisner died on January 3 2005 of complications from a quadruple bypass surgery performed on December 22nd. His contribution to the art of creating comics will never be forgotten, and his legacy endures in the Will Eisner Awards, the comic book 'Oscars'. He is survived by his wife Ann and son John.

Will Eisner
1917 – 2005



incoming

Events

PARAGON 2

March 25th-28th

Eastercon returns to Hinckley this springtime, and with guests of honour such as Ken MacLeod, Robert Rankin, Richard Morgan and Ben Jeapes, plus the usual fun, frivolities and the fanatic, Eastercon regulars and con virgins alike are guaranteed a great time.



4th March - British Fantasy Society open night, Devereux pub, London. 6.30pm onwards. All welcome.

4th-6th March - Mecon 8, Belfast. GoH Ian McDonald. See www.mecon.org.uk

5th-6th March - Microcon, Exeter. Guests TBA.

23rd March - BSFA event, London. British SF author Liz Williams is interviewed about her novels. See www.bsfa.co.uk for more information.

March 25th-28th - Paragon2 (Eastercon), Hinckley, Leicestershire. More info at www.paragon2.org.uk

8th-30th April - *The Day Of The Triffids*. Stage adaptation by Shaun Prendergast, New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich. www.wolseytheatre.co.uk

27th April - BSFA event, London. Susanna Clarke talks about *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. See www.bsfa.co.uk for more information.

Future Events in 2005

August 4th-8th, Interaction (Worldcon), Glasgow, Scotland. More info at www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk.

October 1st-2nd 2005, NewCon3, Northampton. More info at www.newcon3.co.uk

Movies

SIN CITY

Released April 22nd

A collection of interweaving stories all based in the corrupt, crime infested hell-hole that is Basin City. Heavily influenced by film-noir, the main storylines concern a hulking brute called Marv who is seeking the murderer of a beautiful woman who was killed while asleep in bed with him. All based on the brilliant graphic novels written and illustrated by Frank Miller.



March 11th - *The Machinist*

March 18th - *Constantine*

April 1st - *The Ring 2*

(Hollywood remake)

April 15th - *The Amityville Horror*

April 22nd - *Sin City*

Games

MATRIX ONLINE

Set in a virtual, persistent online universe in which millions of players around the globe can participate, *The Matrix Online* will feature cutting-edge graphics, real-time martial arts combat and a rich storyline that picks up where *The Matrix Revolutions*, the third chapter in *The Matrix* film trilogy, leaves off.



Metal Gear Solid 3 - PS2

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening - PS2

TimeSplitters Future Perfect - PS2, GameCube

Doom 3 - XBOX

Star Wars Republic Commando - XBOX, PC

Resident Evil 4 - GameCube

Black & White 2 - PC

The Matrix Online - PC

Books

WOKEN FURIES

Takeshi Kovacs has come home - home to Harlan's World. Embarked on a journey of implacable retribution for a lost love, Kovacs is blown off course and into a maelstrom of political intrigue and technological mystery as the ghosts of Harlan's World and his own violent past rise to claim their due.



March

R. Andrew Heidel - *Desperate Moon* (PS Publishing)

Diana Wynne Jones - *Conrad's Fate* (Collins)

Richard Morgan - *Woken Furies* (Orion/Gollancz)

K.J. Parker - *Devices and Desires: Book 1* (Time Warner UK/Orbit)

Philip Reeve - *Infernal Devices* (Scholastic UK)

Jeff VanderMeer - *City of Saints & Madmen* (Tor UK)

April

Rob Alexander - *Welcome to My Worlds* (Paper Tiger)

Neal Asher - *Brass Man* (Macmillan/Tor UK)

Ashok K. Banker - *Armies of Hanuman* (Time Warner UK/Orbit)

Eric Brown - *The Fall of Tartarus* (Orion/Gollancz)

Mark Chadbourne - *The Hounds of Avalon* (Orion/Gollancz)

Fiona McIntosh - *Myrren's Gift* (Time Warner UK/Orbit)

Kim Stanley Robinson - *Fifty Degrees Below* (HarperCollins UK)

Johanna Sinisalo, ed. - *The Dedalus Book of Finnish Fantasy* (Dedalus)

Martin Sketchley - *The Destiny Mask* (Simon & Schuster UK)

Steph Swainston - *No Present Like Time* (Orion/Gollancz)

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

ENCOUNTERS

Basingstoke
Genesis SF Club

Meets every four weeks on Thursday, starts 7:30pm. The Hop Leaf, Church Street, Basingstoke RG21 7QQ
Web: www.genesis-sf.org.uk

Belfast

Belfast Science Fiction Group
Meets alternate Thursdays, starting at 8:00pm. The Monaco Bars, Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB
Contact: Eugene Doherty tinman@technologist.com
Web: members.fortunecity.co.uk/tinman/monico.htm

Birmingham

Birmingham Science Fiction Group
Meets 2nd Friday, starting at 7:45pm. Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham
Contact: Vernon Brown bhansgroup@yahoo.co.uk
Web: http://bfsg.freereservers.com
The Black Lodge
Meets 2nd Tuesday, 8:30pm. The Hog'shead, Newhall Street, Birmingham B3 3PU
Contact: Steve Green greshwords@yahoo.co.uk

Cambridge

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

Colchester

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

Croydon

Croydon SF Group
Meets 2nd Tuesday, 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 Furlong - furlong32@aol.com

Dublin

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

Edinburgh

Forth
Meets every Tuesday, at 9:00pm. The Donic Tavern, Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DE
Contact: Jim Darroch el_cid@fsmail.net
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@antipope.org

Hull

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

Leicester

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. Cottenil theoutlanders@hotmail.com
Web: www.outlanders.fsnet.co.uk

London

London BSFA meeting
Meets 4th Wednesday, starting at 6:30pm. The Star Tavern, Belgrave Mews West, London.
Contact: Farah Mendlesohn farah.st@gmail.com

East London fans

Meets Tuesday after the first Thursday, starting at 7:00pm. The Walnut Tree, Leytonstone High

Road, Leytonstone, London E11 1HH
Contact: Alex McAttock alexmc@aol.com

The City literates

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

The Ton

Meets 1st Thursday, starting at 7:00pm. The Florence Nightingale, 199 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7UT
Web: www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Ansible/london.html

Manchester

Meets 2nd and 4th Thursday at 8:30pm. The Crown and Anchor, Hilton St, Manchester, M1 2EE
Contact: Arthur Chappell arthurchappell@clara.net
Web: www.arthurchappell.clara.net/sf/fort.htm
www.gainval.demon.co.uk/fortzine/fort.htm

Northampton

Northampton SF Writers' Group
Meets once a month with SF author Ian Watson to workshop members' fiction.
Contact: susans@albion.co.uk

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
Web: www.homepage.norworld/reality/online/Oxford

North Oxford

Meets first Wednesday of the month, from 7:00pm. The Plough, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8BD
Contact: Steve Jeffery peveter@aol.com

Peterborough

Peterborough Science Fiction Club
Meets 1st Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm. The Blue Bell Inn, St. Paul's Road, Peterborough PE1 3RZ
Meets 3rd Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm.

Goodbarns Yard, St. John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD
Web: www.gsfclub.britinternet.co.uk/pst.htm

Portsmouth

South Hants Science Fiction Group
Meets first Tuesday, starting at 7:00pm. The Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth PO1 5BX
Contact: Mike Chester mike.chester@ntlworld.com
Web: www.pompey.demon.co.uk/shsf.htm

Preston

Preston SF Group
Meets every Tuesday, starting at 8:30pm. The Grey Friar, Friargate, Preston PR1 2EE
Contact: Dave Young psf@hai1r1.demon.co.uk
Web: www.hai1r1.demon.co.uk/psf/

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 enquiry@rsfg.org.uk
Web: www.rsfg.org.uk

Sheffield

Meets every Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm. The Red 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 AL4 0RW
Contact: Martin Stewart polaris@pobox.com
Web: www.polaris.org

Matrix Contributors

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News: Claire Weaver, Tom Hunter

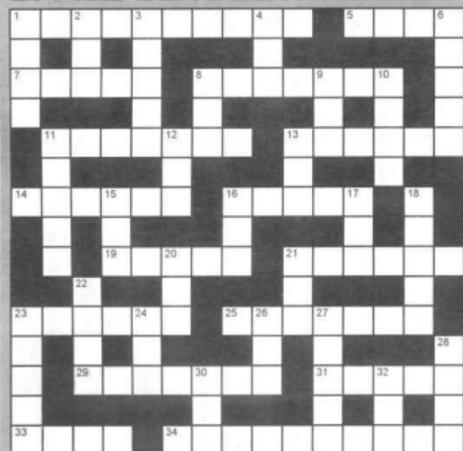
and Martin McGrath

Flicker, Google Books and

Crossword: Martin McGrath

Incoming: Claire Weaver

SPACE ODYSSEY: VOYAGE TO THE PLANETS

**Down**

- It's the thing - just missing around (4)
- Make slippery - black gold (3)
- Happen because of something else (5)
- Too for more than two in this container (3)
- Smallest parts of an element (5)
- Where 9 may be found (3)
- Metal-bearing rock (3)
- Pain (4)
- Pluck a string, on a distinct ocean (5)
- Male offspring (3)
- Blue, great or marsh (3)
- Dublin university (3)
- Imperial fighter in knots (3)
- Scots negative (3)
- Hollow cylinders (5)
- Airforce, square or for the road (3)
- Youngster, prone to yapping (3)
- Group of countries (4)
- Low voiced, like a dog? (5)
- No score (3)
- Gone by, in the past (3)
- Ant (5)
- Requests (4)
- Seed, beep, narrowly beat (3)
- ___ West, actress (3)



This BBC exploration of space combines cutting-edge scientific knowledge with the best in special effects as the crew of the spaceship *Pegasus* go on a "Grand Tour" that encompasses the Solar System from Venus to Pluto. We've got the DVD and the BBC book that accompanies the series to give away to one lucky winner.

The "across" words of this crossword have not been clued, all the answers relate to one planet of our solar system.

To win the prize, complete the crossword and send the name of the planet and all of the moons mentioned in this crossword to matrix.competition@ntlworld.com by Friday, 3 June.

The Matrix 170 Douglas Adams crossword competition winner was Ian Taylor from Surrey. The *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* CDs are on their way.

RAGE against... 2001!



William Mitchell dares to rage about the sacred status of 2001: A Space Odyssey - high-brow philosophy or completely insensible?



2001 - some people rave. I'm here to rage. After all, what can be so good about a film that had people walking out of cinemas before the credits were even rolling? A film that few can even understand? And don't give me any rubbish about it being deliberately ambiguous, or open to interpretation. You may be one of those who wax lyrical about the "epic sweep of its narrative" and the "deep philosophical meaningfulness" of it all - the majority opinion however is slightly different. "2001? What the hell was all that about? A load of monkeys throwing bones around, waltzing spaceships, HAL going mad (ah, something's actually starting to happen) then a load of flashing lights and an old man in a bedroom?" These are the words of people who have had whole hours of their lives wasted, all because they couldn't make sense of what they were seeing.

So are the majority just stupid? Lowbrow ignorami, only fit for the kind of undemanding, simple stories

of which a quality intellectual film has no need? Maybe so - but 2001 is different. It's different because it already has a story - in the form of Clarke's novel - and what's more, it's one of the greatest, most profound stories that has ever been told. It's just that to anyone watching the film without the aid of prior knowledge, that story is completely invisible - and that, frankly, is a failing.

Sure, the film isn't a direct adaptation of the book - the reality of how the two came into being is more complex than that. But fundamentally it's the same - human evolution is deliberately set in motion by extra-terrestrial intervention; a machine is then planted on the moon to act as a tripwire, to signal when the resulting intelligence takes its first steps into space; and then the next stage in the experiment - to take a member of that race and turn him into something approaching the immortal status of the extra-terrestrials themselves. Obvious? As if. Even some who claim to like the film see the apes and the

bone throwing as nothing more than a metaphor for man's natural evolution.

Take the section where Bowman approaches the giant monolith (around Jupiter in the film, on the Saturnian moon of Japetus in the book), and sees it open up to become the Star Gate, the path to the place where his transformation will occur. The build-up of tension in the book is masterful, as he tries to relate the enormity of what is happening, not knowing if his words to mission control will ever even be heard;

The Eye of Japetus had blinked, as if to remove an irritating speck of dust. David Bowman had time for just one broken sentence which the waiting men in Mission Control, nine hundred million miles away and eighty minutes in the future, were never to forget: "The thing's hollow - it goes on forever - and - oh my God! - it's full of stars!"

The hairs on the back of my neck still stand up when I read that passage, and imagine what he must

have been seeing as space turned in on itself. How does the film handle this scene? No dialogue or explanation, just multicoloured shapes flying out of the screen, and a picture of Bowman's eye, shifting from one false colour distortion to another. That says it all really.

Of course effects were limited in those days, and budgets were too, but if master filmmaker Kubrick really wanted to make people understand what they were seeing, he could have done. What he actually did - here and throughout the film - can only be described as pretentious at best, and arrogant at worst.

The idea that an intelligent, meaningful film somehow has to be so impenetrable that you can't even tell what's happening, is simply wrong. And Kubrick of all people should have known that.

RAGE against the...

Angry? Don't keep it in, let us know. Let rip with your own "Rage against" whatever you loathe in sf in 650 words and send it to: matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk