

matrix

Sept/Oct 2003



No. 163

£2.25

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Mind-expanding cinema

Spirited Away is the best film of the year. Don't miss it.

Jessica Yates defends "The Lord of the Rings"

Steve Green on Novacons past and present

Stephen Baxter says goodbye to Galileo

Pádraig Ó Méalóid on Irish books

Simon Morden on the demise of Earthlight

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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Welcome,

A couple of pleas this issue. Firstly, we welcome any and all contributions on any aspect of SF, fantasy and horror in all its myriad forms and media. But it'll make life simpler if all contributors could submit copy by e-mail or on a disk (as a rtf or text file please). And please follow some simple rules. The basic rule is, don't.

- Don't double space.
- Don't put an extra line between paragraphs.
- Don't indent paragraphs.
- Don't put two spaces after a full stop.
- Don't use tabs.
- Don't use bold unless absolutely necessary.
- Don't underline.

Don't write headlines or introductions (These are written to fill the space available, which Martin knows only when he lays to page. The poor boy doesn't get much fun these days - so don't deny him this.)

Don't hyperlink web addresses or email addresses. (If you're using Word, right click on the address, select "Hyperlink" and then "Remove hyperlink")

- Don't use paragraph styles.
- Don't use more than one font in a piece.
- Do italicise the names of magazines, films and books. If you need to emphasise a word, use italics.
- Do put episode titles, short story titles, feature titles etc in single quotation marks.
- If it's a news story include a source whenever possible.
- If you can stick to these rules, it'll save our sanity - which, after editing *Matrix* for a year or so, is a precious and rare commodity.

Secondly, we'd love to run some cartoons and illustrations. Perhaps even a regular comic strip. So we'd welcome any contributions from established and budding cartoonists out there. We'd look at anything with a sf/fantasy/fannish theme, so get scribbling ...

Mark & Martin

Commissioning Editor: Mark Greener

53 Lambs Lane, Cottenham, Cambridge, CB4 8TB
markgreener1@aol.com

Production Editor:

Martin McGrath
48 Spooners Drive, Park Street, St Albans, AL2 2HL
martinmcgrath@ntlworld.com

Contributing Editors

Fandom:

Mark Plummer
14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6JE
matrix@fishlifer.demon.co.uk

Magazines:

Roderick Gladwish
27 Perth Road, Bridgemary, 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
bfafcom@smof.demon.co.uk
- Treasurer:** Paul Hood
112 Meadowside, Eltham, London, SE9 6BB
paul@auden.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 Willfred 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@amarranth.aviators.net

BSFA Awards:

Claire Brialet
26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA
awards@fishlifer.demon.co.uk

London meetings:

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

Orbiter Writing Groups:

Gillian Rooke
Southview, Pilgrims Lane, Chilham, Kent, CT4 8AB
animant@feasant.fsne.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@dlcs.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
bfafcom@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

BSFA

RAGE against the... ...people who like SF

As a self-confessed "fan" of science fiction, **Martin McGrath** watched in horror as Jon Tickle bored the nation with his encyclopaedic knowledge of *Star Wars* spin-offs in *Big Brother*. Vowing that it must never happen again, he has a plan. It's time to rebrand science fiction fans, and *Big Brother* is the place to start.

Many of you will be familiar with the man pictured below. Some, more fortunate perhaps, will not.

His name is Jon Tickle and he was a contestant in this year's *Big Brother*, which staggered to a conclusion at the end of July. He has been rather famous this summer, at least amongst those of us who read tabloid newspapers.

Now I can already hear many of you irritably mumbling questions from behind your broadsheets. Why on Tatooine are you bothering the aesthetes of BSFA with this frippery? What the Darth Sidious has this piece of flotsam on the ocean of pop culture got to do with the high-minded pursuits of an organisation dedicated to the promotion of the very finest in speculative fiction?

Let me explain.

Hobby

Jon Tickle has a hobby. It is a hobby so startling that it has earned him a place on the front page of every British tabloid and hours of coverage on television and radio. It is so strange that, in admitting it on national television, he has earned equal measures of derision and hero-worship.

Jon Tickle likes *Star Wars*. He likes it so much, he's actually read some of the Wookiee books that fill half of every WH Smith in the country. He likes *The Lord of the Rings* films and he's even read those books. And, wonder of wonders, he enjoys watching *Star Trek*, one of the biggest franchises in film and television history.

Shattering, isn't it? Jon Tickle (whisper it) likes some of the most popular books, films and television programmes ever made.

The media's response was predictable. As soon as he started talking about science fiction on

television he was branded a nerd, a geek and a Vulcan.

All this might be the perfect launching pad for a standard "how other people see us" rant about the way poor science fiction fans are misunderstood and misrepresented by the media. We could, with Jon Tickle as our standard bearer, launch a campaign to demand fair treatment from "the mainstream."

We could, except for one thing, the media were right - Jon Tickle really is a geek. And a nerd.

This is a guy with a physics degree who spent an afternoon trying to build a water heater out of some plastic sheeting and a length of hose. An admirable use of his scientific training! Maybe, if the swimming pool into which the water was flowing wasn't already heated.

I like *Star Wars* - I even like the new ones we're supposed to hate - but no one deserved to have to listen to this berk drone on endlessly about the plots of obscure spin-off novels. Anyone silly enough to go on *Big Brother* deserves what they get, but even I felt sorry for the poor souls locked in with Jon Tickle as, oblivious to their yawns, he warbled on about Chewie or Luke or the bloody Ewoks.

So, it turns out, sometimes the media are right. Sometimes people who like science fiction really are nerds and geeks. Sometimes science fiction fans really do drone on about our little obsessions in a way that no sane person could tolerate. Sometimes, perhaps, we do let the little things in our hobby blind us to the really important things in life - like relationships and other people.

Friends

Some of my best friends are sf fans. And some of them are kind, sensitive souls with a firm grip on reality and a clear sense of priorities. Some of them, but not all of them.

I have a friend, let's call him Kyle, who can, with a straight face and without a shred of irony, accuse George Lucas of "raping his childhood" for putting Jar Jar Binks in *The Phantom Menace*. I have another, who we shall call Stan, a *Doctor Who* fan, who is reduced to a stuttering,

swearing wreck at the merest mention of Bonnie Langford. He has, and I am not kidding, written hate mail to UK Gold when they showed *Paradise*

Towers. Kenny, by contrast, is a more even-tempered young man, but even he can (and does) bore innocent bystanders with his superhuman recall of the events in any number of foot-thick fantasy trilogies.

Typical

And yes, you've guessed it, I'm Cartman. The typical fat, specky sci-fi fan with shelf after shelf of movies featuring wooden acting and dodgy special effects that I like to refer to as "charming" and "evocative" and into whose lame excuses for plots and script I am apt to put far more meaning than they deserve.

Watching *Big Brother* has convinced me that my friends and I are too much like Jon Tickle.

So my campaign is not for equal rights for geeks, I come not to praise nerds, but to bury them. SF fandom need to be rebranded.

My campaign is to find a well-adjusted, presentable, intelligent and charming science fiction fan. Someone who can hold their own in a conversation which does not feature the words "warp drive" or "sonic screwdriver."

Someone who can talk about science without reducing it to a list of words in physics that begin with the letter "P". Someone,

crucially, who can live in a house with a group of other people without any or all of them plotting murder.

Candidate

Having picked the candidate (or if we're extremely lucky, candidates), I recommend that the BSFA invest in grooming them. We should help them prepare their video and buy them trendy clothes. We should put our collective brains together and provide them with every scrap of non-sf related small talk we have at our disposal - and if that doesn't take more than five minutes we should ask the British Fantasy Society to help.

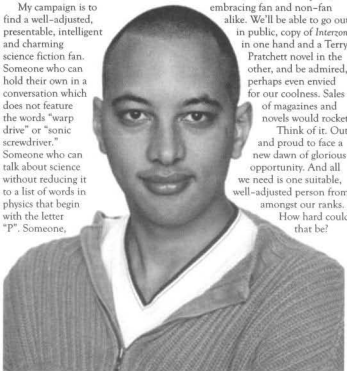
We should rebuild them. Bigger. Stronger. Less geeky than ever before. Then we should put them forward for next year's *Big Brother*.

This super-fan, this envoy to the real world, could open doors for us all. On television 24 hours a day, all summer, they would reinvent the very idea of fandom, not just for the general public but for other fans as well. They would be likeable and popular and they would appeal to the opposite sex!

Soon we could be spreading across the nation like Irish-theme pubs, embracing fan and non-fan alike. We'll be able to go out in public, copy of *Interzone* in one hand and a Terry Pratchett novel in the other, and be admired, perhaps even envied for our coolness. Sales of magazines and novels would rocket.

Think of it. Out and proud to face a new dawn of glorious opportunity. And all we need is one suitable, well-adjusted person from amongst our ranks.

How hard could that be?



RAGE against the...

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

Daleks return

The fifteenth and final novella in Telos Publishing's range of original Dr Who books will be *The Dalek Factor* by award-winning horror and dark fantasy author Simon Clark.

"I grew up watching Dr Who," says Clark. "I never missed Dr Who. Not even on my wedding day. Dr Who fuelled my imagination and my appetite for the fantastic as a child. To get the opportunity to work on a Dr Who story is a dream come true."

Being able to work with the Daleks was also a large part of the appeal that attracted Clark to the project. "Like total eclipses, the chance to write a Dalek story only happens once in a blue moon. There was no way I could turn down something like that. But, darn it, I knew if I was going to tackle *The Dalek Factor*, it would be my mission to make the Daleks frightening again. I want them to be menacing. I want them to be the essence of evil. No more 'stairs' jokes. I'm determined to write a dark, disturbing story where even to catch a glimpse of a Dalek makes the palms sweat, and triggers waves of revulsion and fear."

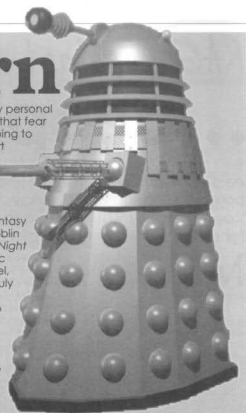
"Think back to the time when you were last

frightened by a Dr Who episode. My personal quest in writing this novella is to pull that fear trigger again. *The Dalek Factor* is going to be a journey into the heart of darkness. Not everyone on that journey is going to come back in one piece."

Clark has twice won a British Fantasy Award, once for his short story, "Goblin City Lights" and once for the novel *Night of the Trifids* – a sequel to the classic John Wyndham story. His latest novel, *Vampyrhic Rites* was published in July by Hodder and Stoughton.

Authors who have contributed to the Telos novella series include Kim Newman, Mark Chadbourn and Paul McAuley whose story, *Eye of the Tyger*, will be published in November 2003 with a foreword by Neil Gaiman.

The Dalek Factor will be published by Telos in February 2004.



New HHGG website

"Magrath's" is a new website devoted solely to providing news about Douglas Adams and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Since Douglas Adams died two years ago there has been an unprecedented number of publications, broadcasts, events, etc but these have only been reported very sporadically on the various Adams/HHGG websites that exist.

As author of two books on the subject and Research Archivist for the Official HHGG Appreciation

Society, webmaster MJ Simpson has an enormous number of contacts among people with connections to Adams/Hitchhiker. "I have decided to stop complaining about the lack of an authoritative, constantly updated news site and actually do one myself", he says. See homepage.nitworld.com/mj2000

A new Experience

Next summer, the Science Fiction Experience will open in Seattle. It's described as an "interactive, media-rich experience that combines artefacts and information in evocative

environments that immerse visitors in science fiction's alternative worlds". But don't let that put you off. They want people to enjoy science fiction, and will encourage them to participate in the community that embraces it.

There will be a Hall of Fame for the Great and the Good of SF and it plans to be a venue for award ceremonies and other events. Props from films and TV shows will be present too. Displays will include signed first editions of Isaac Asimov's Foundation Trilogy, Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* and *Fahrenheit 451*, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and a first edition printing from 1895 of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*.

Initial funding comes from Paul Allen, Microsoft cofounder. Source: www.sciencefictionexperience.com

Advent Rising

Los reports that Orson Scott Card is writing *Advent Rising*, a computer game for Majesco Sales. Apparently the alien species game will "emphasise moral choices". Novels and movies are planned.

Vote for Dr Who

This year – of course – is the 40th anniversary of *An Unearthly Child*, the first Dr Who episode. UK Gold is hosting a 'Doctor Who @ 40 Weekend' over November 22nd and 23rd. The weekend will include one complete story from each of the seven doctors voted for by viewers, specially commissioned shorts featuring interviews with cast members and famous fans, plus fantastic behind-the-scenes footage. You can vote for your favourite Doctor Who stories, determining which ones will air. See www.ukgold.tv.

Most wanted

Bookfinder.com recently released a list of the most requested out of print SF, fantasy and horror books:

1. *Rage* Richard Bachman
 2. *The Croquet Player* HG Wells
 3. *My Pretty Pony* Stephen King
 4. *The Resistance* Kristine Kathryn Rusch
 5. *Six Stories* Stephen King
 6. *Labyrinth* ACH Smith
 7. *Tree and Leaf* JRR Tolkien
 8. *The Dune Encyclopedia* Willis E McNelly
 9. *Tomorrow's Children* Isaac Asimov
 10. *Time for the Stars* Robert A Heinlein
- Source: www.bookfinder.com

Comics round up

Comics International report that Comics Library International are adapting the 1910 movie *Edison's Frankenstein*, which starred Charles Ogle... Image comics are launching a series based on the exploits of the Faction Paradox, a group of time terrorists, who first appeared in 1997's *Dr Who: Alien Bodies*... 88 MPH Studios plan comics based on the 1984 movie *Ghostbusters*...

Top ten blockbusters

According to Eurobusiness, Titanic still stops the list of the top ten grossing movies of all time with a worldwide box office of £1662 million. But all the rest are genre movies. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone and The Phantom Menace place 2 and 3 with £878 million and £835 million respectively. The remaining seven are: *Jurassic Park* (£833 million); *LoTR: The Two Towers* (£815 million and still on release); *LoTR: The Fellowship of the Ring* (£779 million); *Independence Day* (£735 million); *Spider Man* (£731 million); *Star Wars* – A

Earthlight goes out

As part of "a restructure of key departments within the Adult Trade Division of Simon & Schuster UK", *Earthlight* will cease to exist as an imprint from the end of this year. Its authors will be published on the Simon & Schuster and Pocket lists. The press release says the authors "will be given the same profile and commitment as before, but will enjoy the benefits of belonging to the main body of the fiction list". Darren Nash, Senior Editor, leaves at the end of September.

The press release goes on: "In an increasingly aggressive market we must continue to reassess our publishing programme and our market share. We have maintained our position as the fastest growing UK publisher for three years now and to continue in this way we must make every effort to strengthen the publishing process and enhance company sales potential. Naturally this had led to some tough but necessary decisions, which have been taken with great sorrow and sadness, but I am confident this newly focused structure will lead to even greater success."

• Simon Morden gives his view on the demise of *Earthlight* on page 25.



New Hope (£723 million); and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (£704 million). *Crouching Dragon, Hidden Tiger* is the second highest grossing non-English Language movie (£209 million), behind *Life is Beautiful*.

Forthcoming books

According to *Locus*, several big names have new books forthcoming. Mike Moorcock's finished *The Vengeance of Rome*, the final Colonel Pyat book... Bruce Sterling's delivered *The Zenith Angle* to Del Rey... Orson Scott Card's sixth Alvin Maker book will be *Crystal City*... Anne and Todd McCaffrey delivered the Pern novel *Dragon's Kin*... Gollance will publish John Brosnan's *Mothership*... Alistair Reynolds' *Absolution Gap* is due from Gollance as is Mary Gentle's *1610: A Sundial in a Grave*... Tanith Lee's first part of the *Lionwolf* trilogy, *Cast a Bright Shadow*, will be out from Tor... Ken MacLeod's *Newton's Wake* will also come out from the Tor stable... Del Rey will publish volume three of Robert Newcomb's *Chronicles of Blood and Stone*, *The Scrolls of the Ancients*... Eos will publish *The Burning Land*, the first in a two-book series, by Victoria Strauss.

Awards news

Locus reports that Patricia Bray won the 2002 Compton Crook award for best first SF/F novel for *Devlin's Luck*... Bob Tucker, Kate Wilhelm, Damon Knight and Edgar Rice Burroughs are the 2003 inductions into the SF and Fantasy Hall of Fame... Robert Holdstock's *The Iron Gull* is the Best Novel of 2002 according to the Czech Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror... *The Consciousness Plague*, by Paul Levinson, won the Mary Shelley award for Outstanding Fictional Work. The Media Ecology Association presents the award for fiction in which information technology and communication theory play major roles.

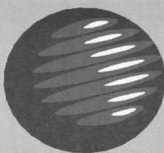
Corrections

Some of the friendly mogwai that normally help us put *Matrix* together have turned into Gremlins. Some mistakes crept into *Matrix* 162.

First, Maureen Kincaid Speller's name was spelt wrongly throughout the issue – as many of you rushed to tell us. We'd like to thank Maureen for being so generous in accepting our apology and hope we've got it right this time!

Second, on page five we wrongly captioned a picture of the presentation of the Clarke Award to Christopher Priest. It was not John Clute, it was Paul Kincaid presenting the award.

We promise to try harder in the future.

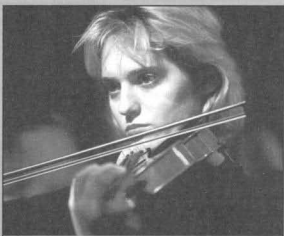


RODERICK GLADWISH'S WORLD OF SCIENCE

Science in tune

Researchers at Imperial College used a technique called neurofeedback to help Royal College of Music students to improve their performance. Sensors on the student's heads used specific brainwaves to influence a video game that the students learned to control by altering their thoughts. The study used techniques focusing on enhanced attention and deep relaxation. The best improvement – ranging from 13.5% to 17% – came from the relaxation technique. Students who undertook more orthodox physical exercise and mental skills programmes did not improve as much.

Researcher Dr Tobias Egner, from Imperial College London at Charing Cross Hospital, said: "This is a unique use of neurofeedback. It has been used for helping with a number of conditions such as attention deficit disorder and epilepsy, but this is the first time it has been used to improve a complex set of skills such as musical performance in healthy students." **Source:** [annanova.com](#)



Scientists studying a new genetic marker in Siberians and Native Americans found evidence that the first migrations to the Americas probably occurred no earlier than 18,000 years ago. Previous estimates suggested that occupation began 30,000 years ago, but this has been contradicted by archaeological and linguistic evidence.

DNA of living Siberian and Native American populations suggest at least two migrations from Siberia. But finding when the first people arrived in the Americas was difficult, as geneticists needed a marker in the Y chromosome. They found such a change in the DNA sequence. It is present in Siberian men but not Native Americans. Named M242, the change occurred 15,000 to 18,000 years ago. So the Americas must first have been occupied some time after that date. **Source:** *International Herald Tribune*

Georgia Tech researchers isolated a bacterium, *Dehalococcoides* strain BAV1, that feeds on and destroys chlorinated compounds in polluted environments. Natural biotic and abiotic processes break down chlorine-based pollutants, but lead to toxic intermediate substances including cancer-causing agents. Studying BAV1 will help develop cleaning systems that result in non-toxic end products. This has the potential for dealing with contaminated sites that resist conventional cleanup. Unregulated use of solvents for dry-cleaning and degreasing of metal components are common causes of contaminated sites. A former industrial dry-cleaning factory was selected as a pilot site and complete dechlorination to ethene took six weeks. BAV1

and related organisms might also be able to clean sites contaminated with more complex polychlorinated dibenzo-dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls. **Source:** [spacedaily.com](#)

Finally, updates to previous science stories:

- Rosetta, the comet intercept mission delayed by the failure of an Ariane 5 launcher earlier this year, has had a new target selected: comet Churyumov-Gerasimenko. Planned to be launched February 2004 on an Ariane-5 G+, it will arrive in November 2014. Scientists will also investigate an alternative launch date to this comet, in February 2005. **Source:** ESA
- Mars Express and Beagle 2 have completed their first in-flight system checks. All has checked out satisfactorily though there is a problem with the power subsystem. The spacecraft must function on 70% of the budgeted supply. This will not be mission threatening. **Source:** ESA
- X Prize competitors' hardware is undergoing testing. In July Starchaser Industries Ltd. successfully dropped its Nova 2 space capsule. The piloted capsule was released at an altitude of 10,000 feet and used a steerable canopy to land safely. Armadillo Aerospace also completed a drop test of their capsule, the Black Armadillo in July. The team dropped a full-scale vehicle of 2000 feet. The test confirmed the design of the team's drogue parachute and crushable nosecone recovery system. Scaled Composites' plane-launched rocket design is undergoing flight tests. These tests will take the combined vehicles to 50,000 feet and later test separation and glide-return of the rocket half. **Source:** [xprize.com](#)

Morden nominated

Hearth, a novel by Focus editor, Matrix columnist and Vector reviewer Simon Morden has been nominated for the British Fantasy Society Best Novel award 2003.

Newell wins cup

Mike Newell, the British director well known for *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Donnie Brasco*, will direct the fourth *Harry Potter* film. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* will go into production before filming on the third movie, *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (see picture on opposite page), is completed.

Ultimately fantastic

The next Marvel comic property will get the Ultimate treatment will be *The Fantastic Four*. It will be co-written by Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Millar and drawn by Andy Kubert... Babylon 5 creator J. Michael Straczynski is writing *Supreme*

Power for Marvel's adult Max line of comics... Neil Gaiman's *1602*, a story transposing the Marvel universe to Elizabethan England, has begun its eight-issue run... Kurt Busiek is back in *Astro City* with the excellent five-issue mini-series *Local Heroes*.

Analog service

Analog and Asimov's sf magazines are changing their publishing schedule. Currently published eleven times a year, with one double issue, the magazines will, in future, produce only ten issues annually, with two double-sized issues.

Editorial address change

Mark "ants in his pants" Greener has changed address for the second time this year. His new address is: 53 Lambs Lane, Cottenham, Cambridge, CB4 8TB. Mark denies that he is on the run from members of an Albanian crime family. But then he would, wouldn't he.

Sailing again

Taking its name from the early pulp magazine *Golden Argosy*, *Cooperville* will launch a new magazine *Argosy* this autumn. Trade paperback-sized, each issue of *Argosy* will be composed of two volumes - the main magazine, and a separate novella - in an illustrated slipcase. At 200 pages, *Argosy* will initially ship on a quarterly schedule. Contributors to the first issue include Michael Moorcock and Adam Roberts interviewing Samuel R. Delany, Leo and Diane Dillon provide the cover artwork for the first and three subsequent issues. More details at: www.argosymag.com



What's in a name?

Brian Aldiss writes: Jeff Gardiner's article regarding the term 'Science fiction' is interesting. But his case could be better made with a little historical background.

The term SF (let's keep it short) was unknown until its coinage in the 1920s, when it was regarded as a climb down from the uglification of "scientification". It is a clumsy term, although not without its attractions, combining as it does two antithetical halves. It has another virtue, alerting its readers to the fact - or at least the promise - that they are going to read something that contains logical extrapolation and does not toy with astrology or magic.

We have to admit it is useful to have a term that distinguishes a kind of fiction from a neighbouring kind, fantasy. It is idle to argue that SF is a kind of fantasy; it is and it is not.

But this label "SF" was wished on us by a young American readership getting on for a century ago - a readership largely unlettered and probably spotty, without the perspectives of today. So the term has become slightly pejorative, especially when down-market still further by the shortened form, "sci-fi".

There are many writers, well accepted within the SF field, who are more nearly surrealists. One thinks of such names as Robert Shekley, William Tenn, Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett. We might consider that these authors would be happier to be regarded as surrealists per se.

We also see how those who have rejected the term SF outright have prospered in a

more general acceptance. The names of Kurt Vonnegut, JG Ballard and, more recently, Margaret Atwood come to mind. Such authors' novels are reviewed with better professional attention than *Matrix*, with its amateurs, can achieve. They are considered somehow as real writers.

It would be sensible for those who consider themselves SF writers (ie those who adhere to well-worn generic conventions) and are content with the label - perhaps profiting by it - to continue to use it. Those writers who feel that the SF thing has reached its sell-by date may be happier to call themselves Surrealists or Futurists or - well, how about just writers? That's a proud thing to be.

On another matter. Could you please publish the address of the Iris Albino One? Some of us might like to read a copy!

David Curl writes: Jeff Gardiner's rage against the term 'science fiction' and his bigging up of 'fantasy' was provocative and worthwhile. However, there are things to be said for the first term and against the latter. After all, 'science' can refer to any systematic and formulated knowledge, including the political and social sciences,



historiography, and so on. As with democracy, science is partly just a way of doing things and partly a moral aim. 'Science fiction' sounds groovy because the ordering of the terms suggests uplift, extrapolation. 'Fantasy' is often used in the sense of

private reverie, or daydream; it can sound weak, solipsistic. On the notice board at the Fantasy Centre bookstore on Holloway Road, London N7 for at least a couple of years, there was a letter from an enquirer who had obviously mistaken the name of the shop. He asked whether the proprietors had anything available about women wearing exotic boots and shoes, "especially orthopaedic." Iris Murdoch writes, in her essay 'On "God" and "Good"', that "the chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams that prevents one seeing what is there outside one." It seems reasonable to posit that an erotic obsession with corrective footwear would tend to get in the way of good conduct and good literary criticism; one could of course contest Murdoch's implied puritanism. (She got it by way of

Plato, who wanted to expel the artists from his Republic, except that he was only pretending).

Jeff Gardiner responds: My concern is that Fantasy merely appears as a footnote under the SF umbrella. Why has SF become the dominant brand name when it is so narrow and exclusive whilst Fantasy is a broader and inclusive term?

I'm grateful to Brian Aldiss for his expert response, although the thought of "logical extrapolation" leaves me rather cold. Surely the whole point of literature is to entertain and exhilarate. In response to David Curl, there is nothing weak or solipsistic about Fantasy. Fantasy is ambiguous, but that's its strength, not weakness. It celebrates the imagination and our spiritual reality; it cannot be defined and resists all attempts - that's what's so exciting about it.

The argument depends on personal tastes or semantics, but perhaps we should listen to Mike Moorcock who argues that there is no such thing as SF or Fantasy; there is just good writing.

Martin adds: *Albedo One*, 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co Dublin, Ireland. See page 22 for details and a review of the new issue.

We also heard from Neil O'Keefe who agreed with Mark's assessment of the *Talons of Weng Chiang* and even liked *Trial of a TimeLord* (Mark: Obviously a man of taste and refinement). But, unlike Mark, he found the Hartnell year fired his imagination. He adds: "There is one question that puzzles me: why if the scripts of the missing Dr Who episodes still exist, why has nobody made an attempt to re-dramatise them?"

Mark replies: I don't know the answer, but I suspect it's due to copyright issues. Neil also asks why Keith Robert's stories has never been dramatised or *The Knights of God* rebroadcast. Answers anyone!

FLICKER



Armed and dangerous: Revealed at San Diego's Comic-Con, this is the new look Doctor Octopus, who will be battling Spider-Man in the forthcoming sequel to last year's hit film. Also on show at the convention was footage showing the villain, played by Alfred Molina, in action.

Hype for Hyperion?

The rights to the Hugo Award winning novel *Hyperion* have been bought by a major studio, author Dan Simmons has revealed. And he hinted that the project may be developed by *Goodfellas*' director Martin Scorsese.

According to *Ain't It Cool News*, Simmons revealed the news at a talk at a Seattle Bookstore. Scorsese, *Ain't It Cool News* reports, wants to turn the four-novel sequence into a major film trilogy based on the novelist's own treatment of his work.

Hayter on Watchmen

Scriptwriter David Hayter has completed "a faithful adaptation" of Alan Moore/Dave Gibbon's classic *Watchmen* comic series. Hayter, who wrote the *X-Men* movies, may also direct the project.

Ultraviolent

Kurt Wimmer (*Equilibrium*) will return to the genre with his next movie, *Ultraviolet* (not to be confused with the new Robert Altman movie or the ITV vampire drama). The film will feature a central female vampire (Violette) caught in a civil war between a government and a genetically modified race of superhumans. Director Wimmer promises his trademark ultra-violence and told

universe (called Evermere) and travels there to usurp his corrupt uncle."

Governor terminated

Arnold Schwarzenegger may have other things on his mind but work is progressing on a fourth *Terminator* movie. Producer Mario Kassar has said that they expect to begin production in nine months. A script is being prepared. And Arnie? "It depends on what he's doing in life. If he wants to do politics, he'll do politics. Then we'll have to figure out a way to do it without him. But he has expressed interest in doing T4" Kassar told *Lebanese film magazine The Movie Guide*.

Lost In The Woods

M Night Shyamalan's (*Signs*, *Unbreakable*) next film will be *The Woods* and will star Joaquin Phoenix (*Gladiator*), William Hurt (*Dark City*) and Sigourney Weaver (*Alien*). Set in 1897 it is about a close-knit community who live with a mystical race of creature in the surrounding woods.

Monster hit

Written and directed by Stephen Sommers (*The Mummy*) and starring Hugh Jackman (*X-Men*) and Kate Beckinsale (*Underworld*), *Van Helsing* will take all Universal's famous movie monsters out for a twenty-first century run next year. Jackman, as the eponymous hero, will battle his traditional nemesis, Dracula, but will also cross swords (or pistols) with Frankenstein and the Wolf Man.

Football Crazy

Shaolin Soccer is the best fantasy/skung fu/musical/football movie ever made. Of course it is the only fantasy/skung fu/musical/football movie ever made, but that shouldn't stop you

from wanting to see it.

Miramax, who own the American distribution rights, have been delaying the release as they tried to "improve" the film. Terrible results at preview screenings for their version have now convinced them to release a relatively unchanged and subtitled version in US cinemas this September.

There is no news on a UK release but the Chinese DVD (with no region coding) can be found and comes with the added bonus of comedy subtitling.

Elvis has left the building

Bubba Hoest stars *Evil Dead's* Bruce Campbell as "Elvis" and Ossie Davis as "JFK" as they battle an ancient evil in an East Texas retirement home. Based on the Bram Stoker Award shortlisted short story by Joe R. Lansdale, *Bubba Hoest* tells the "true" story of what happened to Elvis and how he confronts and Egyptian monster that is using his retirement home as a hunting ground.

Currently on limited release in America, this will almost certainly go straight to video in the UK - if it gets released at all - but has cult classic written all over it.

New Reich

Andrew Dominik, the Australian director of *Chopper*, will develop and direct an adaptation of Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man* for Paramount.

Looking very dodgy

Paul W.S. Anderson (*Resident Evil*) making *Alien Vs Predator... I, Robot* by Alex Proyas (*Dark City*) - shooting has begun on a lengthy motorbike chase... For no good reason, Fox will mess around with *Alien* and release a special edition with unseen footage in cinemas later this year. We didn't realise the original was broke.



Siriusly dirty: These first shots from *Harry Potter* and the *Prisoner of Azkaban* suggest a grimmer time for Harry, Hermione and Ron under new director Alfonso Cuarón. It is also the first chance to see Gary Oldman (right) as Sirius Black and David Thewlis (back) as Professor Lupin.

A league of very ordinary gentlemen

Based on one of the best comics of recent years, the film adaptation of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* was always going to have a difficult time living up to its roots. What is disappointing, says **Martin McGrath**, is not that it fails but that it never tries to match the intelligence of the original.

Comics, at least in the hands of a talented creative team, are a much denser medium than film. Comics can encompass more visual information and more complex literary ideas, page for page, than a film script. This is certainly true of Stephen Norrington's attempt to convert Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* to the big screen. For reasons that are too often the director's fault, it cannot match its source for intelligence, style or drama.

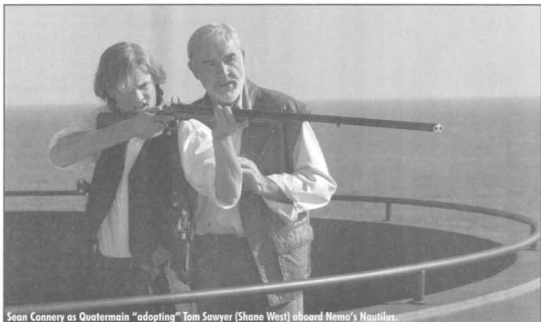
Film images flash past at twenty-four frames a second and, at least in the cinema, cannot be pored over in the same way as a comic book frame. Technically, then, *The League* on screen cannot match the visual richness of the comic. One of the book's great appeals, the way in which O'Neill filled every page with entertaining incidental detail, is inevitably lost.

Appealing

Norrington's *The League*, if never matching O'Neill's art, at least manages to develop an appealing look of its own. The opening sequence in Africa, Dorian Gray's library and the interior of the Nautilus are, in their own way, well designed and stylish. Sadly the one element of the design that survives from the comic books almost intact - Mr Hyde is fairly faithfully transferred thanks to CGI - is the least convincing of the film's special effects. I especially hated the transformation sequences.

However, if the look of the film is reasonably successful, the script and plot seriously disappoint. Film adaptations rarely manage to encompass the same degree of character development and complexity as their literary sources. Moore's *The League* covered a lot of ground and it is not entirely surprising that the film fails to match the scope of the original. What is disappointing, however, is the way in which the film fails to even aspire to a similar degree of intelligence. Norrington's film is clichéd in a way that Moore would never be, the dialogue is stiff and there are huge holes in the story's logic.

Worst of all is a sequence in which The League must save Venice from



Sean Connery as Quatermain "adopting" Tom Sawyer (Shane West) aboard Nemo's Nautilus.

being sunk by a big bomb in the foundations of the city's buildings. The filmmakers seem to believe that the city of Venice is built out into the Adriatic rather than on an island. From the moment that the aircraft-carrier-sized Nautilus sails up a Venetian canal to the villains' inevitable escape, the whole misadventure is nonsensical and badly handled. The action and dialogue are turgid, the ideas ridiculous and the whole sequence is infuriatingly bad.

Sawyer

The introduction of Tom Sawyer (the wooden Shane West) is another serious mistake. *The League* should essentially be Quatermain's story. Sawyer robs Quatermain of any serious opportunities for character development, gets in the way of his action scenes and adds nothing to the group dynamic. Dorian Gray's replacement of Quatermain as Mina Harker's (pointlessly reinvented as a vampire) "love interest" further diminishes the role.

Sean Connery was always going to be too vital a screen presence to succeed as the rather wasted and embittered old hero in Moore's original. Still, Connery's screen persona is curmudgeonly enough

these days to suggest that, given the chance, he could have made a success of the role. He never gets the chance and it is easy to see how, as rumours suggest, he might have become frustrated at the treatment of his character and the wasting of his talents.

Over the top

However, not all the changes are for the worse. Stuart Townsend is fabulously over the top as the other new character, Dorian Gray. As an invulnerable immortal he is wonderfully *lounge* and gets almost all of the film's scarce good lines. Pausing to heal during a fight with an equally immortal and indestructible foe he sighs campily, clearly bored already, and exclaims: "We'll be at this all day!"

Issues over character rights apparently prevented the use of Hawley Griffin as *The Invisible Man*, but I rather liked his replacement, a wiseboy thief named Rodney Skinner (Tony Curran) who stole the potion.

In the end, however, it is the script that lets *The League* down. It is full of painfully obvious, pointless statements. So, Naseeruddin Shah (who otherwise does a rather good job as Captain Nemo) is forced to point to a (ludicrously out-of-place)

sportscar and declaim: "I call it an auto-mo-bile." And Quatermain shouts: "Venice still stands!" when half of the city has been flattened.

None of these characters speak or act like their literary originals. Moore, in the comic book version, takes liberties but, at least, he brought a knowledge and understanding of these characters to the page. With Norrington's version you are simply left to wonder why they bothered calling the characters Quatermain or Harker. They might as well be called Smith or Jones. They bear no relation to their supposed source material.

Disaster

The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen is not a disaster on the scale of *Batman and Robin* or *Battlefield Earth* and yet it is, in some ways, an even bigger disappointment than either of these films. The kernel of the idea was so good and the source material so exciting that the failure of Norrington's film to come close to exploiting all that potential is shattering. Add to that the fact that this disappointing outing all but guarantees that the brilliant second story in the sequence will never be adapted to the screen, and all those involved have a lot to answer for.

Governor Arnold's last hurrah?

Martin McGrath wanted to hate *Terminator 3*, honestly he did, but it was too much fun and he was weak, so very weak.

The news that Jonathon Mostow was going to direct the third Terminator movie did not inspire confidence. *U-571*, his only other major directorial outing, was patchy at best. Nothing suggested that he was up to the job of following James Cameron on one of the biggest film franchises of all time. Add the absence of Linda Hamilton and alarm bells were ringing long before this film even began production.

To say that, when I sat down to watch this film, I had low expectations would be an understatement of enormous proportions.

I expected to hate *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* and was surprised, even disappointed, to leave the cinema having thoroughly enjoyed myself.

In a curious way, the absence of James Cameron from *T3* is the best thing that could have happened to the franchise. That's not to say that this is a better film than James Cameron would have made. Nor is it, for that matter, the equal of the earlier episodes in this series. However, Cameron's absence has reduced audience expectation and allowed the film to shed huge amounts of baggage. *T3* is a more nimble film than it could have hoped to be under Cameron's autocratic control.

Technical

In films like *The Abyss* and *Titanic* Cameron's determination to break technical boundaries has seen him neglect the basic rule of film-making – that the film should be entertaining. He has become obsessed with exploring the furthest limits of what is possible with technology. It is a fixation that has driven him to make increasingly complex documentaries – but it can blind him to the needs of the audience.

Cameron's *T3* would have been huge and expensive and technically superb, but I'm not sure if it would have been this much fun to watch.

Jonathon Mostow possesses neither Cameron's pretensions to grandeur nor his ability as a director. He has plainly sat down and decided that at the heart of the Terminator demographic are people who like to watch things explode, who enjoy watching hugely overblown gun fights and whose idea of a sensitive drama is something along the lines of *The Simpsons* Itchy and Scratchy cartoons.

He's back! And this time he's a woman.
Kristanna Loken as T-X



And that is what he delivers – tightly-paced, cartoonish action that raises as many laughs as gasps. Sometimes the humour is too broad and too frequent, occasionally undermining the dramatic possibilities of the plot, but no one will accuse *T3* of being pompous. Some of the better jokes – especially Arnie's sunglasses and the continued torture of Dr Silberman – play neatly with the most iconic elements of the earlier films.

Homage

However, in important ways, *T3* pays homage to the past – such as making the female lead fight most fiercely and make the tough decisions.

A more ambitious (or more arrogant) director might have tried to wipe the slate clean and impose themselves on the material. Success could have brought the kudos enjoyed by Cameron himself for *Aliens*. However, David Fincher and Jean-Pierre Jeunet – more talented directors than Mostow – know the damage that can be done if this gamble fails. Both suffered when they couldn't give the fans what they wanted in their attempts to follow Cameron on the *Alien* franchise. Mostow, given his capabilities, sensibly plays safe.

At well under two hours *T3* pelt along, leaving newcomers to catch up

if they can. Two terminators, Arnie (of course) and the T-X (Kristanna Loken) battle over Connor (Nick Stahl) and Kate Brewster (Claire Danes). All the actors do fair enough job, but since most of what they are asked to do is to stay out of the way of increasingly large pyrotechnics, they are not stretched. The script is serviceable.

Surprises

The plot contains a number of nice surprises, which I have no intention of spoiling, and contains no more holes than one would expect in a movie like this. I'd like to discuss the interesting conflict between the "philosophy" (that's much too grand a word for it) in Mostow's sequel and Cameron's previous movies, but I can't without spoiling the ending, so that will have to wait for another time.

Some critics have complained that the third outing lacks the artistic merit of Cameron's earlier outings, which leaves one wondering how long it is since they've seen the original *Terminator*. It is true, however, that Cameron has a far greater grasp of what makes a shot truly dramatic than Mostow can ever hope to achieve and so, inevitably, this film will have fewer lasting images. The special effects are very good, though not

groundbreaking, but the stunt work – in particular one chase scene featuring a fire engine – is outstanding.

T3 makes no pretence of being anything more than an action movie. More so than the ponderous *Matrix Reloaded* or the thoughtful *Hulk*, this is a movie driven by spectacle. In this sense it delivers in spades. Anything that gets in the way of the action is pared down to the absolute minimum and just when you think things can't get any more overblown, they do. So, for example, having crashed one helicopter into a building in the most explosive fashion, Mostow does it again but this time with a bigger helicopter and even bigger explosions.

Perfect

That, in a way, is a perfect summary of everything *T3* is about. Do everything from the first two films again, but do it bigger. The law of diminishing returns is unavoidable but, for all that, *T3* moves quickly enough and retains enough goodwill to make it an enjoyable piece of escapism.

Is *T3* as good as its predecessors? No. It has neither the scope nor the quality of film-making of the first two Terminator films. But for fans of Itchy and Scratchy and big explosions, it is the only must-see film of the year so far.

Spiritual

Martin McGrath gets carried away by *Spirited Away*, a Japanese animated film about a little girl in a land where gods go to chill-out. Go and see it, whatever the effort required: it will be worth it.

Spirited Away: childlike but never childish.



If, like me, your previous encounters with Japanese animation stretch only as far as *Akira* and the occasional juvenile movie featuring giant robots, then *Spirited Away* may be as pleasant a surprise to you as it was to me.

This is mind-expanding cinema. Winner of last year's Oscar for best animated feature, *Spirited Away* tells the story of Chihiro, a young girl trying to survive in a strange, dangerous, magic world. When her arrogant and greedy parents take a wrong turn during a house move, they are turned into pigs. Left alone, Chihiro has to make her own way, save her parents and her new friend Haku and stand up to the witch Yubaba.

There are echoes of classics such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Secret Garden* but, for once, this is a piece of cinema that deserves to be placed alongside great works of literature. Director Hayao Miyazaki gives the whole project a wonderful, lyric, quality that is moving but never manipulative.

At the heart of the film is the little girl, Chihiro. It is easy to imagine how, in an American movie, the film-makers would have been unable to resist the urge to make their heroine "feisty" and "sassy" and maddeningly irritating. Chihiro is none of these things. She is pure and honest and yet Miyazaki

succeeds in making her feel like a real ten-year-old girl, who can be frightened or playful or develop an enormous crush on a boy.

This, I think, is the core of *Spirited Away*'s success as a piece of art and as a piece of entertainment. It achieves a child-like simplicity without ever slipping over into childishness. This is a world where anything can happen and, as all children know and as all fairytale attest, such a world may contain wonders but it can also be home to great dangers. That means that this film, like all great fairytales, contains material that very small children might find disturbing – but that is, after all, the point.

Even at over two hours long there is something here to keep everyone entertained. The children will love the wonderfully designed characters and the film's delight in swamping everything in mud and vomit, but parents will appreciate the mythic quality of this work and the extraordinary style of the filmmaking on display.

Miyazaki has made a film that is wonderful to watch but even more beautiful to look at. The quality of the animation is amazing. Primarily hand-drawn, the artwork far surpasses almost everything produced by Western animation houses. There are moments in this film that will leave you dewy-eyed

with wonder. For me, in particular, Chihiro's train journey across a flooded land brought a lump to my throat.

It comes as no surprise that John Lasseter – the man behind *Toy Story* – is in awe of Miyazaki's work. It is to Lasseter's credit that he has played a significant role on ensuring Miyazaki's films are shown in the West.

Optimum Releasing, the company distributing *Spirited Away* in the UK, are releasing it in two formats, dubbed and subtitled. Subtitled versions will go to "art house" cinemas, while the dubbed versions will be more widely available. My personal preference is to watch foreign films in their original language but, since this is a film that children should love, a dubbed version also seems appropriate. With fifty prints *Spirited Away* won't be in every multiplex but it is worth any extra effort you might need to make to see this wonderful film.

I could not possibly recommend *Spirited Away* more highly. It is the best film I've seen this year and deserves the widest possible audience. Having watched it I immediately went out and bought every other Miyazaki film I could find on DVD.

• *Spirited Away* is released on September 12, 2003.

Yo Ho Ho and a barrel of fun!

Martin McGrath takes a look at *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* when Johnny Depp goes over the top so far and so fast that it seems certain that he will achieve escape velocity and zoom right out of the film. Depp has flirted with outrageous hamming before, of course, in films like *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Ed Wood*, but his performance as the pirate Captain Jack Sparrow doesn't just take the biscuit, it takes the whole biscuit factory and the planet on which the biscuit factory was built.

Depp is so totally committed to this madness that only the most curmudgeonly of audiences will not be dragged along, giggling. If Depp leads the way, Geoffrey Rush isn't far behind with his equally outré Captain Barbosa as he "Arts" and gums across the screen. When I say that their performances here are pure pantomime I mean no disrespect. These are broad, often hilarious, crowd-pleasing performances. They make you want to scream "He's behind you!" at the screen, and that reaction is precisely what a film like this needs.

Surprisingly for a film produced by Jerry "explosions" Bruckheimer and based on a theme park ride, it is the acting that carries this film. Orlando Bloom (*LOTR*) and Keira Knightley (*Bend It Like Beckham*) work well as the romantic leads and supporting actors such as Kevin McNally (*Shackleton*), Jack Davenport (*Coupling*) and Mackenzie Crook (*The Office*) all do good jobs with a funny script.

Pirates is undeniably silly but it is also tremendous fun. The plot, involving cursed treasure and ghostly pirates, is nicely paced, so that even at well over two hours it never seems to drag. The special effects are superb and the general standard of direction and production is high. Don't expect subplot or subtlety, this isn't that kind of film, but for a popcorn-filled, entertaining night at the movies, *Pirates of the Caribbean* will be hard to beat. If only all fluff were this much fun.

Identity crisis

Cypher wastes its early promise says **Martin Lewis**.



Jeremy Northam stars as Morgan Sullivan - industrial spy.

We first meet Morgan Sullivan (Jeremy Northam) as he is being interviewed for a job as an industrial espionage agent for Digicorp. Sullivan makes an unlikely spy and Northam, in turn, makes an unlikely Sullivan - he's the sort of guy you get in to play Ivor Novello, not a twitzy, badly dressed ex-salesman.

He is provided with a new identity and sent off to incredibly boring regional sales conferences to gather information. Though they are tedious Sullivan enjoys the liberating sensation of his new persona. Cypher is an apt title since we know nothing of Sullivan other than his appearance, his mannerisms and his voice. We are presented with an image, not a person. And, as we learn, images are flexible. Sullivan soon discovers that cigarettes and alcohol make you cooler and give you the confidence to hit on beautiful strangers who look like Lucy Liu. He is also plagued by headaches and visual disturbances. Inevitably he finds that his job is not all it seems and neither is Liu's Rita or indeed himself.

Northam provides the anchor for the film, he is on screen for most of the running time and he has the requisite versatility to play his chameleon part. However his character, like the viewer, is passive and is simply dragged along from plot point to plot point. Although science fiction should be the ideal genre for interrogating identity it seems that, however many Philip K Dick adaptations are made, mainstream films such as *Fight Club* (1999) and *Memento* (2000) do it better. Ironically, the answer seems to be that directors such as Fincher and Nolan are working with a broader

canvas: Cypher lacks the depth and ingenuity of these films.

There are some production issues as well. Director Vincenzo Natali was previously responsible for the well received, micro-budget *Cube* (1997). After that enforced restraint he can be forgiven for using multiple locations but he has spread his money a little thinly and as a result the film can look cheap. There is a great update of the old Indiana Jones flightpath map but the other graphics simply aren't subtle enough. They are too long and too repulsive and they hammer the audience over the head.

The film is very linear and unfortunately this progression is downhill. As the film develops it becomes more conventional, less interesting, squandering its promise. This is reflected in the cinematography: early on when Sullivan leaves Digicorp's headquarters the eerily isolated building could be an Andreas Gursky photograph; by the end things are shot as cheesy action clichés. The earlier muted palette becomes brighter and brighter until eventually we are bathed in the simplistic sunlight of the South Pacific. The obligatory final revelation is telegraphed well in advance, so much so in fact that you expect an ancillary twist that never arrives.

Cube, despite being rough around the edges, was a very interesting film. Cypher has much more modest ambitions but at least it hits all its targets. All the principal players in the film's production are relatively inexperienced and it shows; it is a competent rather than compelling film. Natali is clearly still finding his feet.

A sin and pretty bad

Martin McGrath on *Sinbad*.

It isn't that *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* is a terrible film - it isn't badly made, it isn't badly acted and the script, I suppose, is perky enough. It is just that it has something rotten at its heart.

Technically, except for one or two gripes about computer-generated monsters, the animation is of a very high standard. Occasionally, particularly in Tartarus, land of chaos, the film comes up with an image that is surprisingly good.

But *Sinbad* is a shallow film and, in the end, that shallowness stops us from caring about what happens to the characters and it stops us from caring about what they are doing. The result is that, at just eighty minutes long, *Sinbad* seems to drag interminably.

In part this shallowness stems from the decision by those involved to strip out anything that would make this *Sinbad* recognisable as the character from Scheherazade's *Arabian Nights*. Gone are the Arabic settings, replaced with a generic, vaguely Greek fantasy world with myths cut and pasted from Homer. Gone too is *Sinbad* the trader and adventurer, replaced by the most unconvincing pirate and thief who, despite his trade, will always do the right thing.

The film's characters are recognisably Western and modern. The sense of wonder and the thrill of the exotic that first made *The Arabian Nights* so appealing to Western audiences has been excised with surgical precision. Instead, we get a dull and predictable love story pepped up with a half a dozen action sequences that, though pretty, never convince us that the film's protagonists are in real danger. Insofar as this film has anything that could be called "inspiration" it is the "extreme

sports" such as bungee jumping, snowboarding and sky-diving tacked crudely into every available action sequence.

A cartoon fantasy may be the wrong place to look for cultural depth but, without a sense of place or history, this film loses anything that might have set it apart from other movies of this type. The result, as with other Dreamworks animations (*The Prince of Egypt*, *The Road to El Dorado*) is that *Sinbad* plays it safe, failing to create distinctive identity. Dreamworks placed themselves in the situation of releasing a film about a hero from Baghdad while American troops are occupying that city and the country around it. Their response is to deny the origins of their source material and pretend that everywhere is just like America.

There is a breathtaking arrogance behind this film and a fundamental disrespect for the source material.

Whatever one thinks of the recent war, would it have been beyond the ability of Dreamworks to make a children's film that recognised the value in different cultures and to make a film which respected and even celebrated those differences? At least then *Sinbad*'s creators could have pointed something that made it appear worthwhile. Certainly it would have been a timely message at a moment when intolerance on all sides is becoming ever more common.

Instead *Sinbad* becomes an exercise in cultural theft without even the grace to acknowledge the source of its booty. It is the kind of appropriation of mythology and history that can only be described as cultural imperialism. It is the rewriting of the stories of another people in the image of the powerful.

That it also fails to entertain and leaves only a bad taste in the mind adds to the reasons to sail far, far away from this insipid version of *Sinbad*.



The Matrix Reanimated

Martin Lewis takes a look at *The Animatrix*, a collection of animated shorts set in the Wachowski's *Matrix* universe.

The *Animatrix* is a compendium of nine short films (each ten minutes or so in length) set in the universe of *The Matrix* and it has been received in a wide variety of ways. One persistent criticism is that this is simply a marketing gimmick designed solely to fuel hype. Well, of course it does add to the hype (despite being released after *The Matrix Reloaded*) but it does not seem like a cynical cash-in. After all writers, particularly genre writers, get to play repeatedly with the worlds they create. This is simply a much rarer treat for directors. The format itself seems entirely fitting, since anime is one of the streams of Asian popular cinema that, along with martial arts and heroic bloodshed films, so obviously inspired the Brothers Wachowski. Indeed *Ghost In The Shell* notoriously provided them with actual shots.

There is another charge you can lay at the Wachowski's feet that does stick though; that they are guilty of style over substance, both here and in the films. Like the films they are inspired by, much of the point is simply to make violence pretty. Whenever someone stops kicking and starts ponderously flapping their mouth, things take a nosedive. In

Mutilated by Peter Chung, the best Animatrix has to offer.



The Second Renaissance (Parts 1 and 2) where the backstory to the films is made more explicit, the viewer can only laugh at the risible nature of the rise of the machines and the utter cobblers of the idea of using humans as batteries. It's a shame because the style and direction of the short make its gloriously over the top depiction of Armageddon compelling to watch.

Only a few of the segments actually relate directly to the films.

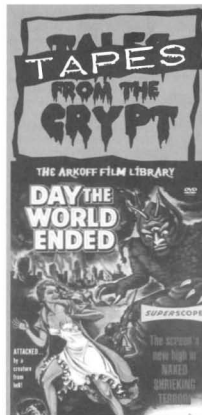
The most important of these is *The Final Flight Of The Osiris*, which acts as a prelude to *Reloaded* and shows the machines' discovery of Zion. It opens with a twist on the Neo/Morpheus "I know Kung Fu" fight rendered in highly realistic computer animation. However it is the very lifelikeness of the style that makes it less successful than some of the others on display. There is always a nagging sense that it isn't quite as good as digitally altered

film, something not present in the more obviously non-realistic styles of animation. This variety is one of the best things about *The Animatrix*; the ability to play both stylistically as well as thematically with the subject matter. The styles range from this sort of Playstation 2-type graphics to more traditional Japanese animation to expressionist and static, black and white pieces.

Two segments stand out though and tellingly neither of them are written by the Wachowskis. The first is the reflectively shot *Beyond* showing a group of children discovering a glitch in the Matrix. The other is *Mutilated* by Aeon Flux creator Peter Chung. Here we witness a resistance attempt to subvert the machines to their cause using a dreamlike VR simulation.

When the group find their stronghold under attack the story takes an unexpected path.

The ability to jump quickly between chunks of film makes DVD ideal for these sort of short, dense animations. However due to the shortness of these films (they are vignettes rather than episodes) *The Animatrix* is unsatisfying. However, as an anthology of animation techniques it is undeniably impressive.



Martin McGrath takes a look at *The Day the World Ended* – the things he does for you!

The names of Samuel Z Arkoff and Roger Corman together on a film – a guarantee of quality entertainment for all the family! Well, if by quality entertainment you mean terrible stories, bad acting and the worst special effects in the history of movie-making, then *The Day the World Ended* delivers on every front. Plus it has a fantastic selection of warbling theremin music to let you know when something "special" is going to happen.

So, briefly please, what's the plot?

Seven stereotypes survive a nuclear war because they happen to be surrounded by hills containing lead ore. Gradually they kill each other or fall victim to a radiation-mutated monster until, in the end, only the hero and heroine remain to repopulate the earth.

Does *The Day the World Ended* teach us any interesting science?

Oh yes. Radiation, for example, looks a lot like the smoke from a smoke machine.

Fascinating. Anything else?

Well radiation mutates all living creatures in the same way. They grow wobbly horns, long fangs, a third eye and develop an unhealthy taste for flesh.

Extraordinary –

Wait, I forgot something. They also develop steel claws and bullet-proof skin.

Why on earth would that happen?

Its nature's way of coping with radiation, apparently. The mutant monster also develops an irresistible urge to run off with the prettiest blonde in the movie.

Any other effects of radiation exposure?

Well... the safest place to hide from a radiation-created monstrosity would be in a bath or shower because God's good, clean natural rainwater is sure to destroy these wicked man-made beasts. Manchester is safe.

Anything good on the DVD?

Nine increasingly awful trailers for other Arkoff productions and a mildly entertaining Guardian/BFI interview/monologue by the man himself in which he reveals that the monster in *The Day the World Ended* was originally meant to be played by a six foot tall, athletic actor. However, they got the suit made on the cheap by Paul Blaisdell, an out of work actor who made it to fit himself. Unfortunately he was only five foot three inches tall and weighed forty pounds less than Louise Maddison, the actress he was supposed to sweep off her feet and carry through the forest. They had to have people offscreen holding the girl up when the monster was supposed to be carrying her.

Is there any reason why I should buy this film?

The theremin music is cool.

Not to be confused with?

The Day the Earth Stood Still, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, *The Day of the Triffids*, *The Day of the Jackal*, *The Day Today*. And *The Day the World Ended*.

Wait a minute! This is *The Day the World Ended*.

That's what they'd like you to think! Arkoff produced a 2001 TV movie "remake" that used the same name but an entirely different plot – one in which the world doesn't end.

Blake rises in Rebellion



A consortium, 87 Enterprises Limited, has secured the rights to Blake's 7 and plans to make a new miniseries "Rebellion Reborn" more than 20 years after the original programme went off the air.

The group have secured development funding and hope to raise a budget of £3.7million through a co-production deal. They are aiming for a transmission date sometime in 2005 – though there is no indication yet as to which channel. If any, will buy the series. The producers hope to use the miniseries to launch an ongoing programme or a string of TV movies.

Sebastian Froulkes of 87 Enterprises told *Matrix* that the consortium was made up of experienced media professionals. "The three principal directors all have extensive production experience. Andrew Mark Sewell was formerly Creative Director of BBC Worldwide, Simon Moorhead is a film producer whose latest film *MirrorMask* is for Jim Henson Pictures and of course Paul Darrow needs no introduction," he said.

Darrow's character, Avon, will be the only returning member of the original crew. The plot picks up the story twenty-five years after the crew of the *Liberator/Scorpio* apparently met their deaths and features Avon's re-emergence after years in prison to become the reluctant figurehead of a revolution in a crumbling Federation.

The new story is based on an idea by the late Terry Nation, creator of the original series. Paul Darrow says: "Terry and I

were close friends and we will produce a worthy tribute to his creative legacy taking his original concept into an entirely new and exciting realm that will win a whole new audience."

More details at www.blakes7.com.



Making a Hallmark

Hallmark Entertainment, a production company usually known for sickly sweet family dramas, will make a four hour miniseries based on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* starring Alec Newman (*Sci Fi's Dune*), Luke Goss (*Blade 2* and *Bros*) and Julie Delpy (*An American Werewolf in Paris*). Also in production is a miniseries based on H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* starring Patrick Swayze as Allan Quatermain.

Scorsese on Sci-fi

With some reports linking *Goodfellas*' director Martin Scorsese with a major sci-fi film trilogy (see *Flicker*) the *Sci-Fi Channel* has confirmed that he will be producing a miniseries to be broadcast on the cable network in 2005.

Called *The Twelve* it is set around an FBI investigation

into a mysterious chain of events that may lead to the end of the world on the twelfth day of Christmas.

New imports on Sci Fi UK

Sci Fi UK's September schedule will feature two new American imports. *John Doe* was a short-lived (one season) but reasonably well-received show about a mysterious hero who appears to know everything, except his own identity. *The Visitor* from Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin (*Independence Day*) stars John Corbett (*Sex and the City*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*) as a missing World War Two pilot who turns up in 1997. Described as "thoughtful" and a "cross between *Starman* and *Kung Fu*" the series was also quickly cancelled but has developed something of a cult following in America.

Dead on



Martin McGrath on *The Dead Zone*, perhaps the best fantasy show currently on television.

Unless you have satellite or cable television then, at least for the moment *The Dead Zone* will mean nothing to you.

Which is a shame because the *Sci Fi Channel's* American import may just be the best fantasy programme on television at the moment.

The film owes its basic premise to a Stephen King novel. David Cronenberg directed a superior adaptation to the novel in 1983 starring Christopher Walken. The television show shares the same premise – Johnny Walker wakes after five years in a coma to discover that he has lost his girlfriend and his past life but that he has gained the power to glimpse the future of those he comes into contact with.

The television incarnation is less disturbing than Cronenberg's film – hardly a surprise – but it can still deliver effective chills. Two stand-out episodes from the second season "Cabin Pressure" and "The Man Who Never Was" play very effectively on the limits of Johnny's (a very good Anthony Michael Hall) powers.

In "Cabin Pressure" Johnny becomes aware that the plane he is on is going to crash but he cannot tell how or why. I found it a genuinely gripping piece of television as he struggles first to convince anyone of what he's seen and then to work out exactly what is going to happen.

"The Man Who Never Was", by contrast, opens with a chilling vision in which Johnny watches himself fade away. The conclusion is a little mundane but the start of the episode certainly grabs the attention.

Underlying the standalone episodes is an arc, borrowed from the book, in which Johnny sees the future of ambitious local politician Greg Strillon (Sean Patrick Flannery – *The Young Indiana Jones*) who will go on to become America's president and cause Armageddon.

This arc, because it has moved so slowly and often gets pushed aside

for weeks at a time, is perhaps *The Dead Zone's* greatest weakness. I can understand why television producers feel the need to give shows like this an arc, it allows the regular viewers to feel part of the show's mythology, but unless it moves on and can be sustained over a long period then, in my view, it can simply drag everything else around it.

The Dead Zone has been a success in America where it is shown on the USA Network. It is already the highest-rated cable show in history and the second season has been extended by a further seven episodes that will be broadcast this summer in America. One of these episodes, "The Hunt for Osama", has achieved some notoriety already as the network pulled the episode from its original slot.

The quality of the acting in the show is generally good. There are pretty women fighting over Johnny – Nicole deBoer (Cube) is good as Johnny's former fiancée Sarah Bannerman – and stalwart character actor David Ogden Stiers (M*A*S*H) adds gravitas as Johnny's legal guardian and TV evangelist Reverend Gene Purdy.

But it is Anthony Michael Hall who dominates the show. He has an otherworldly, slightly off-centre screen presence that makes it hard to believe that this is the same man who starred in the 80s teen movies *Weird Science* and *The Breakfast Club*. Still, it is perfect for the part. His Johnny Walker is both vulnerable and yet fiercely determined to use his gift for good. It is a fine performance.

The Dead Zone can be hard to catch, but perhaps a terrestrial channel will pick it up in the future. With Stephen King's name attached a show of this quality deserves to pick up a decent audience in this country.

• *Sci Fi UK* is repeating *The Dead Zone* on Thursdays at 8pm. The seven new episodes will be shown in October.

Fort: Damned facts and fictions

**Foundation
favourites**
Number Four: *The Outcast
Manufacturers* by Charles Fort

"I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while." Charles Fort studied everything from falling fish to lights in the sky and hated nothing more than a closed mind. He also wrote three and a half million words of fiction. **Andy Sawyer** reads *The Outcast Manufacturers*, his only published novel.

Neither science fiction nor fantasy, *The Outcast Manufacturers* (B.W. Dodge, 1909) is at first sight an odd novel to be in a collection devoted to these genres. But take a look at the name of the author again. Charles Fort (immortalised in the title of the magazine of anomalies, the *Fortean Times*) was the great recorder of "damned facts"—falls of frogs, mysterious disappearances, lights in the sky. The fruit of years scribbling down obscure stories in the British Museum was four books: *The Book of the Damned*, *New Lands*, *Lo! and Wild Talents*. One of the many writers inspired by Fort's resolute scepticism was Eric Frank Russell who took his "I think we're property" as the theme for his novel *Sinister Barrier*. Russell's copy of the book is now in Liverpool University Library, part of the archive deposited by his daughter Erica Metcalfe following the arrival of the Science Fiction Foundation Collection in 1993.

The Outcast Manufacturers, says Damon Knight in his biography of Fort (Charles Fort: *Prophet of the Unexplained*), came out of Fort's days as a struggling New York writer in the early years of the twentieth century. According to novelist Theodore Dreiser, quoted in Knight's biography, Fort produced "the best humorous short stories that I have ever seen produced in America". He lived, with his wife Anna, in the same poverty-ridden tenements he wrote about, and he wrote — 3,500,000 words of novels alone, according to his own estimate. Only one of these novels was ever published, and it is not easy to find. The manuscripts of the others were apparently destroyed.

Incongruous

Is it any good? Well, Knight writes of "Fort's eye for the incongruous and unexpected, his perception of hidden

relationships," and the "trick of perspective" by which he makes his characters lively, engaging, sometimes even poignant puppets. His physical description is almost like a series of notes, jotted down at white heat, as is the breathless energy of his description of events. Knight quotes his groping, gasping style in the way he describes one

character, Miss Dumphy: "She flushed a little-flushes, like goldfish in an aquarium, fluttering in her globe-like, colorless face-goldfish in a globe of milk, perhaps-or goldfish struggling in a globe of whitewash, have it." Readers of Fort's non-fiction will be familiar with this exhilarating rush of words, but presented in fiction it seems almost avant-garde.

Struggling

Fort's only novel gives us a few weeks in the lives of struggling New Yorkers. Sim, a young man from the country, takes employment with The Universal Manufacturing Company, a shady mail-order company run by the idealistic but wholly impractical Birtwhistle, full of ideas and ambitions but incapable of carrying anything out: a good-hearted man but a petty fraudster. Fort shows us a group of energetic characters on the decline from poverty to destitution—at one point they are evicted from their apartment, forced to wander from



Charles Fort: "what science fiction he could have written"

park bench to park bench and only return to a roof over their heads because their landlord has political ambitions that would be wrecked by a reputation for dispossessing tenants. We see the instability of Irish-American New York tenement life in a series of remarkable vivid comic sketches, particularly the rows between Birtwhistle and his wife, but also scenes, which are

both grotesque and poignant:

"The sound of indistinct profanity shouted in a room upstairs; the oath repeated, but this time, instead of being shouted angrily, it seemed uttered as if appealingly."

"That poor old man's dying," said Mrs Birtwhistle to Sim. "It's old Mr Strout; he won't last long now, because he's had two strokes already... the second took all his speech away except one oath that was always on his lips when he was well. Now that's all he can say, and he shrieks it when he's mad about anything... He swelters in the dark, and tries to tell them he'll be good if they'll only give him light and air, but his oath is all his lips will form; so he groans it or roars it."

Attention

Fort draws attention to his characters (Mrs McKicker in her red hat "an effect like that of a stern gray shaft of a ruined temple. Straight and lonely in a Greek plain, and made burlesque

by some mocking hand that had placed millinery on top of it.") His despairing, angry women, constantly watching the price of meat, and his charmingly feckless or mutely furious men are caricatures, but they are the wonderfully observed caricatures of the comic-strips of the period, the Katzenjammer kids, Mutt and Jeff, or the Yellow Kid, struggling immigrants only a missed rent away from the abyss, but full of life.

Caricature perhaps—there's definitely an "Arrah!" or two among the explanations although I'm pretty certain never a "begorrah!"—but the characters are too real to be stereotypes. Fort's impressionistic style draws our attention to New York's swirling energy—arguments, screaming babies, furious denunciations and passionate dreams. Stories weave their way through the novel. The almost humphbacked Miss Guffy is brought to a tragic end by her gratitude to the Birtwhistles. Asbury Parker never lets go of a bundle of letters from his wife. One day, fantasises Birtwhistle, his schemes will bear fruit. One day someone will appreciate what he is. One day...

What if?

Reading *The Outcast Manufacturers*, you wish more of Fort's fiction had been preserved. What if he'd written fiction based upon his indefatigable chronicling of loopy "damned facts"? What science fiction he could have written, if he had turned his mind to it! Even so, as a novel of "real life" *The Outcast Manufacturers* stands up well compared to, say, the contemporary stories of O. Henry. Once dipped into, its turbulent humour and inventive imagery are unforgettable. It certainly does not deserve its neglect and considering Fort's position as someone who has given his name to a particular cast of mind, it really ought to be brought back to life. How about it, *Fortean Times*?

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: <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.

A faithful servant

Stephen Baxter on the troubled times and eventual triumph of the Galileo mission. First approved in 1977, Galileo will plunge into Jupiter on September 21, 2003 – ending a successful mission and making one final sacrifice in the name of science.

In the year we lost Columbia, two more space veterans are fading from our view. In my latest novel *Coalescent* (Gollancz, Sep 2003) I touch on the fate of the Pioneer space probes. Launched in the 1970s, they were the first to the outer planets, and then went on to become our first ambassadors to the stars. But the signal from Pioneer 10 was lost in January.

This year, too, the Galileo space probe will meet its end – and oddly the destinies of all these pioneering craft are intertwined.

In the 1970s, after the fascinating results from Voyager and Pioneer, NASA's appetite was whetted for a Jupiter orbiter. The Galileo mission was approved as long ago as 1977 – just after I left school, so back in the Iron Age ... But Galileo was born in troubled times, and had to endure a twelve-year odyssey through NASA politics before it got off the ground.

Triumph

After the triumph of Apollo, NASA's unmanned space programme went into serious decline. Allowing for inflation, by 1980 NASA's budget would be only about a third of the 1966 appropriation, the peak of the Apollo spending years. And throughout the 1970s NASA's energies were devoted to the development of the space shuttle, the future of its manned space programme. NASA mortgaged nearly everything – science, space exploration, the development of new technologies – to build its spaceplane. Overall, the unmanned planetary exploration budget, adjusted for inflation, was slashed by a factor of four from 1974, when expenditures peaked on the Viking missions to Mars, to 1977, when Galileo was approved. Astonishingly, for a while it even looked as if the Deep Space Network system of radio telescopes would be closed down, which would have left the Voyagers, already on their way, to send their pictures of Uranus and Neptune to an unhearing Earth.

Only Galileo survived: by 1982 it was the last major planetary mission in the budget.

Galileo was a big probe, but it was actually lighter than the Viking Mars probes, and could have been launched on the Viking launcher – the Titan III-E Centaur – as early as 1982. But that would have meant launching it on a throwaway booster, and that wouldn't do. Galileo was slated for launch on the shuttle – and it was

A faithful servant: Galileo passes close to Io (JPL/NASA)



soon bogged down in the shuttle programme's politics and delays.

Shuttle

Even by 1979 it became clear that Galileo was too heavy to be carried on the shuttle. So various options were explored. At one time it was planned to split Galileo in two (1), and launch it on two separate shuttle flights. Finally it was decided that Galileo, having been hoisted into Earth orbit by the shuttle, would be sent on its way by a Centaur booster. The shuttle had carried booster rockets before, but always small and relatively safe solid-fuel rockets. Centaur, though, uses liquid fuel.

Galileo would have been launched in May 1986. But the shuttle's launch schedules were getting compressed. That spring NASA was planning to send up not one but two shuttles equipped with Centaurs; Challenger would have sent the solar probe Ulysses on its way, while Atlantis would have launched Galileo. The engineers were very unhappy. They were only using Centaurs in the first place because budget cuts had caused the cancellation of a planned 'space tug'. And the safety aspects had simply not been thought through. When I went to Houston to research my novel *Moonseed* in 1997, a NASA

insider gave me something of the flavour of that frantic period: 'We were planning a shit-load of weird stuff before Challenger blew ... Because both [Galileo and Ulysses] were going to Jupiter – and because the launch window was tight – we'd have had two shuttles on orbit at the same time.'

Payload

'Not only that, you'd have had both of those ships with liquid oxygen/hydrogen loads in the payload bay. And we never truly figured how we were going to handle that. We couldn't figure out how to keep the load topped up on the pad. Would you run cryogenic lines through the skin of the orbiter? What if you have to abort? You have an explosive fuel load aboard, and we couldn't figure out a way to dump it fast enough in case of an abort. For instance you might be flying an RTLS abort [Return To Launch Site], which is a powered fly-around back to the Cape, a hell of an aerobatic manoeuvre which we've never, in fact, tried. And in the middle of this you'd have to dump your forty thousand pounds of LOX and hydrogen, separately.'

'Or what if you do a TAL [Trans-Atlantic Landing] and finish up at some airfield in Africa? How are you going to process the stuff there?'

It takes three days to get the C-130s [cargo aircraft] out there, and in that time you could get an explosive build-up of gases in your payload bay.

'Well, hell, after Challenger we just never looked at that again ...'

Challenger was destroyed in January 1986. After the wide-ranging safety review that followed, Centaurs were banned from the shuttle payload bay – but that meant Galileo was without a launch vehicle once more.

Atlantis

Galileo was finally launched, by Atlantis, in October 1989. By now its booster was the 'Inertial Upper Stage', a solid-fuel rocket intended for defence satellites. The IUS was safe, but so underpowered that Galileo was going to have to rely on gravity assists to get to Jupiter. It flew a contorted course through the inner solar system, passing Venus once and Earth twice. Galileo took six years to reach Jupiter, arriving in 1995 (its original flight plan would have been three years).

However, despite a few more technical problems, notably a balky main antenna, it was a marvellous success. Even that extended tour of the solar system returned some good results, including the first close encounter with an asteroid. When Galileo finally reached its destination it threw a probe into Jupiter itself, and then spent eight years sailing among the Jovian moons.

But in September 2003 Galileo will be deliberately crashed into the Jupiter. It has lasted three times longer in its Jovian orbit than it was designed for, but now it is running out of the propellant it needs to keep its antenna pointing at Earth: its time is up. The ground control team stopped work on 28 February, leaving the onboard computer to manage the final few months. Even Galileo's demise is a wondrous gesture, for it is being deliberately destroyed to ensure that there is not the smallest chance that it will ever impact Europa, and perhaps contaminate the fragile life forms that may exist in that moon's putative ocean. The crash will be a spectacular end to a triumphant mission.

Space projects last lifetimes, and Galileo's contested destiny was shaped by decisions made by President Nixon and others decades ago. Like Columbia, like Pioneer, I've been following the perils of Galileo all my adult life, but now its long journey is over. Goodbye, old friend.

Interaction stations

**CHECK
POINT**
News on fans and fandom

It might be two years away, but the planning is already well underway for Interaction, the Worldcon in Glasgow 2005. **Mark Plummer** talks about the work underway and he reviews *Emerald City*, a fanzine with actual science fiction in it!

I suppose there's something about the fan temperament—all that time spent poking about in books about the far future an' all—that inclines us to take the long view of things. Thus while many of my professional colleagues are still trying to puzzle out their holiday arrangements for the summer or even what they'll be having for dinner tonight, I can confidently predict where I will be in early August 2005 when Britain—and more specifically Glasgow—once again plays host to the World Science Fiction Convention.

Let this come across as some sort of goshwoboyboy fannish enthusiasm for the idea of a Worldcon in what is, comically speaking, if not my back garden then the back garden of the house just across the road and up a bit, you know, the one with the Charles Rennie Macintosh wallpaper. I should say that in common with many people I have a certain ambivalence about the event, mainly because the staging of a Worldcon—as currently constituted—represents such an enormous logistical task. As conventions get bigger they become exponentially more complex to organise and the whole process can end up sapping everybody's energy as staffers attempt to balance their convention roles with real-world pressures like paying work.

Manage

Interaction, the formal name of the 2005 event, is keen to manage this problem and it was one of the themes of the first staff weekend, billed as Construction, which took place in Cardiff in mid-July. This was mostly top-level planning stuff given that we're still two years off the event but there will be further events in the coming years as everybody starts getting into the detail. For more information about what's happening with Interaction, see the fourth issue of their 'behind the scenes' newsletter *Sailing the Clyde*, online at www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/stel.htm. And there is plenty of scope to get involved at a wide range of levels, from general box carrier up.

The folks behind Interaction seek sustenance after a hard day's planning.



Photograph by Cheryl Morgan

Contact: volunteers@interaction.worldcon.org.uk

And, in a rather slick link, I note that one of the people at the Construction weekend—one of four US-based fans in fact—was Cheryl Morgan, editor of the Hugo-nominated fanzine *Emerald City*, the ninety-fifth issue of which has, at the time of writing, just appeared. Given that the statistical average lifespan of a fanzine is supposed to be somewhere between one and two issues, this represents quite an achievement.

Remarkable

Emerald City is so remarkable for managing the feat of being both exactly what you would and wouldn't expect from an sf fanzine. Armed with some kind of rudimentary knowledge of the form, you might say that it pretty much matches the archetype: it's an amateur publication in which a fan writes about the books she likes. Yet for those whose knowledge extends a little beyond the rudimentary, it represents the stereotype—an amateur publication in which a fan writes about the books she likes—beyond which fanzines are supposed to have risen. It's still a line that's trotted out from time to time, that of course of fanzines aren't actually about sf because of course the kind of fans who read and write for fanzines don't actually

read if any more and, yes, for some within the community I'm sure it's true but it's a long way short of a universal truth. There are plenty of fine fanzines that pay little or no attention to the mother literature, at least on the surface, but *Emerald City* is one of the ones that does care about this stuff and argues about it in an engaging and often provocative manner.

The fanzine is entirely written by Cheryl and has appeared on a solid monthly schedule since 1995. It exists on paper copy if you happen to be at a convention which also happens to have Cheryl at it, but otherwise it's available from the *Emerald City* website (www.emcit.com) which also has all the back issues) or by email as a plain text file.

The greater part of each issue is devoted to book reviews and there's a fairly thorough coverage of major recent titles. Now before I get accused of undermining my colleagues across the way in another part of the BSFA camp, I should stress that its coverage is nothing like as comprehensive as that of *Vector*, which shouldn't be surprising as we're talking about something which is all one person's work. But this brings a certain freedom—Cheryl can cover what she likes at whatever length seems appropriate (#94 with a June date carries a 3,000-word review of *The Light Ages*, for instance)—and by presenting such a concentrated dose of one person's opinions it makes it relatively easy to build up a picture of Cheryl's tastes and the extent to which these are likely to mesh with your own.

Coverage

The other main area of coverage is the convention scene and #95 looks at the recent Westercon (a US regional convention, this held in Seattle) and also at Construction. When it comes to this side of the fanzine, Cheryl's more inclined to be critical, suggesting that she's either more picky about what

she reads and reviews than what she attends or that her working definition of a 'convention' is 'a gathering of sf fans that has something wrong with it'. This isn't necessarily unhealthy: fans have been running conventions for over sixty years and you'd have thought we'd have worked out how to do it by now, but no, we haven't, as Cheryl regularly points out. A small criticism, though, is that I rather regret the fact that (unlike most fanzines) *Emerald City* doesn't have a letter column. It seems to me that it's full of the kind of material that has the potential to spark a lively debate. But that's Cheryl's call.

Anybody reading *Emerald City* regularly will quickly come to the realisation that Cheryl is something of a world traveller, bouncing around between the US, the UK and Australia. And right now—he said, groping for another link, however tenuous—two British fans are taking part in the Going Under Fan Fund (GUFF) race to take a delegate to Australia in 2004, a trip that will probably take in the national convention (Natcon) in Canberra.

Founded

GUFF was founded in 1979 and every couple of years takes someone from Europe to Australia or vice versa when, by tortuous manipulation of the acronym, it becomes the Get Up-and-over Fan Fund. This year's candidates are Doug Bell and Pat McMurray and you can get a ballot form at www.eridindsoy.com/guff/ballot03.pdf or, if you don't have net access, from the European administrator Paul Kincaid at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ. Votes must reach the administrator by Monday, 10 November 2003 which currently seems a long way away but act now 'cos it may seem like a long time but, well, it is two years to the Glasgow Worldcon... that's hardly anything at all.



Photograph by John O'Halligan

Cheryl Morgan accepts the Lotus Award for "Best Fantasy Novel" on behalf of Pan Macmillan, publishers of China Miéville's *The Scar*.

Once upon a time in the Midlands

As Novacon prepares for its thirty-third outing, **Steve Green** takes a look at the history of Britain's biggest annual, regional SF convention and looks forward to what might be on the "menu" for this year's incarnation.

In ancient times, primitive Britons would gather within isolated stone circles and worship the dying embers of autumn. Millennia later, groups of British science fiction fans can still be discovered, huddling in hotel bars and marking the calendar's twilight with their arcane rite of "Novacon" (a corruption of the Old English for "desperate fun").

It may be quite difficult for younger *Matrix* readers to imagine the social wasteland offered by UK fandom in the late 1960s, a thin scattering of local meetings and one major science fiction event each Easter.

However, 1971 saw an initiative from Birmingham's short-lived Aston University SF Group, for a one-off convention in the nearby Imperial Centre Hotel, with James White as guest of honour. (He'd resume the role fourteen years later, and the short story award in his memory was fittingly presented during last year's closing ceremony, following a touching speech by James' teenage grand-daughter).

Flight

It proved too good an idea not to take flight and plans for a second Novacon (swiftly adopted by the neighbouring Birmingham SF Group) were in motion even before the first had wound down. The change of ownership was fortuitous: while the university group eventually dissolved, the Brum Group rapidly established itself as the UK's leading "formal" gathering (ie. monthly guests, entrance fees, regular newsletters), providing the fledgling "alternative convention" with vital organisational and financial stability.



As a result, Novacon became the UK's first annual regional event (as opposed to the Eastercon, which moved from city to city each year – actually leaving England for the first time in 1980). Turnout has reflected the growth both in sf and the fanfanz calendar, rising from the initial 140+ through its 1984 peak of circa 550 (forcing the committee to run an alternative programme stream) to the current level of 250-300.

Walsall

Most instalments have been held in Birmingham, although venues in Coventry, Malvern and Solihull were toyed with before the whole shebang relocated to Walsall's Quality Hotel in 2001. Its instant popularity – a combination

of centralised layout around the bar and an uncommonly co-operative management – has been reinforced by frozen room rates, so a further move is unlikely in the near future.

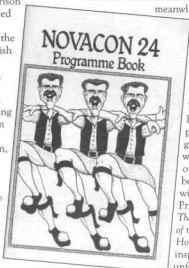
The first six Novacons reflected their fanfanz undercurrent by alternating guest authors with fans (Doreen Rogers, Ken Slater, David Kyle), while more recent instalments accentuated the science in science fiction (biologist Dr Jack Cohen, mathematician Prof Ian Stewart, NASA astronomer Dr Inge Hoyer, cybernetics specialist Prof Kevin Warwick).

Otherwise, with rare exceptions (Anne

McCaffrey, Harry Harrison – both Americans settled in Eire), Novacon has chosen its guests from the ranks of British and Irish writers, some veterans of the field (Ted Tubb, John Brunner, Ken Bulmer), others still in the throes of establishing their reputation (Storm Constantine, Graham Joyce, Peter F Hamilton, Geoff Hamilton). A few brave souls have even made a return visit (Brian Aldiss, Bob Shaw, Harry Harrison, Iain Banks, James White, Christopher Priest).

Consummated

The third Novacon consummated its links with fanfanz fandom with the launch of the Nova Awards, initially a jury-judged pat on the back for that year's best fanfanz but since expanded both democratically (all Novacon members are now eligible to vote, provided they can exhibit a basic familiarity with the field, a hurdle which might improve the Hugos no end) and thematically (there are



now three statuettes: best fanfanz, fan writer and fan artist).

As well as a who's who of leading Britfanz and fanfanzes – Peter Weston's *Speculation*, Don West, Michael Ashley, David Langford's *Tull'Dhu*,

Sue Mason, Dave Bridges, Yvonne Rowse's *Barmad*, Dave Mooring, *Platka* – the list of winners also proves an intriguing guide to the ever-changing tastes of their audience. Recent revisions in the rules have

meanwhile opened

the contest up to Eire and electronic fanfanzes.

Since 1979, Novacon has also promoted its guests' work with a series of chapbooks, beginning with Chris Priest's memoir *The Making of the Lesbian Horse* (its title inspired by the unfortunate French

translation of *The Inverted World*). Last year, Ian McDonald entertained members with a hefty extract from his novel-in-progress *Cyberabad* (the first souvenir booklet to carry a "parental guidance" warning).

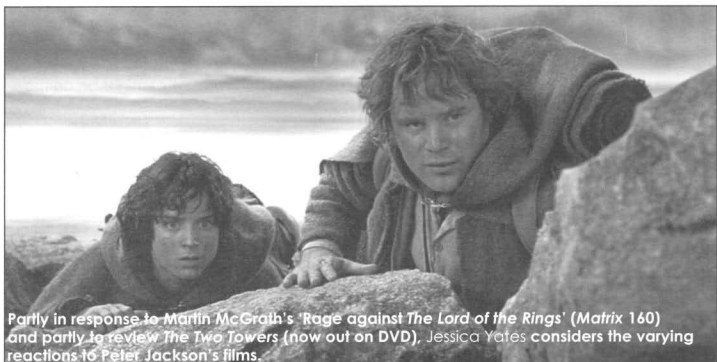
This year's guest, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, has already taken an interest in the food on offer at the post-con party (he's a former chef, after all, perhaps this year's volume – the twenty-fifth – will be a cookery book from one of the alternative histories which drive the plots of such novels as *Rushdaze* and *Felatheen*!

Steadfast

So there you have: well into its fourth decade, Novacon remains steadfast as ever. For full details of this year's event (7-9 November at the Quality Hotel, Walsall), check out the website at: www.novacon.org.uk, e-mail Novacon 33 at n33@zoom.co.uk or send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. For information on the Nova Awards, e-mail novacon33@yahoo.co.uk. For information on the Birmingham SF Group, go to www.bsfj.freewebservers.com.



Return of The Ring



Partly in response to Martin McGrath's 'Rage against The Lord of the Rings' (Matrix 160) and partly to review The Two Towers (now out on DVD), Jessica Yates considers the varying reactions to Peter Jackson's films.

It seems there are four basic reactions to the film of *The Lord of the Rings* – given that the saga has an enormous following, sold millions of copies and is hated by a number of literary critics and academics.

The purist knows the text well and approves only a film treating the story chronologically, using nearly all Tolkien's dialogue, with limited abridgement. The enthusiast, like me, has been looking forward to the live-action film ever since Bakshi failed to make the second part twenty years ago. I am prepared to accept the amalgamation and disappearance of supporting characters, some new dialogue (though not contemporary slang such as "Let's hunt some orc") and even new scenes. Prepared by stills and trailers, I accept the appearance of the characters and landscape as approximating my vision.

Novice

The novice has read the book once, or not at all, and enjoys the film as a historical genre movie like *The Vikings*, *Batman*, or *Excalibur*. He accepts the costumes, heroic dialogue and epic battles rather more than some mainstream critics accept the book. Some novices "came out" as Tolkien virgins when reviewing *Fellowship of the Rings*, for example David Ansen in *Newsweek*: "I didn't know what Middle-earth was... The movie works. It has real passion, real emotion, real terror..."; Nigel Andrews in *The Financial Times*: "I refused to read all those tomes about elves... After twenty

minutes I realised that Peter Jackson's film... is... close to great film-making"; and Jonathan Ross in *The Mirror*: "the film is fantastic... one of the best fantasy films ever made... I've never actually read either *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*."

Finally, we come to the untouchables – such as Martin. If they read the book, they didn't like it. They don't like the films either.

Convert

I can't aim to convert Martin. But the two films have done tremendous box-office, indicating that there are thousands of enthusiasts and novices, some of whom, I dare say, have gone at least twice to see them on the big screen before buying the video/DVD and the soundtrack. The book trilogy also sold very well.

Now for some more critical arguments. Mark Lawson received some hate mail from Tolkien fans after criticising the film (and the books, presumably) on television. (I saw *Newsnight Review*, and thought the line-up of two pro- and two anti- critics was fair.) Lawson went on, in *The Guardian*, to compare readers' expectations for *Harry Potter* films and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. "This hostility to interpretation is anti-cinematic. The point of view is to rip up the words and reassemble them as pictures which may – which should – differ in key details." Boyd Tonkin added in the *New Statesman*: "Film culture treats books – its chief source of narratives – with a scorn tempered

by ancestor worship... homage to the source will vie with shameless meddling... movies have always used and abused books."

On the other hand, the publicity for the *Harry Potter* movies emphasised their closeness to the books, and how, unusually, the author had the right of approval. This was what the books' readers wanted, and the straightforward narrative of the *Potter* books seems to be relatively easy to translate into a screenplay. More than one-and-a-quarter million video and DVD copies of HP1 were sold on the first day of its release. Lawson's views cut no ice with the *Harry Potter* production team, nor, as far as costume, landscape and acting go, with the Tolkien film team. "These films... are being made by the fans of the book, for the fans of the book!" Peter Jackson said in the *FOTR Insider Guide*, by Brian Sibley.

Purists

As far as narrative goes, Jackson was reported many times (see Sibley's two large books on the films' making) as saying they could not film *LOTR* straight from the book. "They made a considered decision to change, amend or ignore Tolkien's text" (McKellen quoted by Sibley). Yet purists and enthusiasts alike will not be pleased if any of the big climactic moments are drastically reworked or even omitted, let alone if the new scenes and dialogue ring false to our idea of Tolkien's original conception. Here is Jackson's pledge in Sibley's

book: "we have really tried not to lose anything we feel is key or important to the books and why, almost without exception, all those things that are memorable and vivid from reading the books are there in the movies."

Experience

Caring so much about fidelity is a new experience for me: I don't usually know a book so well as to complain when the film invents scenes. I approved of the dramatic changes made to the plots of the Heston SF movies *Planet of the Apes* and *Soylent Green*; and even, as a sofist, preferred the remake of *The Vanishing*. However, I approve of some, but not all of Jackson's changes, and will now analyse some of the main ones.

Martin complains of the "long, slow, languid, infinite detail" spent on New Zealand's countryside. Fans of the movies would have wished them even longer. If you know the book, you will be surprised at the indecent haste with which Frodo leaves The Shire, pleased at the real-time shots of Gandalf researching the ancient history of the Ring. (Pedantic note: why the naked torch and candles in Gondor's archives? Why is the vital manuscript left carelessly on top of other scrolls instead of being safe in a casket?) And they'll be thrilled because the journey to Buckleberry Ferry has been turned into a chase. Tolkien was rather good at thinking up fresh dangers and ambushes on the way – yes, the Watcher in the Water was Tolkien's idea.

I accepted the amalgamation of Arwen with Glorfindel before the Flight to the Ford. However, where Glorfindel set Frodo on his horse and stayed behind to fight the Black Riders, Arwen carries Frodo, who is very weak, across the Ford and defies the riders herself. In the book Frodo makes a last effort to declare "By Elbereth and Luthien the Fair, you shall have neither the Ring nor me!" In the film, Arwen defies the Riders: "If you want him, come and claim him", thus encouraging them to cross the ford and to be trapped by the flood created by elven magic. This enhances Arwen's role at Frodo's expense. This diminution of Frodo's heroism continues: in the snowy mountains there is an invented scene where the ring falls off Frodo's neck and Boromir picks it up. Aragorn makes him give it back. Frodo seems unable to speak from shock. In *The Two Towers*, this pattern continues. The power of the ring weakens Frodo much too soon, in my opinion.

My general opinion of *The Two Towers* is positive: full marks for the Tolkienian Rohirrim, Eorlas, Wormtongue, Theoden, the fight with the Balrog, the return of Gandalf, the portrayal of the Ents, the orcs in chase and the siege of Helm's Deep. Wargamers too will enjoy the details of the siege: the ladders, "turtle" battering ram and explosives. The Oliphants were magnificent – CGI of course, but in the middle distance they completely fooled me.

Roughhouse

I approved of the roughhouse in Theoden's hall; it was logical that Wormtongue's henchmen would try to stop Gandalf reaching the king. I also thought the warg attack was logical, especially as the warg attack in *FOTR* had been cut. Purists would accept neither. Even enthusiasts started to worry when Aragorn was apparently killed and then rescued – though the Appendix watched over him in thought". According to *The Two Towers Photo Guide*, which may contain material that will be included in the extended cut on DVD, Aragorn sets Theoden's horse Brego free, as his master is dead. Brego then returns to nuzzle Aragorn back to consciousness.

My chief complaint about *The Two Towers* reside in the three narrow escapes and two wrong decisions in the second half of the film. In all these, Jackson moves away from Tolkien to distort character and they may have a knock-on effect in the third film.

The Ents stand aside from the war, and the hobbits trick Treebeard into seeing the destruction of the trees near Isengard. Treebeard would have known about this – as he does in the book. The film also shows Treebeard and Gandalf together. Gandalf would



Lord of the Rings: No laughing matter.

not have left Fangorn Forest unless he was sure that Treebeard would act against Saruman. In book two, the ride to Isengard needs only a small force, as Gandalf knows that the Ents have destroyed Saruman's power.

The remainder of my criticism deals with the Frodo-Sam scenes – apart from the portrayal of Gollum, which is technically and dramatically brilliant, a significant contribution to the Oscar this year for visual effects. Jackson said in *Starburst*: "Elijah can register such subtle emotion on his face... that I really loved doing close-ups on him". I have no complaint about Elijah having the right face for Frodo, but time and again he is shown as passive and unable to act. After he has recruited Gollum, he falls into a bog in the Dead Marshes – not in the book – and Gollum rescues him. Then Sam falls down a little cliff in front of Mordor Gate – and Frodo rescues him by using the elf-cloaks – lucky they work to make the hobbits invisible as a boulder.

Pathetic

These pathetic escapades show Frodo and Sam as too accident prone to be entrusted with such a quest. In fact, Frodo was more of a leader until he fell prey to Shelob. Just before he returns to the Shire he lists the three wounds he received, due either to the Ring's temptation or carelessness: "I am wounded with knife, sting and tooth" – and that should be that! In *SFX* Sibley wrote that Jackson "understands that the heart of the story is Frodo and Sam and the Ring" and that is correct, but a little more heroism from Frodo and a little less protectiveness from Sam would have been more Tolkienian.

Finally, Jackson has Faramir take the wrong decision first, which leads Frodo and Sam to Osgiliath and another narrow escape. In the book Frodo and Sam convince Faramir to help them, before they leave the cave. In *SFX*, Jackson said he wanted to surprise the audience so they would keep "wondering what is going to happen". Certainly, many were surprised – unless they read the *Photo Guide* first! Faramir is convinced to let Frodo go, by seeing the power of the Ring tempting Frodo in the presence of a Nazgul, possibly the Witch-king. According to *Cinefa*, this was adapted from Frodo seeing the Witch-king "on his way to Mordor" (ie outside Minas Morgul). But in the book, Frodo in hiding is tempted to put on the Ring, but forces himself to grasp Galadriel's phial. In the film, Sam drags him away and he draws the sword on faithful Sam. Apart from this distortion of the book, doesn't the Nazgul now know that the Ring is in Osgiliath? In the book, Sauron doesn't know that the ring is so close to Mordor. He thinks it will be taken to Minas Tirith, if anything.

Criticisms

These criticisms, obvious to those who know the books, will go unnoticed by the novices who may enjoy *The Two Towers* even more for the extra suspense they engender. But I'm concerned whether the great moments of *The Return of the King* will be played as Tolkien wrote them, from the challenge of the Witch-king to the Crack of Doom, and then to the Grey Havens. Will I resist the temptation to read the *Photo Guide* in advance (if there is one)? Stills published so far have been reassuring, especially Frodo

holding up the star-glass. But given the incredible attempt to recreate the world of Middle-earth in the minutest detail why tinker with motivation?

Looking again through Martin's critique, I find much of what he writes purely subjective. For example, he says that: "The struggle at Helm's Deep is impressive but too long" – considering it took nine weeks of night shooting to film, much in the rain, we owe these guys half-an-hour of our time to watch the work! All the major newspaper reviews were positive.

Politics

Just at the end of his review Martin touches on Tolkien's politics. Well, warlords who invade other people's countries and massacre them are still, tragically, with us today. We understand that Jackson did not film "The Scouring of the Shire", where the hobbits return to find the Shire occupied by Saruman's henchmen. However, it was dramatised in the BBC radio production. This contains scenes relevant to Tolkien's time and since, which have been compared to Hitler's occupation of Western Europe. I also regret this. After all, I love the films and want to see the hobbits deal with the ruffians as Tolkien described. I would also like to read Martin's review of *The Return of the King*, if he can force himself to see it. If he still doesn't like it, I am sure he will be in a small minority!

• If anyone wants the dates of the articles cited please contact Mark. Please note also that Jessica's original piece contained the correct accents in every Tolkien name, we didn't have time to reproduce them. Sorry.

Martin replies: Jessica is perfectly correct, my response to LOTR is purely subjective. I would regard with suspicion anyone who claimed they could review anything objectively. But I am happy to stand by my comments and to justify them.

Jessica's piece rather confirms my prejudice that these films were primarily made to appeal to those who already knew Tolkien's world and wanted to revel in it. And this is why, for me, these films fail.

They are nostalgic. They are conservative. They are reverent. None of these qualities appeal to me, though I can appreciate why they appeal to others.

I can also appreciate the technical quality and the hard work contained within the film without granting the film-makers *carte blanche*. Having spent some time on film sets I can pretty confidently state that all films are hard work, but no matter how hard people work, some films simply aren't very good. The Helm's Deep sequence is a technical marvel but is too long. It piles violent image after violent image until these images stop having any impact or meaning. Instead of increasing the tension and drama, it is dissipated.

I am happy that these films have been a huge success – it is good for the genre – but even so I may be in a tiny minority. I stand by my view that, as pieces of cinema divorced from the mythology of the books, these films do not deserve the praise heaped upon them.

Back Brain Recorded



Martin Sketchley talks to Chris Reed, founder of Back Brain Recluse - one of the most prestigious small press magazines in the UK — and organiser of the New SF Alliance/BBR Catalogue, an invaluable resource for all those interested in the small press in this country and abroad.

As mentioned in the last Ironing Board, there's a wave of new SF writers and artists breaking through at the moment. And many of these cut their teeth in a tried-and-tested breaking ground for SF/fantasy/slipstream — whatever you might want to call it — the small press. One of the best sources for small press magazines is undoubtedly the NSFA/BBR Catalogue, run by Chris Reed.

Born in 1965 in Surrey, Reed founded one of the UK's most prestigious small press magazines: *Back Brain Recluse* (BBR) in 1984 while still at school and quickly became dubbed 'the angry young man of the small press'. In the 1993 awards of the American Readercon convention, BBR was named Best Fiction Magazine. BBR #24: *Angel Body and Other Magic for the Soul*, was recently published.

Comprised of more than 1,700 small press books and magazines from over 100 different publishers from all over the world, the NSFA/BBR Catalogue is updated weekly. It covers the whole spectrum of sub-genre material, from novels through to short fiction, poetry and even 'how-to' books offering guidance for those who want it. The new arrivals at the time of writing were New York Review of Science Fiction #176, the evocatively titled *Gobhite Quarterly* #2, *Crimewave* #7 and *The Third Alternative* #34.

Wondering

While wondering how Chris finds time to do all this and have a life, I asked him a few questions...like how did this BBR/NSFA thing get started in the first place? 'It came about at the Iconoclasm convention in Leeds in 1989,' says Reed. 'Dave Hughes from *Works Magazine* was doing a lot of networking with other small press publishers, and he arranged for several of us to share a table in the dealers' room.' Did they spend the whole time discussing photocopyers and guillottes, I wondered. 'Something like that. It

BBR Catalogue

worked really well, and it was clear that pooling resources could be used in other contexts to our mutual benefit, such as advertising and distribution. It was out of that the NSFA Catalogue was born.'

I pointed out that I was a bit uncertain whether it's officially the NSFA Catalogue, or the BBR Catalogue; as it turns out, it's both. 'The BBR Catalogue was set up to focus on the titles that we (BBR) import from the USA, Australia and elsewhere,' says Reed. 'Whereas the NSFA Catalogue is primarily a sample copy service for the UK-based magazines in the co-operative.' So, is there much difference?

I asked. 'We'd keep BBR and NSFA Catalogues as two distinct printed versions, but now that we just run the website there's little to distinguish between the two, which is why we've combined them in a single database online.'

Come and go

I pointed out that lots of small press magazines come and go; I subscribed to several in the mid-90s and only one or two published further editions after that. I wondered if there are any stalwarts. 'You're

right, there is a high turnover in the small press,' admits Reed. 'Of the six magazines that founded the NSFA — *Auguries*, *BBR*, *Dream*, *Nova SF*, *The Scanner* and *Works* — BBR is the only one still active, and even then only sporadically.' So are their peaks and troughs in the number of magazines out there? 'Well, not exactly peaks and troughs: there are plenty of others coming through the ranks. The current stalwarts are *Scheherazade*, which has reached 24 issues so far, *The Third Alternative*, now up to 34 issues, and *Roadworks*, which is currently on issue 15.'

Vibrant

Having not been involved in the small press for a long time myself, I wondered what the UK scene is like at the moment — it was pretty busy back in the mid-90s. 'It's pretty vibrant,' Reed affirms. 'Andy Cox is doing good stuff at TTA Press, and Ben Jeapes was very active at Big Engine before he decided to call it a day. Overall, though, I'd suggest that there's been a general decline over the past few years.' Were there any particular reasons for that? I asked. 'I'd attribute it mostly to the rise of the Internet,

and the ease with which people can now build websites from their home PCs — web publishing today is rather like the desktop publishing of the 1990s, and blogging's the biggest growth area on the Internet at present. The Internet gives people so much more flexibility over format, and minimises overheads — there's no more stumping up the costs for printing, and you can choose between running an e-mail newsletter, keeping a web log, building a website, or even traditional typesetting served up in PDF format.'

I wondered if the number of subscribers varies much. 'I can't speak for the individual publishers in terms of their subscriber base, but from our perspective we have a pretty consistent number of people taking standing orders to magazines.' Are any publications particularly important? 'The *Third Alternative* figures highly for us, while from our overseas titles *Australis*, *On Spec* and *New York Review of Science Fiction* are all very reliable sellers.'

Business

I wondered if this is a business venture, or more of a labour of love. 'The BBR Catalogue's what I consider to be my hobby,' states Reed, 'so there's no expectation to make a pile of money out of it. I count myself fortunate that my hobby happens to break even! Having said that, though, there's a very fine line between what I do for pleasure and what I do for a living, and there's been a number of



URLs of relevance to this issue

Albedo 1 — <http://www.yellowbrickroad.ie/albedo/>

BBR Online — <http://www.bbr-online.com/catalogue/welcome.shtml>

New York Review of Science Fiction — <http://www.nyrsf.com/>

Scheherazade — <http://www.sheaz.net.co.uk/>

Simon Clarke — <http://www.bbr-online.com/nailed/index.html>

Roadworks — <http://www.roadworks-legend.co.uk/index1.htm>

The Third Alternative — <http://www.ttiapress.com/>

occasions where my hobby's been a definite door-opener.' Like what? I enquired. 'Well, my degree's in Spanish, but it was having Back Brain Reduce on my CV that got me my first job after graduation, writing, editing and laying out the Sheffield University in-house newsletter. The BBR Catalogue itself is another example: it may not be a money-spinner selling magazines that only cost a few pounds each, but when exactly the same infrastructure is applied to the books that we represent for a number of small academic publishers, which sell for thirty or forty pounds, the figures become a lot more interesting.'

Time

But it must take up a lot of valuable time, right? 'When you're your own boss there's always the sense that every second counts, especially when the boundary between work and hobby is so blurred. I've managed to automate a lot of the repetitive tasks involved in processing orders and maintaining the catalogue – a new issue of a

given magazine is automatically allocated to people with standing orders, for example, and the catalogue web pages may be static, but they're automatically updated by the stock control database, and so on.'

I asked about the website itself. 'The focus is still firmly on the original goal of providing an effective shop window for small publishers. The whole catalogue is fully searchable by subject category, author, publisher, country of origin, and key words. I'm particularly pleased with

the author search, because it not only lists the books by a particular author, but also their anthology and magazine appearances: if you're a Brian Stableford fan, it'll not only list his *Susan Songs* book from Big Engine, but also his short stories in magazines like *Albedo 1* and *Scheherazade*, and his critical pieces in *New York Review of Science Fiction*.

I wondered if the majority of Reed's customers now come via the internet rather than post? 'Yes, I'd say it's true that all our new customers come through the website now, either directly or as a result of referrals by the publishers we carry. When we did a printed catalogue

or flyer, we were only ever able to promote a subset of all the titles we carried, usually the most recent ones to come into stock, so sales would be skewed that way. Now, because everything's accessible through the website, we're selling many more back issues of magazines. And because we've got magazines going back to when we first set up the NSFA in

1989, we get a lot of collectors and completists coming through picking up the 'before-they-were-famous' small press appearances of their favourite best-selling authors. The other effect of the internet presence is that we're getting an increasing number of applications from publishers wanting to join the catalogue. Many of them have heard about us from publishers we're already dealing with, which is great! We'll consider pretty much anything within the SF/F/H field – our only criteria is whether we can be an effective outlet for their titles.

Importance

Given the importance of the small press as a testing ground for new writers trying to hone their skills, I asked whether anyone particularly stuck in Reed's mind as having gone on to, well, play with the big boys. 'Neal Asher's an obvious example,' he says. 'I saw him feature heavily in a full-page ad for *Tor* in an American magazine recently – it's great to see him doing so well. Others that come to mind include Stephen Baxter, Peter F. Hamilton, Jeff VanderMeer, Paul Di Filippo ... but going back a few years, my favourite success story has to be the horror writer Simon Clark – we published his debut short story collection *Blood and Grit* in 1990, and it was apparently instrumental in landing Simon his first pro contract with Hodder & Stoughton. There's no looking back for him since, his eleventh novel – *Vampyre Rites* – was published in July.

So, with such a rich and diverse heritage, why not delve into the varied and mysterious world of the UK's small press scene by visiting the BBR website? They're bound to have something to suit your taste...

Thanks to: Chris Reed

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. Go on, you know you want to...

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

Spinnerets

Odd world

In the troubled times in which we live it can be hard to find a news source you can trust to give you the facts straight, without spin or sensationalism.

That's why I always turn to *Fortean Times* Online (www.forteanimes.com) for my daily dose of journalism. Without this marvellous resource I wouldn't know that, for example, an iceberg in Edinburgh is growing because of the (as I write) ongoing heatwave. Heck, I wouldn't even know Edinburgh had an iceberg, let alone that it was growing.

Similarly I would have entirely missed out on the news that a woman was carving a full-size model of a Harley Davidson from butter. *Fortean*, named after the researcher and sceptic about everything Charles Fort, (see Andy Sawyer's review of *The Outcast Manufacturers* on page 15) is the place where sceptics and the credulous meet. While professional scientific sceptics will refuse even to discuss the paranormal and the credulous will refuse to consider scientific explanations, Fort sought to gather evidence, reports and theories and to present them for study.

This ethos helps make the print version of *The Fortean Times* one of the most entertaining magazines in the world and creates the perfect material for the internet.

I'm particularly keen on cryptozoology – the search for mysterious and out-of-place animals. For many years biology acted as if every creature had been pinned down and classified and that searching for new stuff was pointless. But over recent years an increasing number of animals, primarily from Asia and including some

large mammals, have been newly identified.

From all over the world there are claims of strange or out-of-place creatures. Some of the claims are more credible than others. The idea that a very large, upright ape like *Bigfoot* might exist unseen and unfooted (dead or alive) in populous North America seems unlikely. That the orang-pendek, a short upright ape might survive in the largely empty Sumatran jungles seems, to me, somewhat more plausible. Which is where The Centre for Fortean Zoology comes in (www.czfz.org.uk).

With reports of exotic trips to Sumatra and etc... Cannock, the CFZ posts updates on newly discovered species, reports of strange sightings and wild speculation. It is a classy site, and essential for any self-respecting Fortean. The CFZ take their work seriously, whether they're searching for an Ivory Billed Woodpecker or a Mongolian Deathworm. If I ever win the lottery, this lot are getting some of the cash.

Another potential candidate for my imaginary cash is the Charles Fort Institute (www.forteanimes.com), which hopes to create a museum of the weird, a reference library and archive and to create a professional research environment for the study of Fortean material. Fort was a compulsive collector of material, an institution like the CFZ would be a perfect way of continuing his work. Nothing seems to have happened at the CFZ site for some time, but it does feature a nice article by Bob Rickard, editor of *The Fortean Times* on why such an institute is necessary.

Now, if only my numbers would come up this weekend.



Is this an orang-pendek? Visit: www.bbc.co.uk/nature/weird/bigfoot/orang_pendek/1.shtml

Looking for Alternatives?

Roderick Gladwish takes a look at the latest SF magazines.

The *Third Alternative* is an outstanding magazine that leaves me with a dilemma. All of it is excellent, especially the writing, but I don't like the fiction. Themes of misery, urban decay, wasted lives, creeping madness or reality not being as solid as people pray it is, are hard for me to read. I've given up on some of the stories because they reach the limit of my capacity to cope with these themes.

In Issue 34, *Finistere* by Patrick Samphire explored loss and redemption with a twist on alternate worlds. The *Legality of Dreams* by Alan Wall, with an accompanying interview, was on harnessing dreams. Li Ketsuon by Eric Brown on Thai witchcraft. *Babies*, by Leslie What, samples the loveless marriage of a pregnant woman with a strange obsession. *New Life* by James Sallies is about a speed bump - or maybe not. *Don't Touch the Blackouts* by Paul Meloy examines grief. In the *Darkest Green* by Mike O'Driscoll is set in a children's home that doesn't produce model citizens.

Every illustration is striking and the non-fiction is illuminating. Interviews discuss a life's work and motivations. *Electric Darkness* explores film, not Hollywood blockbusters, but movies with brains. There are in-depth reviews of major talents in each issue. Alejandro Jodorowsky in issue 34. Previously, they have covered Alan Moore, Brian De Palma and the Cohen brothers. Japin's *Dark Lantern* examines the undercurrents hidden by the orderly facade of Japan.

In the recent run of issues there have been guest editorials, recently M John Harrison (issue 33) and Muriel Gray (issue 34). Harrison took a view on Fantasy. Gray argued that art is a side effect to mankind's developing skills to develop technology.

Left to last is *The Dodo* has Landed by Alan Ashley. He takes apart a subject with wry observation. The BBC's Big Read was the target, leading to reading for pleasure. That's where I have my problem with *The Third Alternative*; everything is quality, but the fiction is no pleasure for me.

The *Statue of Liberty* is alive and well and living at the *Quantum Muse* homepage. At least, that's what I thought of the Rubenesque lady with shades and a starchy headgear when I first saw her a year ago. In fact, she is the eponymous muse. *Quantum Muse*, a monthly, is dynamic with a self-effacing humor. The July editorial cheers on Burt Rutan of Scaled Composites (www.scaled.com), an X-prize



competitor whose plane-launched rocket is undergoing flight tests, hoping that cheap spacecraft will take us further than expensive and complex national launchers. They also share their recommended reading list, which ranges from: *Transdimensional Blues* and *Tales of the Cahuilla Mythos to Photoshop 5.5 Classroom in a Book and HTML 4 For the World Wide Web*.

Fiction is divided into Sci-Fi, Fantasy and Alternative with four stories in July. Under Sci-Fi were *Restant* and *Red Three*. Von Kraemer's *Restant* is an audio diary by a patient with pancreatic cancer offered a life-saving treatment with a life-changing side effect. Giving it a definite speaking style was good. The character's life choices seemed against type, but he had changed. *Red Three* by Justin Stanchfield was space opera about prejudice and how courage can overcome small mindedness. In the Fantasy corner was *Me and Pedro* by Steve Bonkamp, an audio transcribed. Able to sit unabashed in *The Third Alternative* stable, under Alternative,

was *Duet*, by Alan Walsh. This began with a mentally uncomfortable taxi ride and descended into a brutal other world. The stories are not illustrated, but there is an Artwork section containing a gallery of selected artists. There are also mugs and T-shirts to buy with the curvy muse on them.

Forward and bright, these people are buskers. And to prove it, each page has a cup for accepting donations (split equally between publishers and contributors). Visit the site and if you like it drop a coin in the cup or buy their print anthology *Quantum Musings*.

Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine is a bimonthly A5-sized magazine with lots of stories for your money. Contradicting their claim of being the pulpiest magazine in Australia, the tales follow the traditional thoughtful SF route: idea and effect. Don't expect high art or insight into the human condition, *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* focuses on good yarns. There is a strong impression that the editorial staff enjoy themselves. Throughout there is humour. And many of the stories and poems go for the laugh. Most stories are short and, although some flag, they end before getting too weak.

A *Flax for Help* by Kevin McLean is a take on the mag's concept as inflight literature. *Father Figure* by Byron Merritt is a child's eye-view of something sinister. *Space and Time* Books by Melissa Yaun-Innes was a tale of a bookshop that loves its owner who loves books, a personal favourite because I love books and bookshops. *The Dealer* by Simon Haynes is fantasy comedy, with a rude constellation and a red-shirt joke. *The Kalamash Covenent* by Geoffrey Maloney explores an uneasy symbiotic relationship between humans and aliens. We need their tech while they need our language skills. The *Stars Like Candles* by Dirk Finlath uses a Hollywood Alien but in a good way. *Blindside by Venus* in the House of Mars was space opera that ended predictably.

Tasters are available on their website (www.andromedaspacesways.com). Every magazine claims it wants to bring on new talent, but this is the first I've seen that runs a competition for under 21s. If nothing else gets you interested you get a badge for subscribing.

After asking where the upbeat SF poetry was, I've been told that it is out there and some of it is on the *DarK Planet* website (<http://darplanet.basespace.net/>) on hiatus since 2001.

Reflect on this

Martin McGrath reviews the latest issue of *Albedo One*.

WINNER OF THREE EUROPEAN SOCIETY AWARDS

INTERVIEW
IAN WATSON
on *Kubrick, A.C. and
The Great Escape*

ALBEDO



As I've said before in these pages, no magazine is so welcome when it drops through my door as *Albedo One*. It consistently provides interesting stories and strong editorial content. Neither the prettiest nor the most polished small press magazine, *Albedo One* nevertheless often proves to be more than the sum of its parts.

James Michael White's "Apeiron, Azz" opens issue 27 with the meeting of a crap god with a crap journalist. Magic ensues in a really strong story. Also good is Laird Long's "All Men are Constructed Equal", a simple but neat take on racism. Simon Kevin's "The Long Walk", the story of a lost "Toxrunner", is fair but overcaresses itself slightly. The central character isn't interesting enough to make the story work. Fantasy isn't normally my thing, but Andrea Horlock surprised me by making me enjoy "Conception", a story about the dangers of magic. Only Idiotus Buguise's "Blood" fails, being too short and too obvious to elicit a reaction.

Fred Johnston's "Bulus Ground" is this issue's highlight. The central character's only saving grace is that he is a little less unpleasant than the people round him and, though the ending is telegraphed, there is real pleasure in the journey.

Non-fiction includes an interesting interview with Ian Watson, a good batch of reviews and the return of "Severian" - the opinion column.

Albedo One is available from: Albedo One, 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin, Ireland. A four issue subscription costs €19 (Ireland), €15 (UK), €23 (Europe) and \$25 (rest of the world). Web: www.yellowbrickroad.ie/albedo. Email: bobn@yellowbrickroad.ie

Contacts

The *Third Alternative*
UK subscriptions: TTA Press, 5
Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs,
CB6 2LB

US subscriptions: TTA Press, 360W,
76th Ave, #H, Anchorage, AK 99518

Quantum Muse
www.quantummuse.com

Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine
Australian subscriptions: Andromeda
Spaceways, PO Box 495, Chinchilla
QLD 4413

Non-Australian subscriptions:
subscriptions@andromedaspacesways.com

Early and often

Let that be your maxim for nominations in the BSFA Awards, advises **Claire Brailey**. She wants to know what you loved in science fiction and fantasy this year, and she wants to know now. With the deadline for nominations creeping up, don't leave it too late to have your say about what should be on the shortlist.

Helloooo? Is there anyone there?
As I'm writing this, it's only been about three weeks since *Matrix* #162 arrived in the UK, so it's not too surprising that no one has yet rushed to answer the questions about the awards I asked last time. By the time you receive this issue, however, I'm confident you'll have read the previous magazine cover to cover and will be poised to write in to tell me what you think about the awards, what they should represent, and what should be eligible for them. Don't let me stop you. And you can send me some nominations at the same time.

Deadline

By that time, of course, the **31 January 2004 deadline for nominations** for 2003 will be creeping inexorably closer, which brings me to this issue's questions. These are relatively easy, but they are kind of fundamental to the whole exercise: Have you read any good science fiction novels this year, or any good shorter sf? Have you read a good piece of writing about science fiction, or seen a good piece of sf art work? If so, are you going to nominate any of these works for the BSFA awards?

At about this stage of the nominations process, the administrator usually faces the prospect of falling into gloomy reveries not just about your answers but about the consequences: if you haven't come across anything you want to nominate for the awards, is that because there isn't currently enough sf in your life or because there isn't much around that's very good? (Either of which could be rather unfortunate.) And if you've seen loads of good stuff but haven't nominated anything for the awards, is it because you care about the sf but not the awards themselves? Think about it. And then tell me.

It may be, however, that you're not sure what you're allowed to nominate or whether you're allowed to nominate anything. So, to clarify the position:

- The **Best Novel** award is open to any novel-length work of science fiction or fantasy first published in the UK in 2003. (Serialized novels are eligible provided that the publication date of the concluding part is in 2003.)
- The **Best Short Fiction** award is open to any shorter work of science

fiction or fantasy, up to and including novellas, first published in 2003 (in a magazine, in a book, or online).

- The **Best Artwork** award is open to any single image of science fiction or fantasy artwork that first appeared in 2003.
- The **Best Non-Fiction** award is open to any single piece of critical writing about science fiction or fantasy that was first published in 2003. (This would include a review or an article in a magazine or journal, on paper or online, an essay included in an anthology or collection, or a book-length work.)

Nominate

And you can nominate as many pieces as you like in any category provided that you're a member of the BSFA. If you're not a member of the BSFA, I'm delighted that you're reading our magazine and can only urge you to join now: you get all the publications and the chance to nominate for the BSFA awards... Works by members

(including Council and committee members) of the BSFA are generally eligible for the awards, but anything published by the BSFA (whether in book form or in one of the magazines) is not.

Questions

I have some other questions for you, too (I'm just that sort of girl). The nominations received so far are predominantly for the novel and artwork awards, and just going by the novels on the list that I've already read it looks like a pretty good year.

But nominations for both the short fiction and the non-fiction awards have only just begun to come in, and this makes me wonder about whether most people now read new short fiction or non-fiction writing about sf. I also wondered whether it's not perceived to be easily accessible, although that seems unlikely: for instance, in virtually every issue of *Matrix* Roderick Gladwin is telling you about some of the variety of

magazines around and Martin Sketchley is pointing you towards interesting web sites, featuring sfnal short fiction and non-fiction alike. This makes me return again to the question about quality: could it really be the case that there's less good stuff around in these categories? Or do people apply higher standards to it, and thus hold back from nominating? Is there a time lag between when new pieces become available and when people actually read them? Or could it, maybe, just possibly, indicate that you just haven't got round to nominating yet?

Summer

A hot summer still lies ahead as I write, followed by the joyous prospect of autumn, winter holidays and the nominations deadline of 31 January 2004. What better ways could you spend the time than by reading, thinking, and nominating science fiction?

Nominations

Novel:

- The Reliquary Ring* – Cherith Baldry (Pan)
- * Alva & Inva* – Edward Carey (Picador)
- The Iron Chain* – Steve Cockayne (Orbit)
- * Pattern Recognition* – William Gibson (Viking)
- Singing the Dogstar Blues* – Alison Goodman (Collins Voyager)
- * Finding Helen* – Colin Greenland (Black Swan)
- Felaeahn* – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight)
- Dark Heavens* – Roger Levy (Gollancz)
- * Unfired Kingdom* – James Lovegrove (Gollancz)
- * The Light Ages* – Ian R MacLeod (Earthlight)
- Natural History* – Justina Robson (Macmillan)
- Varjak Paw* – S F Said (David Fickling Books)

Short fiction:

- * 'Love in the Age of Spyware'* – William Shunn (www.salon.com)

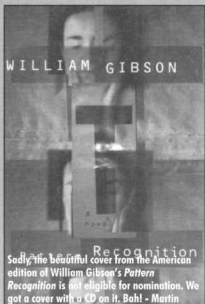
Artwork:

- Cover of Varjak Paw* by S F Said – Dave McKean
- Cover of Cities*, edited by Peter Crowther – Edward Miller
- Cover of Polystorm* by Adam Roberts – Sonar
- Cover of Natural History* by Justina Robson – Steve Stone
- Cover of Felaeahn* by Jon Courtenay Grimwood – The Whole Hog

Non-fiction:

- * Review of Poison* by Chris Wooding – Maureen Kincaid Speller (Foundation #88)

This list includes all those works nominated by the end of July 2003. New nominations since the list published in *Matrix* #162 are asterisked. Appearance in this list means simply that at least one person has nominated it so far. If you liked it too, make sure you nominate it yourself; and if things you liked don't appear on this list at all, you know what you have to do...



Ireland's favourite Irish books

Pádraig Ó Méalóid takes a look at BBC Northern Ireland's version of The Big Read and discovers that their favourite Irish book is the tale of a man's love for his bicycle and the wonders of omnium. If you haven't read *The Third Policeman*, you're missing out.

In March this year, the BBC announced that it was going to try to discover the nation's favourite book. Members of the public would vote for their favourite novel (rather than play, or short story collection, thereby immediately narrowing the parameters) in a variety of ways. The notion of which nation was to vote seemed a little blurred, too, and I voted for my own particular favourite (Robert Rankin's *The Brentford Triangle*, seeing as you ask), without being told I couldn't, despite patently not being any stripe of an English-Scottish-or-Welshman, but rather an Irishman, and one of the ones from the southern bit, at that. There were some problems with the website's voting form, anyway, it seems, as the drop down menu for the admittedly voluntary geographical location had Scotland entirely missing from its list of British counties, not to mention a few of the English ones too. Not only that, but there was only a period of two weeks in the middle of April allocated for people to vote in.

Arguments

Other arguments would arise when they announced their list, with questions on why Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, as well as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* only got one entry, while the *Harry Potter* books got individual listings. However, it all came and went, and the BBC announced its top 100 in alphabetical order, and will reveal the top 20 sometime in the Autumn, with yet more voting to determine the eventual winner.

The avowed purpose of all this, by the way, is to get the nation reading again. This is to be achieved by people watching more television programmes about books, apparently...

However, while all this was going on, the BBC's Northern Ireland service decided to run their own poll, on their section of the BBC's website, to find out what their

particular corner of the UK though was its favourite book, and Irish book at that, as that was specifically what they said they were looking for. This was not particularly well advertised, never having been mentioned on the BBC NI TV service, and would have entirely escaped

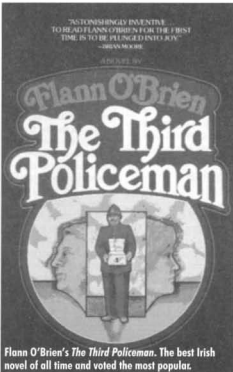
my notice if not for an email note from Belfast SF writer Ian McDonald to the Queen's University Belfast SF Society, which got reproduced elsewhere, and eventually made its way to me (and which I subsequently forwarded on to others via my

handy-dandy electronic newsletter, Irish SF News. Subscribe now at irishsfnews@yahoo.co.uk.)

Touting

In short, Ian was happily touting for votes, and seemed especially keen that he should do better than Colin Bateman, and was offering to buy pints all round in the University bar if he succeeded in doing so. This has to do with the fact that Bateman used to play football in their garden in his

youth, having grown up a few doors away. Isn't it always interesting to get



Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*. The best Irish novel of all time and voted the most popular.

are. What was interesting, though, was that they had listed all the votes on the site, along with the names of the voters, and their comments. Intrigued, I decided to try to figure out for myself what was getting voted for, and to see who came out on top.

Votes

Before I get on to the votes, I should point out that, as the number of votes recorded up to now, which is at the end of July as I write, is still absolutely tiny as far as these things go, and is only 207, so all the conclusions I draw should be seen bearing that in mind. So, on to a little number crunching...

There were, as I said, 207 votes in all, up to now. These are spread over 104 titles by 67 authors, with 65 of those titles getting only one vote each. A rigorous examination of the votes would probably eliminate a number of

an insight into the private lives of writers, all the same! In any case, Ian is a friend of mine, and I always loved his *Desolation Road*, so I voted for it and thought no more about it, at the time. It was only at some later stage that I went to have a look at the BBC NI site to see if they'd tabulated the votes. I found that they were still taking votes, and indeed still

the entries, too, as Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* and Peig Sayers' truly awful dirge, *Peig*, are definitely autobiographical, with the latter being in the Irish language, and at one time the bane of every Irish schoolgoer's life. Also, things like William Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, which is non-fiction, and Sean O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman*, which is a play, aren't eligible, but their inclusion or exclusion doesn't materially affect the outcome in any way, and comment on them here serves little other purpose than to help me achieve my allotted word count. Once we ignore these (as well as the people who voted for two books at the same time), and look at the rest of the votes, we can see a few outright leaders.

Wish

Ian McDonald got his wish, coming in joint fifth, along with Maeve Binchy, with a total of nine votes, thereby beating out Colin Bateman by one vote. He does even better when we get to votes for individual books, with Ian's *Desolation Road* getting six votes, while Bateman's best effort is *Disowning Jack*, which got three votes. So, pints in Queen's for all it seems (or

at least some, as the names of the voters are on the site, so at least he'll know who he's buying them for, and I'm sure he won't have missed the fact that a lot of the Queen's crowd didn't bother voting at all, neither for him nor for anyone else).

Further up the list, we go past Frank McCourt,

who got eleven votes, all but one of them for his *Angela's Ashes*, and Roddy Doyle, getting votes for various things, to James Joyce, who polls a very creditable seventeen votes to get into second place, with eight of these being for *Ulysses*, or *Ulysses*, as it is occasionally referred to by the more frivolous elements of the Irish book trade.



[His. It's my favourite novel, Irish, SF, mainstream or otherwise – Mark.]

However, the writer chosen as

the greatest Irish writer, and undeniably rightly so, is the late great Flann O'Brien, perhaps the most underrated writer this country has ever produced. Flann scores twenty-six votes altogether, which is more or less exactly one eighth of the total votes cast. Four of these are for his first novel, *At Swim Two Birds*, an experimental novel with several beginnings and endings, and being about a writer writing a book about a writer writing a book, and what the characters of these books get up to when the writer fellows are not using them.

Eight of the votes were for his Irish language book, *An Béal Bacht*, translated into English as *The Poor Mouth*, which is both a parody of the kind of catalogues of awfulness that were being produced as supposed true-life in rural Ireland, and a very funny fantasy tale of a land where scholars from Dublin can mistake the grunting of pigs for the Irish language, where whisky runs down the mountains in streams, and where the only English that the natives need to know is 'Boots, Sur!', to allow them to purchase footwear to go working on the building sites of England.

Policeman

Most of Flann's votes, though, go to *The Third Policeman*, which, at fourteen votes, is the clear leader. *The Third Policeman* is my favourite Irish novel, [and mine, why did we never get to read that at school? *Bloody Chancer!* – Martin] and is among other things, a murder story, a satire on the Irish police force, a surrealist fantasy set in a singular sort of eternity, and a touching and alarming

examination of the erotic possibilities of the relationship between a man and his bicycle.

It is endlessly re-readable, and has gathered praise from people as diverse as Robert Rankin and Alan Moore, and now the plain people of Ireland. The sadness of all this is that the book was published in 1967, the year after O'Brien's death from cancer, having been rejected by publishers when it was first completed in 1940.

Little

enough remains to be said. I originally wanted to write about the votes that genre titles got in this, and also to compare the votes here with what made it into the broader version, as announced on the TV. However, with

local Northern Irish SF writers like Bob Shaw and James White only scoring one vote each, it would be hard to try to find something meaningful to say about it all.

Fowl

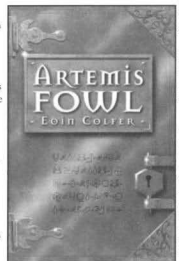
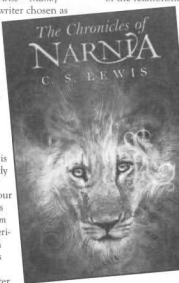
Perhaps the only other author worth mentioning in this regard is Eoin Colfer, whose *Artemis Fowl* got 5 votes. Of the four Irish books that made it to the main top 100 list, only two of them got any votes in this,

which are Colfer's *Artemis Fowl*, and, inevitably, Joyce's *Ulysses*. The other two to make it to the top 100 are Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Drovers* and C S Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.

Not only was Lewis a native of Belfast, but Ian McDonald, when he was a small boy, lived in a house built in the back garden of what had been C S Lewis' childhood home.

Which just goes to show what a very small world it is...

• Padraig announces PCon in Dublin later this month. Check out www.slovobooks.com



by Simon Morden

I'm certain that others will talk about Simon and Schuster's decision to axe the Earthlight imprint. However, that won't stop me from having a rant, so brace for impact.

The state of the publishing industry is always in flux: presses and imprints come and go, caught by the vagaries of economic wind and personal circumstances. But sometimes, there just doesn't seem to be a reason for corporate decisions.

Simon and Schuster's press release is full of corporate-speak and impenetrable language. I'm reading between the lines, but the reason for the sudden demise of Earthlight might well be a sudden loss of vision. Why else would Managing Director Ian Chapman be worrying about 'maintaining market share' rather than creating demand, or fretting over the 'aggressive market' rather than aggressively marketing? So he finishes up with the need to 'reassess our publishing programme'. Could it be possible that reassessment in this context can only mean one thing: cutting back?

The chief casualty of this corporate organisation is Earthlight, a respected brand that John Jarrold spent five years creating. It had a varied stable of talented authors, who now face an uncertain future. The press release states 'its authors will be published on the Simon & Schuster and Pocket lists where they will be given the same profile and commitment as before, but will enjoy the benefits of belonging to the main body of the fiction list'. That is difficult to square with his earlier assertion that editorial teams 'will focus on building their lists with particular emphasis on strengthening the mass-market side of the fiction list'.

I'm the first in line to say that bookshops should list their fiction A-Z. When I was last in Foyles, I found a copy of *Heart* shelved precisely thus, and my own little ticker leapt for joy. But even I'd admit that it would be more likely found by someone who was interested in crime/horror/fantasy, if it

was shelved together with other crime/horror/fantasy books. What are the booksellers going to do with Pocket books from now on? Rely on their knowledge of the authors and shelve them accordingly? Or leave it to a shelf filler to get the alphabetical order right in the general fiction section? Will this lead to an increase in sales? Like most genre readers, I head to the SF/F/H section first to see what's new. I don't have time to scour the general fiction section because I have two small children and these books rarely have pictures in them. If readers can't find an ex-Earthlight author's books, they'll buy someone else's.

I predict Gollancz's acquisition of Christopher Priest's *The Separation* will be the first of many. Priest's book won both the BSFA and Clarke Awards, but any product that is poorly marketed will achieve a self-fulfilling prophecy: 'we don't believe it's worth telling anyone about this because we think it's rubbish and won't sell.' Gollancz clearly think otherwise, and have taken Priest's backlist too.

Steve Robinson, Ottaker's manager in Sunderland, says that SF is the second-best selling section in fiction – across the whole chain. Readers aren't going to stop reading SF because Earthlight has gone, but they won't be buying Earthlight books. They'll be buying someone else's.

In all this, the man in the middle mustn't be forgotten: Darren Nash, currently in charge of Earthlight. When things are going badly, you get a feeling in your gut that your job is going down the pan. When things are going well, you're pretty certain that the golden goose of fate isn't about to meet the cost of corporate destiny. Nash has expressed his utter shock (among other sentiments) at losing his job. We can guess from his comments whether business was good or bad.

So here's a raised glass in memory of Earthlight, and a hope that Mr Nash and all the affected authors find new, more welcoming homes.

Simon'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. *Heart* is currently battling it out with Stephen King, Clive Barker and Terry Pratchett for BSF Best Novel.

Conventional news

I've just paid for my first ever convention. I'm going to Interaction in August 2005. You will all be nice to me, won't you? Anyway, I might sneak into a few smaller ones in advance, just to check out what it is all about. Look out for me, I'll be the short, fat one.

7-8 Sep 03 Phoenix Con (P-CON)

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

4 October 03 NewCon2

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

10-12 Oct 03 Grissecon 1 (Wraeththu)

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

24-6 Oct 03 They Came And Shaved Us

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

30 Oct - 2 Nov 03 World Fantasy Con.

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

31 Oct - 2 Nov Armadacon 15

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

7-9 Nov 03 Novacon 33

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

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: marlinmegrath@ntlworld.com

14-16 Nov Alternate Universe

Thistle London Heathrow Hotel, Jr Bourne (SG-1), Peter Stebbings (Jeremiah), Andrea Thompson (Babylon 5) Sarah Douglas (SG-1, Superman). Brian Aldiss (running a writers workshop). £125 'VIP' class, £85 weekend, £40 Friday only. Contact Level 3 Conventions, 71 Virginia Way, Reading, Berks, RG30 3QR. 0118 967 5739. Web: www.l3conventions.co.uk Email: info@l3conventions.co.uk

21-23 November 2003 Fantasycon 2003

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

20-23 August 04 Discworld Convention IV

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

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

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

4-8 Aug 05 Interaction (63rd Worldcon)

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

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

Books and magazines for sale

Recent donations and bequests mean that the Science Fiction Foundation has 100s of sf/fantasybooks 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/~osawyer/sale.html> or contact Andy Sawyer, Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA, UK (email osawyer@liv.ac.uk).



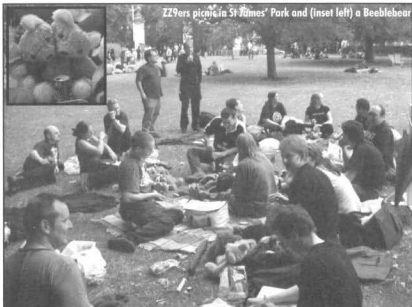
Beeblebear's picnic

Hello everybody. I'm still a bit surprised to have been given the back page of *Matrix* to fill with local SF group news, and I've just been reproducing and extending the list without comment. But I'd like to turn the page into something with a bit more content than a simple list, so I'm looking for stories to add to the back page. If any readers have meeting reports, anecdotes, upcoming special events, or photos, I'd love to hear about them. I can't promise to be another Dave Langford, but I'd like you to think of me if your group has anything upcoming to announce, or any confessions of recent misbehaviour to get off your consciences.

Del Cotter
matrix@branta.demon.co.uk

The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy fan club, Z29, gathered in London's St James' Park on Saturday 26 July for the Beeblebear's Picnic. Alex McLintock reports:

It's not often that a bunch of science fiction fans get "out-weirded" by a bunch of mundanes but the annual Z29 Beeblebear's picnic clashed with the annual Gay Pride march through London culminating in a pop concert in Hyde Park. You'd think it was the annual Consumers' Pride march with the outrageous clothes seen throughout the day. Hyde Park was closed off for the pop concert, but we were lucky to have picked the nearby St James' Park for our picnic by the empty bandstand. It didn't stay empty for long. A Brass Band turned up and played at the gathering, horses, until the rain started and drove everyone away. (I don't think it was deliberate but the band played a few themes from sci-fi flicks which warmed us to them.) Needless to say we retired to a pub



- the Wetherspoons opposite London Circle ex-meet the Silver Cross. Disaster (for some) the pub didn't serve real ale so the group was split in half and eventually we re-emerged entirely in the back of the

Silver Cross with feelings of déjà-vu and mutterings about those most vocal in bad-mouthing the Silver Cross also being instrumental in us returning there for one night only.

Basingstoke

Genesis SF Club
Meets Every four weeks on Thursday, starts Basingstoke RG21 7PQ
Contact: Mark Sinclair
genesis@revolution.demon.co.uk
Web: www.genesis-df.org.uk

Belfast

Belfast Science Fiction Group
Meets Alternate Thursdays, starting at 8:00pm
The Monica Bars, Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB
Contact: Eugene Doherty timan@techno.demon.co.uk
Web: members.fortnecity.co.uk/timan/monica.htm

Birmingham

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

Birmingham

The Blue Larder
Meets 2nd Tuesday, 8:30pm The Hoghead, Newhall Street, Birmingham B3 3PU
Contact: Steve Green ghsatwords@yahoo.co.uk

Cambridge

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

Colchester

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

Croydon

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

Didcot

Meets 2nd Wednesday, starting at 7:30pm The Ladygrove, Cox Lane, Didcot OX11 7SZ
Contact: Nigel and Sabine Furlong
lurlong22@comcast.net

Dublin

Dublin Sci-Fi Club
Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm Upstairs in Bowes Pub, Fleet Street, Dublin 2
Contact: Francis Dwyer fdwyer@laptoppark.com
Web: www.laptoppark.com/sfclub/

Edinburgh

FORTH
Meets Every Tuesday, at 9:00pm The Doric Tavern, Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DE
Contact: Jim Darroch jld@fmail.net

Edinburgh

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

Hull

Hull SF Group
Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 8:00pm The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull HU1 2DE
Contact: Mike Cross mike@mjclash.demon.co.uk
Web: www.mjclash.demon.co.uk/hullid.htm

Leicester

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

London

Z29 Plan 2 Alpha - the Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Appreciation Society
Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:00pm Penderel's Oak, High Holborn, London WC1V 7HP
Contact: Robert Newman meetings@z29.org
Web: www.z29.org

London

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

London

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

London

The City Illusions
Meets Every Friday, starting at 6:30pm The Red Lion, Kingsley Street, off Regent Street, Westminster W1B 5PR

London

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

Manchester

FOUNT
Meets 2nd and 4th Thursday, starting at 8:30pm The Crown and Anchor, Hilton Street, Manchester M1 2EE
When there are five Thursdays in the month, also meets 5th Thursday, starting at 8:30pm Fab Café, Portland Street, Manchester M1 4RJ
Contact: Arthur Chappell
arthurchappell@bt.com
Web: www.arthurchappell.dave.net/1stfont.htm
Web: www.goweb.demon.co.uk/fountainfont.html

Norwich

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

Oxford

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

Peterborough

Peterborough Fiction Club
Meets 1st Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm The Blue Bell Inn, St. Paul's Road, Dugthorpe, Peterborough PE1 3RZ
Meets 3rd Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm Goodbarrow Yard, St. John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD
Contact: Pete H. secretary@blinter.net
Web: www.pdclub.blinter.net.co.uk/pf.htm

Portsmouth

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

Preston

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

Reading

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

Sheffield

Meets Every Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm The Red Lion, Charles Street, Sheffield S1 2ND
Contact: Fran David fran@david.demon.co.uk

St. Albans

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

Wells hello!

Win three classic films on DVD.

This issue we're offering you the chance to win three classic HG Wells adaptations. On offer are the DVD releases of *The Time Machine* (George Pal version), *The First Men in the Moon*, and *War of the Worlds*.

In the crossword below, **the shaded answers (14 Across and 4 Down) have no clues.** Fill in the answers to the clues provided, and you should be able to work out the titles of the two science fiction films that complete the puzzle.

Send the titles of the two films with your name and address to Martin at: matrix.competition@ntlworld.com by noon on Friday 10 October 2003. First name selected by the random number generator, wins the three DVDs.

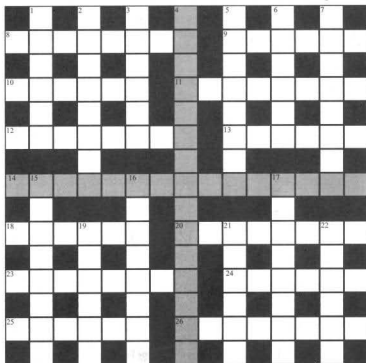


Across

- 8 Mickey cleaned up in this musical film (8)
- 9 Shrubby uncultivated lands (6)
- 10 Some people would jump at this genre (6)
- 11 Leper tot could get confused in transport (8)
- 12 Drives away (8)
- 13 Really (6)
- 14 See instructions above
- 18 Captain of the first USS Enterprise (6)
- 20 These Austrians might take you for a whirl (8)
- 23 Hard work (8)
- 24 People in towns with something to shout about (6)
- 25 Schweitzer, Camus and Einstein (6)
- 26 Green radiation? (5,3)

Down

- 1 Chicago gang boss (6)
- 2 Gaiman novelette (8)
- 3 Egyptian god of the dead (6)
- 4 See instructions above
- 5 Babyish (8)
- 6 Twisted, like Enterprise? (6)
- 7 This many ghosts in a film is just unlucky (8)
- 15 Call this Doctor first (8)
- 16 Annoy (8)
- 17 We could all stand here, Brunner said (8)
- 19 Homes (6)
- 21 Make a base (6)
- 22 This movie makes me want to shout (6)



Congratulations to the winner of last issue's crossword competition, **Susan Francis** from Colchester. A copy of the Marvel Ultimate line graphic novels are on the way. The answer we were looking for was: **STAN LEE**

Crossword 161 Solution

Across: 1 Ice man 5 Polaris 9 Magneto 10 Ultron 11 Silver Surfer 14 Nova 15 Stingray 18 Wrestler 19 Isle 21 Yellowjacket 24 Vox pop 26 Iron Man 27 Dazzler 28 Tinpot Down: 2 Came 3 Megastars 4 Needle 5 Professor Xavier 6 Lou 7 Rotor 8 Stonewalls 12 Ship 13 Poor second 16 Guilty man 17 Claw 20 Eke out 22 La Par 23 Into 25 Pal

Contributors

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

Flicker, Goggle Boxes, Spinnerets and Crossword: Martin McGrath

Timewasters

Competition 163

Read each answer in each part consecutively; ie if A1 is 28 and A2 is 14, the answer to A is 2814.

- A. 1. Twice the number of keys of Eden.
2. Half the number of gates from limbo.
- B. 1. Bob Shaw's timers.
2. A third of Asimov's tomorrows. 3
3. David Karp's dystopia.

You now have two numbers, and all you have to do is to tell me the connection with this month's mailing.

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

Competition 161

First, an apology for the error in question 3, which should have read Nebula, not Hugo. Having said that everyone got the answer right, even those who did not complain. Dave Langford (who else?) was the answer. First out of the pot is Andy Mills