

matrix

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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Return to Solaris



PLUS: BSFA Awards' final shortlist - page 21

matrix

Welcome,

Mark's never quite worked out just what comprises 'SF'. What is it? About SF sets it apart from other genres? (We'd welcome some suggestions by LoC.) No one means if we include S&S, horror, dark fantasy in Matrix, for example. A purist could argue that these aren't SF, but there must be some common theme. And every example that you could cite in defence of one particular definition of SF can be undermined. Indeed, Mark doubts that any 'genre' that includes works ranging from Eco, Orwell and Amis to Perry Rodan, Gor and Plan 9 can be defined – at least in any meaningful or useful way.

Of course, that diversity is both a curse and a strength. SF and fantasy's great strength is its ability to examine the modern zeitgeist and the human condition with the benefit of a certain distance. The resulting insights can be profound – and entertaining. In the SF canon, we have a handful of recognised literary masterpieces, many great novels and numerous good books. But there's also a lot of dross – and many outlandish, strange or bizarre books.

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Andy Sawyer's probably in a better position than most of us to see just how diverse the SF and Fantasy genres are. Andy oversees the 25 000 books and thousands of magazines, critical journals, and fanzines in the Science Fiction Foundation Collection. Starting this issue (see page 12), he offers some selections from the collection, beginning with *The Year of the Angry Rabbit*, the 'inspiration' for the 'golden turkey' movie *Night of The Lepus*.

In his new series, Andy shows how wide and varied both the SF collection and the genre itself is. We hope Matrix celebrates this diversity. It is, perhaps, the genre's – however you define it – greatest strength.

Congratulations to Martin and his wife Moira on the birth of their daughter Niamh in January. There must be something in the ink. Mark's third child should be born by the time you read this.

Mark & Martin

Commissioning Editor: Mark Greener

16 Orchard End, Bluntisham, PE28 3XF
markgreener1@aol.com

Production Editor:

Martin McGrath
91 Bentley Drive, Harlow, Essex, CM17 9QT
martinmcgrath@ntlworld.com

Contributing Editors

Fandom:

VACANT

If you'd like to take over as contributing editor for things finnish, contact Mark (address above).

Magazines:

Roderick Gladwish
27 Perth Road, Bridgeman, Gosport, Hampshire,
PO13 0XX
roderick@gladwishes.freemove.co.uk

Web/Internet news:

Martin Sketchley
232 Alvechurch Road, West Heath,
Birmingham, B31 3PS
msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

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BSFA Officers

President:

Sir Arthur C. Clarke, CBE

Vice President:

Stephen Baxter

Joint Chair:

Paul & Elizabeth Billinger
1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants,
NN11 3BE
bsfcom@smof.demon.co.uk

Treasurer:

Paul Hood
112 Meadowside, Eltham, London, SE9 6BB
paul@ouden.demon.co.uk

Membership Services: Estelle Roberts

(UK and Europe)

97 Sharp Street, Newland Avenue
Hull, HU5 2AE
estelle@lythande.freemove.co.uk

US Agent:

Cy Chauvin
14248 Wilford Street, Detroit, MI 48213, USA

Membership fees

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Registered address: 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, NN11 3BE

BSFA Services

Website:

www.bsfa.co.uk

Web mistress:

Tanya Brown
Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road,
London, SE8 4LH
bsfaweb@amaranthaviators.net

BSFA Awards:

Tanya Brown
Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road,
London, SE8 4LH
awards@amaranthaviators.net

London meetings:

Paul Hood
112 Meadowside, Eltham, London, SE9 6BB
paul@ouden.demon.co.uk

Orbiter Writing Groups:

Carol Ann Kerry-Green
278 Victoria Avenue, Hull, HU5 3DZ
metaphor@metaphor.karoo.co.uk

Publications manager:

Kathy Taylor
kathyandian@blueyonder.co.uk

Other BSFA Publications

Vector: The critical journal of the BSFA

Production

Tony Cullen
16 Weaver's Way, Camden, London, NW1 0XE
tony.cullen@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

Features

Andrew M Butler
c/o Dept. of Arts & Media, D28-ASSH Faculty,
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College,
High Wycombe, Bucks., HP11 2JZ
ambutler@enterprise.net

Book reviews:

Paul Billinger
1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants,
NN11 3BE
bsfcom@smof.demon.co.uk

Focus: The writer's magazine of the BSFA

Editor:

Simon Morden
13 Egremont Drive, Sherriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5SE
focus.editor@blueyonder.co.uk

RAGE against the...

...Lord of the Rings

It is the biggest fantasy series since the original Star Wars films. *Lord of the Rings* movies are breaking box office records across the world. Critics and legions of fans can't get enough. Almost everyone loves them. But not **Martin McGrath**. They're too long, he says, too boring and they choose the wrong side in the struggle between the old and the new.

Let me start by holding my hands up and admitting two crucial facts. First, I loathe Tolkeinesque fantasy. I don't know why, but place the words *elf* and *quest* in proximity to each other and I find myself unable to resist the urge to reach for a weapon.

Second, at least partly because of this reflex action, I have never been able to read more than fifty pages of the *Lord of the Rings*. As a younger man (when life seemed eternal and time seemed a commodity that could be wasted) I did manage to get all the way through *The Hobbit* without tearing out my own eyes but its bigger brother has always defeated me.

Instinctive aversion

Despite this instinctive aversion, I went to see *The Fellowship of the Ring* with something approaching enthusiasm and, indeed, excitement. I love the cinema, and everyone insisted that this was a great film.

So, big bag of Revels and a large Diet Coke in hand (perhaps in the futile hope that the second would counteract the effects of the first), I took my seat for the first movie. Things started well. The prologue was fantastic. The huge armies clashed and great deeds were done and, just for a moment, I began to believe that here was the movie to cure me of my elf-phobia.

Then the prologue ended, and so did my interest.

Oh the film was pretty enough, but if I'd wanted to see that much of New Zealand's countryside portrayed in long, slow, languid, infinite detail I'd have paid the money for a holiday there. Yes, there were other (too brief) moments that sparked my interest, but nothing could compensate for the overwhelming emptiness of the movie. It is a film without subtlety. Seeing the action from the book transferred to the big screen might be enough for fans of Tolkien's original but, for me, the absolute determination to be spectacular, whatever the cost, quickly became tedious.

And yet so many of my friends

love the movie.

Many people whose opinions I respect rate it as a great film. So, to be fair, I tried again. I bought a friend a copy of the extended director's cut for Christmas and, before passing it on, I watched *The Fellowship of the Ring* again. Surely, this time, with the Peter Jackson's vision fully realised, I'd "get it." But here is the thing, the director's cut doesn't improve the movie, it only makes worse the faults that are already there.

The film is too long. The dialogue is too stiff. The pressure of being "faithful" to the novels has left the film poorly structured – for example no competent screenwriter, starting from scratch, would have included two lengthy visits to elvish settlements that serve the same purpose and drag intolerably.

Spectacular

The determination to be spectacular, in the presentation of the landscape and the action sequences, wholly overwhelms the human and non-human characters. The constant use of slow-motion, twisting, tedious tracking shots, swooping across dramatic landscapes past tiny figures becomes, in the end, not a stylistic device but a laughable visual tic. It is used so repetitively that I began to wonder if Peter Jackson is making fun of himself or of the viewer.

There are things to admire in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. It is ambitious, technically clever and it does have some breath-taking moments but, no matter how hard I try, I can't forgive the film for the simple fact that it is, too often, simply boring.

And then came the sequel. I know what you're asking. If the first film annoyed me so, why did I go



At last someone apologises for the being in *Lord of the Rings*

and see the second one. Well, for a start, I'm an optimist – I hoped for improvement. Secondly, I realised it was a way to find out what happens in Tolkien's story without having to go to the bother of reading the books. Finally, I'd seen everything else at my local multiplex.

The Two Towers is better than the first movie – but not much. There is so much ground to cover that the meandering feeling of the first movie is reduced. The struggle at Helm's Deep is impressive but too long. And, again and again, I was left with the feeling that the director expected me to be awed by the special effects rather than to care about what was actually happening on the screen. It is technically impressive but not emotionally engaging. There is no substance.

Conservatives

There is a suggestion in *The Two Towers* that this story is more fundamentally about the struggle between the old and the new – the first hint of a meaningful subtext. But, tellingly, the film and, I presume, the books reveal themselves to be on the side of the conservatives. If Western thinking can be divided between

philosophies of The Enlightenment – based rational thought and a belief in progress – and conservative philosophies – based on mysticism and nostalgia for the past – then the *Lord of the Rings* is on the conservative side – and I am on the other, radical, side.

Philosophical questions

Philosophical questions aside, *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers* are not great movies because they rely on spectacle rather than emotion. They dazzle when they should enlighten. They long for the supposedly simple times of the past at a time when we should be trying to cope with the complex problems of the present and future. And there are just too many shots of tiny people running over mountains.

RAGE against the...

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

SF and Marxism

China Miéville appears in a special issue of *Historical Materialism - Research in Critical Marxist Theory*, supplying the introduction to an issue of the academic journal exploring fantastic literature from traditional Marxist perspectives. Other contributors to the issue (Volume 10, no. 4) include Stuart Elden on 'Through the Eyes

of the Fantastic: Lefebvre, Rabelais and Intellectual History', Ben Watson's 'Fantasy and Judgement: Adorno, Tolkien, Burroughs' and Andrew M. Butler on Rob Latham's *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption*. The journal can be ordered online from the publisher at www.brill.nl.

Who's daughter in comic

Miranda, who debuted in Lance Parkin's 2001 *Dr Who* novel *Father Time*, is an ordinary 80s girl that discovers she's the Empress of the Universe - as well as the good Doctor's adopted daughter. Now she is getting her own comic according to Comics International. Parkin is writing the six-issue comic from UK-based Ceeppanance comics.

Fake Pottery

JK Rowling was the highest paid author in the *Sunday Times* pay list of 2002, earning some £28 million during 2002. (Terry Pratchett made £1.8 million.) *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (due June 21) is already being heavily promoted. However, publishers of a Russian "parody" Tanya Grotter may face legal action if they publish any more stories of their 11 year old, orphaned wizard. Tanya Grotter and the *Magical Double Bass* sold a respectable 100 000 copies. A second book *Tanya Grotter and the Disappearing Floor* followed and there were plans for more. Meanwhile, in china fakes are appearing pitting Potter against the Golden Turtle, the Crystal Vase and Leopard-Walk-Up-To-Dragon. Source: *Locus*.

Williamson keeps going

Jack Stonehenge recently sold *The Stonehenge Gate* to Tor. It should appear this year, 75 years after his first sale. Source: *Locus*.

Ashton Smith's Plaque

Auburn, California will unveil a plaque to Clark Ashton Smith, one of the big three Weird Tales writers. The plaque is on a

stone that formerly stood beside his ashes. However, the boulder was moved as "The Band of Auburn's" old log cabin is being redeveloped. Although best known as a prose writer, Smith was also a talented poet. Hippocampus Books recently published *The Last Oblivion*, a collection of his poems with a fantastic element. (Mark recently reviewed *The Last Oblivion* for *The Alien Online* (www.thealienonline.net). Source: *Locus*.

Aldiss reads at Poetry Weekend

Brian Aldiss has agreed to read in the sf poetry section of the programme at the Poetry Weekend organised by the Back Room Poets in Oxford in July. Other sf poets reading their poetry at the event, which takes place on Sat July 19 in the Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford, will include Rip Bulkeley, Cardinal Cox, who is the 2003 Poet Laureate

of Peterborough, and John F. Haines, editor of *Handshake*, the sf poetry newsletter established 1992. For full details send an SAE to 38 Lonsdale Rd, Oxford, OX2 7EW, tel 01865 451266, email poetryweekend@ntlworld.com event website homepage.nflworld.com/barataria

Conference on New Myths

New Myths! Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror The Fifth Annual Conference of the Department of Arts and Media at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, UK, will be held on Saturday 3 May 2003.

The organisers note that Science Fiction is not about the future but reflects, using analogies, metaphors and allegories, our fears and dreams about the present. Fantasy is not escapism, but a rewriting of our past and of our present. Horror shows us what we have (barely) survived, and our current nightmares.

"These genres rewrite and interrogate old myths, and offer us up new myths to guide us, to warn us, to amuse us, to scare us," says organiser Andrew M Butler. "Some of these myths merely confirm what we already know, some of them expose the ideology we weren't previously aware of, some of them offer us future possibilities and some of them... well, you tell us..."

Andrew is looking for papers that would last about twenty minutes that explore science fiction, fantasy and horror as new myth(s), whether on film, on television, on stage, in books, in magazines, in art or in comics.

• Send abstracts (200 words) to Dr Andrew M Butler, D28, Department of Arts and Media, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 3JZ, UK or to ambutler@enterprise.net by March 30th 2003.

More poetry

Handshake, the 50th issue of an irregular publication of the Eight Hand group of SF poets has reached us. It's available for a SAE

from JF Haines, 5 Cross Farm, Station Road North, Fearnhead, Warrington, WA2 0QG.

Conan returns

Matrix directors Andy and Larry Wachowski seem set to produce the King Conan movie. John Milius is lined up to direct Arnold Schwarzenegger in a sequel to *Conan the Barbarian* and *Conan the Destroyer*. Source: *scifi.com*.

Star Wars DVD news

The forthcoming DVDs of *Star Wars IV, V and VI* will contain the special editions of *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. Lucas said that the special editions contain his original vision, which time and money prevented being actualised when the films were first released. The films as originally released will never, Lucas has said, be released on DVD. So we still have to put up with Han shooting second. Source: *scifi.com*.

Dracula Theme Park

Romania plans to build a Dracula theme park near the burial site of Vlad the Impaler. The \$32 million park will be built near Snagov Lake and include restaurants, hotels, a zoo, a golf course and a Gothic castle on a 520 acres. Vlad's body is supposed to be buried in a monastery on a small island on the lake. Source: *scifi.com*.

Sci-fi do Riverworld

Philip Jose Farmer's epic novel *Riverworld* has been adapted for television by the Sci-Fi Channel. A pilot episode, starring Emily Lloyd and Brad Johnson and produced by genre director Alex Proyas (*The Crow*) will be aired on 22 March 2003. No news yet of a UK broadcast date.

Molina 'armful

Alfred Molina has been cast as Spider-man's handiest villain, the tentacled Doctor Octopus, in the sequel to the Marvel hero's 2002 hit movie.

Poe resurrected and toasted

Lou Reed's *The Raven* should be out on CD by the time you read this. Based on Edgar Allan Poe's poem, the CD includes readings by, among others, Steve Buscemi, Laurie Anderson and Willem Dafoe. Reed and a host of other artists - including David Bowie - offer musical interludes. Meanwhile, on January 19 a visitor left a half-empty bottle of cognac and three red roses at Poe's grave - at around 3:30 in the morning. The ritual at the old Burying Ground of Baltimore's Westminster Church continues a tradition dating from the 100th anniversary of Poe's death in 1949. Source: *Darkecho.com*



Awards News

Ursula K. LeGuin is new grandmaster

The Alien Online reports that Ursula K. LeGuin will become the 20th Science Fiction Grand Master during the Nebula Awards weekend in April. She joins such luminaries as Heinlein, Clarke, Asimov, Aldiss and Pohl. Over her 40-year career, LeGuin's remarkable resume includes the *Earthsea* books, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*.



Awards in brief

Ray Bradbury won the first Ross Macdonald Literary Award, named after the mystery writer... Philip Pullman won the Eleanor Farjeon Award for outstanding contributions to children's literature... Salman Rushdie won the London International Writers Award for contributions to world literature. Source: *Locus*... Robert Silverberg won the 2002 Prix UTOPIA, the lifetime achievement award presented by the Utopiales International Festival held in Nantes... Nancy Farmer won the 2002 National Book Award for Young People's Literature with *The House of the Scorpion*... Ursula K. LeGuin won the Pen/Malamud award for "excellence in a body of short fiction"... Joyce Carol Oates won the 2002 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award. The \$25,000 award aims to recognise "internationally acclaimed authors who have written a distinguished body of work and made a major contribution to the field of literature and letters"... On this side of the Atlantic, Philip Reeve won the Nestle Smarties Gold Award for 9-11 year olds with *Mortal Engines*... Katherine Maclean is this year's SFWA Author Emeritus. Source: *Locus* and *Ansible*

Clarke nominations announced

The Clarke Shortlist was recently announced: *Kil'n People*, David Brin (Orbit) *Light*, M. John Harrison (Gollancz) *The Scar*, China Miéville (Macmillan) *The Separation*, Christopher Priest (Scribner) *Speed of Dark*, Elizabeth Moon (Orbit) *The Years of Rice and Salt*, Kim Stanley Robinson (HarperCollins)

Details of this year's BSFA Awards' shortlist can be found on page 21



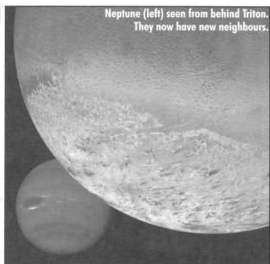
RODERICK GLADWISH'S WORLD OF SCIENCE

New moons found around Neptune

An international team of astronomers recently discovered three new moons around Neptune to add to the eight already known. Between 30 and 40 kilometres (18-24 miles) across they are so far from the Sun they are extremely difficult to see.

Some 100 million times fainter than can be seen with the naked eye, the new moons were found by combining multiple exposures from several large telescopes and accounting for Neptune's motion. This made stars appear as streaks of light, while the moons accompanying the planet appeared as points, thus making them easier to spot.

These moons, and the largest, Triton, orbit in the opposite direction to the rotation of the planet providing evidence that much of Neptune's satellite population was the result of an ancient collision between a former moon and a passing comet or asteroid. Source: NASA



Bacterial communities

That slime on your teeth in the morning is a highly organised bacterial community. Bacteria, it seems, communicate and cooperate.

Layers of different bacteria congregate and work together to form so-called biofilms. Standard antibiotics fail to penetrate some biofilms deeply enough to be effective and, using over a dozen different signals, the bacteria synchronise their response to attack on the outer layers to prevent fatal damage.

Biofilms have been found in such diverse places as gums and in the lungs of cystic fibrosis sufferers. They are particularly common round implants so cyborgs beware. Source: *Associated Press*

Worlds around other stars

The European Space Agency (ESA) is developing technology to view extrasolar planets. In the last decade planets around other stars have been identified by the wobble they induce on the star they orbit. This works well for giants (multiples of Jupiter), unfortunately even these are too small to be seen with largest state-of-the-art optical telescopes.

ESA plans to build smaller telescopes and then combine their light so they behave like a huge scope. Known as

interferometry it has already been done on a smaller scale. What is new about ESA's plans is that they will modify the technique to 'null' the light from the star that would otherwise swamp that of the planet. A ground-based version, GENIE, will start in about a year. In about ten years time, Mission Darwin will follow using six separate free-flying spacecraft beyond the orbit of the Moon. Source: ESA

Rosetta postponed

In December 2002, an Ariane 5 rocket blew up sending two communication satellites into the Atlantic. Though unfortunate for the telecommunications industry it is a bigger blow for science. The investigation into why the rocket failed and the engineering solution to fix it has seriously delayed the next flight.

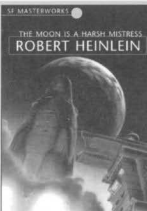
On that flight would have been Rosetta, a comet interceptor. It was planned that the spacecraft would go into orbit about comet 46 P/Wirtanen and deploy a lander to collect more data. To make this rendezvous was going to take eight years requiring two Earth and one Mars gravity assists. Now the spacecraft will miss the 'window' to join this cosmic dance.

Rosetta has been put into storage for at least a year until another candidate comet is found. Source: ESA

Mistress wants writers

It is a project so long mired in development hell that it had seemed that everyone had forgotten about the proposed production of Robert A Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. Heinlein's classic has a long history of not being made. Dreamworks SKG most recently failed in an attempt despite having a script they seemed excited about in 1998.

Now Harry Potter producer David Heyman has got involved is looking for writers. The outline, published in *Variety*, reads: "An unassuming computer repairman living on the moon in the future becomes part of a cadre of revolutionaries plotting secession from earth - with the aid of MIKE, a super computer that has recently come alive."



Does this simplistic summary represents Heyman's total understanding of the story or will he oversee a project as faithful to the original source material as Harry Potter? Heinlein's original is heavy on the author's particular brand of political philosophy which, though dear to his fans, might not survive the transfer to the big screen in a Hollywood blockbuster.

dumped), *Smallville* writers Alfred Gough and Miles Millar have been snapped up by New Line to write the screenplay for another Marvel super hero. They are, according to *Variety*, the latest in a long line of writers to be given a chance to script the adventures of Iron Man, the armoured alter-ego of industrialist Tony Stark.

Ex-Matrix editor in the Galaxy's Greatest Comic

Former Matrix editor Gary Wilkinson has scripted a story for 2000AD. The one-off 'Terror Tale' 'The Statue Garden' appeared in Prog 1327 (12 Feb 03) and was illustrated by highly-rated newcomer Dom Reardon. Gary has already sold

another story to Tharg but feels a long way from emulating his hero Alan Moore just yet. Back issues of 2000AD can be ordered via the website: www.2000ADonline.com

Big Engine's big plans

Big Engine recently published *Guardians of Alexander* by John Wilson, the first of a projected

Trilogy. The books tell the story of the eponymous group established after Alexander's death to protect the mysterious amulet of Ammon-Ra. But Theopolites is under the indirect influence of the alien Pollenato.

Big Engine's future plans include publishing Vonda N McIntyre's *Starfarer Quartet*, Charles Stross' *Festival of Fools* and Kit Reed's collection *Weird Women, Wired Woman*. McIntyre fans can get a discount if they order all four books, while *Weird Women, Wired Woman* contains two stories not included in the US edition.

Lovegrove's Untied Kingdom

Gollancz publishes James Lovegrove's *Untied Kingdom* on 17th April in both hardback and trade paperback. His previous books attracted considerable (and deserved - Mark & Martin) acclaim. Lovegrove was inspired to write *Untied Kingdom* by watching coverage of the bombing of Kosovo and wondered what would happen if the UK faced the international community's wrath. It's also the tale of schoolteacher Fen Morris, who sets out to rescue his wife from the clutches of the British Bulldogs, a brutal London gang that have stolen the village's women.

New X-Files game

For *X-Files* junkies lamenting the end of the series, Universal Games and Fox Interactive announced that *The X-Files: Resist or Serve* for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox should be out in the summer. The horror game spans three episodes created by the *X-Files*'

executive producers and features the likenesses and voices of Mulder and Scully investigating a string of murders linked to paranormal activity. Source: sdf.com

New Iron Man writers

Despite being replaced on *The Amazing Spider-Man* by Michael Chabon (who has also now been

The state of SF on TV and radio

Letters should be sent to:
The Editors, 16 Orchard End,
Blunham, PE28 3XF
markgreener@aol.com



Dear Matrix editors,

Thanks for another great issue guys, but the page numbers look a bit odd and somewhat hard to discern. (I thought that too, so I've changed them for this issue. Better? - Martin)

"Rage against old TV shous"
- Servalan of *Blake's 7* is not dead, just recycled and refurbished as one of the Peacekeeper leaders in *Farscape*. I suggest *Farscape* continues to lead the way in excellent and sometimes complicated plotlines, with a regular injection of new characters to keep us on our toes or tentacles. It also benefits from the ongoing plotline of "wormhole technology". Don't let it "crash and burn" Roderick Gladwish, let's have a campaign to keep it!

There's not too much new TV SF on terrestrial broadcasters at present, unless you include the *Xcalibur* and *Dan Dare* CGI effects cartoons on Channel 5. *Star Trek: TNG* is now showing it's age as a repeat, but I do regret the demise of *Crusade*, the successor to *Babylon 5*.

Separated at birth?



Servalan - *Blake's 7*



Grayza - *Farscape*

I enjoy *Stargate SG1* but there are too many "blast them with projectile weapon" scenes. At least *Dark Angel* (which now has Nana Visitor as a blonde) has the apocalyptic atmosphere of *Blade Runner* and *Alien* has the plot twist of the Rimbaldis devices. The latest *Spellberg TV* offering *Taken* has all the hall marks of his flawed approach to SF.

Did any of you Radio 4 fans tune in to Philip

Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy broadcast on successive Saturday afternoons? It was a worthwhile investment in seven and a half hours of your time/life - excellently done. It might have attracted more listeners if it had been cut into shorter episodes, and had some earlier publicity. It's a pity that the BBC TV and Radio schedulers don't opt to give the BSFA some advance publicity of F&SF themed programmes.

Mike Brain, Flintshire

I missed *His Dark Materials* on Radio 4 but fans of audio science fiction/fantasy and horror could do worse than keep an eye on the schedules of the BBC's new digital radio channel BBC7. They have been broadcasting some gems from the BBC radio archives. In the weeks since launch it has featured versions of *Childhood's End*, *Blake's 7* and *Pet Sematary* - to name a few - in its 7th Dimension slot (6pm and midnight). Anyone who has dealt with BBC will know that it is easier to get information from an Iraqi scientist than from a Corporation scheduler - but I don't see why we shouldn't try. Martin

A Series of Unfortunate Events

by Lemony Snicket



Unfortunate films

A *Series of Unfortunate Events*, the saga of the Baudelaire children's struggle against the machinations of the evil Count Olaf is to come to the big screen in 2004. While Lemony Snicket's children's books may not have received quite the same attention as JK Rowling's young wizard (and let's face it the second coming might fail to match Harry Potter publicity-wise), they are nevertheless extraordinarily popular with their young (and not so young) fans. For the uninitiated *The Hostile Hospital*, the eighth in a proposed thirteen book series will be published in the UK in May and will continue the adventures of the peculiarly talented Violet, Klaus and Sunny who, when their house

burns down and kills their parents, struggle to survive in a harsh world. Dark and funny the books are closer in mood to Roald Dahl than Rowling - though not quite in the former's class.

Cast rumours include Jim Carrey as the wicked Count Olaf, Johnny Depp as "author" Lemony Snicket with support from Joan Cusack and Emma Thompson. Original director Barry Sonnenfeld (*Men in Black*, *Get Shorty*) left the production shortly before filming was due to start in December 2002 and has not yet been replaced. Shooting has been rescheduled for the summer of 2003.

The film will be based on the first book in the series, *A Bad Beginning*.

of terranauts who tunnel to the centre of the planet and use nuclear weapons to restart the rotation of the Earth's molten core. In the film, the shuttle is destroyed as it comes in to land because changes in the Earth's magnetic field causes problems with navigational equipment. Although the crash sequence has been removed from trailers it will remain in the film when released in March 2003.

The *Core* was originally scheduled for release in November 2002 but unfavourable early screenings meant the studio withdrew it to allow further work on special effects.

Thunderbirds oh no!

Thunderbirds may be forty years old and continue to capture the imagination of children and adults all over the world but, with typical modesty, Hollywood executives have decided that they know the secret of making the franchise really popular.

After years in development hell a *Thunderbird*'s live action movie now has the backing of a major US studio (Universal), a director - *Star Trek*'s Jonathan Frakes - and a release date of July 2004. But, concerned that the franchise, which continues to sell toys by the tonne, may not appeal to kids, the "suits" have decided that it would be better if the film focused on the character of Alan who will be transformed from astronaut and pilot to twelve-year-old boy. The same fate, apparently, also awaits *Brains*. Bill Paxton (*Apollo 13*) as Jeff Tracey and Sophia Myles (*From Hell*) as Lady Penelope will play the adult leads.

Yesterday's tomorrow

World of Tomorrow will star Jude Law, Sadie Frost, Gwyneth Paltrow and Angelina Jolie and began filming in London early this year. This independent production is written and directed by first-timer Kerry Conran. The story is set before World War Two with Jolie as a hotshot pilot partnered by a swashbuckling adventurer (Law) and an investigative journalist (Paltrow) and has been likened to an Indiana Jones film with a retro science fiction feel.

Cracking the Code

Code 46 will be the next film by 24 Hour Party People director Michael Winterbottom. Starring Tim Robbins (*Shushank Redemption*) and Samantha Morton (*Minority Report*) the film is a "futuristic love story" set in the near future. Deserts have spread across the world and civilisation clings on in heavily controlled cities that only allow entry to those with "papellas" (a form of insurance cover). The film is partly funded by lottery money through the UK Film Council's Premiere Fund.

Furious Max

Twenty-four years after the original was released it has been confirmed that George Miller and Mel Gibson will work together again on a *Mad Max* movie. The fourth outing in the saga, provisionally titled *Mad Max: Fury Road*, will begin filming in Australia this summer and has already been scheduled for release on July 23 2004 by Twentieth Century Fox. Story details are being kept under very tight wraps but the budget has been estimated at \$104 million.

Taken together the first three *Mad Max* films grossed only \$69 million in the United States.

Robot wars

Isaac Asimov has not been well served by film adaptations. Two recent efforts, *Nightfall* and *Bicentennial Man*, were bad beyond mere words and things are not looking rosy the fate of *I, Robot*.

Directed by Alex Proyas (*Dark City*) the film will star Will Smith as a detective investigating a robot crime. Described by the director as more of a prequel to the Asimov stories than a direct adaptation the stories' central character, the robot-psychologist Susan Calvin does appear but in a supporting role to Smith's gumshoe-style private eye.

One can hope that Asimov's work will be better served by this latest work. Director Proyas has visual flair but a script by Jeff Vintner (*Final Fantasy*) rewritten by Akiva Goldsman (*Batman and Robin*, *Lost in Space*) does not inspire confidence.

Full steam ahead

Katsuhiro Otomo will release his first film since *Akira* in 1988 later this year. *Steamboy* is set during Britain's industrial revolution and has an awful lot to live up to.

Hulk smash

The Super Bowl isn't just an annual "sporting" event in which very large men try to batter other very large men senseless. It is also one of the most important advertising markets in the world. Huge audiences mean huge prices for time and studios pulling out all the stops to promote their films. This year, at least in terms of sheer

spectacle, the advertisement for Ang Lee's *The Hulk* was hard to beat. The sequence featured an enormous, green, CGI Hulk rampaging through science labs and cities and concluded with the monster tossing a battle tank over the horizon.

Shuttle crash in The Core

Released just days before the tragedy that claimed the lives of all seven astronauts aboard the space shuttle Columbia, the trailer for sci-fi action movie *The Core* has been withdrawn and re-edited because it features the destruction of a shuttle in a freak accident.

The *Core* tells the story of a group



Not in League with Moore

Despite setbacks and reported disagreements *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* remains on target for release in July 2003. However, fans of the Alan Moore series should not get their hopes up for a faithful adaptation. The addition of two new, American-friendly, characters (Dorian Gray and Tom Sawyer) and the rewriting of Moore's version of the wasted Allan Quatermain to suit the more vigorous screen persona of Sean Connery all suggest significant differences in the comic version.

The film's producer, Trevor Albert, told *American magazine* Wizbang! that: "Part of me would like to see the comic book as a movie - a literal version of it. I'm sure many people would. And yet in this climate and time, you have to find some middle ground, and I think [screenwriter Robinson] did a pretty good job of finding that middle ground."

Slowly does it

Best known for his slick and stylish thrillers, Stephen Soderbergh seems an odd choice to direct a remake of a Soviet arthouse classic. Still, says **Martin McGrath**, this new version of *Solaris* isn't a bad film, if you're prepared for a movie that moves slowly and asks big questions.

Sometimes an opening shot will tell you everything you need to know about a film. *Star Wars* had huge spaceships, flashing lasers and chest rattling music. From the very beginning, that was going to be a big, brash, exciting movie. *Solaris*, by contrast, opens with a shot of rain against a window. If that sets alarm bells ringing, you'd probably better leave now.

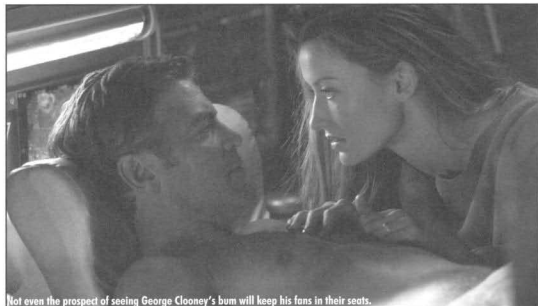
Despite the presence in the credits of James Cameron (producer), George Clooney (star) and Stephen Soderbergh (director) this film, from the very opening moment, makes clear that it is not going to be a typical Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster. Indeed the stories of numerous American cinema-goers walking out early on this film having been bemused by the glacial pace and introspective storytelling are certain to be repeated in this country whenever a multiplex dares show *Solaris*. That's a shame because, while far from perfect, *Solaris* does something that very few American movies ever attempt. It tries to make the audience think.

This is a film that deals with big questions. What does it mean to be human? How do we love other people when we can never, truly, know them? What is our place in the universe that created us? That *Solaris* never quite fulfils its ambitions is a disappointment but that it set itself such lofty goals at all is, on its own, enough to make *Solaris* worth your time and money.

Beautiful and effective

Solaris has great strengths. The cinematography, by Soderbergh himself, is never less than stunning. The design, with numerous references to Kubrick's 2001, is both beautiful and effective. Soderbergh's direction is purposefully slow and deliberate but it succeeded, for me, in creating a meditative, trance-like, state in which the questions raised by the film are explored as much by the viewer as by the characters.

The basic story is simple. A psychologist, Chris Kelvin (Clooney), is asked to come to a troubled space station around the watery planet *Solaris*. Once there he encounters a replica of his dead wife Rhexa (Natascha McElhone) and discovers that the surviving



Not even the prospect of seeing George Clooney's bum will keep his fans in their seats.

members of the space station crew are having similar experiences.

Stanislaw Lem

The film takes its name from the novel by Polish writer Stanislaw Lem but anyone hoping for a faithful screen representation of Lem's *Solaris* will be disappointed. This *Solaris* is a remake of the Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 film and it retains the emphasis placed by Tarkovsky on Kelvin's life before his arrival on the space station while playing down the importance of the planet itself.

I've watched Soderbergh's *Solaris* twice and, in between, I went back and watched the Tarkovsky original. Soderbergh's version has some significant advantages over its predecessor. As a director, Soderbergh has a much greater interest in creating a visually stunning location for his story and the budget to achieve the look he wants. At more than an hour shorter than the original, the modern *Solaris* is also both more concise and much clearer in the themes it raises. Soderbergh pares the flab from Tarkovsky's original and, unburdened of any need or desire to respect Lem's novel, Soderbergh has - by chance or design - picked out and emphasised those themes which were particular to Tarkovsky but that were often diluted or confused by contradictory

messages in the source material.

Lem's story, influenced by his reaction against Stalinism, was fundamentally about the impossibility of human progress and, because of that, the fact that we are doomed never to understand that which is truly different or alien. Both Tarkovsky and Soderbergh, however, are more interested in our inability to understand even those who are closest to us. To that end, in both film versions, we have a far greater concentration on the relationship between the protagonist and his wife.

Faith

Lem attacked the way humanity was ducking difficult questions, so that even science had become a faith rather than way of questioning the universe. But both Tarkovsky and Soderbergh make *Solaris* a story about how we are happier when we stop asking questions and simply make leaps of faith. In the original novel Kelvin's partial deification of the planet *Solaris* is a defeat and an absurdity. In the film versions, when Kelvin stops trying to understand what is happening and treats the planet as a higher power, he is rewarded with the contentment he seeks. "There are no answers, only choices," Kelvin concludes in Soderbergh's version.

That Soderbergh chooses to allow his hero a happy ending with

the woman he loves through the power of *Solaris* might be dismissed as typical Hollywood sentimentality were it not for the fact that Tarkovsky did the same thing though, in his version, Kelvin finds redemption with his father.

It is ironic that, in making *Solaris*, two filmmakers have chosen to make this a story about the superiority of faith over reason when it is precisely this conceit that Lem's original novel attacked.

It is the film's biggest weakness. A philosophy of faith above reason may be appealing - life would, after all, be much simpler if we could rely on others to do our thinking for us - but it is also lazy and dangerous. When we stop asking questions we lose more than our freedom to act as we choose, we lose that which makes us human. Lem's *Solaris* makes just this point.

Interesting and unusual

Still, despite the problems, I would recommend *Solaris* as an interesting and unusual science fiction movie. I do so while warning that many of you may find it tedious and pointing out that many viewers and a few critics have hated the movie. Still, in an era when most Hollywood productions seem to believe that "subtext" is a dirty word, a film that not only asks important questions, but also places them at the heart of the film is to be welcomed.

Out of balance

Equilibrium borrows liberally from great works of science fiction from the past. 1984, *Fahrenheit 451* and *Brave New World* should all get together and kick the living daylights out of this small-minded piece of rubbish, says **Martin McGrath**.

My mother always told me that if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all. If I stuck to that rule, this review would probably end right here.

Equilibrium stinks.

Sometimes I go into a cinema with such low expectations of a movie that, as the film unfolds, I find myself warming to it. I've always had a soft spot for the underdog and so, when everyone else hates something, I often find myself playing the devil's advocate and standing up for even the worst movies. Anyone who has tried to have a sensible conversation with me about Stephen Spielberg's *Hook* will know what I mean.

Unfortunately, *Equilibrium* is so bad that not even I will defend it.

Trite

There are lots of things wrong with this film. The plot, such as it is, is trite, tedious and derivative. The dialogue is lazy and clichéd, even by Hollywood standards. The film criminally wastes the talents of decent actors like Sean Bean, Emily Watson and Angus MacFadyen. The action sequences, and there are many, are poorly realised in a low-budget, sub-*Matrix* style that frequently descends into laughable posing. The much-touted "gun-fu" fighting style is ridiculous and

no amount of high-energy editing can save it. Worse still, the final confrontation between the hero John Preston (Christian Bale) and the Big-Brother-like "Father" is an embarrassing anti-climax.

Fails to entertain

So *Equilibrium* profoundly fails to entertain as an action flick. But the story has pretensions to be more than just a big dumb action movie. *Equilibrium* has a message.

After a third world war the survivors create the state of Libria and set out to abolish violence by banning emotions. So concerned are they to prevent war that they train a heavily armed, very violent and huge army to kill those who would resist them and to destroy anything that would arouse emotion.

This resistance, we see early in the film, includes a group of heavily armed art lovers who have hidden the Mona Lisa under some floorboards. It is never explained why, when the whole population is drugged to the eyeballs on "Prozium" to prevent them feeling anything, such works of art need to be destroyed but, with no time for silly questions like that, the government forces led by our hero batter down the door and get to work.

With soldiers burning great works of art to enforce a totalitarian

regime's thought control in a society maintained by the use of a soma-like drug, *Equilibrium* makes plain its debt to some of the greatest stories of the Twentieth Century. But any film willing to place itself in the footsteps of *Fahrenheit 451*, 1984 and *Brave New World* better have something important to say.

Sadly, *Equilibrium* is as stupid as it is violent.

Emotions, *Equilibrium* tells us, are good. Well, yes, not terribly profound perhaps, but hard to argue with. Emotions are good. Sad then that it is not emotion at the death of his wife, his friend or hundreds of innocent people that first drives our hero to take a stand against the forces of Libria's regime. But, when they try to kill his new puppy, John Preston can take no more and bad guys start to tumble. I'm not kidding, it really is as stupid as it sounds.

Sad

Sad, too, that nowhere in the film does the hero show any sign of remorse for the dozens of men he, sometimes brutally, kills in pursuit of his goal. Worse, though, is the fact that the only emotions that do get any significant screen time in this film are hate and anger.

Totalitarian regimes are bad, *Equilibrium* says, and corrupt. Again, this is hard to argue with

but it is hardly an earth-shattering revelation. This might have been a challenging statement when made by Wells or Huxley but they were writing at a time when fascist and communist regimes seemed attractive to many people. We now have - though Wells and Huxley, to their credit, did not - the evidence of how terrible these regimes were and I wonder how many people sitting down to watch a Hollywood movie are really yearning for a dose of dictatorship to get the trains running on time.

Ultra-violence

The most unpleasant thing about *Equilibrium*, however, is that the alternative it offers to the docility imposed by the totalitarian Librian regime is ultra-violence and the notion that might shall be right. I'm not a squeamish viewer and I like an action movie as much as the next guy, but I was surprised by both the amount of violence in *Equilibrium* and the purpose it seems to serve.

As the film ends, a revolutionary bloodbath erupts, and the final shot is of Bale beaming happily down on the destruction he has unleashed. *Equilibrium* tells us that freedom belongs to strong men with big guns. This is not a message that offers a challenge to totalitarian regimes. On the contrary, it comforts those who would impose their will on others by force of arms. It says that the strong shall prevail and, in doing so, it either fails to comprehend or deliberately distorts the literary sources from which it seems to draw inspiration. As such it is either a very stupid film or a rather nasty one.

In any case, the story fails to live up to the standards of its literary predecessors and compounds matters by liberally "borrowing" images from other films (*Metropolis* and *Blade Runner* most obviously). As a director Wimmer has neither the skill nor the vision to match the films he references, all he succeeds in doing is reminding us of classics we have enjoyed in the past while we are stuck watching this rubbish. *Equilibrium* fails at every level and I cannot honestly recommend it to anyone. It doesn't even make it into the "so bad it's good" category. A true turkey.



Equilibrium's "gun-fu" is ludicrous.

Daredevil no bullseye

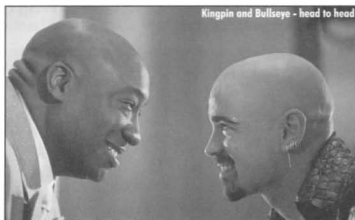
Ian Simpson feasts on *Daredevil*, the latest big screen adaptation of a Marvel superhero, and finds it tasty in places but ultimately insubstantial.

Daredevil inhabits the same Marvel universe as Spider-Man, and lives in the same city, New York. But as far as modern superhero blockbusters are concerned, *Daredevil* lives on a different planet to the friendly neighbourhood wall-crawler.

There is much merit to this adaptation of one of the comic book world's 'b' list. It is darker than Tim Burton's *Batman*, and less cartoonish than *The Crow*, which gives it some substance. I had concerns over the choice of director (Mark Stephen Johnson is best known for the *Grumpy Old Men* films), but, perhaps because star Ben Affleck is a fan boy, *Daredevil* is as noir as it should be.

The film builds slowly, showing Matt Murdock's childhood, and how he loses his sight in an accident. Soon, as with the darker superheroes, death strikes him hard. His father, a boxer known as 'The Devil', is murdered for not taking a fall. A superhero in born. And, as he lives in Hell's Kitchen, the name falls into place.

The biggest problem with the film is lack of plot. Electra's (Alias's Jennifer Garner) billionaire father wants out of the organised crime business, so the crimelord Kingpin



hires mad Irishman Bullseye to eliminate him, and Electra. However, once part one of the hit is complete, Electra comes to believe that Daredevil killed her father. Meanwhile, after the oddest and swiftest romance in movie history - a fight and a rain-soaked kiss - she falls in love with the blind lawyer.

Johnson attempts to create a journey for us to follow, in order to relate to Daredevil. He is trying to convince himself he is a good guy. Ultimately, he fails, as I had little

sympathy with him.

The relationships, which should be the heart of the film, are too shallow. For example, Electra is about to kill Daredevil to avenge her father, but as soon as she removes his mask and sees the man she loves, she immediately accepts his innocence.

Affleck's performance in fine, showing the human side of Daredevil, in both his emotional and physical weakness. He forsakes crime fighting for a night with Electra and he is

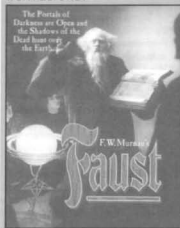
obviously pained after every beating. But as a struggling lawyer, how does he afford all the gadgets, especially the sensory deprivation tank he sleeps in? Garner is adequate as Electra; as is Michael Clarke Duncan (*Armageddon*) as the crime lord Kingpin, until the finale, when he shines. Annoyingly, although both Kingpin and the journalist Ben Urich inhabit the same universe as Spider-Man, thanks to Hollywood studio rights, they now can't appear in any future Spider-Man film. Colin Farrell (*Minority Report*) reveals in his role - looks like he had a blast - and is the most enjoyable character as Bullseye. Of course, to please the die-hard fans, Stan Lee, Kevin Smith and Frank Miller pop up in well-placed cameos.

The star of the show, however, has to be Murdock's radar vision. Inspired. So I won't spoil it for you. The stunts are great, and the GC *Daredevil* is more impressive than Spiderman as it leaps about the Hell's Kitchen's rooftops.

A tasty, if not very substantial starter for this years three course feast of Marvel superhero movies. Waiter, I now think I'll have X2, followed by *The Hulk* please.



FW Murnau's *Faust* was first released in 1926 yet still has the power to move. **Martin McGrath** takes a look at the recently released DVD from Eureka.



FW Murnau, didn't he make *Nosferatu*?

Sigh... yes.

Why the sigh?

Well because *Nosferatu* gets all the attention from fantasy and horror fans, but actually his version of *Faust*, while less flashy, is probably a better film.

But *Nosferatu* has those cool sets and the scary vampire!

Yes, but *Faust* also looks beautiful. The camera almost never moves so that every shot is composed like a mini-masterpiece. The lighting effects are sublime and the post-expressionist set design adds to the films emotional content rather than overwhelming it -

Post-expressionist set design? What are you, a film student?

It's important. The more naturalistic (though totally constructed) look of this movie marked an important shift in German filmmaking. For years the German film industry had been dominated by expressionist films, the sets seemed more important than a plot or

characters. Just a year earlier (1925) the studio that made *Faust* (UFA) had almost gone bankrupt making Lang's extravagantly expressionist *Metropolis*. Yet Murnau took what was best from the German tradition and married it to a recognisably modern film design and created a beautiful looking film that balanced content and style.

I'm bored, give me some juicy details.

The film features a long shot of a naked woman that was originally censored in America. The actress who plays the sweet and innocent Gretchen (Camilla Horn) ended up getting married six times and had a string of affairs with Hollywood glitterati.

What are the best bits in the film?

The opening shot of Faust lecturing over the lighted model of Saturn. The spooky sequence of Faust fleeing from the devil Mephisto. The magic carpet ride. The ending, when the two lovers are re-united in tragic circumstances - proof that

an eighty-years-old silent film can bring a lump to the throat of a jaded twenty-first century film critic.

What isn't so good?

The story does tend to meander a bit. The last third might better be in a film called *Gretchen* rather than *Faust*, because the protagonist disappears. The film commentary is worth a listen but, though written by film historian Peter Spooner it is delivered by an actor and lacks any spontaneity. It is also a little dry and has a tendency to wander wildly across the whole history of German cinema, which can be frustrating.

Any more trivia?

The actor who plays Mephisto (Ernst Janning) won the first ever Best Actor Oscar for his part in *The Last Command* and was also brilliant in *The Blue Angel* with Marlene Dietrich. However, his enthusiastic support for the Hitler and his roles in a number of anti-Semitic propaganda movies tarnished his reputation and his film career ended with Germany's defeat in 1945.

Last round in the magazine

In her final Pulpitations column for *Matrix*, **Glenda Pringle** takes a look at the good and the bad in the world of SF magazines. *Interzone* editors might want to look away now.

Well, here it is folks, the final PULPitations from yours truly. Since the first column appeared in *Matrix* 138 (July-August 1999), a lot of water has passed under the bridge and I thought I would take this opportunity to retrospect a little.

I said in my very first column that I'm addicted to SF magazines and that hasn't changed. I still take delight in receiving my monthly helpings of various 'organs of the genre', but - alas - they are far fewer in number these days. A change of employment and the foregoing of a regular salary has meant I'm much happier passing the days at home editing academic journals than experiencing the heady (and stressful!) heights of middle management in a large publishing house. However, the salary of a freelancer 'ain't so hot', so a lot of subscriptions have had to lapse.

Must-haves

So what do I see as being 'must-haves'? Well, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Analogue*, *Asimov's* and *The Third Alternative* are all definitely top of the list. Newcomer *3SF* has also found a place in my budget - not least because I hope it will someday knock *Interzone* off its (in my view, unjustified) perch as top UK SF magazine. A little competition never hurt anyone.

3SF remains my all-time favourite. Despite various changes in ownership and editorship over the years that have left it surprisingly unscarred, it is still the *grande dame* of SF magazines because no other magazine brings me quite the same feeling of nostalgia. It (along with *Gality*, which unfortunately bit

the dust long ago) was the first SF magazine I picked up as a youngster. As such, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that it was instrumental in my becoming interested in science fiction. For me, the magazines came before the books. With a history of publishing such stories as 'Starship Troopers', 'A Canticle for Leibowitz' and 'Flowers for Algernon', it's not hard to see why *3SF* hold such an enduring place on my bookshelves.

Hard SF

Analogue and *Asimov's* are musts for their hard SF (although it would be fairer to say that this description is more accurate for the former than the latter). However, some stories in both of them can be hard work and I can't admit to reading them cover to cover anymore. (Hm, I still see my age...) That being said, I still see these two magazines as being the standard bearers for true 'science' fiction. They may not always be hopping with new, trendy writing styles, but they sure do make you think. And, thinking, my dear readers, is what SF is supposed to make you do. In my opinion, if you don't get that 'sensawonder' buzz from a story, it has done nothing more than entertain - and you can get that from leafing through *Reader's Digest* at the dentist's office.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *The Third Alternative*. *TTA* is not, I must admit, purporting to be just a SF magazine. I'm sure there are those of you out there who could argue for hours the provenance of the term 'speculative fiction', but I think *TTA* is the very epitome of it. Consisting of a strange mixture of horror, dark

fantasy, SF and the just plain weird, this is one magazine that always amuses me (as does its sister publication *Crimewave*, which covers crime fiction). The production standards and the artwork are fantastic. Not only is *TTA* a good read, it's just so pretty to look at!

3SF is still just a 'baby', so I'm afraid I'll have to reserve judgement on its long-term future. Starting up a new magazine in any genre is fraught with danger - economic and critical - so anyone who has the guts to do it has my vote straight away. The most important thing I think *3SF* has going for it is the dedication of its editorial team and the support of so many popular authors. These are both factors that must be present for any such enterprise to succeed.

Failure

Since I've been writing this column, I've seen more than a few new magazines get launched and more than a few hit the ropes. The reasons for their failure are many: perhaps the founders were inexperienced and didn't know what they were letting themselves in for, perhaps they lacked enough money to keep the magazine going, or perhaps the magazine was one among many in an international conglomerate's stable and thus did not get the support from its owners it should have (unlike *Log Cabin Monthly*!). We all have to admit that our pet interest - science fiction - is a minority one. Therefore, any initiative from within its ranks is going to be one tough proposition. Anyway, good luck *3SF*. I'm rootin' for ya.

So what about the subscriptions I've let lapse? While most of these

have been with the deepest regret, there is only one that I've let lapse as a matter of principle - *Interzone*. I don't hate the poor dear. After all, I've had a love/hate relationship with it for years, and I have no doubt I will love it again someday.

Hurled across the room

However, any magazine that has on numerous occasions made me so mad I've hurled it across the room does not deserve my hard-earned cash. If I could have pinpointed just one thing that so infuriates me about it, I would have written a letter to the editor long ago. Unfortunately, I can't. One time it might be the film critic's unjustifiable (and largely inaccurate) trouncing of a film I particularly enjoyed. Another time it might be a trite and overblown book review that leaves me wondering what in the world the reviewer talking about and have they read the same book as me! Yet another time it might be the fact that I've just spent an afternoon reading it and found myself bored rigid and mightily disappointed by the poor standard of its stories - some of which I feel the editor must have plucked out of an author's dishtin they are so bad. I would never expect a magazine to be excellent from cover to cover - after all, one man's pint is another man's poison - but I would at least expect to find something good.

Now, gentle readers, it is time for me to don my helmet and raygun, climb up into my trusty rocketship and take off for parts unknown. As I leave you in the capable hands of my successor, I hope you have enjoyed coming along with me on this journey. 'So long, partners.'

As pretty
as a
picture

Martin McGrath take a look at *Scheherazade*, re-launched with issue 24 and prettier than ever.

The old *Scheherazade* was a curious magazine. It regularly featured artwork that, in quality, ambition and variety, was easily the equal of many professional genre magazines while, at the same time, featuring text lay-out and design that was amateurish and, sometimes, irritating.

Now re-launched as an A4 sized magazine with a full colour cover and 40 pages, the new *Scheherazade* retains the quality artwork but is now a much more comfortable read. Everyone involved in the re-design should be congratulated - this is one subscriber who will be happy to renew at a slightly increased cost!

Liz Williams dominates this issue with an excellent story and a lengthy piece in which she interviews (the eccentric but very nice) Patricia Kennedy Weston, William's story, 'The Man from the Ministry' has an intriguing oriental setting and vision of hell and

is perfectly illustrated by Gerald Goubert. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

The issue's other stand-out story, for my taste, was 'Children of the City' by Lyn McConchie which seemed to offer something more than the average post-apocalyptic tale. Tanith Lee's short 'Sheherazade in Hell' was brief, nice and got the required groan from this reader. 'Cerebra' by Alexander Glass was a bit mawkish.

The author set himself a difficult task, writing the story from the point of view of a diemonic hound, and he doesn't quite carry it off. Hugh Cook's 'Golgol



Molgo' is the issue's least successful effort - not up to the standard of the other stories.

Overall a good issue with a great new look. The only thing I can't understand is the obsession of magazines from Brighton with William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land* - *Interzone* has recently printed three stories set in this odd, sub-landscap and this issue of *Scheherazade* ends with a brief feature on the author's narrative technique. I've tried hard, sorry, I just don't

get it.

Scheherazade: £3.50/E11.50 (three issues) 14 Queens Park Lane, Brighton, BN2 9JF - www.shinet.co.uk

This joke just isn't bunny anymore

Foundation
Favourites
Number one: The Year of the
Angry Rabbit by Russell Braddon

Andy Sawyer hasn't read all 25,000 books in the *Science Fiction Foundation Collection* but, as its administrator, he knows them better than most. Sometimes, almost at random, he finds a book so interesting or odd that he falls in love. In this, the first of a series of articles on Andy's favourites from the collection, he considers one of those books, *The Year of the Angry Rabbit*.

The *Year of the Angry Rabbit* (London: Heinemann, 1964: the illustration shows the later Pan paperback edition) is known, if at all, as the book on which the 1972 film *Night of the Lepus* was based. The *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* describes the "unintentional humour" of the film as "endearing": in other words, this is a film in the long tradition of "Let's keep the silly idea and remove the entire point of the book from which we've taken it". Even so, the book it comes from deserves more than a listing in "Cinema Turkeys of the Twentieth Century".

Black satire

For despite the film, the book itself is a very effective black satire. Russell Braddon was one of the generation of WW2 servicemen who turned their (often horrific) experiences into literature and his first book, *The Naked Island*, did exactly that. *The Year of the Angry Rabbit* is set in a near-future Australia. The two-party electoral system has been reformed so that whatever the result only ten members are actually sent to Parliament, where they solemnly debate, vote, and announce the motion carried by whatever majority the government has. Tony Blair, eat your heart out.

The Prime Minister, Kevin "Ella" Fitzgerald, takes a late-night call from his old (and loathed) school friend the rich and impossibly vulgar Alf Hill, who has delivered the two seats of his Parliamentary majority in return for a knighthood. ("Ladyll ... yer sweating like a pig. Let's bugger off for a beer.") Now Hill's extensive outback property in Bludgerton is plagued by rabbits and Ella has to jump to the task of sending in a scientific research team to tackle the problem.

Unfortunately, the virus they

develop makes the rabbits highly aggressive and they are able to pass it on to humans. The good news is that this is the perfect weapon of biological warfare. And Australia now has it.

Fitzgerald calls a conference of world leaders and is snubbed until he wipes out the three warring armies in civil-war torn Rhodesia. Then world leaders turn up to see what Fitzgerald has to offer.

What

he has to offer is farce, beginning with a squabble over which World Leaders have to bunk down with whom in school dormitories because in Sydney over Christmas, the hotels are full.

President "Nixon"

Braddon's satire's turned upon Australia and her institutions, but he has some barbed jibes at other nationalities. His best jokes, though, (apart from naming the American President "Nixon" - no-one of that name surely stood a chance from the perspective of 1964) are reserved for domestic issues: sport ("You people killed sport dead the day you introduced conscription for tennis, swimming and athletics"), Puritanism ("he had been able to carry out his most enlightened reform, which made all forms of sexual intercourse illegal

except on Thursdays between 7 pm and midnight.") and philistinism ("youngsters of today should be studying the humanities, the classics, the Odes of Horace"). 'Horace who?' asked Fitzgerald's Minister for Education.

Nuking Bludgerton to make sure no stray rabbits spread infection, Fitzgerald imposes world peace and disarmament. And this of course wrecks the world economy. So the nations are allowed to return to arms manufacture as

long as the output is promptly dumped into the sea. Spend all that money for weapons they're immediately going to scrap! The nations are horrified. Why, it's as bad as - as producing weapons they're not going to use! A new arms race begins as nations compete with each other to produce more and better weapons to dump.

Battle ground

But how to deal with conflicts between nations? Once more Australia has the answer and the interior desert is hired out as battle ground, armaments and other supplies to be provided by the host country. Confusion arises as the Americans demand ice-cream and the Cubans want a siesta break and both sides prefer coffee to tea while the Australian economy does very

nicely out of the labour of prisoners of war and deserters.

But what about those rabbits? Ah, I was hoping you'd ask. After a simulated "World War Three" in which both sides are deemed to have lost (so both sides are liable to pay reparations to Australia) the economy becomes, so powerful that everyone else's collapses. Fitzgerald distributes international aid in the name of his political rival William Dillberry and, as predicted, this aid is so loathed that Dillberry becomes the most hated man in the world. In the ensuing General Election Fitzgerald is returned to power by 122 seats to nil. It's his finest hour.

Rabbit the size of an Alsatian

And then a rabbit the size of an Alsatian is shot somewhere up country. The combination of supermyxomatosis virus and radiation-induced mutation has made these bunnies the most lethal bundles of fur you could imagine. Fitzgerald mobilises the armed forces, including conscripts made up of the ban-the-bombers who "had remained vociferously pacifist until they passed the age of military service, when they graciously moderated their views to allow of limited warfare so long as it was conducted in foreign places like Malaya, Vietnam, or Iraq." (or once again, "Hello Tony!") and battle commences in earnest.

By the end of 2001 the entire population of Australia is eighty aborigines.

Angry Rabbit is a black farce comparable to *Dr Strangelove*. Far from the dumb shock-horror you might think of from the film, it's an oddly topical satire about an undemocratic leader holding the world to ransom with weapons of mass destruction. Time for a reprint!



The Science Fiction Foundation Collection is the largest collection of English-language science fiction and material about it in Europe. Administered by the University of Liverpool, it is a resource for anyone with a research interest in it. 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 (a.sawyer@liverpool.ac.uk).

Science Fiction Foundation Collection: www.liv.ac.uk/~a.sawyer/sff/home.html

Science Fiction Foundation: <http://www.sf-foundation.org>

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

Last of the old ones

The Earth, writes **Stephen Baxter**, is a rather like a fusty old museum full of darkened alcoves and hidden treasures from our deep past. Creatures that walked across the beaches of Pangaea, saw the dinosaurs rise and fall, are still amongst us today. And these ancient ones could survive us all.

Life is stubborn. This struck me forcibly during a trip to Iceland, a few years ago. We visited volcanic springs: hot, steaming, grey-streaked mud in the middle of the ice, where the air is thick with the stink of sulphur, all kept warm by Earth's inner heat. It seems a harsh, unnatural place, but there is life here – just lurid mucous streaks over the muddy fumaroles, but life nonetheless.

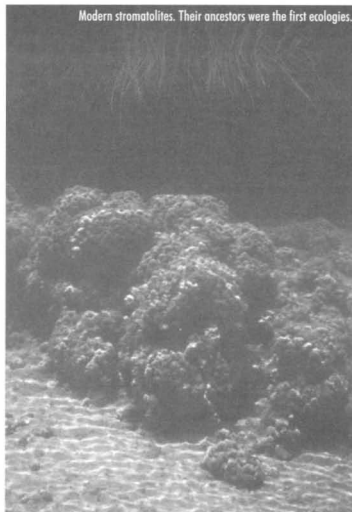
In fact, this is a relic of the first life. Once the whole Earth was like this: a cauldron, acidic, the air laced with sulphur. And the most primitive bacteria basked in hot springs like these. But after some three hundred million years, the first ones' more complex descendants learned a new trick: to gather energy directly from the sun. The oxygen they released as a waste product was poisonous. But the slow, ancient ones lingered around volcanic vents and deep-sea rifts, places where the ground was still hot.

The thermophiles aren't the only survivors. A new species may emerge from an isolated sub-group of an old species – but the old may linger on, side by side with the new, if there is room. And life is never scraped clean, even by the most severe extinction events. Take horseshoe crabs, common on beaches on the east coasts of Asia

and North America. They aren't true crabs, but a very ancient line, related to scorpions and the extinct trilobites. To lay their pearl-like eggs they clambered onto the beaches of Pangaea, the giant supercontinent that once dominated Earth. And they survived the great extinction pulse that preceded the rise of the dinosaurs, as well as the comet impact that finished those giants off.

Then consider stromatolites. Stromatolites are bacterial ecologies, in fact the first ecologies of all. They are mounds, like low laminated hillocks, to be found today strung along the shore of salty lakes like Shark Bay in Western Australia. Once the world was full of structures like this: tiny, delicate, filigree forms in shallow pools and tidal flats, while mounds faced the open sea, and immense cones hundreds of metres high stretched in enormous reefs for hundreds of kilometres. But this dreamy, cooperative world ended with the appearance of the first molluscs, who found slime-living algae a tasty meal. Now the stromatolites can survive only in places too saline for snails and other predators – but survive they do.

It even happened during the complicated emergence of humanity. The pithecin 'man-apes' split off from chimp-like creatures; *Homo erectus* budded



Modern stromatolites. Their ancestors were the first ecologies.

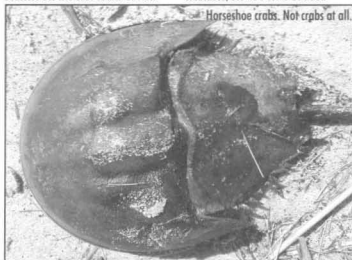
from the pithecin; creatures like Neandertals budded from *erectus*; and then we followed. As recently as thirty or forty thousand years ago many of the older forms may have survived, in pockets here or there. It seems to me a peculiar tragedy that we find ourselves in a world in which nothing survives closer to us than the chimps – and even they are under threat.

Earth is a living world, but it is also a little like a fusty old museum, where in darkened alcoves treasures from the deepest past lurk, all but unnoticed. But there will come a time when a harsh light is shined into those alcoves.

Following its own hydrogen logic, the sun is blazing ever brighter. In

the far future, higher life forms will one by one submit to the heat stress, and great kingdoms of life will implode. At last only my Icelandic friends the heat-loving bacteria will survive – and there will be no upstart photosynthesisers to restrict them to the ecological corners. Once more the eroded rocks will be streaked with their gaudy purples and crimson. For the ancient ones it will be a brief Indian summer, before the final extinction event of all is complete.

● Stromatolite picture (above) by Alan Riggs courtesy of Arizona State University. The picture of the horseshoe crab (left) is courtesy of Russ Dielerman.



Horseshoe crabs. Not crabs at all.

Quiet but disturbing

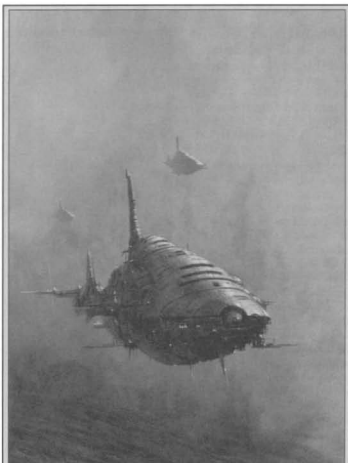
Les Edwards (aka Edward Miller) talks to **Mark Greener** about his work as one of the UK's leading science fiction and Fantasy artists. And he answers that perennial question: Why can't you judge a book by its cover?

Over the last 30 years, Les Edwards produced a remarkable body of SF, horror and fantasy art, both under his own name and his *nom de plume* Edward Miller. And I use the word 'art' advisedly. These aren't illustrations knocked off to pay the mortgage. They're remarkable, evocative and often powerful works (that also make great backgrounds for PCs!) Just check out his website (www.lesedwards.com). And unlike some jobbing illustrators, Les has a real passion for SF and Fantasy - and it shows in his work. But then, Les was always attracted to the strange and bizarre.

"I've drawn and painted for as long as I can remember and the subject matter was always the strange and bizarre," Les told *Matrix*. "My mother was always on at me to draw 'something nice'. When I was young there was very little SF and almost no Fantasy in what passed for the popular media, compared to what's available now. (I don't think Fantasy as we now think of it even existed then.) So I suppose I was trying to draw the kind of picture that I wanted to see. We had to make our own entertainment then. Did I mention I used to live in a cardboard box?"

Fortunately, Les ignored his mother's advice and produced some of the most evocative covers to grace the bookshelves (check out the website). He's won the British Fantasy Award for Best Artist three times and has twice been nominated for a World Fantasy Award. He's also been a Guest of Honour at a World Science Fiction Convention. And he's been involved in several films - although inevitable most languish in development hell.

"Most of the films I've worked on never made it to the screen. I think the first one was a proposed movie of *Dan Dare* for which I did a picture of the Mekon. That movie never happened of course, although the idea has resurfaced periodically," he says. "Probably the most interesting movie I worked on was going to be a version of *King Solomon's Mines*. Then it was going to be called *Empire of the Lost Kings*. Then it disappeared from sight. I did quite a bit of work on it along with a couple of colleagues. One film that did make it was a small



Atmosphere

"I had a bunch of acrylic paints in my drawer, unused for ages, because my first choice of paint has always been oil. I decided, one day, that as I'd got them I might as well make use of them, and, as I'd never done much 'hard' SF I began to rough out a painting of a spaceship, just by way of a change. As the picture progressed I became more and more interested in the feel and atmosphere of the piece and began to paint quite broadly, without much concern for details. It was very much an experiment but I enjoyed both the result and the process enough that a series of pictures in the same vein resulted. They proved to be very popular and have all been sold even though they've never appeared on books. That must mean something. I'll be adding to the series as time permits."

horror film called *Incubus*. I actually got a screen credit on that one. Hurrah!"

Les also worked on major advertising campaigns and designed movie posters for films including John Carpenter's *The Thing* and Clive Barker's *Nightbreed*. "The job for *The Thing* came through my agent at the time. Movie posters were quite often painted then so it wasn't unusual especially as I was doing a lot of horror work in those days. There was another artist commissioned at the same time and

we were to do one poster each. I'm not sure what happened but I ended up doing both posters. Incidentally, I went on holiday immediately after delivering the artwork but the client wanted some changes. They got my chum Jim Burns to make the changes, so that painting is the only Burns-Edwards collaboration in existence. Must be worth a fortune," he quips.

"The poster for *Nightbreed* came about when I was working on one of the Clive Barker graphic novels," Les adds. "Clive absolutely

hated the US poster for the movie which, bizarrely, tried to sell it as a 'slasher' movie. When it came to the poster for the UK he was determined to have a bit more control and recommended me for the job knowing I would enjoy it. I thought it was a much better movie than it was given credit for. Perhaps people were expecting *Hellraiser* all over again, but Clive, being Clive, did something different. It's an intelligent horror movie, which is a rare thing. It seems to have disappeared though."

Les also worked on two critically acclaimed graphic novels based Barker's stories: *Son of Celluloid* and *Rauhead Rex*. Both are marvellous and worth tracking down. However, there hasn't been any since. "The main reason is that the company I did them for, Eclipse Books, went out of business and then nobody asked me to do any more. Simple as that. I did do some comic work for Penthouse Comics, but on the whole it wasn't my best work, although I was pleased with the *(S)X Files* segment. The strip was supposed to be a pastiche of various TV shows then current in the US. Unfortunately, I wasn't familiar with a lot of them so I spent more time researching than painting and it shows. When it came to do *The X Files*, which I did know about, I started to enjoy myself. As to doing comics in the future I'd certainly be interested in the right project although, if I'm honest, I may not be cut out to be a comic artist. I do find the need for speed a bit of a handicap. It would be great to have the time to do it really well."

Indeed, Les cites influences that also take the time to create works of art rather than just illustrations. "I think most illustrators my age would quote the *Eagle* as a starting point. For me it was Frank Bellamy's *Heros the Spartan* rather than *Dan Dare* although Dan had his effect too," he says. "Then I suppose I went through the usual stages of discovering various artistic movements. To be brief though I like what I think of as 'real' painters. That is people who move the paint around a bit and create a painterly surface. I like to see brushmarks and a bit of liveliness and not that dull, featureless, flat paint surface that was once so

common in genre art."

And Les comments that "Leaving aside the obvious people like Bama, Frazetta, Berkey et al the artist I'm thinking of most these days is Bruce Pennington. His work has a real sense of strangeness and, dare I say it, a 'Sense Of Wonder' that seems to be lacking in genre art at the moment. Although there are some technically fabulous painters working in SF and Fantasy I get the feeling they are just recycling the same old images and there's not much feeling or excitement involved. It's time for a Frazetta or a Foss to come along and make us see things differently."

So what about that perennial question. Why is it so hard to judge a book by its cover, even one produced by such as technically superb and interested artist such as Les? One reason is that Les only rarely sees a complete manuscript and the publisher's take the decisions. "If I get to see the manuscript, which is increasingly rare, then I'll read it with a view to finding a striking and dramatic image," Les comments. "Sometimes it comes from a specific episode in the story but at other times I try to create an overall feeling of what the book is like rather than hook the illustration to a particular event. More and more often, however, the publisher will have decided already what is to appear on the cover. As far as I can tell this is often a committee decision and at most I'll get a couple of pages or a brief synopsis to read."

"If the author has any input into the cover, which is by no means always the case, any comments come to me via the Art Editor. I've occasionally had to contact an author to clarify some point or other and it's always turned out to be really useful to talk to them, but as a rule the contact is minimal. I used



to feel that there was a conspiracy to keep writers and artists apart so that we couldn't gang-up on the publishers. That couldn't possibly be true of course."

So which types of story does Les enjoy working on the most? "I like a story that presents a challenge and pushes me to come up with an unusual image. Sometimes I don't get the chance of course as the publisher will decide on what's to go on the cover. I do think it's a waste just to slap on a generic spaceship or fantasy landscape however wonderfully painted. I'll do it of course, if asked, but it does not respect either book or reader. Usually the publisher will say 'This is what sells' and it's very difficult to argue with that. It doesn't matter to me what the genre is as I don't distinguish between them. I know some people cling to the idea that SF is superior to Fantasy, or vice versa, and that everything is superior

to Horror but that, frankly, is a load of rubbish."

Recently, Les went public and confirmed that he'd created a *nom de plume* - 'Edward Miller' for his more romantic style, although it had been an open secret for a while. "Edward was born in the pub one lunchtime. I had been doing bits and pieces of non-genre work, but my agent found it difficult to get clients to take it seriously. People would say 'Very nice, but it's not Les' because they had certain expectations and I had a certain reputation. It seemed to be a good idea to see what would happen if it was presented under a different name. I forgot who actually coined the name 'Edward Miller' although it wasn't me. It was all a bit jokey to start with but when Edward started to get work I found myself with two identities. Sometimes I would be working for the same client as both Les and Edward. It worked out as long as my (our) agent was acting as intermediary, but when I started to represent myself I had to come clean. Most people were OK about it and appreciated the joke. I've only had one person who really couldn't understand how I could work in two such different styles. But as I said 'It's all painting'. The disadvantage is that now I have to lug around two portfolios."

Despite his non-genre work it's clear that Les really enjoys SF, horror and fantasy. Indeed, he's an active member of the British Fantasy Society - although he doesn't go to many conventions. "Fandom seems to have it's own separate existence and set of rules which I don't really understand. Some people seem to talk about being 'in fandom' in an almost religious manner and can be very intense about it. Don't get me wrong, I am a fan too, but, for

Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You.

"This started life as a personal piece and an attempt at some M.R. Jamesian creepiness. I've been a fan of James for as long as I can remember, but I have to say that his stories do not lend themselves easily to illustration. This is one of his most abiding images however."

me, it's just fun. I think my rather offhand manner about the whole thing upsets some 'true fans' One of the reasons I like the British Fantasy Society is that we rarely actually talk about Fantasy if we can help it. When I'm painting a cover though the only fan I have in mind is me. I know some artists have set out to woo fandom and be recognised and we all like our egos stroked, but I really need a painting to please me first. After all, if I don't like it why should anyone else?"

So who are his favourite authors and films? "Writers I read 'by default' so to speak would be Michael Marshall Smith, Steven King, Ben Bova (whose Mars books I thought were excellent and just the kind of SF that I like) Ramsey Campbell, usually Steven Baxter depending on how I'm feeling. Also I've been reading James Lee Burke over the last year and he goes on the list. Bernard Cornwell whose *Winter King* trilogy is the best fantasy I've read in ages. As for movies, probably my favourite all-time is *Lawrence of Arabia*. I also admire 2001, of course, I watched *Alien* again the other day and it's still great. *Lord of the Rings* part one was pretty fabulous as is *The Lord Chaney Phantom of the Opera*."

Finally, I asked the question that every writer and artist must dread - which of his pictures is he most proud. "I've been illustrating for 30 years so it's impossible to pick just one but I'm very fond of a painting I did for Ramsey Campbell's *Ghosts and Grisly Things*. It was done for a small publisher so hasn't been seen much. It's a rather quiet picture but disturbing. A bit like me really." Quiet but disturbing, an excellent way to sum up the work of this impressive artist.



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The Mekon

"This was painted for a proposed film of Dan Dare in, I think, the 70's. It's painted in Gouache which I used in the days before I switched to Oils. Needless to say the movie never made it to the screen."

Planet's in alignment

For nine years, *Planet Magazine* has focused on emerging writers and digital artists. (Blatant plug: *Planet Magazine* published one of Mark's stories in June 2002.) *Planet* editor **Andrew G. McCann** recalls the early days of text files and grey backgrounds, then looks to the future of both *Planet Magazine* and internet publishing more widely.

Planet Magazine (www.planetmag.com) is a free quarterly web-zine of short science fiction and fantasy first published in March 1994. When I began putting the magazine together in the fall of 1993, I was inspired by a long-held desire to edit my own science fiction magazine, and the combination of improved desktop-publishing tools and the Internet, which finally made it cost-effective for anyone to publish electronically and avoid the cost of paper, ink, and postage. I gave the name a lot of thought. I chose *Planet Magazine* for a number of reasons: as an homage to *Planet Stories* (the pulp SF magazine published from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s), to connote the global reach of the Internet, to allude to the literal "other worlds" in SF, and to acknowledge the internal "worlds" created by writers and artists.

It seemed clear from the start that an e-zine would be a money-loser, and because the Internet culture at that time was free-spirited and strongly anti-profit (the word e-commerce did not exist then), I tried to make life easy for anyone involved with *Planet*. As I wrote in the first issue, *Planet* would focus on emerging writers and digital artists - they wouldn't be paid, but they'd keep their copyrights, and I'd get to be the editor!

A training ground for writers

Furthermore, *Planet* would carry no ads and would be free. As we would print the issues on electrons, not with paper and ink, our costs would stay low - especially since electronic transmission saved us the cost of any postage. We did consider the fact that many people don't like to read on-screen, and so we decided to keep the layout simple to allow anyone to print out *Planet* and read it that way. To my mind, *Planet* would be a training ground for writers, and ideally a writer would improve and move up to the paying markets. This, in fact, has happened, although these writers (such as Tony Chandler, who recently published *Mothership*) have had other influences beyond *Planet Magazine*. We've also taken this approach toward digital artists in recent years, as more artists (such

as Kenn Brown, who illustrated our June 2002 cover and also did the December 2002 cover of *Wired* magazine) have come online and as Internet bandwidth has improved, allowing for more illustrations in an issue.

How Planet started

In the early 1990s, I had been working as a journalist and got a part-time job as assistant editor on a short-lived small magazine named *The Prospect Review*, published out of Brooklyn, N.Y. That was my first taste of receiving and reviewing submissions, although it was all done by regular mail. But the costs and the time involved with printing the magazine were daunting, and I didn't see how I could start up my own magazine without losing thousands of dollars in the process.

Then, in 1993, I bought a Mac LC, replacing my old DOS computer and DOS-based CompuServe account, and signed up with America Online. This was my first experience with colour and a graphical user interface on a computer, and it wasn't long before I came across some electronic magazines in colour, such as *Inside Mac Games*. I also found some mainly text-based SF e-zines, like *Quanta* (which started in something like 1990) and *InterText* (founded in 1991, and still going). The light bulb quickly went on, of course, and I started planning my first issue of *Planet Magazine*, which debuted in March 1994 on America Online, CompuServe, and various online bulletin-board services. As far as I know, *Planet Magazine* was the very first electronic SF magazine with colour illustrations (which impresses me, anyway). Originally, submissions came from myself, friends, and family. Soon, though, writers found the magazine online and sent me submissions. I continue to get several submissions every week, and that's essentially built up without any advertising or promotion over the years.

PLANET MAGAZINE

Early in *Planet's* life I was contacted via e-mail by an artist named Romeo Esparrago. We worked well together, and he ended up joining the staff as sort of an at-large graphics editor. Later, Tom Wagner, who is a real-life scientist, and Ray Dangel, a retired newspaperman, came on board to help review submissions and edit accepted stories and poems. We all were motivated by the fun of putting out an SF zine, and we all had skills we could bring to the party.

Some might wonder what qualifies me to be an editor of a SF magazine. I suppose an interest in SF is a good start. Probably like most people reading this, I'd always enjoyed science fiction and fantasy books and movies and how they tickle the imagination.

Favourite authors

My favourite authors included the usual SF suspects - Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Harlan Ellison (and his *Dangerous Visions* series), and Frank Herbert - as well as fantasy masters like H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and C.L. Moore (who wrote *Black God's Kiss*, among other classic weird-fantasy stories). As for movies, I'd have to list *Forbidden Planet*, 2001: A Space Odyssey and Star Wars as formative experiences, as well as *Indiana Jones* and the *Temple of Doom*. There are too many great books and movies to mention, though.

Beyond a love of SF and fantasy, however, I think my native writing and editing skills and my bachelor's degree in magazine journalism have been assets. Yet the most important factor probably is that I have had the willingness to take the time and spend the energy to put out a magazine. It takes a lot of work to review stories, find artwork, and organize the issue on deadline - not that I'm complaining. I think that if you're magazine is good, and you can handle the workflow, your magazine will survive. Just don't expect to get rich...

The development of web-zines

When *Planet* started, the Internet had been around for years, but the Worldwide Web (ie Web browsers and HTML coding) was in its infancy. Back then, Mosaic (the precursor to Netscape) was the only Web browser, all Web pages had grey backgrounds and flush-left images (if any), all links were big, blue, and underlined, and Yahoo! was just a very long page of links.

At that time, it was much easier to put out *Planet* in text and DOCMaker formats and post it for download on AOL, CompuServe, local bulletin board services,

Planet Magazine features a wide range of high quality artwork in each issue.



and even eWorld for a while. (DOCMaker creates self-running Mac applications that functioned as colour e-zines, allowing illustrations.) We also put out *Planet* in Adobe Acrobat and Palm formats for a while.

By 1994/95, we were hoping to do *Planet* in HTML format as a Web-zine, but server space at that time was almost impossible to get (cheaply), unless you were affiliated in some way with a university or a corporate IT department. We had an offer in 1995 from a guy at a university, but we couldn't control the look or the uploading of the files, so we said no. As far as I know, the first HTML-based SF zine was *Dark Planet*, which debuted in September 1995; it's now part of SFsite.com. In fact, *Dark Planet* was probably one of the first web-based zines of any kind.

So, after starting out as a text, DOCMaker, and Acrobat-based zine in early 1994, *Planet* finally switched over completely to HTML format in 1996, once free Web sites like Geocities.com and better page-creation tools (like PageMill) became available to all. Currently, *Planet*'s domain of www.planetmag.com is hosted by Etext.org, at www.etext.org.

Planet today - and the future

Now that *Planet* is nearly nine years old, I can look back and see that we're a little slicker-looking, we have more and better stories, our illustrations are vastly improved, and we've come up with a formula that works for us - but in terms of attitude and spirit, we've probably changed very little. I think that's because we always kept an eye on our initial, simple goals: to have fun, to encourage new authors, and to

just publish an SF magazine. In that sense, we've been very successful.

Monetarily, we have lost money (on the cost of domain names, publishing tools, etc.), but not too much. Although there are dozens of SF zines on the Internet now, I think *Planet* is unique because it was one of the first (probably the first in colour), and it has continued to publish and improve. I assume readers like the magazine because we get a good number of page hits and few letters - as a former journalist, I know that people usually write letters when they're upset, not when they are satisfied (or, of course, when they don't care) - and the letters that we do receive are almost all fan letters of some kind.

Writers and artists

SF and fandom have grown rapidly over the years from a niche to a mass market, helped by franchises like *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings*, and that's fine with us. But fads come and go, and we were never strongly interested in the commercial side of science fiction. *Planet* is all about writers and artists, and we intend to stick with our game plan and publish the zine for as long as it's practical and enjoyable. It's a pleasure for us to put out each magazine, working with authors to improve their stories (if needed), finding interesting artists and artwork, and hopefully giving readers a great mix of SF and fantasy entertainment for free.

As for the worldwide web medium itself - without which *Planet Magazine* never could have existed - it obviously has taken off in a big way in recent years. We believe that the web, as an international, cross-platform medium, is the easiest

and best way to publish electronically, especially for specialized publications like *Planet*. In future, as the Internet, the PC, and the TV somehow converge, we think reading publications online, and printing out online material, will continue to become easier and cheaper. The Internet might never fully replace books and magazines - which, after all, work so much better in the bathtub than a Tablet PC - but in many ways the development of electronic magazines is like a science fiction story coming true.

So, what's the acme of the publishing world? What's the best part of being a writer? Is it the hours spent alone in a small room honing your magnum opus? Is it re-reading the pile of rejection letters? Is it banging your publisher's head off of something hard enough to hurt, but flexible enough to produce a really satisfying "thwunk"?

Forget the multi-million dollar contracts, the awards, the fawning acolytes. Give me... the book launch! Mine was, without a doubt, one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life, and a great antidote to the stress of being published by the world's most incompetent independent press. The ingredients of a good launch seem to be as follows:

1. The Venue. Somewhere accessible, with a roof, is always a good start. This being Britain, open-air launches probably aren't such a good idea. Launches in bookshops probably are... but thereby hangs a tale. Newcastle, the cultural hub of Tyneside, has four general bookshops. Blackwells is up by the universities and as such tends to copies of *Gray's Anatomy* rather than *Perdido Street Station*. One is WH Smiths - and they don't tend to do book signings there, that honour going to Waterstones. Both of them.

By a curious happenstance of history, the two branches of Waterstones are within a well-thrown stone of each other, both have the same selection of books that the other does. And due to a recent corporate decision, neither will host a book launch for a first-time author. Forbidden Planet didn't seem to want to know (Comic Book Guy not coming to my rescue for once). Fortunately, my lovely wife works in Sunderland a lot. Sunderland's one and only general bookshop is a branch of Ottakers. A branch run by one of the editors of Ottakers SF/F magazine, *Ouland*. A couple of phone calls, and yes, we had a venue. Result!

2. Books. A book launch without books. Hmm, I suppose it could be done, but it wasn't how I wanted it done. Reading from a loose-leaf manuscript, people applauding politely, and then going home isn't a book launch. I wanted real dead trees stuck together with glue. So it was that the first date Ottakers had

arranged (middle of October, half-term, loads of invitations sent and replied to) had to be cancelled because the books hadn't been printed, let alone distributed. So I did what any sensible person should have done in the first place, and wait for the wholesalers to get stock, from whom Ottakers could order. This confirmed, we set another date (middle of January), and told everyone again.

3. People. Come to a nice warm bookshop in the evening, drink wine, eat nibbles, listen to someone you know talk about the book he's written, and perhaps buy a copy. The book is only a fiver. Really, how hard can it be? Well, harder than you think. Perhaps it was because it was Sunderland, and people from Newcastle might have to make an effort to travel the few miles between the two cities. Perhaps it was because it was a school night, and lots of my friends now have kids. With four days to go, I was worrying that no one would turn up. On the night itself, it was fine. Better than fine. Unlabeled joy, in fact. We sold out, and they had to order some more.

4. Author. That's me. I'm a man of uncertain health, mainly due to a shabby immune system, and hence I'm prone to catch everything that's going. On the night, I was in a robust condition. Two glasses of plonk on an empty stomach rendered me decidedly garrulous, and made the reading go with a swing. There were some questions, which I fielded competently, and I didn't get cramp in my signing hand.

Having said last issue that writers make poor gods, Bryan Talbot came to my book launch. Bryan Talbot! I, the z-list author, signed a book for Bryan Talbot. I remain quite unworthy. I've climbed the peak, seen the view from the top. I can report back, and tell you what it's like. But it's not the same as being there and doing it yourself. Ropes and axes at the ready, it's time to scale your own mountain.

Simon Morden's first collection of short stories 'Thy Kingdom Come' is available from Lone Wolf Publications (www.lonewolfpubs.com) or in the UK from the author - the first novel 'Heart' is out now from Razorblade Press - order through amazon.co.uk or via any good bookshop. He also edits *Focus*, BSFA's magazine for writers.



Armchair space tr

Hanker after the opportunity to venture outside Earth's atmosphere? **Martin Sketchley** boldly goes where no *Matrix* columnist has gone before and invites you all along on a ride that is literally out of this world.

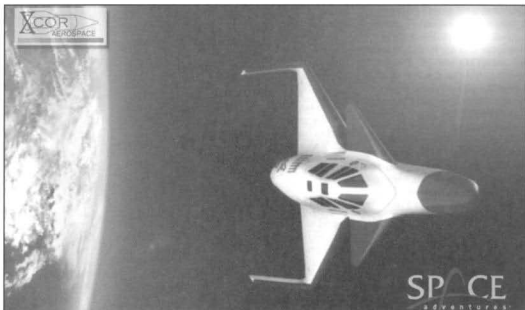
It's probably safe to say that most people reading this hanker after the opportunity to follow that elite band of men and women who have ventured outside the Earth's atmosphere; dream of experiencing the increasing G-load during the launch; the weightlessness once you're in orbit; the rush of liquid to the head; the nausea. OK, well maybe not the last two, but unfortunately they go with the territory.

Ambition

So, how might one achieve such an ambition? Space Adventures offer a selection of experiences along these lines, ranging from the adventure of space without leaving the ground, through edge-of-space and zero-gravity experiences, to a fully blown, Dennis Tito-style trip to the International Space Station. The first of these might sound a little mundane, but a lot of interesting possibilities are on offer here.

Neutral Buoyancy Training, for example, gives you the opportunity to don a spacesuit and enter the water to train for a space walk using a full-scale mock-up of the International Space Station. There's also Soyuz spacecraft training, and, if you decide to take part in Neutral Buoyancy or Zero Gravity Training, Centrifuge G Training is available, both of which are, well, pretty self-explanatory.

However, if you're looking for something a little more exciting and actually want to get your feet



URLs of relevance to this issue

www.spaceadventures.com — exciting adventures
www.alt-planetlar.com/suits.shtml — spacesuits
www.thisplanetearth.co.uk — Dr Who and Gerry Anderson reproductions
<http://johnmeaney.tripod.com> — homepage of John Meaney, author of the BSFA Award nominated *Context*

off the ground, then perhaps the Edge-of-Space experience is the thing for you. The Edge-of-Space experience offers the chance to fly in a range of jet fighters, from the small L29 Albatross, through the MIG-21 Fishbed, up to the latest MIG-25 Foxbat. A trip in the Foxbat offers you the chance to attain a speed of mach 2.5 – that's one mile every two seconds, folks – see the sky overhead fading into the darkness of space, while below you the curvature of Earth is "awesomely apparent", with a horizon no less than 715 miles across.

Weightlessness

Or maybe it's not so much the speed that appeals, but rather the unique experience of weightlessness. This is also available, aboard a Russian

Ilyushin-76 – which hopefully has a better safety record than Aeroflot aircraft given the manoeuvre involved. The aircraft starts in level flight, then pitches up until it's approximately 45 degrees nose-high, with the wings level. As the plane flies climbs it accelerates, until eventually the thrust is reduced and the aircraft glides over the top of the arc with just enough power to overcome friction and drag.

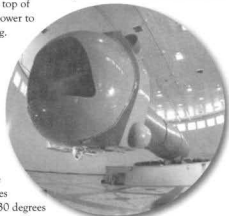
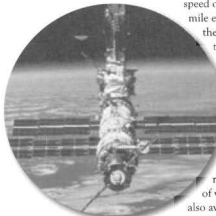
Microgravity

Everyone inside then experiences the sensation of free-fall, with the aircraft's fuselage shielding those inside from atmospheric drag. Approximately 28-30 seconds of microgravity is experienced during "the pushover", which continues until the aircraft is about 30 degrees

nose down. The aircraft is then eased out of the dive, and when all the passengers are safely on the padded floor, the plane accelerates to about 1.8 Gs, for the pull-up to 45 degrees nose high, whereupon the manoeuvre is repeated.

Sub-orbital flight

If that's not enough of a thrill, and you're prepared to wait a while, you can even book your place on a future sub-orbital flight aboard a Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV). Costing a mere \$98,000 per person (you can pay in instalments if you want to – the deposit's only \$12,000), rockets boost the RLV beyond the normal limits of aircraft



traveller



capabilities to a height of more than 62 miles. As the RLV nears maximum altitude, its engines are cut. This is followed by up to five minutes of weightlessness, and the opportunity to see the "vast blackness of space set against the blue limits of Earth below".

Finally, if you've got the money, determination and level of fitness required, Space Adventures can help you qualify to fly to the International Space Station. Since 1999 the company has worked with RSC Energia – the Russian Space Agency – and the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center, to develop private flights to this ultimate of destinations.

Simulate

But let's face it, while these are all things we dream about doing, in reality they're not going to happen for most of us. However, given a little imagination we it might be possible to simulate a trip into space. If you want this to be a particularly authentic experience, you'll need at

least one or two decent bits of kit. Just to set the atmosphere (or lack thereof, ho, ho).

Replica suits

To this end you might well find Nostrom Productions, AiT/Planet Lar useful, offering an exclusive range of replica suits for you to use during your space flight fantasy! These thoroughly researched suits are meticulously crafted reproductions of NASA's Apollo mission suits, and are available in all sizes in both standard and deluxe versions. The standard suit costs a mere \$275, and is surely worth it at that price. All you need to do then, suit adorned, is turn off all the lights, lie on the bed and use your imagination.

And hey, if you can rope in a couple of mates, all the better: one can shake the bed to simulate the forces experienced during blast off and re-entry, while the other sits on your chest to recreate the gravitational pressures involved. Lots of corny gags spring to mind here, but I'll leave you make up your own...

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

This *Ironing Board* was written to the sound of the troop movements.

Martin Sketchley

www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

Spinnerets

John Meaney's website has been substantially updated, and now tells you all you could possibly want to know about him, including where he's going to be, what he's going to be doing there, interviews, and all sorts of other stuff. It also features disturbing photos of John splitting the difference (if you have a look you'll see what I mean) at Plakta.com in June 2002. Why not pay a visit: <http://johnmeaney.tripod.com>



Regular ironing board surfers may remember a recent column in which I pointed you in the direction of this planet earth ltd, manufacturers of reproduction Dr Who-related products: Daleks, Cybermen and K9 [split], that kind of thing. Well, the exciting news from the this planet

earth camp is that the company has secured a deal with Carlton International Multimedia to produce figures from Gerry Anderson's *Fireball XL5*, *Stingray*, *Thunderbirds* and *Captain Scarlet*, official reproductions of which have never previously been available.

The first range will consist of Steve Zodiac, Troy Tempest, Scott Tracy and Captain Scarlet. Produced from original casts, each figure is about two feet tall and "as authentic and stunning as any collector could want" having been hand-made to exacting specifications using many of the materials used to produce the original characters.



While original Gerry Anderson puppets can sell for £20,000+, and are thus unaffordable to most enthusiasts, this planet earth ltd hopes to sell its puppet characters for around £850 each, although this isn't set in stone yet.

The company is also manufacturing reproductions of the '60s Movie TARDIS, photos of which are now on the site, and half-size Daleks. The latter have a four-

week waiting time and cost £490 each. This planet earth is, however, discontinuing its K9 model, so if you want one (there's no accounting for taste, I suppose) you'd better move fast. Besides that, the site's well worth a visit just to experience the *double entendre* pun on the homepage

www.thisplanetearth.co.uk.

Big Engine revs up

Big Engine has established itself as a publisher of remarkable new fiction and great books too long out of print – Langford's *The Leaky Establishment* and Saldek's *Maps* to name but two. And they've launched 3SF. Continuing our series on the small presses, publisher **Ben Jeapes** explains how he got Big Engine on track and up to speed.

I started Big Engine because I had worked in publishing for 12 years, and when I lost my job I had no other usefully marketable skills. And it was a chance to put the dream into practice.

The dream company had been at the back of my mind for years. I knew several people with perfectly good, unpublished manuscripts. I had a wish list of out of print titles that I wanted back in circulation as soon as possible. The company would have low overheads (there's just me and my mortgage here) and would be able to afford to take risks with new authors – and, more important, keep them in print. Bypass the bookshops, sell over the web and via direct mail, and you should get round the problem of books that are hard to classify and which shops will only tolerate having on the shelves for a couple of weeks. If at all. New century, new millennium, new publishing vision.

Okay, so that's the first week. I knew the disillusion would set in eventually and was mildly interested to see exactly when it would happen. But meanwhile, the highs and the lows...

The highs and lows

The highs include the pleasure that just can't be described of reading an MS and thinking that this author has got it. (The pleasure is multiplied exponentially when it's the tenth MS that comes at the end of a line of nine unpublishable ones.) Taking my first book, the reissued *The Leaky Establishment*, to Eastercon 2001 and selling out, despite the dire warnings of established booksellers who still have the original handover lurking in their backlist. The rush of blood to the head when authors you admire approach out of the blue. The yah-boo-sucks of publishing a great novel that the bigger companies turned down.

The lows have been the constant lack of money. The feeling of banging your head against a wall as you try to get the booktrade to take you seriously. Waterstones, which in the annals of small press relations needs a chapter all of its own. The endless stream of prospective writers, so many of whom lead you to suspect sneakily that some people should be licensed to write. The

sinking feeling when someone offers you a "humorous fantasy", missing the point that in the best comedies the characters don't realise they're being funny. The inverse ratio of people who offer moral support to those actually prepared to buy a book from you. Trying to be polite to people who query me about a book which they can't find on Amazon. (If you've got web access anyway, why not look at the Big Engine page, *dodos*? Wow, I finally said it.) Oh, and Amazon generally.

And what I miss most: reading. Being able to sit down with a good book and lose myself for a couple of hours. Never again: not with that slush pile looming over me.

Lessons learned

Over-optimism. The initial publicity promised a book a month for a year – an insane promise, in hindsight. I'm eternally grateful to the customers who were patient and understanding, and who let me eke out six books a year for two years while their money burned a hole in my pocket. But six a year is a much more realistic rate and I have settled into it.

Cash-flow. Even if you publish a book every two months, that's two months with no money coming in. When it began to run irrevocably low it became obvious I needed what that actually paid, so I started part-time for a publisher of law journals. I had edited journals for VNU before but they had kept me carefully away from the business side of the process. Now, though, I saw how a periodical can generate cash flow. Thus 3SF.

Distribution. Easy, said my



publishing-ignorant friends. Why not distribute over the web? These are people who think that books magically appear out of an extra dimension, rather than sit in a warehouse somewhere, so their advice isn't too hard to ignore. Most distributors won't touch a start-up publisher with a bargepole.

A higher than

usual phone bill in April/May 2000 and a well thumbed Cassell's *Directory of Publishing* in Abingdon library is testimony to this fact. But tucked away in a corner of Cassell's I found Chris Reed and BBR, who publish a profoundly literary SF mag but and provide a friendly and efficient distribution service. Chris was delighted to take on the task.

Booksellers. I've heard from booksellers who object to BBR's strange habit of requiring payment before actually sending out the books. These are doubtless the minority of booksellers who pay their bills promptly. Most don't, and I can't afford to be a charity. Did I mention Waterstones?

Whither SF?

Sometimes I wish it would, ba-boom.

I think we are in the midst of a Darwinian struggle. I'm young and spoilt and I'm so used to writing on a computer that I doubt I could manage without it, whilst fully acknowledging that almost every book that I love on my bookshelf

was written on a typewriter. I couldn't have got off the ground without print-on-demand. Yet, the ease of writing that a computer offers, and the ease of getting it published through PoD, has led to a glut of

writing that makes Sturgeon's Law look hopelessly over-optimistic. I think that in the days of typing, writers were automatically closer to their work and would instinctively take more care. Now that people can just run off their random thoughts at the drop of a hat, they do.

I once turned down an MS that would have read quite well out loud, but which was so littered with typos and literals it was almost painful to read. The next day the author phoned me up to ask if I thought he should go on a creative writing course. No, I thought he should just know the rules of composition.

Another author, who turned in an even worse MS said he could sense I had cooled on his story – but that was okay because it would be published the next month by some publisher I had never heard of. Good luck to them, I thought. I later saw it reviewed unfavourably in SFX, which highlighted exactly the faults I had seen in it.

Be of good heart, though: a publisher that churns out badly written, badly spelled, ungrammatical crap won't survive, however low the overheads. But in the meantime they do damage because they encourage people to churn out novels without any kind of critical feedback. In my rejection letters I do my utmost to be constructive, so that they will do better next time. I want there to be a next time. I want more writers – good ones. But as long as mediocrity is encouraged, as long as there are publishers who will just take anything, it's going to be hard to identify them.

And finally...

The biggest realisation has been something I always knew anyway, without ever having put it into words. A story that works is, 9 times out of 10, a variation on an existing theme. It sounds obvious, but it's true. And the variation is the key. Being able to write is an indispensable bonus but it's not everything. You are only in with a chance if someone asks you what is different about your space opera / time travel / whatever, and you can put your finger on it and say "that".

As long as the "that" keep emerging out of the slushpile, I hope Big Engine will go on.



BIG ENGINE

BSFA Award Nominations

The nominations for the 2002 BSFA Awards have been counted up and at last the shortlists can be announced! **Tanya Brown** takes us through the final contenders.

The novels on the shortlist for the 'Best Novel of 2002' award can be compared with those shortlisted by the judges of the Arthur C Clarke award. Four of the six novels - *Light*, *The Scar*, *The Separation* and *The Years of Rice and Salt* - appear on both shortlists. The other two novels on the Clarke Award shortlist (*Kil'n People*, by David Brin, and *Elizabeth Moon's Speed of Dark*) each received just one, late nomination for the BSFA Award. By contrast, Jon Courtenay

Grinwood's *Effendi*, second in his Iskandria series, was nominated early and often. While there's technically no reason why a novel's month of publication would affect its chances in the BSFA Awards, it seems likely that material published well before the end of the nomination period is more likely to receive multiple nominations. A single nomination may prompt others to read the nominated work and possibly nominate it themselves.

Effendi and *Castles Made of Sand*

are both sequels, second books in ongoing series. While this needn't prevent a novel being nominated for - and even winning - the Arthur C Clarke Award, there seems to have been a tendency in recent years for middle volumes to be passed over. The appearance of these books on the BSFA novel shortlist may indicate that they are eagerly-awaited sequels, as well as fine novels in their own right.

The shortlist for 'Best Short Story of 2002' shows more variety of sources than has been the case in some years. Three of the stories appeared in *Interzone*, still the leading publisher of short stories in the British SF market. Charles Stross' 'Router' appeared in *Asimov's*, the respected US SF magazine. But Australian writer Sean McMullen's 'Voice of Steel' made its appearance on the online SciFiction 'zine (www.scifi.com/scifiction) - proof that online magazines don't rely exclusively on reprints and amateur fiction! Neil Gaiman's *Caline* is published as a children's novel, though at 30,000 words it has been classified as a novella for the Hugo Awards as well as the BSFA Award.

There's some indication of an opposite trend on the 'Best Artwork of 2002' shortlist. The quarterly magazine *The Third Alternative* seems to be the place to look for groundbreaking artwork (as well as fine short fiction, which often really does defy genre classification!) Three of the five shortlisted items appeared as cover art for TTA: an *Interzone* cover by Dominic Harman represents a more surreal movement. It's especially good to see comics art being represented by Frazer Irving's whole-page panel for 2000AD: perhaps the comics market has been underrepresented before because of the difficulty of selecting a single frame from a strip.

The 'non-fiction', or 'other', or 'Best Related Publication' shortlist also shows pleasing diversity. There's an online film review presented in pseudo-fictional format; there's an *Interzone* interview; there's a full-length science book, an introduction to an anthology, and - last but very definitely not least - there's Fred Smith's *Once There Was a Magazine*, an issue-by-issue personal review of *Unknown* magazine, published by Becon Publications.

Best Artwork:



'Experiment 1' - Peter Gric (cover, *The Third Alternative* 30, Spring 2002)



Cover of *Interzone* 179 - Dominic Harman (*Interzone* 179, May 2002)



'My Name is Death' - Frazer Irving (Judge Dredd: My Name is Death, 2000AD Prog 1289, 1st May 2002)



Illustration for 'The Routine' - Joachim Luetke (*The Third Alternative* 31, Summer 2002)



'Obliquequest' - Richard Marchand (cover, *The Third Alternative* 32, Autumn 2002)

Best Novel:

Effendi - Jon Courtenay Grinwood (Earthlight)
Light - M John Harrison (Gollancz)
Castles Made of Sand - Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz)
The Scar - China Mieville (Macmillan)
The Separation - Christopher Priest (Scribner)
The Years of Rice and Salt - Kim Stanley Robinson (HarperCollins)

How to vote

Ballot forms should be included in this mailing. (If not, they will be mailed separately). The deadline for receipt of these is Saturday 12th April 2003. Please remember to write your BSFA membership number on the form.

If you are attending the Eastercon in Hinckley, you may vote there instead of voting by post - giving yourself extra time to catch up on your reading! Ballot forms will be included in the membership packs.

You may vote by email, to awards@amarranaviators.net. The deadline for email votes is Tuesday 15th April 2003. Again, please include your BSFA membership number.

Keep an eye on the Awards page of the BSFA website (www.bsfa.co.uk) for links to shortlisted stories, non-fiction and artwork: although not all the shortlisted items can be made available, we are hoping to add links to as many as possible before Easter.

The winners will be announced, and trophies awarded at the Awards Ceremony, which is scheduled for 8pm on Easter Sunday, 20th April 2003. The winners of the Awards will be posted to the website as soon as is practical after Easter.

Nominations for the 2003 award will be gratefully received ... *after* the Eastercon!

Best Short Fiction:

'Singleton' - Greg Egan (*Interzone* 176, February 2002)
Caline - Neil Gaiman (Bloomsbury)
'Voice of Steel' - Sean McMullen (www.scifi.com/scifiction)
'If Lions Could Speak' - Paul Park (*Interzone* 177, March 2002)
'Router' - Charles Stross (*Asimov's*, September 2002)
'Five British Dinosaurs' - Michael Swannick (*Interzone* 177, March 2002)

Best Related Publication:

'The Interrogation' - Nick Gevers interviews Chris Priest (*Interzone* 183, September 2002)
Introduction to Maps: the Uncollected John Sladek - David Langford (Big Engine)
Mapping Mars - Oliver Morton (Fourth Estate)
'The Timex Magazine' - Lucius Shepard (www.elctricstory.com/reviews/timex.asp)
Once There Was a Magazine - Fred Smith (Becon Publications)

See the world with SF

Canada, Finland, Hinckley. SF conventions cover the globe. Travel the world, meet interesting people and get drunk. Go to a convention.

18-21 Apr 03 Seacon '03 (Eastercon)

Venue confirmed as the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leics (same as 2001 Easter event). Guests of honour: Chris Baker (artist known as Fangorn and involved in Spielberg's AD), Chris Evans, Mary Gentle. £40 full attending membership. Contacts:

www.seacon03.org.uk or 8 The Orchard, Tonwell, Herts, SG12 0HR, UK



9-12 Apr 04 Concourse (Eastercon)

Blackpool Wintergardens. GoH Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Danny Flynn, Christopher Priest, Philip Pullman, Sue Mason. £25 register, £15 supporting, £15 children (5-17), infants (0-5) free. Rates to rise in June if not before, except that full reg for the unwaged will be held at £25 until the con. On-line credit card payment facility planned. Contact 479 Newmarket Rd, Cambridge, CB5 8JJ.

3 May New myths? SF, fantasy and horror

(academic conference), Bucks Chilterns Univ Coll, High Wycombe. Probably £25 reg (£15 unwaged) inc lunch. Contact Dr Andrew M Butler, D28, Dept of Arts & Media, Bucks Chilterns Univ College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ.

1-3 Aug 03 Finncon X Eurocon 2003

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

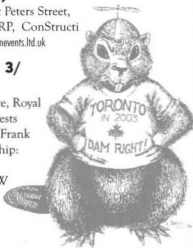
5-6 July 03 ConStruction

(Convention running con)

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

28 Aug-1 Sep 03 Torcon 3/Worldcon 61

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



10-12 Oct 03 Grissecon 1 (Wraeththu)

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

31 Oct - 2 Nov Armadacon 15

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

20-23 August 04 Discworld Convention IV

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

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

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



INTERACTION

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

4-8 Aug 05 Interaction (63rd Worldcon)

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

Take note:

Are you attending a convention?

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

Are you organising a convention?

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

Save your relationship

Your partner doesn't really care about the importance of the post-apocalypse as a theme in modern SF, but we do. Go to a local meeting and stop boring the one you love.

Belfast Science Fiction Group

Alternate Thursdays, 8:30pm at the Monaco Bars, Rosemary Street, Belfast. Contact Eugene Doherty: 02890 208405; tinman@technologist.com; www.terrocon3000.org.uk/sfgroup.htm

Birmingham: Brum SF Group

Second Friday of the month on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New St. Membership is £15/year. Contact Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarks Lane, Willenhall, W. Midlands WV13 1HX. brfg@bortas.demon.co.uk

Cambridge SF Group

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

Cardiff SF Group

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

Colchester SF/F/Horror Group

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

The Croydon SF Group

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

Glasgow SF/F Writers' Circle

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

Hull SF Group

Second and Fourth Tuesdays, 8:00 to 10:30pm at The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull. Contact Carol & Steve on 01482 494045 or Dave and Estelle on 01482 444291. Please note that the pub room is not always available so if you intend to come along, please phone first to check on venue, or see: www.mjckeh.demon.co.uk/hulls.htm for the current list of events.

London BSFA meetings

Fourth Wednesday of the month (except December) from 7:00pm at the Rising Sun, Cloth Fair (off Long Lane), EC1. Barbican/Farringdon tube. Check Anisble for details and guests, or organiser, Paul Hood on 020 8333 6670; paul@ouden.demon.co.uk.

London Circle

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

Manchester: FONT

Changed: FONT meets on the second and fourth Thursday of the month now at the Crown & Anchor, Hilton St from about 8:30pm onwards. Info 0161 355 0599.

North Oxford

The Plough, Wovercote (just off the A43 Pear Tree turnoff). Last Thursday evening of every month. Small, informal get-together with good bar food, guest beers and scurrilous gossip. You'll usually find us by the bay window of the library bar from around 7:30 pm onwards. Contact: Steve and Vikki on peverel@aol.com or 01865 371734

Norwich Science Fiction Group

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

Peterborough SF Group

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

Portsmouth/South Hants SF Group

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

Reading SF Group

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

Southampton: Solent Green

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

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

Books and magazines for sale

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



Contributors

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



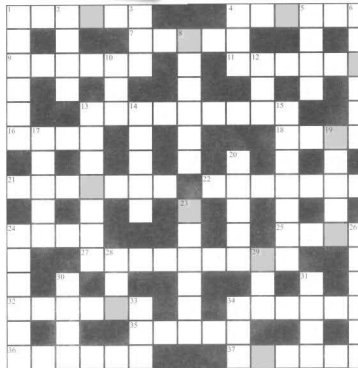
Flicker: Martin McGrath & Niamh Kathleen McGrath - whose main contribution was to arrive seven weeks early and almost stop this issue getting done. I don't miss sleep.



Win the Sight and Sound Science Fiction/Horror Reader

From older classics such as *Rosemary's Baby* and *Bladerunner* to more recent highlights like *Cube* and *The Hole*, the *Sight and Sound Science Fiction/Horror Reader* provides an insight into how genre films have developed in recent decades. Edited by Kim Newman, this book features a broad range of erudite and entertaining writing on science fiction and horror films.

To win this book, complete the crossword below - which contains the names of 13 science fiction authors. When complete the shaded squares will spell out a phrase which links all the authors. Send that phrase to: matrix.competition@ntlworld.com with your name and address by noon on Friday 11 May 2003. First name out of the proverbial hat wins the prize.



Across

- 1 Author of *A for Anything* (6)
- 4 Author of *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* (6)
- 7 US state and a beach (5)
- 9 Author of *Nerves* (3,3)
- 11 Author of *Dark Piper* (6)
- 13 Steal someone else's property (5,4)
- 16 Author of *Starburst* (4)
- 18 Journey, on a horse (4)
- 21 Author of *Mission of Gravity* (7)
- 22 Author of *Slam* (3,4)
- 24 Limit (4)
- 25 Compact or brake, for example (4)
- 27 Reject (9)
- 32 Creator of the Grey Mouser and *Fafhrd* (6)
- 34 Author of *The Stars my Destination* (6)
- 35 Walkway (5)
- 36 Author of *Let Darkness Fall* (2,4)
- 37 Hypnotic state (6)

Down

- 1 Abduct (6)
- 2 Ireland, for example (4)

- 3 Plaything (3)
- 4 Enthusiast (3)
- 5 Partner (4)
- 6 Go back on a promise (6)
- 8 Author of *The End of Eternity* (6)
- 10 Snake-like fish (3)
- 12 This unit may be futile (3)
- 13 Climb over (7)
- 14 Organises holidays, perhaps for spies (5)
- 15 Make available (7)
- 17 Lubricated (5)
- 19 Magistrates of Venice or Genoa (5)
- 20 The Family (5)
- 23 Author of *Non-Stop* (6)
- 24 Greek shape-shifter! (6)
- 26 Author of *A Fall of Moondust* (6)
- 28 First woman (3)
- 29 This fighter could have you in knots (3)
- 30 Bluish-white metal (4)
- 31 It's amazes what these phasers can do (4)
- 33 Knock, door and knuckles (3)
- 35 Gamble (3)

The winner of last month's crossword competition was Garry Selva from East Yorkshire. The correct answer was: *Hallucians*. Thanks to all those who pointed out the mistake in last issue's crossword. *Moya* is not the pilot in *Farscape* but the name of the ship. The pilot is called... Pilot.

159 Crossword Solution

Across: 1 *The Mummy* 2 *Witch* 9 *Telegraph* 10 *Cared* 11 *The Phantom of the* 17 *Newt* 18 *Opera* 19 *Typo* 21 *Buffy the Vampire* 26 *Abort* 27 *Australia* 28 *Rules* 29 *Headless* Down: 2 *Halve* 3 *Unreal* 4 *Yahoo* 5 *Wacko* 6 *Tarot* 7 *Hedge* 8 *Stetsons* 12 *Pontiff* 13 *The Edge* 14 *Moya* 15 *Fly trap* 16 *Horseman* 18 *Omit* 20 *Ranted* 21 *Blair* 22 *Fjord* 23 *Yaris* 24 *Heath* 25 *Jules*



Orbit co-ordinator wanted

Are you interested in writing? Like to get involved in organising the orbiter groups? Orbit is looking for a new co-ordinator. It's not an involved job, but it does need to be kept on top of. Duties include:

- Keeping a list of those in current orbiter groups
- Keeping a waiting list
- Checking prospective members are BSFA members
- Settling up new groups or filling vacancies as they come up.

If you think you could do this, please contact:
Carol Ann Kerry-Green, 278 Victoria Avenue, Hull HU5 3DZ
email: metaphor@metaphor.karoo.co.uk

Jo's Timewasters

Competition 160

The following 24 titles fit, perfectly logically, into eight groups of three. Group them, please, with your reasons.

1. 1984
2. By his Bootstraps
3. The Caves of Steel
4. The Cyberiad
5. The Forbidden Tower
6. The Forever War
7. Hawksbill Station
8. Here Gather the Stars
9. Jeffy is Five
10. The Left Hand of Darkness
11. Mindstar Rising
12. Needle
13. One
14. Out of the Silent Planet
15. The Outward Urge
16. Penterra
17. Perelandra
18. Preferred Risk
19. The Silver Locusts
20. The Space Merchants
21. Starchild
22. That Hideous Strength
23. Time is the Simplest Thing
24. We

Answers, by three weeks from receipt of mailing to (note new address): John Ollis, 13 Bernshaw Close, Snatchill, Corby NN18 8EJ

Timewaster 158 Result

What can only be described as a thin entry results in the winner being Steve Jeffrey for this quote from the bouncer: "For God's sake, people, it's only a suit."