

matrix

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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association



Goodbye, Mister Anderson

Martin McGrath
reviews *The Matrix
Revolutions*

Neal Asher on genetic research

Stephen Baxter on our common history

Elastic Press stretches expectations

Gwilym Games on Lovecraft and film

Marion Arnott interviewed

PLUS reviews, news, competitions and more

matrix

Welcome,

DEADLINES

If you wish to contribute to future issues of Matrix, the deadlines are:

matrix 166 (Mar/Apr 2004) copy deadline: 7 February, 2004

matrix 167 (May/Jun 2004) copy deadline: 7 April, 2004

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Yes, we're still here. *Matrix* seems to have the gravitational pull of Jupiter: we just can't escape! Rather than leave you without your bi-monthly dose of news and reviews, we put together this issue. But *Matrix* needs new editors. Mark is happy to stay on as book editor and Martin will continue as "Media" editor. So we need a news editor, a production editor (even if only for a couple of issues so Martin can write his thesis) and an editor-in-chief to chase everyone each issue. (You know who you are!) Indeed, we could perhaps combine the production and editor in chief role, but we need at least two more people to come on board. You'd be welcome. Just get in touch with either Mark or Martin, who will let you know what you are letting yourself in for. You'll enjoy it. Honest.

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RAGE against the... ...kneejerk reactions to genetic research

Neal Asher, author of *Line of Polity* and *The Skinner*, gets on his soapbox about the ignorance that accompanies the debate on genetic research. We're not playing God, he argues, we're working to save lives and solve problems.

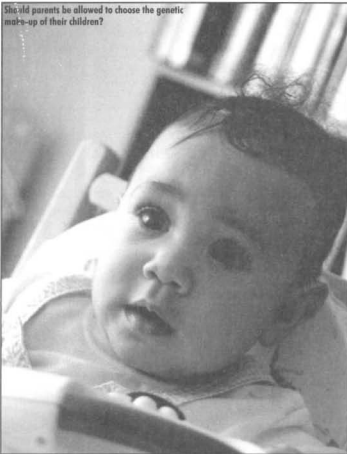
Jayson and Michelle Whitaker were initially refused permission to have a designer baby by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. Apparently it was 'unlawful and unethical' to save the life of their three-year-old son with a bone-marrow transplant from this second baby. Thankfully, sanity finally prevailed, and now the deed has been done.

Putting aside questions about who comprise this 'Authority', whether or not they were elected (or another fucking quango), and what right they have to make such life-and-death decisions, this is one of the sillier examples of the hysterical fear that has gripped this country for too long, of 'interfering with God's work/nature'. The biggest bugbear is 'GM', though in the Whitaker case all the parents were doing was selecting the right child, not altering its DNA. 'Unlawful and unethical' in all cases such as this are vague terms modern hysterics have now transposed with the vaguer 'against God or Nature'. These are applied to everything from human fertilisation to GM crops. But first, let's look at human DNA.

As our medical technologies advance it is becoming increasingly obvious that many of the diseases killing us now are due to faults in our own DNA, or in themselves need studying and tackling at a genetic level. Cancer, though in some cases having a viral or bacterial cause, arises from errors in the genetic blueprint. To truly defeat it we need to learn how to correct those errors; straight chemical intervention mostly just delays the process. The most likely way this will be done is by creating a virus that goes into the faulty cells like a nanoscopic technician, and repairs the faulty strand. Cutting-edge genetic research is the answer – not reliance on God or Nature.

The subject of GM crops is another one to get people banging their tambourines. Along with my acquisition of a garden came the beginning of a whole new vocabulary. I can now use the words hellebore and aquilegia and know what I'm talking about. I now also have a use for epithets, which I use less

Should parents be allowed to choose the genetic make-up of their children?



commonly in my writing, as prefixes for the words slug, snail, ant, and aphid. What, you ask, has this got to do with the GM debate? In reply I can tell you that I recently took part in the slaughter of the innocents. Two handfuls of slug pellets yielded me two litres of dead snails, which I duly transferred to my council-subsidised composter. My garden, I'll have you know, is just about big enough to get the Queen's head on. Beyond it is a field in which it would fit many thousands of times. A friend of mine is a farmer and he applies slug pellets from a spreader on the back of a quad bike and my few handfuls, I know, translate into sackfuls for this purpose. The environmental cost of this is but a small proportion of the whole. Thousands of gallons of

potent herbicides and insecticides are poured onto our land every year. GM crops need few of them, their yield is greater, therefore less land has to be used to produce the same amount of food. When are the hysterics going to realise that in this case we are already in a deep and poisonous hole out of which GM just might drag us?

The arguments against GM range from the apparently cogent to the plain silly. Tampering with the human genetic code will produce Midwich Cuckoos who'll take over, and consign old humans to the waste bin. Rubbish: it will result, in years to come, in the eradication of hereditary diseases, of faults, of people dying young or living lives governed by pill bottles, injections or the next pull on an inhaler, and it will be a slow process.

There's the idea that some super plant may wipe out or displace established species. We're already doing this with herbicides, and compared to what the natural world produces we are amateurs. Do the hysterics visualise armies of triffids marching across the English countryside? Get real. What we're having trouble with, is what nature produces. What the hell is so frightening? Could GM produce poisonous plants, killer insects or animals, virulent and fatal diseases ... er, nature already seems to be doing a pretty good job in those departments. Really, anyone who thinks that genetic modification is going to produce monsters that billions of years of evolution has not already produced is, frankly, an idiot.

Nature or God, however, do provide us with natural and godlike things. There's famine, plague, and other disasters that belittle our paltry attempts at the same. More species have been wiped out by nature than we are ever likely to wipe out. While we piddle about with our little wars and exterminations, nature comes along and puts us in our place. In the first world war we killed millions. The flu that came along after killed many millions more. Genocide? We're rank amateurs. Black Death killed twenty-five million, which was a third of the Earth's population at that time. So, when you hear people ranting about nature and how we are playing God, please point out to them that we are not playing. We are trying to solve some serious problems and take control of our own existence. As for nature: we live in a world that is completely unnatural and, in reality, the only way any of us is going to get back to nature is when we're buried in a paper coffin under a tree.

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.

Magazine woes

In 2003 the short-lived *3SF* crashed, *Spectrum SF* failed to produce a single issue and *Interzone* announced that it is shifting production to a bi-monthly schedule. Of the professional UK science fiction and fantasy magazines, only *The Third Alternative* has managed to stick to its schedule this year. Are science fiction magazines doomed, asks **Martin McGrath**, and should we care?

The announcement that *Interzone* was abandoning its monthly schedule and will now be produced only six times a year hardly came as a surprise. The magazine had effectively been publishing bimonthly for a good portion of the previous year as deadlines slipped and slipped. But added to the rapid rise and fall of *Big Engine's 3SF* and the failure of *Paul Fraser's Spectrum SF* to publish an issue in 2003, it caps a pretty bleak year for sf magazines in the UK.

From the statement made by *Interzone* editor, David Pringle, it seems clear that financial reasons were the prime factor behind the magazine's production downshift. Pringle told *Interzone* readers that: "If we can find some substantial new backing, then it may be that the magazine will return to a monthly schedule at some point in the future; but for now, and for the immediately foreseeable, it's a bimonthly publication."

Interzone has had a number of recent and well-documented financial misfortunes, losing a total of around £7000 in around twelve months due to bad debts from Andromeda Books UK, Firebird Distributing USA and emagazineshop.com.

Interzone will, at least, continue to publish on a regular basis and all subscriptions will be honoured.

The future of *Spectrum SF* does not look so optimistic. Despite an impressive debut, production of *Spectrum SF* stuttered in 2002 and the magazine failed to appear at all in 2003 as editor Paul Fraser took time off from what has always been a publication with his personal stamp clearly on it.

Paul told *Matrix* that he was uncertain about the future of the magazine. "At the moment [it's] still on hold," he said. "I'm tempted to say there will not be any more issues. However, every now and then I get the hankering to do another couple of issues. I'll make a concrete decision one way or another in the New Year."

Of the professional magazines

interzone

that started the year, only *The Third Alternative* has kept to its (quarterly) schedule, and (while it publishes many very fine stories) TTA rarely provides stories that cater to the more traditional science fiction fan, printing mostly urban fantasy, slipstream and some borderline horror.

On a more positive note, PS Publishing will launch a new genre magazine next year. The digest-sized quarterly, provisionally titled *Postscript*, should see the light of day in Spring 2004 with 60,000 words per issue and a cover price of five pounds, or (as is PS Publishing's *modus operandi*) as a special,

limited edition signed hardback costing £50 per issue.

But Peter Crowther, the publisher, is approaching the project with a realistic outlook, as he said on the TTA Forums. "I'm keeping my fingers crossed that this is going to work out without my losing too much money. But if it doesn't work out then I'll

be a brave boy and simply pull the plug: there's no way that it will affect the regular PS Publishing line of novellas, novels, collections, anthologies and other stuff."

In the UK small press 2003 has also been a mixed year. Ian Redman returned to launch *Juniper SF* in the summer and produced two issues on a quarterly schedule and Gary Fry produced the first issue of *Fusing Horizons*. But both *Here and Now* and *Scheherazade* had managed only one issue each. The next issue of *Here and Now* is at the printer and editor

Jenny Barber hopes to get back on a quarterly schedule next year. Paul Denyer announced the demise of *Roadworks* following falling subscriptions - though he will return to the fray with a new magazine in the new year. *Midnight Street* will be A4-sized and sport a colour cover.

Magazine publishing has always had a cyclical element to it and it might be a mistake to read too much into the present problems. Yet at a time when there is a new energy in British SF, with a group of writers attracting attention both within and beyond the boundaries of the genre, it seems anomalous that British sf magazines should be having such difficulty.

While the eighties and early nineties saw *Interzone* in particular bring on a crop of new writers (including Stephen Baxter, Kim Newman, Richard Calder and Paul McAuley) it has been suggested that the traditional role of short fiction magazines as the breeding ground of new talent is no longer relevant. Some of the current batch of British SF&F writers making

big names for themselves - such as China Miéville, Ken MacLeod and Richard Morgan - have had no short stories published in magazines. Even those who were published in magazines before moving to novels - Justina Robson (*The Third Alternative*) and Alastair Reynolds (*Interzone*)

- could hardly be called prolific short story writers.

There are exceptions. Charles Stross made his first professional sale to *Interzone* in 1987 and has sold an increasing number of short stories (many to Asimov's) in recent years. His first novel was published

in America in 2003.

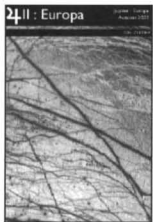
The short story route is certainly not the only route into professional publishing for aspiring sf authors. It may not even, any longer, be the primary route into professional publishing. But for many readers, short stories represent something of the essential vitality of the genres of science fiction, fantasy and,

indeed, horror. They are places where both the writer and reader can experiment with different styles and ideas.

On a personal note, as a subscriber to all the magazines discussed here, it is my belief that the short form of sf represents the genre in its purest form. This is based not on a hankering for a Gernsbeck-style "golden-era" but a feeling that magazines like *Interzone* and *The Third Alternative*, at their innovative best, can set the tone for the whole field. They don't reach beyond the genre in the way that novelists can but provide the core of writers and fans with a forum where new idioms and "new waves" can be constructed.

Elsewhere in this issue (p21) Mark Greene talks to Marion Arnott about her short story collection, *Sleepwalkers*, and Andrew Hook (p16&17) discusses the genre-stretching ambitions of *Elastic Press*. The strength of magazine publishing and the short story form is that it allows risk-taking and invention in ways that book publishers and booksellers simply cannot (or will not) support in the current market.

I, for one, will be hoping that *Interzone* returns to a monthly schedule sooner rather than later and that 2004 will be a brighter year for the publishers of genre magazines.



Nova Awards

The 2003 Nova Awards for excellence in science fiction fanzines were announced at Novacon 33 on Sunday, 9 November.

Pete Young's relative newcomer *Zoo Nation* was named "best fanzine", taking many pundits by surprise (although more than half of the voters had placed it in their top three), whilst Claire Brialey and Hugo winner Sue Mason were named "best fan writer" and "best fan artist" respectively. Their trophies, silver rockets upon a wooden base, were presented by the event's guest of honour, author Jon Courtenay Grimwood.

A special Nova, for "best fan", was chosen by the Novacon committee and presented by author Harry Harrison to Ina Shorrocks, active in British fandom since the early 1950s.

Best fanzine: 1, *Zoo Nation*, ed. Pete Young (59 points); 2, *Plotka*, ed. Steven Cain, Alison Scott, Mike Scott (39); 3, *Banana Wings*, ed. Claire Brialey, Mark Plummer (33); 4, *Tortoise*, ed. Sue Jones (16); 5, *Head*, ed. Doug Bell, Christina Lake (14).

Best fan writer: 1, Claire Brialey (29); 2, Tony Keen (22); 3, Pete Young (17); 4, Max (16); 5, Tanya Brown (14).

Best fan artist: 1, Sue Mason (69); 2, Dave Hicks (44); 3, Alison Scott (18); 4, Pete Young (15); 5, D West (14).

The Novas have been presented annually since 1973 and are voted upon by members of the convention able to demonstrate a basic familiarity with the field. The contest was this year opened up to candidates from Eire.

A total of 37 ballots were cast, and points awarded on a 3-2-1 basis for first, second and third place. In cases where a nomination was declared invalid, any subsequent nomination moved up one place. A full breakdown will appear in the first Novacon 34 progress report.

Following the awards ceremony, it was announced that Novacon 34 would be held at the Quality Hotel, Bentley (near Walsall), over the weekend of 5-7 November, 2004. The guest of honour will be Ian Watson.

Fanzine editors are invited to send copies to the Nova Award administrator, Steve Green, at 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ, for listing on the ballot. For further information, e-mail novacon34@yahoo.co.uk, or check out the convention's website at www.novacon.org.uk.

World Fantasy Awards

This year's World Fantasy Awards winners were:

Life Achievement: Lloyd Alexander; Donald M Grant
Novel: *The Facts of Life* (Gollancz) by Graham Joyce;

Ombria in Shadow (Ace) by Patricia A McKillip

Novella: 'The Library' (*Leviathan* 3) by Zoran Zivkovic

Short Story: 'Creation' (*F&SF* 5/02) by Jeffrey Ford

Vikingology: *The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest* (Viking) Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, eds; *Leviathan* 3 (Ministry of Whimsy Press) Jeff VanderMeer & Forrest Aguirre, eds.

Collection: *The Fantasy Writer's Assistant and Other Stories* (Golden Gryphon Press) by Jeffrey Ford

Artist: Tom Kidd

Special Award, Professional: Gordon Van Gelder, for *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*

Special Award, Non-Professional: Jason Williams, Jeremy Lassen and Benjamin Cossel (for *Night Shade Books*)

PS lead way at British Fantasy Awards

The big winner of the British Fantasy Society sponsored British Fantasy Awards was PS Publishing. Peter Crowther's Harrogate-based small press published three of the four fiction winners and, for the third consecutive year, was named best small press.

Keep Out The Night won best anthology for editor Stephen Jones; *Ramsey Campbell, Probably by* (BFS President) Ramsey Campbell won best collection; and Mark Chadbourne's *The Fairy-feller's Master Stroke* completed a PS hat-trick with the award for best short fiction.

Winner of the August Derleth Award for Best Novel was *The Scar* by China Miéville, while Les Edwards (Edward Miller) won best artist. The Special Award: The Kahl Edward Wagner Award went to Alan Garner.



Fresh and tasty?

Homegrown food may not be good for you if you live in the city. Researchers at Northwestern University in Chicago tested plants grown in local gardens and found lead levels in onions and radishes often exceeded 10 micrograms per gram when the plant was dried. The figure was even higher in some leafy vegetables such as rhubarb. Dried coriander taken from one garden contained more than 39 micrograms per gram. The US Food and Drug Administration says the maximum safety limit for lead ingestion is 15 micrograms per gram per day for children and 75 for adults.

Source: *New Scientist*



Water power

Canadian researchers at the University of Alberta have developed a new power source from water. Called the 'electrokinetic' battery, it generates electricity by 'charge separation' where the ions in liquids are liberated when they make contact with non-conducting surfaces. By driving water through 10-micron-diameter channels, a positive charge is created at one end of the block and a negative charge at the other. The prototype generated 10 volts with a current of a milliamp. This allowed the team to successfully power a light bulb.

Its efficiency is very low (less than 1%) and research continues to improve this. It is unlikely this technology will be powering anything large but may, one day, appear in mobiles telephones and calculators.

Source: *BBC Online*

Voyager still going

After 26 years of flight Voyager 1 is finally entering interstellar space - maybe. Over eight billion miles (13 billion km) from the Sun, the spacecraft must be crossing the zone where the Sun's powerful influence is blocked by the general radiation of the galaxy. This boundary layer, defining the end of the solar system, will be given away by a change in the level and intensity of

radiation. Trouble is Voyager's aging instruments have provided evidence that it has both entered the boundary layer and that it hasn't yet, because levels changed then returned to the original readings. Scientists are still debating what this means, but it probably means that the boundary is a dynamic environment.

No matter what the data says, soon humanity's furthest thrown object will leave the solar system.

Source: *NASA*

They fuck you up, your mom and mom and dad

Scientists have successfully created a fetus with three parents. The controversial IVF treatment uses a technique used in cloning to transfer a fertilised nucleus from a mother's egg to the egg of another woman. The fetus got most of its DNA from its mother and father but the mitochondria came from the other woman. The process could help women who are infertile because of genetic defects in their mitochondria or because of faults with their eggs.

Although, in this case, the fetus did not survive until term, children with three parents have already been born using another IVF process that injects cytoplasm (and mitochondria) from one egg to another.

Source: *New Scientist*

Phoenix to rise again

The Phoenix Con will rise again as P-CON II at the Ashling Hotel in Parkgate Street on Saturday 13th & Sunday 14th of November 2004. Guest of Honour is Juliet E McKenna. Other guests include Ariel, Diane Duane, James P Hogan, Peter Morwood, Charlie Stross, and Steve Westcott.

The cost is €20 until and including the weekend of Eastercon. Thereafter, (from Tuesday 13th of April) the cost will be €30. A supporting membership will cost €10. The Sterling equivalent will be £15 until Eastercon, thereafter it will be £20. Sterling support rate is £10.

The convention is largely going



Phoenix Convention

13th & 14th November 2004 Ashling Hotel Dublin

II

to concentrate, as did the first one, on the written end of the genre, rather than on TV, or movies, or such, although they'll not be deliberately excluding anything. They're completely abandoning the video room, however, as well as the Saturday night disco, which will be replaced with a table quiz, and convivial conversation, which seems to be what people prefer,

and only using the hotel's own bar, rather than getting a separate bar of our own, as the hotel bar is where everyone ended up in the evenings, anyway. This allows the organiser to take a few less rooms, all in all, and therefore to bring the price down on what it might have been.

The organisers hope P-CON II will be small but amiable, more conservative in its nature than some,

but none the worse for that.

"A lot of conventions want to be bigger and better," says Padraig O'Mealoid. "We want to be smaller and better." The convention's website, together with a lovely new logo by Fearag NicBhríde, (see above) can be found at www.slovbooks.com/phoenix. Any queries should be directed to the convention's email address, phoenixconvention@yahoo.co.uk

Terrorvision

There are plans to launch a channel dedicated to horror programming on US cable.

Variety reports that Nick Psaltos is attempting to raise funds to launch the Horror Channel on Halloween 2004. They have a line-up of distinguished horror directors (including Wes Craven, John Carpenter and Tobe Hooper) as an "advisory board" and have established links with horror magazine (and video producers) Fangoria. They have, according to Variety, one thousand US horror movies and more than one thousand movies and series from abroad to draw on for a planned twenty-four hour broadcasting schedule.

As well as showing old films and re-runs, The Horror Channel have also committed themselves to produce original material, including new series, mini-series and films. Films will account for about 70% of the channel's output, with a mix of documentaries, news, lifestyle, music and talk shows making up the rest of the programming.

There is no reason why the Horror Channel should not exist and thrive," Psaltos told Fangoria's Anthony Timpane. "Comedy Central and Sci Fi are both doing extremely well. Both are very valuable enterprises and they are both descendants of movie genres."

An official website is already online (<http://www.horrorchannel.com>) asking fans for their input. "The fans will become part of our programming and content creation process," Psaltos told the website. "We will develop programs that they ask for and, in some cases, produce scripts that they write or produce. Films will be uninterrupted and uncut."

The history of the Sci Fi channel demonstrates that such enterprises can take some time to find their feet. However, the recent success of that channel in producing increasingly

ambitious and successful small-screen science fiction at least suggests that the Horror Channel could be a step forward for fans of dark fiction.

More terrorvision

British horror author Clive Barker (*Hellraiser*) is working on a television series. *Demonologist* will be based, loosely, on Gerald Brittle's book about real-life couple Ed and Lorraine Warren, investigators of supernatural events. Barker will work with *The Dead Zone* writer Ted Tannenbaum and the programme is due to air late in 2004.

Edwards update

Artist Les Edwards (*Matrix 160*), the winner of this year's award for best artist from the British Fantasy Society, recently updated his websites: www.lesedwards.com and www.edwardmiller.co.uk.

SF popular with scientists

According to a poll conducted by *The Scientist*, SF and Fantasy rank third behind comedy and drama as the most popular movie genre. Comedy and drama got 74 and 58 per cent of the vote respectively. SF and fantasy 56 per cent, horror and suspense just 33 per cent.

Elastic stretches to The Aliso Project

Elastic Press (see page 16) expands online to the multi-author format with *The Aliso Project* (publication date 31st December 2003) in which twenty-three writers examine the enigma of Aliso. Spurred by a simple typographical error, and containing an eclectic mix of styles, ideas, genres and meaning. *The Aliso Project* contains stories by Marion Arnott, Allen Ashley, K.J. Bishop, Gary Couzens, Matt Dinniman, John Grant, Kay Green, Andrew Hook, Brian Howell, Andrew Humphrey, Nick Jackson, Christopher

Kenworthy, David Allen Lambert, Antony Mann, Marie O'Regan, Lisa Pearson, Justina Robson, Nicholas Royle, Steve Saville, Alasdair Stuart, Kaaron Warren, Conrad Williams, and Tamar Yellin. Contact: Elastic Press, 85 Gertrude Road, Norwich, NR3 4SG and selected outlets. See www.elasticpress.com

Obituary

John Ritter (1948-2003), son of country singer Tex Ritter and actress Dorothy Fay, died 11 September, six days before his 55th birthday, following an aortic dissection.

Genre appearances include the comic fantasy *Stay Tuned* (1992),

Stephen King's *It* (miniseries, 1990) and the biopic *The Dreamer of Oz* (1990, as L. Frank Baum). More recently, Ritter played a homicidal android in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ("T", 1997). His most famous role was the male lead in *Three's Company*, the US version of *Man About the House*. The inevitable spin-off, *Three's a Crowd* (the US *Robin's Nest*) failed to rekindle the ratings.

Ritter leaves four children (three from his first marriage to actress Nancy Morgan, one from his marriage to actress Amy Yasbeck). His eldest son Jason Ritter currently appears in the acclaimed fantasy series *Joan of Arcadia*.

Steve Green

Feral Vampires

US publishers Feral House recently published *True Vampires* by Sandra London, which examines the real vampires whose crimes have contributed to the fearsome myths from Romania and Russia, France and Wales, Brazil and South Africa, to the hills of Kentucky and the streets of Los Angeles.

The history of the vampire myths is traced from Jesus Christ urging his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood, to the legendary exploits of Vlad the Impaler, Countess Bathory, and Sawney Bean. Ancient tales of the accursed undead rising from the grave are given new life when compared with modern accounts of persons approaching burial who suddenly sit up and ask for a drink of water. London explains how the seductive appeal of the commercialized vampire image acts as a "media virus" and contributes to a widespread desensitization toward a truly horrific level of personal violence.

The ultimate vampire of contemporary variety is revealed to be Nicolas Claux, otherwise known as "The Vampire of Paris." This notorious blood-sucking killer is also a talented artist, and as such, Claux has lavishly illustrated this book with a series of striking oil portraits of vampire killers, and his Oath to Satan, inscribed and sworn in upon blood while he was imprisoned for murder.

True Vampires

By Sandra London

Illustrations by Nicolas Claux

Winner of a Best Book Award

From the author of

True Vampires

True Vampires

True Vampires

True Vampires

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Kids today!

Martin Lewis samples the delights of *Battle Royale 2: Requiem*, not the great film about teenagers in exploding necklaces waging war against sympathetic terrorists that he had been hoping for. Shame.



Battle Royale II: *Requiem* takes up the story three years after the original, surprise hit, movie. Having survived the deadly game of *Battle Royale* (2000) Shuya Nanahara (Tatsuya Fujiwara) founded a terrorist organisation, Wild Seven, dedicated to overthrowing the 'adult' world responsible for the events of the first film. The authorities strike back by passing the second Battle Royale Bill. Another bus of teenagers is drugged and wakes to find themselves in a military compound with explosive collars round their necks. This time however they are not expected to battle each other to the death but hunt down and kill Nanahara.

The film starts strongly but unfortunately this has a lot to do with the fact it borrows heavily from other films: the last five minutes of *Fight Club* (1999); the first fifteen minutes of *Battle Royale* (a virtual rerun); the first fifteen minutes of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). This last one comes from the fact that the students' first task is to assault the Wild Seven island stronghold. Approaching by sea in dirigibles (under a 'Mission One' caption that explicitly casts the film in video-game terms) they come under sustained and horrific fire from the defenders, instantly losing a quarter of their number. It is an impressive

sequence but suffers from an over-familiarity with Spielberg's recreation of the Normandy landings which it references at every point. After this bravura sequence the students continue their head-on assault but doubts start to creep in for the viewer.

In the original film the arbitrary and unlikely nature of the central premise was part of the point; it was supposed to engender fear and hence instil respect into the non-participating high school students. Here, though, the government takes the same approach when dealing with a very different objective: the elimination of a highly-motivated terrorist group. The message seems to be that as long as teenagers continue to die bloody and pointless deaths the fact that terrorists are free to blow up skyscrapers is a small price to pay.

This is enforced by the fact that a helicopter flies helpfully overhead dispensing ammunition and advice to the rookie troops below. Since the terrorists' fortress is made entirely out of scaffolding and corrugated steel and could be razed to the ground by a pair of helicopter gunships you can't help but see this as a lack of seriousness on the part of the government.

This problem stems from the fact that the film doesn't really know what it is. It oscillates wildly between black

humour, straight-faced violence and melodrama, punctuated with stabs of out-and-out farce and satire. There is also some very muddy political stuff revolving around the twin motifs of American interventionism and Afghan turmoil, which sits badly with the rest of the film. Excepting the politics, the same was true of the first film to a lesser extent but there the tension of the plot and the central anchor of Takeshi Kitano as the students' teacher held everything together. Neither is true of *Battle Royale II*. Riki Takeuchi, in the Kitano role, has none of his implacable dead-eyed menace, instead resorting to chewing the scenery and (literally) foaming at the mouth. Neither does the film maintain the tension of its earlier sections.

After the initial assault the students come face to face with their opponents, at which point all tension is dissipated and the film becomes very baggy. Interesting ideas, like the fact that the students are twinned and if one dies the other's collar is detonated, are discarded and it devolves into one long shootout as the Japanese government storms the island. Now, there's nothing necessarily wrong with long shootouts providing they are shot well but this is like an episode of *The A-Team*. Tactics do not exist and people routinely

stand shooting at each other from distances under two metres. Even more irritating is the fact that the constant gun battles are magically paused for the ponderous final words of characters breathing their last.

There is a great film to be made about teenagers in exploding necklaces waging war against sympathetic terrorists but this sloppy curate's egg isn't it.

If you want to see *Battle Royale* 2, and didn't get to the London Film Festival screenings, the film's distributors Tartan Video have tentatively slated it for a limited UK cinema release in April 2004 with a UK DVD release later in the year. Import DVDs from Japan should be available to order by the time you read this.

Battle Royale II: Requiem (not rated)

Directors: Kenta Fukasaku, Kinji Fukasaku.

Screenplay: Kenta Fukasaku. Producer: Masumi Okada.

Starring: Tatsuya Fujiwara, Natsuki Kato, Yuma Ishigaki, Ai Iwamura, Mitsuru Murata, Masumi Toyokura, Takeshi Kitano Ai Maeda.

134 mins.

Oh Neo!

It doesn't tie up the loose ends from the earlier films and it doesn't provide an emotionally satisfying denouement but it does have some spectacular set pieces. **Martin McGrath** on *The Matrix Revolutions*, the disappointing final chapter in the Wachowski brothers' sf trilogy. It doesn't quite kill off any magic left in Neo's world, but it was a damned close thing.

The *Matrix* is over. An ending, of sorts, has been reached but it leaves as many questions as it does answers. Chief amongst the questions, sadly, is how the creators of the excellent first film in this series could have got things so badly wrong with parts two and three.

There is excitement and fun to be had in *The Matrix Revolutions* and, at times, I did find myself enjoying the film. But, in the end, such moments are too rare and can't disguise the fact that the sequels have done nothing but tarnish the reputation of their predecessor.

When *The Matrix Revolutions* is good, it can be very, very good. There are spectacular moments and the whole budget is clearly up there, on the screen. And *Revolutions* is better than *Reloaded*. There are far fewer of those lacunae in which some sage-like character expounds, ad nauseum, on some philosophical matter. The action sequences are bigger and, on the whole, better – with a tense scene in the Merovingian's nightclub and the huge battle between machine and humans in Zion being technical, if not emotional, highpoints.

But many of the weaknesses evident in *Reloaded* return in *Revolutions*, magnified and made more explicit.

The Matrix contained characters that we were encouraged to care about because they were fighting for a cause that was bigger than themselves. In *Reloaded*, and even more so in *Revolutions*, Neo (Reeves), Morpheus (Fishburne) and the rest have become avatars, mere plot devices for moving an increasingly bedraggled and confused story along. This lack of engagement with the characters is crucial because, though there are big action sequences aplenty here, there is no one we really care about.

The large number of bland, second-rate characters added to the second and third films means that there has been a loss of focus. Our ability to care about the characters on screen has been diluted and the additions have sidelined key characters from the first film. Morpheus, for example, has become increasingly peripheral to the action as the trilogy has progressed and is reduced here to little more than a distant cheerleader for Neo.

The quality of dialogue has been a particular weakness of the big



fantasy and sf franchises. Fans and critics have been quick (and right) to criticise some of the dialogue in *Star Wars*, but the Wachowskis manage to make George Lucas sound, if not eloquent, then at least literate. Characters declaim rather than speak to each other and every exchange is overloaded with portents and signs.

Particularly annoying are Niobe (Jada Pinkett Smith) and Mifune (Nathaniel Lees), respectively hot-shot pilot and hard-bitten soldier, who seem to have swallowed whole the dialogue from every Second World War film ever made. From this canon they proceed to spout random excerpts, whether appropriate or not, at odd intervals during their time on screen. Little better is Trinity (Moss), especially around Neo, when she becomes a simpering mess, completely reliant on him for the affirmation of her choices and the

maintenance of her courage. Their final scene together, which should be moving to the point of tears, elicited only a shrug from me and giggles from the rest of the audience. Trinity deserved better.

But fundamentally it is in the unravelling of the plot that *The Matrix Revolutions* fails most seriously. It is now apparent that the Wachowskis had no clear arc planned for a trilogy, as they have claimed since the success of *The Matrix* made sequels inevitable. *Revolutions* offers no resolution of the questions raised by the first movie – Neo's "victory" does not defeat the machines but results in a compromise with them. Those who wish to be free from the matrix will be released, but the mass of humanity will continue to be used by the machines. Those whose consciousness have been raised to serve as slaves of the machines. Superman

has triumphed, but ordinary man will be left to rot.

Such a resolution may fit with the Nietzschean philosophical thread running through *The Matrix* trilogy but it does raise the question of what Morpheus and the rest were fighting for all along. Was the search for "The One" really only so that Zion could be left in peace while the rest of humanity was left in slavery? Wasn't there supposed to be some reclaiming of humanity and the planet? This conclusion is neither internally consistent nor satisfying. There is, however, implicit in the ending the threat of further (please, Neo, no!) instalments in the series.

In many ways it is easy to be harsh on *The Matrix* sequels. The first film was so fresh and so exciting that it was always going to be impossible to repeat that impact.

In my review of the middle film, *The Matrix Reloaded* (Matrix 162), I criticised the Wachowskis for being blinded by the critics' response to *The Matrix* and concentrating too much on explaining their philosophy. I hoped then that *Revolutions* would justify the weaknesses of the second film, that there would be some pay-off for having to sit through all that speech-making. There isn't. And I don't believe I will be alone amongst those who watch this film and feel cheated.

There can have been few bigger cinematic disappointments in recent years for *The Matrix Reloaded* and *Revolutions*. For me, their only real achievement, beyond some fleeting visceral thrills, was to make me question whether the original was really as good as I'd first thought. So I went back to watch it again and the good news is that it really was that good. *The Matrix* has survived its sequels.

The Matrix Revolutions (15)

Directors/Screenplay: Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski.
Producers: Bruce Berman, Grant Hill, Joel Silver, Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski.
Starring: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss, Hugo Weaving, Mary Alice, Jada Pinkett Smith, Anthony Wong, Nathaniel Lees, Ian Bliss. 129 mins.

Lone star films

Texas is, as Texans never tire of telling everyone who will listen, a very big place, which probably means that the kids from *Holes* will never have to worry about meeting Leatherface from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Keep your *Freddie Vs Jason*, that's a crossover I'd pay to see! **Andrew M Butler** takes a look at two very different films from the "Lone Star State."

The grisly crimes of Wisconsin serial killer Ed Gein are possibly the most filmed of all time: in *Ed Gein* (2000), but also via Robert Bloch's novel to Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and sequels/prequels and a shot-for-shot remake, in *Deranged* (1974) and in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and its sequels. *Chain Saw* achieved a degree of notoriety among British horror fans thanks to its unavailability and in the mean time its title became a brandname for a certain kind of gruesome horror – bolstered by the appearance of *The Driller Killer* (1979) and the BBFC's blanket distaste for films with power tools in their titles.

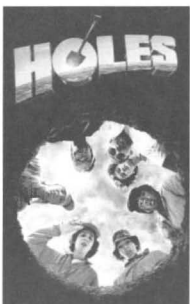
Now producer Michael Bay brings the same subtle touch to this remake as he did to *Pearl Harbor* (2001), treading a line between the pointlessness of being faithful and the sacrilege of being unfaithful. *Chainsaw* acknowledges *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) in its retreatment of *Chain Saw* 1974 set-up and an abattoir being owned by the Blair Meat Company, in the virtuoso camerawork of Argento in a shot which pulls back through a bullet wound and a van's rear window, and in the forensic obsession of *Se7en* (1995). *Chainsaw* risks becoming *Scream* (1996), but comes across more like an 18-certificate *Scooby Doo*.

After its found-footage crimescene opening – which unsubtly bookends the film – it feels faithful, and it even looks as if we are in for a nostalgic recreation of period detail – although Balfour (from 24 and *Six Feet Under*) looks more surfer dude in his baggy trousers. But once the five teenagers pick up a woman rather than a male hitchhiker on a road in Texas, the narrative diverges. It delays entry into Leatherface's domain, but once we are there we see more, and in the CGI age we can see amputees. As always more explicit is not more frightening and curiously the really disturbing sections are the moments when the teenagers become complicit in the murderous culture – R. Lee Ermy stealing the show as a sinister sheriff.

Chain Saw derived much macabre humour from putting one of its heroes in a wheelchair; *Chainsaw's* equivalent is as annoying but able bodied, and to show the shallowness of this political correctness, one of the

villains is a chair user. The film is as glossy and professional as you'd expect from Bay, but I don't suppose we'll be as fascinated with this version in thirty years.

Meanwhile, in another part of Texas, the palindromic Stanley Yelnats (LaBeouf) is in a prison camp for a crime he did not commit, and his character-building punishment is to dig a five-foot deep and five-foot wide hole every day, under the cruel eye of Voight. Stanley believes he is there because of his no-good great-great grandfather, who brought a curse on his family for failing to carry the wise woman Madame Zeroni (Eartha Kitt, always splendid) to the top of a hill before departing to America. His hole-building, on the other hand, is all about the desires of the Warden



(Weaver) to reclaim something lost to one of her ancestors.

Sachar, largely faithful to his own novel, offers us a new fairy tale, in the triumph of the little man, the perils of greed, the importance of love – and in the bringing together of the sweetness of the peach with the sourness of the onion. Rationally the film should just not work, with its dependence

on coincidence, but we are in the realm of Destiny which allows for such things. The way the present-day narratives intersect with the past works wonderfully, as if it were all meant to be.

Director Davis, better known for thrillers (*The Fugitive*, *Collateral Damage*), finds the right level of grotesquery in his adult actors, and

charms great performances out of his teenagers. Their characters are branded criminals by society, but they are allowed to have a decent core and, despite occasional problems, they offer Stanley a brotherhood he's never had, especially with the illiterate Zero, whose fate is intertwined with his. The racial tensions of the nineteenth century narrative seem entirely resolved by the twentieth. This isn't realism, it's fairy-tale.

In a year of CGI blockbusters which have largely failed to perform, this, like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, is a delight from the start to the end of the closing credits. It might be, you know, for kids, but let your cynical self fall under Madame Zeroni's spell.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (18)

Director: Marcus Nispel.
Producers: Michael Bay and Mike Fleiss. Screenplay: Scott Kosar. Starring: Jessica Bird, Eric Balfour, R. Lee Ermy. 98 mins.

Holes (PG)

Director: Andrew Davis.
Producers: Lowell D. Blank, Andrew Davis, Mike Medavoy, Teresa Tucker-Davis.
Screenplay: Louis Sachar. Starring: Sigourney Weaver, Jon Voight, Tim Blake Nelson, Shia LaBeouf. 117 mins.

Messaged: More explicitly if not more frighteningly.



Bloody Bill

Kill Bill Volume One is violent, very violent. It is also, says **Gary Wilkinson**, one of the best martial arts movies ever made. Has Tarantino made a film that "cannot be judged on the same criteria as ordinary western cinema?"

There is a moment soon after the start of *Kill Bill Volume 1* where there is a single gunshot... a gunshot that left me gasping in my cinema seat in shock. Shock, not so much from the gunshot itself but from my own reaction to it, because I... flinched. And as I sat there while the titles rolled I tried to think of the last time I'd actually flinched at a gunshot in a film and I, honest to God, could not remember.

To me this says a great deal about so-called action films that have been churned out by the Hollywood machine in recent years... safe products that try to recreate the earnings of past hits, any

even Steven? I would have to kill you, go upstairs, kill little Nikki, then wait for the good Doctor Bell to come home, and kill him. That'd be about square." She stops off in Okinawa to have a sword made, then it's on to Tokyo for a showdown with O-Ren, now the head of all the Japanese Yakuza, and her gang of swordsmen (the Crazy 88s) in the House of Blue Leaves teahouse that takes up much of the latter half of the film.

So why should a review of this film be appearing in *Matrix*? It is too limiting to think of this as simply a pastiche, as some critics seem to think it is, because quite clearly this is a superb fantasy film. A film that takes place in a genre

hinterland, an alternative reality, a place where the looks, philosophy and physics of martial arts films and spaghetti westerns are taken as real and extend beyond their

traditional geographical boundaries. Here East meets West in crazy combinations.

The double-bills of kung fu movies of the local grindhouse theatres and 70s television series of Tarantino's youth were obvious formative influences on this magical kingdom. A place where you can fly with a sword propped against your aeroplane seat and one character's back-story is presented as a superb manga short.

In order to create the correct look and feel for his film, Tarantino employed Chinese crewmembers using traditional

special effects techniques and other production methods that were used in the movies that inspired him. The manga was subcontracted out to the top studio Production IG, responsible for such classics as *Ghost in the Shell* and *The Last Vampire*. The production design is particularly expert, climaxing in the House of Blue Leaves, which combines old and new Japan as a backdrop to the martial arts mayhem before the duel takes place outside for a action in a snow-covered formal garden of aching beauty.

As well as an overall sensibility there are innumerable specific fan references, from the logo of Hong Kong production company, Shaw Brothers,

which starts the film. The swordsmen is played by martial arts legend Sonny Chiba, in a role that is supposed to be a descendant of a long line of characters he has played. Uma Thurman's yellow tracksuit is a direct homage to Bruce Lee's final film *Game of Death*. Tarantino has already built up a number of his own visual references and these are continued here: the Red Apples cigarette adverts, the boot shot, bare girl's feet, breakfast cereal. The Viper Squad is obviously a riff on Fox Force Five, the television series pilot that Thurman's

Pulp Fiction character starred in. There are plenty of art-school touches with long sections of subtitled dialogue, monochrome in the fight scenes (partially to avoid a financially crippling censorship rating) and the action is split into 'Chapters' with on-screen captions, time-shuffled so that the first chapter is '2'.

After his usual considered casting Tarantino goes on to get the best possible performance from his actors.

Liu expertly

plays a character who is all delicate stillness until she needs to erupt into brutal fury to assert her authority. Thurman

puts in an equally charismatic performance; her unconventional beauty is riveting. Although primarily known as a writer and director of dialogue Tarantino now proves he can equally handle action. He has had the intelligence to hire the best fight choreographer in the world, Yuen Woo-ping, who choreographed the *Matrix* movies.

But why is his work here so much better? Well, Tarantino has a soul for a start; his style suffuses every aspect of the fight scenes and the action is perfectly combined with a high mastery of visual editing and sound design, combined with some key and, unusually for this director, sparse dialogue.

One thing that cannot be denied is that this film is very, very violent. In the final conflict between Thurman and the Crazy 88s, there is mass dismemberment with arms, legs and heads flying, stumps gushing with blood like the Black Knight in *Monty Python and the Holy*

Grail. This is, however, true to the film's source material and the fact that the result is neither totally revolting or utterly hilarious is indicative of Tarantino's skill. The final swordfight is a true work of art, as exquisite as an Astaire and Rogers duet.

Of course, the biggest cut of all is cutting the film in half, releasing it in two parts... a rip-off? Well, perhaps, it might have been possible to nibble away to make a commercial length film (it's foolish to think they would release a three hours plus cut - which would have meant one

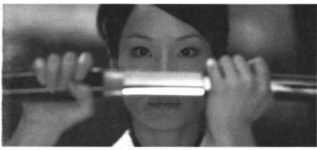
less showing a day - of a multi-million dollar film that had already crept over its budget) but I'd rather have it this way.

Many critics have moaned that after the alleged 'maturity' of *Jackie Brown*, Tarantino should have gone on to make the great American movie. Some have complained about the violence or supposed lack of depth of this offering. They have got it so wrong - this is a new East/West hybrid and cannot be judged on the same criteria as 'ordinary'

western cinema. This is total cinema, a pure adrenaline ballet of brutality. He's simply made one of the best 'martial arts' movies of all time. Tarantino's mission seems to be to recreate a perfect example of each of the genres he loves: crime, pulp, blacksploitation and now martial arts. His next project is a WWII war film, *Inglorious Bastards*; on the back of this I expect it to be one of the best war films of all time... But wait a minute, good golly Miss Molly, we're only halfway through this one!

Kill Bill Volume 1 (18)

Director: Quentin Tarantino. Producers: Lawrence Bender, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein. Screenplay: Quentin Tarantino, Uma Thurman. Starring: Uma Thurman, David Carradine, Lucy Liu, Daryl Hannah, Vivica A. Fox, Michael Madsen, Sonny Chiba. 111 mins.



creative quirks of interest smoothed away by audience testing to create the bland blockbuster that infect the multiple screens of multiplexland. *Kill Bill* towers over them like Godzilla over Tokyo, a laser-shooting, atomic-blasting, monster of a movie. It is quite simply a masterpiece.

The plot is so simple it can be summarised in one word: revenge. Thurman plays The Bride (we never learn her real name) who in flashback is shot, pregnant, on her wedding day - leaving her in a coma. The rest of the wedding party, down to the 'old coloured fella who played the organ', is slaughtered. The culprit is Liu (Carradine... though we only ever see his hand or cowboy boots) and his 'Deadly Viper Assassination Squad' consisting of Vernita Green ('Copperhead' (Fox), O-Ren Ishii 'Cottonmouth' (Liu), Elle Driver

'California Mountain Snake' (Hannah) and Budd 'Sidewinder' (Madsen). We learn The Bride was an ex-member ('Black Mamba') but beyond that we've no idea why she's been targeted for killing. Thurman wakes from a four-year coma to find she's lost her child. She is now hell-bent on revenge, wanting to cross each member of the squad off her tick-list... as she says to Green: 'To get even'



Working for the Paycheck

By the time you read this *Paycheck*, the next film by John Woo and the latest in a very long line of Philip K Dick cinematic adaptations, will be in the cinemas. Ben Affleck and Uma Thurman star in a story, adapted from a Dick short, about a man who has lost all memory of the last three years of his life and must discover his secret before he is killed by the people he used to work for or the federal agents pursuing him.

Neither Woo or his producer, Terence Chang, have read the original story and, Chang told *Sci Fi Wire*, they don't like science fiction. "So we've got to change the script. I mean, we keep the essence of the story but turn it into something that John feels comfortable with, meaning this will be an action thriller."

Most disconcerting is the comparison Chang made with Woo's earlier futuristic thriller, the (dire) *Face/Off*. "On *Face/Off* the original script was very, very sci-fi. But Woo just stripped out the sci-fi elements, but kept the face-swapping part and made it an emotional suspense thriller." Which explains why so much of *Face/Off* made no sense.

Slipstreaming

Slipstream is, sadly, not a remake of the Mark Hamill/Bob Peck "Luke meets Max" film of the same name. It is, instead, the story of a scientist who invents a device that allows its users to travel ten minutes back in time and then decides to use it to rob a bank. Everything goes according to plan until another group of robbers try to hold up the bank at the same time. What are the chances of that happening?

Starring Sean Astin (*Lord of the Rings*), Vinnie Jones (*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*) and "model-



This is the first image from *Howl's Moving Castle*, the next film from *Spirited Away* director Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli.

turned-actress" Ivana Milicevic (*Paycheck*, *Love Actually* – but waaaaay down the credits on both), *Slipstream* will be directed by first-timer David van Eyssen and is written by Phillip Badger (*Retroactive*).

Aronofsky in Cradle

Will Darren Aronofsky ever make another film? The talented young director of the brilliant *Pi* and the mind-altering *Requiem for a Dream* has been stuck in development hell for almost four years. He has announced that he is working on two films – adaptations of Theodore

Rozak's novel *Flicker* and Kazuo Koike's Japanese comic strip *Lone Wolf and Cub* (perhaps as a western?) but neither of these projects has been confirmed.

Now there are rumours of a third project that would see him working with another cinematic tyro, Richard Kelly (*Donnie Darko*). *Variety* reports that Kelly will write and Aronofsky direct Leonardo DiCaprio in an adaptation of Kurt Vonnegut's classic *Cat's Cradle*. The status of this project remains unconfirmed but it is consistent with Aronofsky's interest in taking on difficult s

Kaufman, will write the script, but if he does: lock up your children.

Stuck in the middle

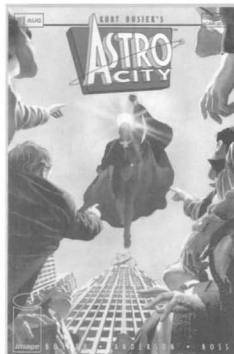
In the *Equidistant* (or just *Equidistant*, depending on which report you read) is an Australian sci-fi time travel disaster movie currently in production, to be directed by Ben Gibbs, who previously directed a short film called *Nova*.

Mwah-ha-ha

New Line Cinema have optioned Neil Zawaicki's self-help manual, *How To Be A Villain*. The (funny) book contains a step-by-step guide into how to make it as a criminal mastermind, with help on mastering the evil laugh, choosing your secret lair, picking the correct henchmen (hmm, winged monkeys or ninja warriors) and, of course, deciding on hardware to help you in your cause (Death ray or doomsday device? Mind control or orbital laser? So many choices, so little time!). The film will focus on a loser's struggle to make the world pay for doing him down.

Looking dodgy...

Apparently enough people paid to see *Underworld* (what were you thinking?) to make the studio contemplate *Underworld 2* – "part sequel, part prequel" to the first film. I can hardly wait... Cyrus, sword and sandals epic about Iranian (roughly) emperor who, in the sixth century BC invented human rights and religious tolerance, Sean Connery (!) will play Shyrush and Angelina Jolie hish empress (please, no sex scenes)... *Superman*... casting rumours... too stupid to repeat... can't stop laughing...



Astro Movie

Excuse me while I have a fanboy moment. Eek! Kurt Busiek is working with short film writer/director Jonathan Alpers and producer Ben Barenholtz (*Requiem for a Dream*, *Miller's Crossing*) to develop a film from his *Astro City* series of comics. *Astro City* is (in my opinion) one of the best comics currently in production, telling stories about ordinary people in a metropolis where superheroes are the norm. At its best it can be intelligent, poignant and insightful. So there is no chance of a Hollywood film capturing any of that. Still, you must buy the comic, if only for the beautiful covers by Alex Ross.

In other comics-to-movies news, Ben Affleck has said that he probably won't return as Daredevil unless "Kevin Smith wrote it and was going to be involved" ... Bruce Campbell will play a "snoopy usher" in *Spider-Man 2*.

themes. Production on *The Fountain*, his generation-spanning epic dealing with immortality, was shut down just days before shooting started in 2003 when Brad Pitt left the production and the studio got cold feet over the complex script.

Jonze goes Wild

As if *Being John Malkovich* hadn't done enough to mess with the heads of the world's population, Spike Jonze is being let loose on small children. Jonze will direct an adaptation of modern children's classic, *Where The Wild Things Are*. Originally planned as a CG animated movie to be produced by Tom Hanks, Jonze will shoot a live action version of the story. It is not clear if Jonze's usual companion, Charlie

Big finish



Expecting schlock, **Martin McGrath** finds *Atomic War Bride* and *This Is Not A Test* surprisingly well intentioned but it's the extras that make this disk really frightening.

Other than a preoccupation with the destruction of the planet in nuclear war, *This Is Not A Test* and *Atomic War Bride* have something else in common. They both make it (to quote *Raising Arizona*) "a hard world on the small things".

In *Atomic War Bride* a cow is shot by a jet fighter (I think it's symbolic) while in *Test* there is a spectacular chicken-flinging scene and an off-screen (boo!) puppy throttling. The chicken-flinging scene is particularly memorable because I'd be willing to bet good money that those were real chickens getting flung. You don't see that much in modern movies. Political correctness gone mad?

I love old sci-fi movies and this (region one) DVD from Something Weird Video won me over right from the start with the promise of a little bit of nostalgia. The packaging sells the films as Roger Corman-style exploitation flicks, so it took me a little while to readjust my expectations when after twenty minutes or so into the first feature I realised that they were taking this nuclear holocaust thing seriously. That's not to say that viewers should be expecting classics of modern cinema; in places both these films are pretty ropey technically and artistically, but the surprise is how hard both films try to treat their common subject – the end of civilisation in nuclear holocaust –

seriously compared to the exploitation monster movies I had been expecting.

Atomic War Bride (or *Rat*) is a Yugoslavian stab at *Strangelove*-ish satire about the madness of war, especially nuclear war. The film is most effective when the characters' struggle to maintain a semblance of normality in the face of escalating warfare breaks down and madness ensues.

Two scenes in particular stand out. When "John Johnson" receives a faulty "anti-radiation suit" (a black bag with a hole in it) he desperately tries to crawl inside one that someone else is wearing, while all around people just kneel in the streets, waiting for detonation. Later, John is trained in "camouflage" by milling around with branches pretending to be trees or scrambling around on all fours pretending to be sheep. There is a specifically Eastern European feel to these farcical antics. *Atomic War Bride* was nominated for The Golden Lion at the Venice Film



Festival in 1960 and, though now looking very creaky, it is still interesting.

This Is Not A Test is much more obviously a "B" or even "F" movie. The plot staggers down several blind alleys getting mugged by a leaden script, wooden acting and static direction. You know you're amongst Hollywood's "F-list" when most of the cast can't muster a

career CV with more than uncredited parts in *Bonanza* and when the "star" – Seamon Glass – was "Mountain Man #2" in *Damnation Alley* and "First Grinner" in *Deliverance*. And yet, despite these drawbacks (and Glass is a grunting, plank-like drawback) *This Is Not A Test* makes a creditable stab at making a serious point.

There is a *Twilight Zone* vibe to the film as a group of strangers are stuck in the middle of nowhere while their world falls apart. There is no flag-waving patriotism, the "enemy" are never mentioned and there is no anti-communist ranting. Instead a martinet

policeman tries to impose order on a diverse group of people and, as the film progresses, it becomes clear that he is nuttier than the murdering psychopath wandering amongst the bushes.

That *This Is Not A Test* is poorly acted, weakly scripted and badly directed is undeniable, but the film's refusal to tread more obvious and more salacious paths wins it a small place in my heart. There is something admirable in the way the film avoids the simple clichés; the policeman is a nutter, his plan to save them is mad, there is no "Adam and Eve" walking hand-in-hand at the end to repopulate the world. Nuclear war really is the end.

And if the films aren't enough to persuade you to buy the DVD then the inclusion of five American Cold War information films on the easy ways you and your family can survive a nuclear holocaust (stay indoors for at least fifteen minutes) must surely be the straw that breaks your camel's lumpy back. Mind-boggling in their inanity, they make the point about the particular lunacy of the Cold War in a way that neither of the "fantastic" efforts on this disk quite manage.

This disk is region one, so if you're player can't cope with American disks, avoid *Atomic War Bride/This Is Not A Test*. The disc can be ordered from www.somethingweird.com or direct from www.somethingweird.com.



So what are we talking about this time? *The War Game*.

Ah! I loved that film, didn't you? I'm surprised you enjoyed it. I wouldn't have thought it was your sort of thing.

What? Matthew Broderick. Ally Sheedy. Tic tac toe. What's not to like?

No you idiot, that's *Wargames*. This is *The War Game*, the grim British docudrama about the aftermath of a nuclear war. It caused a huge controversy and the BBC shelved it.

Shocking. And what, exactly would be the aftermath of a nuclear war?

Millions of people would die. Some curtains would catch fire. A cup would fall off a dresser. People would be very miserable.

Presumably because they really fancied a cup of tea and couldn't have one, what with the cup being broken and everything? You know what the British are like when they can't get a cup of tea. There is something very British and middle class about director Watkins' view of the apocalypse. There are going to be food riots but people will still be wearing neat suits and sensible coats. Their faces have got a bit dirty though, so things must be bad. And they will still take the time to make placards and write cutting, middle class slogans.

But it is horrible, isn't it? Everyone says *The War Game* is terribly harrowing.

Sometimes. It isn't like I'd want to disagree with the central thesis (I'm a paid up CND member) that nuclear war is a bad idea. And there are moments when it is genuinely affecting. The sight of the mother and father crouched under a table hugging their children while their world shakes (or

rather the director pushes the cameraman a lot) is really strong. But sometimes it totters over into the melodramatic.

Such as?

Well, there are some real *Star Trek* moments when they try to portray a firestorm and have people jumping about pretending to be blown by one hundred mile an hour winds. No amount of fast cutting can hide the fact that they look a bit silly.

Oh dear.

And the food riot...

You've mentioned that.

I know, but it looks more like the first day of a House of Fraser sale than a riot.

The middle class can be pretty mean when they really have to have that fondue set.

And sometimes I found myself objecting to the way the film attempts to manipulate me. There is something disturbing about the way the film presents speculation as fact and uses fake "vox pops" to make a point. I know Watkins felt that a polemical film was justified given what he saw as the conspiracy of silence about the real impact of nuclear war, but sometimes even I felt this film was taking liberties.

So, the message we should take from *The War Game* is?

That nuclear war is a very bad thing.

So it is just like *Wargames*!

Shut up.

Shall we play a game?

Tic tac toe?

How about Global Thermonuclear War?

I'll go first.

More nuclear apocalypse now. Martin McGrath takes a look at the controversial, Oscar-winning, BBC docudrama from 1966, *The War Game* directed by Peter Watkins.

No time for sandcastles

Martin McGrath takes a look at *Children of Dune*, the second mini-series from the US Sci-Fi channel based on Frank Herbert's *Dune* books.

Children of *Dune* is the Sci-Fi Channel's follow-up to its double Emmy-winning mini-series *Dune*. The original adaptation of Frank Herbert's classic novel was a big hit for Sci-Fi, winning the channel its highest ever ratings and garnering considerable acclaim.

Dune had its problems. Relatively low budgets and some undeniably poor special effects sequences detracted from what was, overall, an honest attempt to bring one of SF's biggest and most popular blockbusters to life. While David Lynch's version of *Dune* is unpopular with many fans, the rather stiff mini-series suffered in comparison with Lynch's version in terms of visual imagination and style.

Undertaking a project like *Dune* is always going to be a tricky exercise. One has to cope with the expectations of fans while trying to appeal to the broader audience. Fans will immediately ask whether the adaptation is faithful to the original and may be willing to sacrifice immediate thrills for the chance to see the accurate realisation of the minute detail of imaginary worlds. The general audience simply wants to be entertained and cares nothing for verisimilitude.

For my money the original *Dune* (rather like Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*) fell too heavily on the side of pandering to fans. Given the relatively limited budget, there was too much emphasis placed on putting as many elements of the novel on the screen as possible. This overly reverent treatment meant that the series was poorly paced and, in trying to get too much in too quickly, felt impenetrable to those not already initiated into Herbert's world.

John Harrison wrote and directed the first *Dune* mini-series and returns here as writer, while Greg Yaitanes (CSF: *Miami*, *Fastlane*) was recruited to direct. And it is clear that some lessons have been learned from the first outing.

The most obvious improvement is the increased sense of scale. We now see the open desert sprawl away, we swoop through crowded cities and, most crucially, we see the worms writhe across the desert and leap from the sands. A bigger budget and better computer graphics make this



an altogether more convincing and more exciting realisation of Frank Herbert's universe, so much so that one can't help wishing that they would now go back and do a "special edition" version of the original – from which *Dune*'s desert and worms were almost entirely absent.

There are still problems – moments when the join between characters and constructed images are too obvious and when backgrounds are too clearly computer generated – but even so the makers can be proud that they have achieved a significant step up for television special effects and in the scale of the world they have created. There is surely no longer an excuse for the *Star Trek* desert, the *StarGate* forest or the *Doctor Who* corridors when productions like this can do such a good job of constructing whole worlds.

The acting has improved as well. In the original I felt Alex Newman as Paul Atreides was stiff and unconvincing. Either he has improved immensely or my standards have dropped, but I found him much better here. However, it is James McAvoy (*Band of Brothers*, *State of Play*) as Paul's son Leto who has to carry two of the three episodes in this mini-

series, and he succeeds, coming across as genuinely charismatic. His fine work is supported by a starry cast including Alice Krige, Ian MacNeice and Stephen Berkoff. Unfortunately PH Moriarty as Gurney Halleck is terribly wooden and the usually excellent Susan Sarandon is just terrible as Wensicia Corrinio.

When I discovered that this mini-series combines the stories of *Dune Messiah* and *Children of Dune*, Herbert's second and third *Dune* novels, I was also hopeful that the writer had cured himself of the need to be overly faithful to the source material. Sadly this is not the case. There is, again, a struggle to get everything on the page on to the screen and it seems impossible to me that anyone unfamiliar with this universe will be able to make sense of much of what is going on. It also makes the pacing of the story problematic, with repeated visits to overly familiar locations and odd pauses in the story as the creators try and tick every box.

Still, for those of us familiar with Herbert's work, this is by no means a wasted exercise. There are strong elements and some dramatic sequences and it is always a pleasure

to return to Arrakis. I confess that, at times, my critical faculties deserted me and I surrendered to the fanboy inside. It was at these moments that *Children of Dune* won me over. So, despite reservations, I would recommend it to those who enjoy the books and can live with the rough edges imposed by television rather than Hollywood budgets.

This three disc set (with a one and half hour episode on each disc) also includes a very brief documentary on the making of the mini-series, a gallery of production photos and an entirely unlightening sequence comparing storyboards with the finished film. I got mine from Amazon.co.uk for £29.98.

Children of Dune (12)

Director: Greg Yaitanes.
Screenplay: John Harrison.
Producers: John Harrison, David Kappes.
Starring: Alec Newman, Julie Cox, Edward Atherton, Ian MacNeice, Barbara Kodelova, Steven Berkoff, Daniela Amavia, PH Moriarty, James McAvoy, Alice Krige, Susan Sarandon. 3 discs, 263 mins

Odd top

Marlin McGrath reviews *Carnivale*, the new American fantasy from HBO done in past tenses. Warning: some mild spoilers!



Any fantasy television programme that has a modern setting and a tendency to play tricks with our perception of reality is bound to risk comparisons with *Twin Peaks*. When the show features, as a main character, Michael J Anderson the backward-talking dwarf from David Lynch's tour de force, then it seems to be asking for trouble. A lot of shows have been buried under the weight of expectations that accompany the title: "*The New Twin Peaks*."

What is encouraging about *Carnivale*, the new fantasy show from American network HBO, is that it doesn't immediately crumble under that tag and even plays games with it. There is a coffee shop but a lead character refuses the free coffee, preferring tea.

As one might expect from HBO, the network behind *Band of Brothers*, *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*, *Carnivale* has high production values, intelligent scripts and an excellent cast. What isn't quite clear yet (I've only seen half of the first season's twelve episodes) is whether *Carnivale* is going to be brilliant or just very good. We will only know that when we know if its creator Daniel Knauf has answers that are as interesting as the questions he is asking.

Set in depression-era America at the heart of the dustbowl, nothing about *Carnivale* is exactly simple though at first it appears to be a standard case of good versus evil.

Nick Stahl (*Terminator 3*) plays farmboy Ben Hawkins who, as the story begins, is trying to bury his mother in the thin sand of the family "farm" while a man in a bulldozer attempts to evict him. Ben has a gift, he can cure people, and from the start we are supposed to sympathise with him and the freak-show characters (from a travelling show called *Carnivale*) who help him.

But we are soon asking questions about Ben. Why is he wearing the remains of leg-irons? Why did his mother refuse to let him save her

and insist that he is marked by the devil? Why does the *Carnivale*'s blind psychic, Professor Lodz (Patrick Bachau, *The Cell*), believe that Ben's dreams, of two identical men fighting in the first world war trenches, signify that he is dangerous. And soon we're wondering if the travelling show isn't the home of something darker.

It is Ben's dreams that link his story to the second thread in *Carnivale*. Brother Justin Crowe (Clancy Brown, *Highlander*) is having the same dreams and performing different sorts of miracles while pursuing his goal of building a mission for the refugees from the depression who are looking for work.

Brother Justin is, from the start, less sympathetic – he is clearly drawn to the darker side of things and his powers result in one man committing suicide and he kills another who gets in his way.

But Brother Justin is no simple villain. He is clearly driven by genuine faith. His concern to do good is contrasted with Ben, who takes part in a fake revival meeting, stealing money from the poor while pretending to cure people of illnesses.

There is much, much more to *Carnivale* than can be encompassed here. The main plot arc is supported by an excellent cast of secondary characters with their own interest.

Half way through and *Carnivale* has provided very few answers while every episode offers more and more questions. It has been enthralling viewing, the question is will it end on a satisfying note. The producers promise that the season finale will answer some of the questions and it appears (though it hasn't been confirmed) that the programme will continue into season two, *Carnivale* has been a critical hit but not a great commercial success.

Carnivale has recently been bought by Sky and Channel Four for transmission in the UK and should be appearing on screens this side of the Atlantic some time in 2005. I recommend it.

Resurrections

Two "classic" television shows from the distant past are being revamped for the twenty-first century. Gerry Anderson's *UFO* and the Irwin Allen's *Lost in Space* are both undergoing modernisation for a return to the goggle box.

The WB Network beat off considerable competition (Varley claimed) to land the rights to rework *Lost in Space* and have commissioned a pilot. Former *Buffly* writer Doug Petrie will write the pilot and act as executive producer under *Mission: Impossible* 2 director John Woo. The new version will see the perpetually misplaced Robinson family and (presumably) Robbie the Robot, struggle through the universe in the year 2097.

Meanwhile Carlton America plan to bring back Gerry Anderson's first foray into live action television, *UFO*.

UFO ran from 1970 to 1973 and chronicled the struggle of Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation (SHADO), led by Commander Ed Straker, against alien invaders bent on harvesting human body parts. Set in the 1980s, *UFO* featured some of the maddest hairstyles in SF's history.

Triology Entertainment Group, the company behind the modern versions of *The Outer Limits* and *The Twilight Zone*, will produce *UFO*. No broadcaster is attached at present but Carlton America claim to be "in advanced discussions" with a number of US networks.

Spielberg back to Sci-Fi

Following the commercial success of Sci-Fi's Emmy-winning mini series *Taken*, the creative team behind the programme will reunite to create a new show. *Taken* writer Les Bohem will script *Nine Lives*, a trilogy described as "a saga of love, death and beyond" with Stephen Spielberg as executive producer and DreamWorks Television making the mini series for Sci Fi.

Resurrections II

Buffy creator Joss Whedon's *Firefly* flopped on television in 2002, cancelled after just fifteen episodes – despite being rather better than the continuing *Enterprise*, *Firefly*, however, is far from dead. The series is released on DVD in America at the beginning of December and will feature commentaries on more than half the episodes, interviews, gag reels and other extras. We will have a review of the DVD in the next Matrix.

In addition Universal have confirmed that they have

bought the rights to make a big screen adaptation of *Firefly* from Fox television network. Whedon will write and direct the

film and has promised to retain as many of the original crew as possible while telling a story "with a more epic feel."



What's the Frequency, Ellis?

The WB Network has bought a pilot script based on the Warren Ellis comic book, *Global Frequency*. The story of Miranda Zero's worldwide freelance intelligence organisation has been adapted by John Rogers (*The Core*, *Catwoman*) and will be produced by Mark Burnett (*Survivor*). If any of Ellis' trademark cynicism survives the transfer to television this could be very interesting; then again...

Resurrections III

No one is confirming anything but rumours from Australia suggest that Farscape may yet return. The production office is once again answering telephones, but not answering questions and the Save Farscape website claims that the programme will return as a four hour mini-series to tie up many of the loose ends left by Sci-Fi's abrupt cancellation of the show in 2002. At a recent fan convention series star Ben Browder told fans that he'd been asked to return the prop of Winona (his pistol) to Australia but did not comment on the rumours.

Not dead yet

The *Dead Zone* and *Stargate SG-1* have both had new seasons commissioned by their American networks.

Stargate SG-1's eighth season will see the show set up a spin-off, *Stargate: Atlantis*, and add two new series regulars to the existing crew. The renewal comes about despite the widespread assumption that the present season would be the last. The demise of *Stargate SG-1* has been repeatedly predicted – with every season since the fifth rumoured to be the last – but the show goes on. However, this season will be shorter than the norm – only twenty episodes have been commissioned.

Also returning in a truncated form is *The Dead Zone*. USA, the cable station which broadcasts the programme, has commissioned only thirteen episodes for the third season, half a traditional American network season.

Personal history

Stephen Baxter goes in search of his recent and more distant roots and discovers that, in the not too distant past, we all shared common ancestors and that his matriarch, Helena, is the most common ancestor of the lot. Who'd have guessed?

Despite my comparative youth, ahem, I've recently been committing autobiography (with an essay in the *Dictionary of Contemporary Authors* vol 204, Gale Group 2003). And so I've become interested in my family history.

Thanks to heroic efforts by relatives on both sides of my family, I have a fairly complete family tree, including names and dates for all my great-grandparents, twelve of sixteen of my great-great-grandparents, and even six of thirty-two of the generation before that.

Where am I from? I was born in Liverpool, as were both my parents, but only one of my grandparents was born there. At least eight of my sixteen great-great-grandparents were from Ireland. So I suppose I am predominantly Celtic. But I suspect many of us have similarly widespread roots.

The name 'Baxter' comes from the old English word 'baecestre', which is a feminine form of 'baecere', baker. I've always wondered how come a patriarchal name was derived from a female root. The family motto is *Vincet Veritas*, 'Truth Conquers' – hardly appropriate for a fiction writer, but there you go.

My father's father was a regular soldier who was married during the First World War; his father was a soldier of the Empire, who served all over the world and married in India. On my father's mother's side, my great-grandmother came from Cork. Once she was a Morse code operator. I met this lady, 'Granny', on her 100th birthday, in 1968. It was a mighty Catholic gathering.

There is an exotic legend in my father's family that holds that long ago an heir to the Blarney property ran off with a serving maid and was disinherited to become a progenitor of the line. If this is true, I may have a root reaching back to the McCarthys, kings of Munster from the 10th century. On the other hand, my mother says that all Irish families think they have royal blood.

Meanwhile my maternal grandfather, Fred Richmond, was born in Norfolk in 1889. In 1916 he was wounded at Passchendaele.

They say that the only truly reliable genealogy is your mother's line, and her mother's before her. After all, you can be sure your mother was, but not your father. The



earliest name I have in my line of grandmothers is my maternal great-grandmother, Sarah Hackett, born in 1869 in Newcastle.

In this spirit, I invested some of my modest autobiography fee in a test of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) – which is passed exclusively down the mother's line and, therefore, is a record of that chain of grandmothers. (There is also another test based on the Y-chromosome, which boys inherit solely from their fathers, which therefore traces back a chain of grandfathers.) A company set up by Bryan Sykes, an mtDNA authority – and author of *The Seven Daughters of Eve* (Bantam Press) – traced European grandmothers' lines back to just seven common ancestresses – the 'Seven Daughters'. Of course, there was nothing intrinsically special about these women, but with time other mitochondrial lines expired leaving no current descendants.

Sykes playfully calls the matriarch of my 'clan' Helena. We can even know a little of her biography. From the genetic distributions, we know she lived about twenty thousand years ago, at the height of the last Ice Age, in the region of the Pyrenees. And she must have lived long enough to bear at least two daughters (otherwise, if you think about it, she would not be the last common ancestress of two maternal lines). A natural snob, I felt a little put out that Helena's clan is the most numerous, numbering some 47% of all modern Europeans. But I can now extend my maternal family tree with a dotted line spanning perhaps a thousand generations, from Sarah Hackett of nineteenth-century

Newcastle to Helena of the Ice Age.

And my family tree doesn't end with Helena. The Seven Daughters have common ancestors – such as 'Lara', the ancestress of all non-Africans, who lived some hundred thousand years ago. The line reaches further back still to 'mitochondrial Eve', the common ancestress of all modern humans. Deeper still we unite with the Neandertals – and beyond that all our grandmothers are low-browed *Homo erectus*.

Much of our genealogy is common, of course.

I had two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents. Follow this doubling back through ten generations and I have about a thousand ancestors. If I go back forty generations, just a thousand years or so, my nominal family tree has swollen to a trillion – a thousand billion – not only far more people than were alive in 1000 AD, but maybe ten times as many humans as have ever lived.

The resolution of the paradox is of course that any family tree quickly becomes an entangled bank: go down a certain depth and you must encounter the same individual by following more than one path. This deep tangle is the common 'family history' genealogy of us all.

In principle, how far could we take our biomolecular exploration of our common past? The technology is still new. Modern tests look at comparatively little DNA on a statistical basis, so what you get is a probabilistic estimate rather than a clear-cut verdict. The modern genetic databases are also patchy; not all

ethnic groups have been sampled. And besides, out of the thousand of my ancestors that existed ten generations back, the mtDNA test picks out just one – my great-great... grandmother. So the bulk of my genetic heritage is an invisible crowd. These reservations matter; for many people, for instance the descendants of slaves, the question of origins is a deep and troubling issue.

But the technology will surely get better, and there is a great deal of information in our genomes to unravel.

Some of our genes are a billion years old – the deep ancient ones, shared across the great domains of life. Some genetic information has been copied more than twenty billion times, with an error rate in surviving offspring of one in a trillion. By comparison the earliest date in my family tree is a marriage on my mother's side in 1796 – probably as far back as human records will take me. DNA far outdoes our paper records, or tablets of clay or stone. The antique database locked into our bodies, endlessly defying entropy, may be our best window into the past.

Some people, of course, will have left no genetic trace, if no descendants survived to the present: such childless souls are lost in the dark, perhaps forever. But it is a finite genealogical universe – there have only (I) been some hundred billion humans – and we've barely begun to unscramble the data in the DNA. We can never retrieve it all, but it is hard to see a limit to how much of our entangled shared heritage we might eventually reconstruct.

One man band?

Andrew Hook explains how the problems he had getting his own collection of short stories published, and his desire to stretch himself, led to the creation of Elastic Press, a small press catering to writers and readers who don't fit comfortably within traditional genre classifications. One year (and four collections) later, he explains how the press is surpassing his expectations, and what he plans for the future.

The decision to set up a new independent publishing house came to me in July 2002. Over the subsequent eighteen months I've published five books under the Elastic Press name and thankfully exceeded many of my expectations.

The idea originated from my increasing determination to find a publisher for an anthology of my previously published "slipstream" stories, *The Virtual Menagerie*. Having amassed what I considered to be a strong body of work over the previous ten years, I wanted to build on the feeling of cumulative success by collating 19 stories in one volume. Partly this was due to the recognition that some of the magazines I'd been published in had disappeared without trace, and also that my perception of my work to date was probably different from that of any readers. Books inevitably have a longer shelf-life than magazines and I wanted a book in which to showcase my fiction. Not long after that I realised that in addition to few publishers taking single-author anthologies of short fiction, even fewer were publishing in the grey area outside of the standard sf/f/h genres within which my work operated. It frustratingly seemed there was nowhere in particular to go.

At around this time I regained contact with a friend of mine who used to work as a printer, and who was currently doing an art and media course. As part of his course work he had to design a book, and I was blown away by the quality work he had produced using his own home computer. That revelation, and the following discussions, made me realise that self-publishing *Menagerie* might be a viable option. The possible stigma related to self-publishing didn't really concern me, as 17 of the

proposed 19 stories had previously been published, and I hoped that it would be evident I wasn't simply publishing work that no one else would touch.

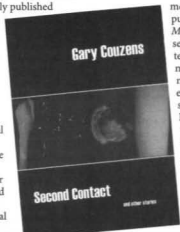
It only took a couple of days with these ideas floating around in my head for me to realise that many prolifically published independent press authors were in the same situation as myself. Plus I was aware that my own anthology might gain some additional credibility if it were seen as the first in a series of single-author anthologies, and not a one-off self-promotional exercise. What

really drew me into the project, however, was that it seemed a logical progression for me to move from writer to publisher. I had been looking for something else to turn my mind to, and it became increasingly evident that this was it.

As a precautionary measure I decided to publish *The Virtual Menagerie* first. It seemed a good idea to test the water using my own work due to my hitherto untested editorial/cover design skills; and I'm grateful I made that decision as the subsequent books have a much more professional feel about them. Regardless of the quality of the production, however, the book picked up some great reviews ("the best stories

here are among the finest that the independent press has to offer" - *The Third Alternative*), culminating in its nomination for a British Fantasy Award for best collection.

Whilst *Menagerie* was in progress I placed a message on *The Third Alternative* discussion boards announcing that I was seeking submissions for single-author short story anthologies. In retrospect I was very lucky to obtain the responses that I did, because the four Elastic writers I've published in 2003 have been great to work with and their anthologies have created immense interest within the independent press, and beyond. Additionally, all four (Andrew Humphrey, Gary Couzens, Marion Arnott, and Antony Mann) are producing fiction that I feel skates the edges of standard genre conventions, and each writer has a very distinctive authorial voice. This is a pattern that I've realised is integral to the development of Elastic Press, in that I'm publishing those writers who the



other presses are less likely to pick up on because of the inherent difficulties in marketing non-specific genre works. For me it's a challenge, and one of Elastic's aims is to break down genre conventions and hopefully target those readers who are tired of being force-fed the standard fare. Elastic intends to be a little different: a bridge between the independent press and the mainstream, yet an entity in its own right. So far things are looking good.

Since my collection was published on 1st November 2002 I've maintained my goal to publish anthologies quarterly. I'm proud of this regularity: it hopefully indicates that Elastic can be depended upon for both commitment and quality. All the books have garnered good reviews, been attractively packaged, and been launched at special events around the country, depending on the location of the writer. The driving force for me is to constantly publish work that I am wholeheartedly passionate about, and it's this determination that I hope will bring work to an audience hitherto unaware of both my authors and the independent press as a whole.

An interesting addition to the Elastic catalogue will be the

occasional multi-author anthology which I hope will raise the Elastic profile in a new and original way. The first of these, due for publication early in 2004, will be *The Aliso Project* (see page four). The idea for this anthology, in which the only guideline for the writers I commissioned was to write a story that had to be titled *Aliso*, originated from a simple typographical error on the Elastic Press discussion boards. Unlike other themed anthologies where the theme can overly dictate the content, the word *Aliso* is sufficiently ambiguous to be used in a myriad number of ways, and the stories received so far

are, in my opinion and without exception, excellent. Including all the Elastic writers published to date, together with those scheduled for the future, the anthology is intended both as a retrospective and a preview. Add a smattering of established and newer names to that mix commissioned from writers whose work I admire and

whose ethos I thought would be akin to the project, and the result is a thoroughly enjoyable book to be involved with. Taking an idea and running with it is one of the benefits I've found with publishing, and it's likely that I'll be inviting submissions in the new year for another multi-author anthology structured

around an unusual premise.

In the immediate future the first two titles of 2004 are anthologies showcasing the work of Kay Green (February) and Brian Howell (May). And although my own fiction has had to take a back seat for a while, my first novel, *Moon Beaver*, will be published by ENC Press in the States next year, and will be available in the UK via the Elastic website. Things are moving fast at the moment, and I'm especially indebted to Marie O'Regan for designing the website and typesetting the books, and to Zero who, since the great reception to the cover of Antony Mann's *Milo & I*, has offered to assist with the cover design for subsequent publications. Publishing is a constant learning process, causing me to re-evaluate my concept of fiction and my own position within it; but more than anything else the buzz comes from seeing the new books as they're delivered, and knowing that they're likely to please the authors as much as they will the readers.

For submission guidelines, in-depth details of our products (including extracts and reviews), and all the important purchase information please visit: www.elasticpress.com

“The driving force for me is to constantly publish work that I am wholeheartedly passionate about.”
Andrew Hook

Flexible friends

Mark Greener reviews two Elastic Press offerings, *Milo & I* by Antony Mann, which features babies assisting the police with their enquiries and *Sleepwalkers* by Marion Arnott, "simply great literature" and one of the best collections he has read for a very long time.

Milo & I collects 12 short stories from magazines such as *Elery Green*, *Mystery Magazine*, *Crimewave* and, even, *CHESH*. Each is highly original. In the title tale, cops carry babes in arms onto crime scenes to help them solve the case. The infants help detectives regain their "lost sense of wonder" by getting past the adult's "jaded, desultory worldview". In 'Taking Care of Frank' a killer sets out to murder an entertainer who will be more valuable to the industry dead. In the 'The Oedipus Variation' a chess trainer advises his student to emulate previous grandmasters and kill his father.

Overall, the writing is remarkably strong. In

'Green', for example, Mann takes you inside the mind of someone who is paranoid. Many slipstream authors enjoy tinkering around inside the mind of people teetering on the brink of insanity. But few manage this with the same insight and literacy as Mann. There's a black humour similar to PK Dick or Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpeted* as well as Ballard's and Harrison's eye for the absurd deils in the detail of our urban-dominated, post-modern world. Mann's

stories are contemporary analyses that transcend the 'crime' or 'slipstream' genres to offer uncompromising commentaries on the state of modern society. But they are no dull polemics: they are witty, intelligent, compelling reading.

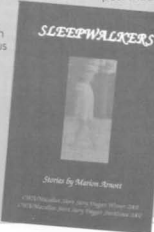
Marion Arnott's *Sleepwalkers* is simply, great literature – and should be known to a much wider audience than just fans of slipstream, dark fantasy or crime. Arnott writes with a visceral intensity that appeals not to the intellect (although they are intelligent) but directly to your emotions. Some tear your heartstrings. Others make you smile – at times guiltily – at some very black humour. In 'Fortune's Favourite' a Jew being shipped East by the Nazis does all he can to stay alongside the women he loves and who saved him when his luck turned sour. I felt guilty about finding the dark humour amusing – unlike the other travellers you know the

passengers' fate. The humour makes the context all the more intense.

In others, Arnott forces you to directly confront the horror – and you want it to stop. You suspect from the first few paragraphs how 'Princess' could end. But you don't want it to progress with inexorable

logical to the horrifying conclusion. Lesser writers would allow an escape. Arnott never finches. As a result, the story will stay with you for a very long time. *Sleepwalkers* is a remarkable book, one of the best short story collections I've read for a very long time.

• The original, full-length versions of these reviews appeared first in *Prism* and on the *Alien Online*. Mark Greener interviews Marion Arnott about *Sleepwalkers* and her writing on page 21.



Exploring Planet and the moons of Jupiter

Roderick Gladwish reviews *Planet Magazine*, the eclectic web-based magazine, *Jupiter*, the latest small press offering from Ian Redman and *Scifaikuest*, a home for Japanese style poetry with an sf flavour.

Planet Magazine is a right old mix of fiction in type and quality. This was a surprise; with it being one of the oldest online mags there is (founded in 1994) I expected consistency. As editor, Andrew G. McCann, said (in his *Matrix* 160 interview) he publishes what he likes and it appears he likes everything. I can't fault his selection of artists. Each image fits the story and is of high quality. He wants to bring on talent and some of the names with the pictures will definitely be known in the future. Of the writers he's more forgiving than most editors, but perhaps that's the way to encourage talent.

Free, the quarterly carries a lot of fiction for its price, twenty stories and three poems in its September issue (No. 39).

'A Careful Plan' by Christian R Bonawandt was a non-magical fantasy with medieval princes and princesses etc. a short tale of love, murder and counter plays. 'Psychic Pop-Up' is Joe Vadalma's attempt at finding laughs from beaming ads directly into the brain. Psychics, auras and mad-ish scientists confused the concept. Why do writers believe there is a rich vein of humour in advertising? We all know it's a deadly serious business of creating product awareness; where is the laughter in that? 'Jacob and the Sorceress's Daughter' by Justin R Lawler, was a variation on 'Jack and the Beanstalk' that left me unsure whether it was deliberately tongue-in-cheek simplistic or written for real that way.

'Green T' by ES Strout hit all the wrong buttons, starting with a quote from Fox Mulder and got worse as it moved further into conspiracy theory land. Roswell, Area 51 and super-soldiers created with DNA from aliens thrown into the plot made it plain hackneyed.

Things then improved. 'Death on the Wire' (Graham Adair) started off like cyberpunk, and examined the effect of cheap teleportation. Cheap not necessarily meaning safe. 'Yesterday the

World' by Tony Thorne could have sat in *Analog's* 'Zero Probability' slot. An impetuous physicist invents backwards time travel in an attempt to get rich and forgets one tiny fact.

There were two tales by William Alan Rieser. 'A Slight Case of Indulgence' is a tale of mysterious world that creates pleasurable fantasies for all who visit it. One fantasy leads to the death of more than the original victim. This is one of a series of stories centred on a galactic investigator Langford Joh and it fell into the trap of explaining too much to keep readers abreast of past history, which is a pity because the idea was solid enough. 'The Calydo Factor' was set in the same universe. Again Joh has a lot of history he wants to share, but the plot is not so weakened by it. Worlds are threatened by a migration of aliens and talking with them is the best solution, if someone can work out how to. 'One Hundred Twenty Three Degrees' (Jo A North) involved a post-holocaust world and a possible messiah figure. For once the 'Underground' weren't the good guys.

Finally there was a nice gag in a hypertext link to let you see 'The Truth Behind the Ultimate Government Cover-Ups'.

There was something for everyone in this issue, which is probably why *Planet Magazine* is heading toward its tenth anniversary. *Jupiter* is a new UK-based quarterly small press magazine. Although numbered, each issue is named after a moon of the gas giant;



The "cover" of *Planet 39*: In darkness light, by Greg Martin (www.artofgregmartin.com)

this time Europa, next Ganymede.

Looking like it has been produced at home, it is a stapled A5 book carrying four medium-sized stories spaced by four poems. No internal artwork, but volunteer artists are welcome. With its appearance I expected unknowns for the contributors, however, all the writers have a publishing pedigree, and produce decent quality.

'Fractions of Jason Bar', by Liam Rands is about resurrecting the dead to learn about lost history. 'Dying Days' (Eric S Brown) was an end-of-the-world tale following different peoples' pointless attempts at survival. The science let it down, Earth is vulnerable to a good dozen apocalypses backed up with solid evidence; he should have used one of those not invented his own. 'Aria', by AJ Alligiero, was another resurrection story, asking if the spirit is lost even if the recreation is perfect. A little over-romantic with a tragic ending, but then again, it was a story of lost love. Nicholas Walker's 'The Ancient' explored a man's imagined heroes and

lovers separated by time-dilation.

Poems were by Lee Clarke and Lavie Tidhar. 'Ever Outward Turning' (Clake) framed the search for extraterrestrial intelligence and who we might find. Tidhar's 'Old Masters' nearly achieved positive SF poetry status — my search continues. More verse can be found in *A Ship to Nowhere* and *Other SF Poetry* (20 poems for £1) from the same publisher.

It is classic small press, one man (Ian Redman) doing it for himself, producing the best he can. *Jupiter* has twenty-odd moons; I hope the magazine will survive to the point of repeating itself.

Clearing through the husks of defunct sites searching for live SF magazines sometimes turns up something that is almost completely unlike SF. I smugly thought I'd found one. Sam's Dot Publishing produces *Scifaikuest* online and as a print quarterly specializing in scifaiku, a form of Japanese poetry. Where the Inuit have many words for snow, the Japanese have a bucketful for poetry, so *Scifaikuest* not only carries the aforementioned scifaiku, but senryu, taibun, horroku and tanka. Explanations for all types are in their guidelines, though apparently *scifaiku* is a lot like *haiku* — crystal clear. About to tick away from the nightmare (for me) of poetry overlaid by a foreign style, I spotted in the guidelines that all these cunning verses must have a SF or horror theme — it is SF! End smugness, start review. Visit the site, read a few, it won't take long because they are all short and wonder at the cunning thinking behind the briefest construction, even, if like me, you don't get half of them.

Analog sprinkles quotes amongst its Hard SF with the best for our times being: 'Everyone is quick to blame the alien.' — Aeschylus.

Details

Planet Magazine

www.planetmag.com

Jupiter

Ian Redman, 23 College Green, Yeovil, Somerset, BA21, 4JR, UK. www.jupitard.co.uk

Scifaikuest

www.samedotpublishing.com/scifaikuest/cover.htm

Hell of a read

**Foundation
favourites**
Number three: *New Maps of Hell*
by Kingsley Amis

Andy Sawyer continues his exploration of the sometimes-overlooked books from science fiction by returning to Kingsley Amis's *New Maps of Hell*, one of the most significant milestones in the critical appraisal of sf and still, he says, essential reading for those serious about developing a critical understanding of sf.

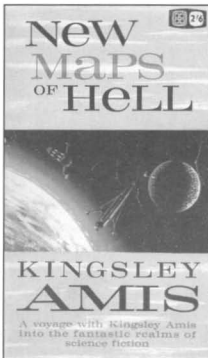
A young lecturer at Swansea University, Kingsley Amis had created a huge splash with his first novel, *Lucky Jim* (1954): a satire of university life that catapulted him into the category "Angry Young Man" – a term used to define a group of novelists and playwrights who had little in common except the fact that they were men, young(ish) and if not "angry" then irritated by the prevailing orthodoxies of post-War Britain. Invited to give a series of lectures at Princeton University in 1959, Amis delivered them on science fiction, a genre he had been reading since about the age of twelve. These lectures were published in the USA as *New Maps of Hell* in 1960, and issued in the UK the following year. The book achieved the remarkable distinction of being reissued by the Science Fiction Book Club, not notable for its promotion of works of literary criticism.

Although by no means the first academic attention given to science fiction, *New Maps of Hell* was groundbreaking in a number of ways. Amis was a best-selling novelist. (He published two sf novels, *The Alteration* (1976) and *Russian Hide-and-Seek* (1980), as well as the ghost story *The Green Man* (1969) and the series of "Spectrum" sf anthologies he co-edited with Robert Conquest between 1961 and 1966.) *New Maps* also concentrated on sf not as a literature of technology or space propaganda, nor a kind of boys' adventure story, but, perhaps naturally given Amis's own writing, as a form of dystopian satire. He gives high praise, for instance, to Frederik Pohl ("the most consistently able writer science fiction, in the modern sense, has produced") and judges Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* "superior in conciseness and objectivity" to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He praises, albeit rather patronisingly, John Wyndham's "Consider Her Ways" and quotes approvingly writers like Robert

Shekley and Katherine MacLean. While many of his judgements might be considered the "damn-with-faint-praise" variety employed by many academics determined to bend over backwards to justify the claim that some sf, somewhere, might be of some limited worth in the grand scheme of things ("such modest power as this extract possesses...") he says of a Shekley story in the course of discussion, concluding that very probably Shekley *did* know that he was allegorising various cultural factors, (well, thanks for making it clear!) it's obvious that Amis knew what he was talking about and liked much of what he knew.

Amis describes the "addiction" to science fiction as "a peculiar interest, related to, but distinct from, ordinary literary interest" and goes on to suggest an analogy with jazz, like sf, an American cultural experience which had swept along many of his generation. He looks rather kindly on the sometimes inflated claims this causes sf fans to make for the field, and is critical of the way so-called "literary" writers are tempted "into irrelevancies to 'conciliate the non-science fiction reader into believing that what he is reading is not science fiction and is therefore worthy of serious attention'."

He is refreshingly forthright, though, about the purposes of sf – "science fiction is not going to engulph the rest of literature and... we do not need it to teach us science or respect for science or to recruit our young people into the ranks of technology" – but it is valuable because it *does* consider the future and because it *does* tackle the large, speculative questions often avoided by other kinds of fiction.



Still, while he's attempting to defend sf, and introduce it to an audience which may wrongly despise it, he's very often too defensive, a little too keen on sharing his adolescent enthusiasms. One sometimes gets the impression that Amis is hiving the field of sf off into a little box somewhere where it can have a little serious critical attention, but not enough to change it. As has been said on a number of occasions, paraphrasing what St Augustine is reported to have said about chastity: "Oh Lord, make sf respectable. But not yet."

And this leads to what might be *New Maps of Hell's* failure. It is very good indeed on establishing a place for science fiction at a particular time and pointing out some of its more interesting aspects. It is less ground-breaking when we look at the subsequent history of the field. Although Amis calls for "an irruption into the field of a new sort of talent: young writers equally

at home in this and in ordinary fiction", and "breaking up that stuffy convention atmosphere... and all the rest of the cliché jargon", when sf started to develop greater ambitions it was in a direction that appalled Amis. Loathing the literary experiments of the "New Wave", Amis's later comments on sf were to reflect his increasingly reactionary response to politics. Like so many who start off with mild rebellion and radicalism, Amis's views became increasingly ossified. It's a moot point whether this affected his writing (for what it's worth, I think *The Alteration* is neglected both by sf and mainstream readers) and conservatism is by no means identical with stupidity, but one gets the impression that with Amis science fiction was better placed, if not in the gutter where it belonged, then close to it.

Nevertheless, *New Maps* is one of the important books in its field. In its time, indeed, it was virtually the only book in its field available for the general reader. Although it may not have wholly succeeded in opening the eyes of the literary establishment to the values of sf – one sighs in frustration at realising that the statement "In otherwise intelligent circles, the term 'science fiction' is still often used as an adverse value-judgement" may be as true today as it was in 1960 – that's not necessarily the author's fault.

True, the book is partial in its coverage. Philip K Dick is mentioned once (although much of his best work was still to come). But as the work of an enthusiastic reader much better read in science fiction than most of his contemporaries working in the academic field of English studies (the older CS Lewis being the obvious exception) it is well worth reading. As an intelligent, informed and passionate history and critical study of sf, it was not superseded until Brian Aldiss published *Billion Year Spree* in 1973, and even today no-one with a serious interest in sf should avoid it.

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 sf. It has been developed thanks to the generosity of publishers, writers, and fans who have donated books, magazines, and money to buy them. For new purchases, and for the preservation and conservation of the existing collection, it depends entirely on such generosity. If you would like to support the collection in any way, contact Andy Sawyer at The Sydney Jones Library, University Of Liverpool, P.O. Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA (asawyer@liv.ac.uk). Science Fiction Foundation Collection: <http://www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/sffhome.html>

Science Fiction Foundation: <http://www.sff-foundation.org>
We are grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Board for funding the "Science Fiction Hub" project, which will develop and enhance our catalogue.

The Call of the Cthulhu

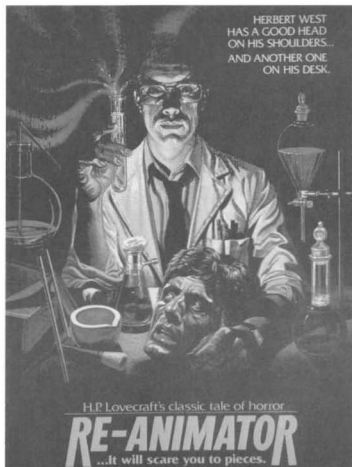
Gwilym Games takes a look at the somewhat chequered history of movies (usually loosely) based on the work of HP Lovecraft and explores the impact the great horror writer has had on the cinema. Prepare yourself for some truly shocking films - and we don't always mean that in a good way.

Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places. In one of those places lurks HP Lovecraft, one of the most influential weird writers of the twentieth century, who also has had a marked inspiration on film, with more than thirty full-length films being linked to him.

Lovecraft himself was, in his own words, "a devotee of the motion picture" observing its development from magic lantern shows, to Charlie Chaplin, whom he admired, and the coming of the talkies. In fact one of his most intriguing stories, *The Shadow out of Time*, was heavily influenced by *Berkeley Square* (1933), which saw the first ever cinematic use of a time slip. Lovecraft was often an indiscriminate filmgoer, going simply to kill time by watching B-movie fare. This is appropriate enough as most films Lovecraft's name is linked to, are indeed things better left unseen by the eye of man, such as *The Unnameable* or *The House of Cthulhu*. This is because Lovecraft's stories are unfilmable in a conventional way, as they rely on grandiose prose combined with bleak and anti-heroic plots and climaxes that are deemed inappropriate for popular film. No wonder film-makers tend to steal the bare outlines of stories or even just use Lovecraft's name and terms from the Cthulhu myths which he created.

This trend was apparent from the first, and in fact one of the best Lovecraft-influenced films, *The Haunted Palace* (1963 - Region 1 DVD) directed by Roger Corman. Corman sewed together pieces from Lovecraft's *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and the stories of Lovecraft's idol, Edgar Allan Poe, to create an unnatural monstrosity. Any film that features both the dread Necronomicon and Vincent Price cannot be all bad, and indeed though not the best of Corman's Poe cycle, it is still worth seeing.

One of the most persistent adaptors of Lovecraft has been Stuart Gordon, the director of one of the most popular film adaptations, *Reanimator* (1985). *Dagon* (2001) is to date Gordon's most ambitious Lovecraft adaptation, based on the story of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. What makes this film interesting is the location, Imboca, a sinister Spanish fishing village, shrouded in perpetual rain, where a shipwrecked American discovers to his dismay, that its inhabitants have been strangely warped by congress with



something from the Deep. There is little here of Gordon's trademark black comedy, though there are still explicit shocks, and the film does suffer from a few dodgy CGI effects. Gordon uses modern Spain rather than twenties New England as in the story and does alters some of the detail, but it holds closer than his earlier films to the essential bleakness and paranoia of Lovecraft's vision and his fear of the sea. Uxia (Macarena Gómez) is particularly unsettling in her role as the cult priestess. It is available on Region 2 DVD and video. Gordon is currently working towards an adaptation of Lovecraft's *The Thing on the Doorstep*.

Italian director Ivan Zuccon completed his third film based on Lovecraft with *The Shunned House* (2003). Zuccon's work is in the Italian horror tradition of directors like Bava and Lucio Fulci, who also included obscure references to Lovecraft in his films, and thus alongside some striking imagery and cinematography there is liberal use of blood.

The Shunned House is a disturbing

piece which merges elements from three Lovecraft tales. *The Shunned House*, *The Music of Erich Zann* and *Dreams in the Witch House*. Bloody events in the house spill through separate times and spaces to mix together as a journalist and his girlfriend attempt to piece together the history of the house and the reason for the violence that haunts it. Obviously not shot on a huge budget, the film nevertheless makes good use of expressive locations and a haunting score that is one of its best features.

Particularly shocking is the outcome of the Zann sequence. Signorina Zann, here (unlike in Lovecraft's story) a female violinist who, when driven mad, has her insanity expressed far more graphically than in Lovecraft's original. The film attempts to capture some of Lovecraft's cosmic fear through intercutting the stories together to build up the mystery of the house, though that also makes it very difficult to follow. It is undermined by the cast's sometimes comic Italian accents and dubbing,

subtitles would have been better, and as it climaxes Zuccon uses graphic shocks typical of Italian horror. It is still interesting, but definitely not for the squeamish. This film, along with *Darkness Beyond* and *Unknown Beyond*, which reveal the very unpleasant events following the return of the Old Ones to Earth, are available from Salvation Films on DVD Region 2. Zuccon is now working on an adaptation of *The Colour out of Space*.

The best possibility for a big budget adaptation of Lovecraft currently rests with longstanding Lovecraft fan Guillermo del Toro (*Blade 2*, *The Devils Backbone*). He has been investigating doing a period adaptation of the Antarctic horror *At the Mountains of Madness* after directing *Hellboy*. Funding, though, may be threatened by the *Aliens* vs. *Predator*, also set in Antarctica.

Perhaps the most exciting area of Lovecraftian film is provided by the enthusiasm of the Lovecraft devotees who film the ever-growing number of Lovecraft shorts, keeping true to Lovecraft's own belief in the value of amateurism. These films are premiered at the yearly Lovecraft film festival in Portland, Oregon and they range from the excellent to the terrible. There are simply too many of these to discuss fully. Bryan Moore's period adaptation of *Cool Air* is excellent and very faithful to Lovecraft. The films of Anton Vanek, such as *Return to Innsmouth* are also recommended. PAL compilation videotapes featuring many shorts can be bought via the Beyond Books website. My favourite upcoming short has to be *Enter the Dagon*, which tells of how a writer's attempt to get Lovecraft filmed properly is twisted into a martial arts film by evil film makers, with horrific consequences.

Perhaps the most essential piece of Lovecraftian viewing is *Alien*, currently on re-release. Writer Dan O'Bannon was a Lovecraft fan, who later directed the excellent adaptation *The Resurrected* (1992), and used Lovecraft's concepts of cosmic horror to inspire the script. The designer HR Giger was also heavily influenced by Lovecraftian visions.

Further details

The Unfilmable
Lovecraftian film info:
www.unfilmable.com

Beyond Books
Buy Lovecraftian films:
www.beyondbooks.com

Aiming for the gut

Mark Greener talks to Marion Arnott about her new short story collection, *Sleepwalkers*, and about why she is trying to bypass intellectual responses and grab her readers by the gut. This interview was originally published in a slightly longer form online at *The Alien Online*.

Sleepwalkers, by Scottish author Marion Arnott (Elastic Press 2003), is the best short story collection I've read this year. It's slipstream at its most potent. *Sleepwalkers* doesn't shock for the sake of shocking. It doesn't lob post-modernist stones at the glasshouses of conventional literature for the sake of seeming rebellious. It doesn't smirk knowingly and hubristically at its clever subversive narrative. Rather, *Sleepwalkers* treads on the dark side of the human psyche to illustrate and exemplify aspects of ourselves. It's a sobering and powerful experience that remains with you.

"Many of the characters in *Sleepwalkers* go through their lives unaware of the forces that make them act, of the forces around them that they have not recognised and will ultimately destroy them," Marion notes. "Some deceive others and themselves. I think this is one of the most profoundly moving and terrifying aspects of human nature."

In 'Dollface', for example, you share a son's misery as he watches his beloved father slowly die. You feel his discomfort as the sordid truth about his father gradually emerges. In 'Angel' a waitress's desperate attempts to find love leaves her personality deeply flawed. Over the course of *Sleepwalkers*, the stories' cumulative effect is disconcerting and evocative. You realise just how close we all are to these horrors. But for a throw of the dice, we sleepwalkers could wake.

Arnott forces you to directly confront the horrors behind the veneer of 'normal' life – and you really want it to stop. You want to turn away. But you can't. You continue to watch, despite yourself.

You suspect, for instance, from the first few paragraphs how 'Princess' could end. You want the child to escape. Yet 'Princess' progresses with inevitable logic to the horrifying, inexorable conclusion. Arnott never flinches. As a result, the story still haunts me – especially as my daughter regularly plays hockey and netball at Soham. And this isn't the only example of a story where you want the character to emerge from the horror. Like Lovecraft, Arnott offers little hope of redemption.

"You've no idea how much I would have liked them to get away, but stories have an integrity of their own from which the ending springs," Marion comments. "Princess" was a response to government safety

campaigns that made children responsible for their own safety: 'Don't talk to strangers' etc. I read an objection by a child safety officer who pointed out that children's definitions of 'stranger' were quite different from an adult's. In short, children were being left to match wits with cunning and devious adults. I think I have to show what happens. When the subject matter is serious crime or war crimes, happy endings are adding saccharine to reality. If you juxtapose the courage, goodness and decency of ordinary people with the monstrous, this is what happens."

I saw shades of Carver, Martin Amis, Bukowski and – even – Joyce in *Sleepwalkers*, especially in the emotional intensity,

which we'll return to, and the intellectual honesty. And Arnott admits that she reads widely. "I suspect, that like most writers, what I produce is a hotchpotch of everything I ever read, heard, or saw," she says.

"I certainly never consciously set out to emulate anyone in particular, although there are many I would give my eye teeth to be as good as. I think the biggest influences have been writers who have given us all permission to write about what interests us. Jim Kelman paved the way for writing about very ordinary people and lives, and let them say things in their own way, without a trace of patronage. Writers like Atwood, Munro and Taylor legitimised the female experience and perspective in fiction by taking them seriously. I love Orwell's attacks on the great ideologies. Non-fiction is also an influence on me. I distrust fiction that moves too far from reality and is too obviously the writer's wishful thinking."

"The ordinary everyday horrors suffered by Alice Munro's characters, and their collusion with their own fates, shock me to the core," Marion adds. "And there is a hypnotic quality to Munro's prose which is irresistible. I particularly enjoy the way she links modern women into historical trends – so much appears different for women, yet so little has really changed. I have a great admiration

for William Trevor, the Irish writer, particularly his short stories. He has an amazing eye for characters and a real wisdom and compassion, which I find appealing. For sheer beauty of prose, Elizabeth Taylor's short stories are breathtaking. In crime writing, my favourites are Stephen Saylor and Ian Rankin, because both of them manage to create a convincing world and milieu. I never read their books without coming away feeling that I've been somewhere else."

Humour, another central element in *Sleepwalkers*, helps Arnott's stories hit home. Humour can, of course, act as a defence mechanism allowing us to face the unbearable. It can venture into areas where other

“ Racism is a gut response, for example. Race theories are constructed after gut response to support irrational feelings ”

Marion Arnott

narrative forms fear to tread. And humour can be remarkably profound.

Arnott's stories certainly make you smile – at times guiltily – at some very black humour. In 'Fortune's Favourite' a Jew being shipped East by the Nazis does all he can

to stay alongside the women he loves and who saved him when his luck turned sour. I felt guilty about finding the dark humour amusing – unlike the other travellers, you know the passengers' fate.

"The world is full of ironies and absurdities," Marion comments. "For example, the Nazi leaders belong in comic opera. Himmler slept with cardboard cut-out SS guards in his room. Goring flitted about in Chinese silks when off duty. Hitler used to give horrendously boring tea parties where everyone had to be on their best behaviour and talk bourgeois. I can almost see the little fingers crooked over the teacup while they planned mass slaughter in Europe and Russia. For me, these absurdities add the cutting edge to the horrors of the era – these very odd people had the fate of millions in their hands. They were full of grand plans and pseudo science, but in the end, their reality lies in the small detail – ludicrous and ugly as it was – and not in their speeches, parades and banners and uniforms. It lies also in the ultimate fate of all their victims."

As you've probably gathered Arnott's stories appeal not to

the intellect (although they are intelligent) but directly to your emotions. Think of the emotional intensity of Joyce's *Dubliners*, Bukowski's *Ham On Rye* or Elizabeth Evans' *Suicide's Griffling* collection and you'll get the idea. And she admits that she intends her stories to deliver "a blow to the guts!"

"Take the Nazi stories for example – their 'science' and theories of race had considerable backing by intellectuals – and not just in Germany," Marion notes. "Their arguments can be countered, but it all tends to be turgid and dull, and the reality of the lives of the people they affect gets lost. Better than arguing is to show what happens when theorists have their way. Another fledgling thought I have is that intellectual argument stems from the gut and not the brain. It is a reflection of personality, not rational thought – racism is a gut response, for example. Race theories are constructed after gut response to support irrational feelings. History would be very different if there was less intellectualising and more compassion and common sense. If I can make people feel the intensity of compassion, then maybe a wall can be built to defend from oppressive ideology."

I think the dark fantasy and slipstream genre should stake a claim to Arnott, before the mainstream catches on. She does our genre proud. Perhaps inevitably, however, Arnott doesn't really think of herself as a genre writer. Rather she considers her stories "explorations of aspects of life."

"I write lots of things – historicals and comedies as well as crime. Even a supernatural story. To me a story is just a story. Other people can classify them as they wish," Marion says. "Prussian Snowdrops", for example, was honoured by the Crime Writers of America, and also selected for Year's Best Fantasy and Horror. I am delighted to have been so well received in both worlds, and delighted that genre can be applied in such an elastic way. My only objection to a genre label is when it becomes a formulaic straitjacket."

Marion's recently begun a novel – a psychological thriller. If that sustains the emotional impact of the stories in *Sleepwalkers*, it could be a contender for some of the major prizes inside and outside the genre. In the meantime, the short stories in *Sleepwalkers* remain a tour de force. Read it now.

The world's flea market



Martin Sketchley recommends retail therapy as the answer to Christmas excess. What he isn't saying, so we will, is that one of the things you'll be able to buy after Christmas is his first novel – *The Affinity Trap* – from Simon & Schuster (on sale from February 2nd). We haven't read it yet but say buy it anyway! Congratulations Martin, and don't forget us now you're a stinking pro.

OK, it's just after Christmas. You're bloated, somewhat heavier than you were a few weeks ago, and although you have every intention of losing the extra pounds over the next couple of months, in your heart of hearts you know that in reality the chances of that actually happening are, well, about the same as something very unlikely happening. Depressing, isn't it?

So, what's the best solution to such a malady? Why, retail therapy, of course. And where best to start given that this is an internet-related column? Why, eBay of course.

You all know what eBay is: a fantastic emporium where just about anyone on the planet can empty their lofts or basements of all that old tat that's been lying around gathering dust in the darkness for the last umpteen years. I myself recently bought

a 1995 vintage IBM "buckling spring" keyboard from an eBay vendor, who pitched it as "The Emperor of Keyboards". And I have to say he was right. Weighing in at around nine pounds due to the hunk of curved steel that's welded into the back of the thing, each key has its own strip of metal that flexes (hence the buckling spring reference) each time the key is depressed, forming the contact. It's not fancy, it doesn't have special keys that open e-mail clients, newsgroups, the bathroom window or make a cup of tea each time you touch them, but what it does have are 101 solid (although surprisingly small) keys that do just what they say on the tin.

Apparently modelled on the classic IBM Selectric typewriter, each key makes a nice "clack" sound as it's depressed. Indeed, when typing particularly

rapidly, which the device actively encourages – I can now type 200 billion words per minute – it does rather sound like a machine gun being fired. When working in the loft at six in the morning I do have to make an effort to depress each key very gently in order to avoid complaints from the people next door.

I have to say it knocks the socks of all the other input devices I've tried on my quest to find the Perfect Keyboard, and coupled with the rounded edges of my Mitsubishi monitor, gives a rather nice Fahrenheit 451 retro-type feel to my working environment. The fact that the PC itself is tucked away out of sight and, more importantly, earshot – they're surprisingly noisy, those fans – adds to the ambience, as, rather like the iMac, the entire machine appears to consist solely of huge monitor and monster

keyboard. Furthermore, due to its weight the keyboard doesn't slide about on the desk, or require you to press any key more than once for the desired character to appear. Given its method of construction, it's not likely to become flustered even if a whole can of something fizzy and sticky is spilled all over it.

So, as an SF fan, what's eBay got to offer you? Well, due to the nature of the site there's an amazing array of items on offer, but these vary from day



to day. At the time of writing, there were the usual selection of SF fiction titles, including some copies of *Astounding* from the early 1950s that seem to have generated particular interest, as well as some old copies of *New Worlds* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*



Spinnerets

Funniest thing doing the rounds at World Fantasy Con in Washington DC at the end of October was the story of an item for sale at the International Spy Museum, where the intrepid John "Gerard" Meaney caused something of a stir by clambering through a ventilation duct. Said item was a T-shirt emblazoned with the legend: "I went to Iraq looking for weapons of mass destruction, but all I found was this lousy T-shirt". (Upon emerging from the duct Mr Meaney was arrested by a CIA agent in a black suit and mirrorshades: apparently the only ducting open to the public is located at the International Museum of Air Conditioning and Ventilation Systems, which is just down the road...)



Available on eBay (from left to right): a Star Wars scout trooper helmet; an IBM "buckling spring" keyboard; old issues of *Asstounding*; a Star Wars clone trooper helmet; And much more...

Printing money

It isn't often that the rubbish we throw away can actually do some good, but **Martin Sketchley** has found a charity that can put your used printer consumables (toner and inkjet cartridges) and even your old mobile phone to good use.

You've got a PC, so you've got a printer, right? Right. And be it inkjet or laser, it gets through what are known as consumables, which include ink and toner cartridges. When you have to replace your ink or toner cartridges you throw them away don't you? I mean, they're not good for anything else, are they. Are they?

Well actually, yes they are. Support Dogs is a UK charity that aims to improve the quality of life for sufferers of epilepsy and people with disabilities by training our canine friends to act as efficient and safe assistants. Each dog is taught specific tasks that enable the owner to lead a fuller and more independent life. And as they are registered as Assistance Dogs, all Support Dogs are able to accompany their owners at all times.

The charity offers three types of Support Dog: Seizure Alert, Disability Assistance, and Medical Assistance. Each dog costs around £6,000 to train and to support for life. As a sufferer of epilepsy once upon a time myself, the seizure alert dogs are of particular interest. One of the worst things about epilepsy, as many sufferers of the condition will know, is the fact that there is often no warning of an imminent attack, which can make life hazardous to say the least. However, a Seizure Alert Dog can change this, giving its owner a warning of five to seven minutes prior

child must come first. I suppose there comes a time when we will all have to put away our childish things.

But not yet, eh? Especially not when there are still people out there selling "genuine" pewter and cork Dalek bottle-toppers ("Buy It Now" for just £8.50) and an almost complete set of 133 original *Star Wars* action figures ("Buy It Now" for just £3000)

and loads of desperate sounding Whovians trying to offload their now technologically obsolete video collections ("rare" and "hard to find") to anyone who hasn't yet got onboard the DVD revolution. And how much would you pay for some

to a seizure taking place. This is achieved by training the dog in question to watch its owner's every move. Then, when it detects minor changes in its owner's behaviour that indicate the approach of an attack – slight changes in speech patterns, perhaps, or dilation of pupils – the dog becomes excited (because it knows it'll get a treat afterwards) and the sufferer of the condition has time to get themselves into a safe position.

So, how do the spent toner and inkjet cartridges come into all this? Well, since August 2003 the charity has been

able to recycle these and convert them into cash. They can also do this with old mobile phones that are still in working order. Through a partnership with Reclaim IT – a leading electronic waste company – the charity has developed a scheme to turn your empty inkjet and laser printer cartridges and old mobile phones into funds: Reclaim IT pays Support Dogs up to £6.00 for every cartridge returned, and up to £45.00 for a mobile phone. So, if you get through a number of cartridges at home or at work, pre-paid envelopes are available from the charity to enable you to send them on. For more details of this and other ways you can help, visit the charity's website (address below) or contact them via snail mail: SUPPORT DOGS, The John Fisher Centre, Trianco House, Newton Chambers Road, Thorncliffe Park, Chapeltown, SHEFFIELD, S35 2PH Telephone: 0114 257 7997 E-mail: supportdogs@btconnect.com

1979 Canadian *Star Wars* wrapping paper, still sealed in plastic and unused with an "original" sticker? I

know it must seem priceless, but bidding starts at just £6.99.

eBay truly has something for everyone.

Or, if you're really serious about losing that bit of extra weight, Body Beautiful Boutique has diet pills on offer that are recommended heartily by someone called Bonnie Corbett. I can't help wondering if Bonnie Carter has also tried them...

URLs of relevance to this issue

www.ebay.co.uk
www.support-dogs.org.uk

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

Martin Sketchley

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

Conservatively fannish

**CHECK
POINT**
News on fans and fandom

Mark Plummer reports from They Came and Shaved Us in Dublin and Novacon in Walsall.

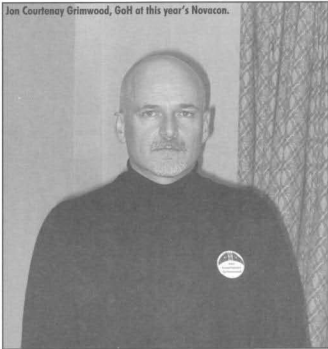
Elsewhere in *Matrix*, BSFA Awards Administrator Claire Brialley encourages you to be movers and shakers in a serious literary sort of way, but here in the fannish ghetto we've already seen plenty of movement and indeed shaking—often of things that should not be shook—in the last few months.

They Came And Shaved Us was, believe it or not, the name of a small convention in Dundalk, Ireland, and many of us duly came in late October while an alarming number left with altogether less hair than they'd had at the start, so at least nobody can criticise the organisers for dishonest advertising. Was TCASU an sf convention?

In a literal sense, probably no. It was organised by fans, and fans provided the majority of the membership, but its programme was... shall we say eclectic? Organisers James Bacon, Michael Carroll and Stef Lancaster have something of a reputation for staging events that don't so much push the envelope of expectation as burst out of it entirely, and what emerges is often, rather like the John Hurt scene in *Alien*, dripping with something icky. TCASU seemed slightly less full-on than the earlier conventions from the same stable such as Aliens Stole My Handbag and Damn Fine Convention, but these guys are still very much in a league of their own and this time, more than ever, you got the sense that this is a school of conrunning where the organisers open up the tops of their heads and invite you to look inside, to see the things that interest them and make them tick. You also got the sense that it was only the lack of the appropriate tools that was stopping them from doing this literally.

Personally, I think this is an entirely valid approach if you can create something that has internal coherence such that you can persuade other people that they'll be interested in the result and clearly the TCASU guys can, but somehow any attempt to describe the result in bald facts falls short of the reality. The guest list was drawn mostly from the field of comics, with author Robert Rankin acting as master of ceremonies; panels and talks

Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Goh! at this year's Novacon.



looked at the work of Alan Moore, UFOs in Ireland, nineteenth century side-show freaks and freemasonry, and these were interspersed with games, parties and discos which varied from the simply manic to the outright dangerous. And, along the way, several people got their heads shaved—all willingly, I believe, some as charity fund raisers and some for the hell of it—but it's probably best that we do not mentioned what happened with the chickens 'cos it seemed to alarm the people visiting the Christmas lighting show in another part of the hotel.

I do wonder whether James and Co will fall foul of the burden of expectation—whether the regular attendees of their extravaganzas will get demanding more, bigger and madder. James has already offered to inject a little sense of TCASU into the 2005 British Eastercon and I'm sure the result will be nothing less than interesting.

Following on two weeks after TCASU, although separated by far more than simple time and geography, was Novacon 33 in Walsall. As you can probably guess—by once, a fannish numbering system maintains a connection with reality—this is a

convention that comes with a lot more pedigree; indeed some would regard it as the epitome of fannish conservatism with a structure that's very much dictated by, dare I say, convention. When journalist Paul Morley attended a few years ago—looking for the bleeding edge of sf and failing to find it because, he maintained, it wasn't there—many people remarked that he was missing the point; Novacon is far more representative of fandom and sf with its pipe and slippers. That's true to an extent, and there's certainly a sense of a family get-together about the whole thing; but it's also a convention where you can see writers such as David Hardy, Harry Harrison, Ken Macleod, Charles Stross and Ian Watson as well as this year's guest of honour, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, and fans from Ireland, Sweden, Australia and the USA.

Novacon is the venue where the Nova Awards for British and Irish fanzine activity are both voted upon and awarded. This year, Sue Mason picked up the fan artist Nova, which she can arrange into a tasteful display with her three other Novas and her Hugo from earlier in the year. Sue's art can be seen in a wide

range of fannish publications; in particular I'd draw your attention to the covers of progress reports for Concourse, the 2004 Eastercon, which is edited by Claire Brialley and myself. And, conveniently for narrative flow, this year Claire also picked up her second consecutive fan writer Nova. Sadly, I can't really make a link between Claire or Sue and Pete Young whose *Zoo Nation* won the award for best fanzine. Its fourth issue appeared at Novacon and features a selection of sercon and more fannish pieces, often drawn from people who have little or no previous experience of writing for fanzines, as well as a substantial letter column. If there were such a thing as an overall Nova I suspect it would have gone to Pete, who also placed highly in the writer and artist category. For a copy of the latest *Zoo Nation* I'd suggest sending your address and three or four first class stamps to Pete at 62 Walmer Road, Woodley, Berkshire RG5 4PN.

This year, an additional 'best fan' Nova was presented. This is an occasional award introduced in 1996 when it was awarded posthumously to Bob Shaw. Subsequent awards have been made to veteran bookseller Ken Slater and Novacon founder Vernon Brown. This year it was presented (by Harry Harrison) to Ina Shorrocks, an active convention attendee and worker since the 1950s.

The 2004 TransAtlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) race was announced just before Novacon. Nominations should be sent to Tobes Valois at 20 Bakers Lane, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire PE2 9QW. The winner will next appear at Novacon 34 in Boston next September (for more details on TAFF, see www.ds.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Taff/). The announcement was followed, a couple of days later, by the result of the 2004 Going Under Fan Fund (GUFF) ballot in which Pat McMurray narrowly beat Doug Bell (see www.ploka.com/pnn/stories.php?story=03/11/15349622 for the full result and www.appomattox.de.mon.co.uk/guff.htm for the latest GUFF newsletter). Pat intends to visit both the New Zealand and Australian national conventions which take place a couple of weeks apart next April; I'm sure we can rely on him to move and shake on behalf of Europe.

Move! Shake!

Claire Brialey with the latest nominations for this year's BSFA Awards and a demand that we all move! Shake! Which sounds a bit dangerous to me. Does it mean I'll have to get off the sofa? Has she thought about the potential property damage?

Here I am in November realising I should wish you a happy

New Year. Forward thinking is a wonderful thing, as those of you who've already sent in some nominations for the 2003 BSFA awards will have realised. Thanks to all of you. So I hope you will have had a splendid festive season immersed in science fiction and fantasy, which you're now bursting to nominate for the BSFA Award so that you can be a mover and shaker who influences the scene. And, as I'd hate to see ornaments of the BSFA membership list exploding all over the landscape, fortunately I can tell you how to avoid this fate in four (or five) easy steps:

1. Think about the science fiction and fantasy novels, short fiction, non-fiction and artwork you've enjoyed during 2003.

2. Check them off against the eligibility criteria for the relevant categories set out below.

3. Note down all those you think are eligible and send them to me (contact details on the inside front cover). It would be particularly helpful if you could include details of where (and when) the works first appeared, including web links if they're online.

4. Move! Shake!

At novel stage in this process (perhaps it should be a Zeroth Step) you'll also want to check that it's before 31 January 2004, or else you'll get a regretful response from me explaining that your nomination sadly arrived too late to be included. And we'll both be unnecessarily irritated.

It may be that you've already sent in some nominations and can't remember what they are. If you're not sure whether you have nominated something, get in touch to check – or simply nominate it again. I assure you that I'll only let any individual nominate a particular work once. At the same time I should probably remind you that you can nominate as many different works as you like and that you are strongly encouraged to think about nominations for all four awards.

I can appreciate, though, that after several weeks of pre-Christmas, Christmas, and New Year celebrations, there may be those amongst you who are feeling sluggish, uninspired, and unable to remember what good sf and fantasy you read last year, never mind whether you've nominated it for the BSFA awards.

There is yet another way. For you, the steps go as follows:

1. Look at the list printed in this issue of *Matrix*, which sets out all the eligible nominations received up to mid-November. The shortlists will consist of the items that have received the largest numbers of nominations; so, to state the obvious, if you want to improve the chances of a particular work appearing on the shortlist, you should nominate it regardless of whether it's already on the list.

1A. For the really thorough, look at the list of nominations set out on the BSFA website (www.bsfa.co.uk) which will be more up-to-date.

2. If you've read any of the writing nominated, or seen any of the artwork, and you liked it, and you're not sure you've nominated it already – contact me and nominate it.

2A. Again, for the really thorough, if you're not familiar with some of the works nominated, and you have access to them (there are links on the website, where available) and time to check them out – why not do that? They're all someone's recommendations for good sf.

2B. Then, if it's before 31 January,

you might wish to go back to step 2...

3. Move! Shake!
After that: as soon as possible after the deadline (which I should point out, in case you've missed it in the preceding paragraphs, is midnight on 31 January – and I should stress that I need to have received your nominations by then, so please bear this in mind if sending stuff by post) I'll draw up the shortlists. They will be put onto the BSFA website as soon as possible, and I'll notify all the shortlisted candidates directly. If anyone doesn't have web access and would really like to know the shortlists as soon as possible in order to make time to read the nominees and be prepared to vote, contact me and I'll see what I can do to keep you informed.

Voting ballots will be included with the next mailing. You can vote at the British national (or convention (Eastercon) which is being held in Blackpool over Easter 2004, or you can vote by post provided that the ballots reach me by 6 April 2004. More on this next time.

Meanwhile: move! Shake!

Nominate!

Nominations to date

Novel:

- * *Free* – M T Anderson (Walker Books)
- * *The Reliquary Ring* – Cherith Baldry (Pan)
- * *Alva & Ira* – Edward Carey (Picador)
- * *The Iron Chain* – Steve Cockayne (Orbit)
- * *The Portrait of Mrs Chabouque* – Jeffrey Ford (Tor Books)
- * *1610: A Sundial in a Grave* – Mary Gentle (Gollancz SF)
- * *Pattern Recognition* – William Gibson (Viking)
- * *Singing the Dogstar Blues* – Alison Goodman (Collins Voyager)
- * *Finishing Lines* – Colin Greenland (Black Swan)
- * *Felakeen* – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight)
- * *The Merlin Conspiracy* – Diana Wynne Jones (Collins)
- * *Midnight Lamp* – Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz SF)
- * *Dark Heaven* – Roger Levy (Gollancz)
- * *United Kingdom* – James Lovegrove (Gollancz)
- * *The Light Ages* – Ian R MacLeod (Earthlight)
- * *Lizard* – Garth Nix (Collins)
- * *Sister Alice* – Robert Reed (Orbit)
- * *Predator's Gold* – Philip Reeve (Scholastic)
- * *Abolition Gap* – Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz SF)
- * *Natural History* – Justina Robson (Macmillan)
- * *Unto Leviathan* – Richard Paul Russo (Orbit)
- * *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* – Steven Sherrill (Canongate)
- * *Ilum* – Dan Simmons (Gollancz SF)
- * *Quicksilver* – Neal Stephenson (Heinemann)
- * *Mind* – Tricia Sullivan (Orbit)
- * *Varjak Paw* – S F Said (David Fickling Books)
- * *Empire of Bones* – Liz Williams (Tor Books)
- * *The Poison Master* – Liz Williams (Tor Books)

Short Fiction:

- * *Almost Home* – Terry Bisson (F&S, October/November)
- * *Of A Sweet, Slow Dance in the Wake of*

- * *Temporary Dogs* – Adam-Troy Castro (Imagings)
- * *Zoster Searches* – Glen Dennis (TTA #35)
- * *The Welles in the Walls* – Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean (Bloomsbury Children's Books)
- * *The Nature of Stone* – Alexander Glass (TTA #35)
- * *Breakfast at the Fire Tree Dinner* – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Interzone #188)
- * *With Acknowledgements to San Tzu* – Brian Hodge (TTA #33)
- * *Coyote Goes Hollywood* – Ernest Hogan (Witpunk)
- * *Refutation* – Alex Irvine (Live Without a Net)
- * *Bolus Ground* – Fred Johnson (Albedo One #27)
- * *Fights* – Daniel Jaynes (Interzone #188)
- * *Stars With Color* – Bill Rept (www.starwithcolor.com)
- * *All Our Heroes are Bastards* – Jay Lake (TTA #35)
- * *Entangled Eyes are Smiling* – John Meany (Interzone #190)
- * *Swastika Bomb* – John Meany (Live Without a Net)
- * *The Chambered Pail* – M Rickert (F&S, August)
- * *Red Leather Tassels* – Benjamin Rosenbaum (F&S, August)
- * *Birth Days* – Geoff Ryman (Interzone #188)
- * *Finisterre* – Patrick Samphire (TTA #34)
- * *Love in the Age of Spynaw* – William Shunn (www.salam.com)
- * *Nightfall* – Charles Stross (Atomix, April)
- * *A Better World in Birth* – Howard Waldrop (Golden Gryphon Press)
- * *The Butterflies of Memory* – Ian Watson (TTA #35)

Artwork:

- * *Cover of Hulk* #60 – Mike Deodato Jr
- * *Cover of Predator's Gold* by Philip Reeve – David

- * *Frankland*
- * *Cover of Maud* by Tricia Sullivan – Lee Gibbons
- * *Cover of Wonderland* by Mark Chaboudon
- * *Domine Harman*
- * *Something to Believe In* (cover of TTA #35)
- * *David Ho*
- * *Cover of The Fix #7* – Joachim Luerke
- * *Sleepstream* (cover of TTA #34) – Richard Marchand
- * *Cover of Varjak Paw* by SF Said – Dave McKean
- * *Cover of Cities*, edited by Peter Crawford
- * *Edward Miller*
- * *Cover of The True Knowledge of MacLeod*
- * *Colin Odell* (SF Foundation)
- * *Cover of Astro City: Local Heroes #3* – Alex Ross
- * *Eros 2* (cover of TTA #36) – Jean-Marc Rullier
- * *Cover of Polyton* by Adam Roberts – Sonar
- * *Cover of Natural History* by Justina Robson – Steve Stone
- * *Cover of Felakeen* by Jon Courtenay Grimwood
- * *The Whole Hog*
- * *Cover of US edition of Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson – Archie Ferguson
- * *Cover of Ambh #171* (artist unknown)

Non-fiction:

- * *The Profession of Science Fiction #58: Mapping the Territory* – Mike Ashley (Foundation #87)
- * *Reading Science Fiction* – Farah Mendlesohn (introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*)
- * *A Sick Mind* (review of *The Thuckery T Lambooth Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*) – Cheryl Morgan (Emerald City #97)
- * *Review of Poison* by Chris Wooding – Maureen Kincaid Speller (Foundation #88)
- * *Why Science Fiction Doesn't Get Any Respect* – Gary Westfahl (Interzone #190)

(* Those new since the previous *Matrix* listing are marked with an asterisk.)

These be the rules:

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 piece of critical writing about 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.)

Anything published by the BSFA (whether in book form or in one of the magazines) is not generally eligible for the awards. Works by members (including Council and committee members) of the BSFA are eligible wherever they appeared elsewhere. You have to be a current member of the BSFA to nominate.

Visions in Walsall

So I went to my first convention, Novacon in Walsall. It didn't go well. On Friday night I felt unwell. By Saturday lunchtime I had a temperature. By Saturday evening I was hallucinating without the need for artificial stimulants. I don't remember Sunday at all. It wasn't a total loss, I did get some good books from the dealers' room (I don't remember buying them all - where did the proof of Adam Robert's *Jupiter Magnified* come from?). Better luck next time, I hope.

9-12 Apr 04 Concourse (Eastercon 2004)

Winter Gardens, Blackpool. £45 adult, £25 children and unwaged. Contact: Concourse, 63 Providence Way, Waterbeach, Cambridge, CB5 9QH. Guests of Honour include Philip Pullman and Christopher Priest. Email: concourse@eastercon.com Website: www.eastercon.com/concourse

5-8 Aug 04 EUROCON 04

Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Still no information. Did you know I once had a fantasy football team called Botev Plovdiv Second Eleven (of course you didn't) and have long followed the fortunes of Bulgarian football's sleeping giants? Website: www.bgcon.org

20-23 August 04 Discworld Convention IV

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

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

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

16-17 Oct 04 Octocon 2004

Irish national convention, Chief O'Neill's Hotel, Smithfield Village, Dublin 7. Guests TBA. €20/£15 reg until 1 November; €10/£7 supp to 'freeze' total price at €25/£20. Contact Basement Flat, 26 Longford Terrace, Monkstown, Co. Dublin, Ireland.

13-14 Nov 04 P-CON 2

Ashling Hotel, Parkgate St, Dublin. Guest of honour, Juliet McKenna, other guests include Diane Duane and Charles Stross. Rates €20/£15 until 13 April (€30/£20) thereafter, support rate £10. Contact: Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland. www.slovobooks.com/phoenix/p2.html

25-28 Mar 05 Paragon 2 (Eastercon)

Hanover International, Hinckley, Leicestershire
56th British National Science Fiction Convention. Guests of honour: John & Eve Harvey, Ben Jeapes, Ken MacLeod, Richard Morgan, Robert Rankin. Membership rates (until April 2004):

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: martinmcgراث@ntlworld.com

Attending £35, supporting £15, junior £17.50, child £5 and infants free. Email: memberships@paragon2.org.uk Web: www.paragon2.org.uk

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 Sheckley, Lars-Olov Strandberg, Jane Yolen. £95 from 1st December 2003 attending, £30 supporting, children £32. Contact Interaction, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S2 5HQ, UK. Email: info@interaction.worldcon.org.uk Web: www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk

11-15 Aug 05 Tolkien 2005

The Tolkien Society, Aston University, Birmingham, UK
"The Ring Goes Ever On" - celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, an international conference on Tolkien's life and works. £50 adult (£45 for members of society), Juniors £25 (£22.50 member), child £1, supporting £17.50. Website www.tolkienociety.org/2005/

23-27 Aug 06 LA Cons IV (64th Worldcon)

Anaheim Convention Centre,
Anaheim, California, USA.
Guests of honour: Connie Willis, James Gurney, Howard DeVore, Frankie Thomas. \$125 attending, \$50 supporting and child rates. info@laconiv.org

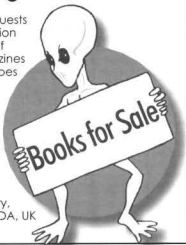
L.A.CON IV

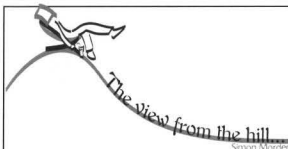
64TH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION
23 - 27 AUGUST 2006
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

Books and magazines for sale

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





Simon Morden

I can't remember learning to read. I am assured by my mother that the first she knew of it was when I asked her what a particular word in a newspaper headline meant – probably something to do with Rhodesia. I was three.

When I got to school, they were at a bit of a loss to know what to do with me. In the good old days of Janet and John, *See Spot Run*, and Ladybird books, I was so far ahead that I fell off the end of any reading scheme the teachers could throw at me. This just happened, in the same way blue eyes or blond hair does. I accepted it as one of those things. I was baffled by those who struggled with the printed word and probably, in a childishly cruel way, ignorant of their efforts.

There were consequences, of course. The chief problem was always going to be what I was going to read. This is where the die was cast. At the tender age of seven, I picked up my first science fiction book. I can't remember what it was, but retrofitting leads me to believe it must have been a James White *Science General* book. *Spaceships! Aliens! Lasers!* Oh my! It wasn't too long before I started on Clarke, Asimov, Aldiss, Wyndham, Wells, Harrison, anything with stars on the cover. There was not just a whole world out there, but whole worlds. Without realising it, I'd progressed from kids' books to grown-up ones. No Enid Blyton for me, because the adventures of the Stainless Steel Rat were so much cooler.

Hard it didn't have girls in it – or at least it didn't in the Golden Age. Since all my reading matter came from the culling of likely suspects from village juvenile sales, I didn't get to read anything new for years. My pre-adolescent education was on interplanetary warfare, galaxy-spanning empires and monsters from the id. Later, Heinlein and Silverberg. Niven and Dick would introduce the subject of womanly wiles to me – but let's face it, they were hardly qualified to write *The Joy of Sex* or give anyone a balanced view of gender relationships.

So, aided and abetted by my mother (who ran the jumble sales and got first dibs on the books), I was catapulted full steam ahead into a dazzling and entirely unrealistic version of the adult world.

The problems set in when I got to secondary school. They wanted me to read things other than sf and fantasy, books where there wasn't a single spaceship or mighty-thewed barbarian. And I discovered that I really didn't enjoy the experience. There were good books, for sure: ones that stick in the mind were *The Silver Sword* and *The Long Walk*. There were many, many more that lie forgotten. For every *Animal Farm*, there were a half-dozen turgid Victorian tomes that were apparently Classic Literature. I have tried Hardy, really I have. But to force school children to read it is a crime.

'O' levels inflicted *Romeo and Juliet* and Coleridge's poems on me: the day was saved by Harper Lee. Then aged almost sixteen, I discovered that no one was ever going to make me read a book I didn't want to ever again. Free at last! Back to the spaceships, the magicians and the shambling nameless entities of Lovecraft.

Fast-forward twenty years. Due to circumstances beyond my control, I now find I'm a teaching assistant in a classroom of ten year olds. The National Curriculum dictates the rhythm of the morning: literacy and numeracy. The desks are scattered with books, interesting books, books by people I've never heard of and titles I've never seen. Books written specifically for children which aren't about posh kids drinking lashings of ginger beer and lording it over the lower classes – and I have absolutely no idea when this happened.

I can't wait for my daughter to get to the age where she's capable of tackling these 'young adult' stories. Which is why I'm reading them for myself, and wondering: where were they when I was growing up? Is this a new phenomenon, or did I miss them in the rush?

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. His second is due out from Subway in 2004.

Basingstoke

Genesis SF Club

Meets every four weeks on Thursday, starts 7:30pm.
The Hop Leaf, Church Street, Basingstoke RG21 7QQ
Contact: Mark Sinclair
genesis@vrommion.demon.co.uk
Web: www.genesis-1.org.uk

Belfast

Belfast Science Fiction Group

Meets alternate Thursdays, starting at 8:00pm. The
Monico Bars, Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB
Contact: Eugene Doherty timmon@technologist.com
Web: members.fortunitycity.co.uk/timmon/monico.htm

Birmingham

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Meets 2nd Friday, starting at 7:45pm. 2nd Floor,
Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham
Contact: Vernon Brown
Web: <http://hulp.preservers.com>

Birmingham

The Black Lodge

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

Cambridge

Cambridge SF Group

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

Colchester

Colchester SFI/Horror Group

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

Croydon

Croydon SF Group

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

Didcot

Meets 2nd Wednesday, starting at 7:30pm.

The Ladygrove, Cow Lane, Didcot OX11 7SZ
Contact: Nigel and Sabine Furlong hurlong32@tiscali.com

Dublin

Dublin Sci-Fi Club

Meets 1st Friday, starting at 8:00pm.
Upstairs bar in Bowes Pub, Fleet Street, Dublin 2
Contact: Frank Darcy shibboleth@tiscali.com
Web: www.kustarpark.com/dubai/

Edinburgh

Forth

Meets every Tuesday, at 9:00pm.
The Doric Tavern, Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DE
Contact: Jim Darroch ed_06@btinternet.com

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@ontopage.org

Hull

Hull SF Group

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

Leicester

The Outlanders: The Leicester Science Fiction, Fantasy

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

London

Z29 Pulsar Z Alpha - the Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Appreciation Society

Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:00pm.
Pendere's Oak, High Holborn, London WC1V 7HP
Contact: Robert Newman meetings@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 9EJ
Contact: Paul Hood elaine-hood@nfworld.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 MacIntock
elensm@yahoo.com

London

The City Litterates

Meets every Friday, starting at 6:30pm.
The Red Lion, Kingly Street, off Regent Street,
Westminster W1B 5PR

London

The Ton

Meets 1st Thursday, starts at 7:00pm.
The Barley Mow, Long Lane, Smithfield, City of
London EC1A 9JE
Contact: Ian Brown ed42uk@yahoo.co.uk

Manchester

FONT

Meets 2nd and 4th Thursday from 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@clara.net
Web: www.arthurchappell.clara.net/sffont.htm
www.general.demon.co.uk/fontsite/font.htm

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, Wy
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, Wolvercot, Oxford OX2 8RD
Contact: Steve Jeffery powers@tiscali.com

Peterborough

Peterborough Science Fiction Club

Meets 1st Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm.
The Blue Bell Inn, St. Paul's Road, Dogsthorpe,
Peterborough PE1 3BZ
Meets 3rd Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm.
Goodhams Yard, St. John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD
Contact: Pete clary@btinternet.com
Web: www.psfclub.btinternet.co.uk/sfclub.htm

Portsmouth

South Hants Science Fiction Group

Meets first Thursday, starting at 7:00pm.
The Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth PO1 5BX
Contact: Mike Cheater mike.cheater@nfworld.com
Web: www.pompey.demon.co.uk/sfclub.htm

Preston

Preston SF Group

Meets every Thursday, starting at 8:30pm.
The Grey Friar, Friargate, Preston PR1 2EE
Contact: Dave Young pdgy@btinternet.com
Web: www.hainy1.demon.co.uk/pdgy/

Reading

Reading SF Group

Meets 3rd Monday, starting at 7:30pm.
The Corn Store, Farnborough Road, Reading RG1 1AX
Contact: Mark Young enquiry@nfworld.org
Web: www.nfworld.org

Sheffield

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

St. Albans

Polaris: The St. Albans SF Group

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

Monstrous

Lovecraftian goodies to be won.

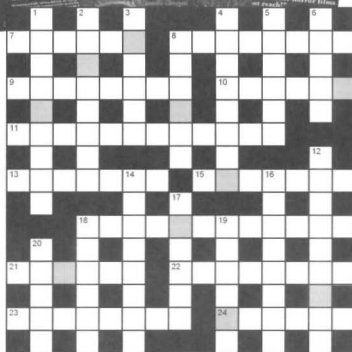
This issue we've got a copy of the paperback edition of *The Starry Wisdom: A Tribute to H.P. Lovecraft* published by Creation Books to give away. Featuring writing from, among many others, J.G. Ballard, William S. Burroughs and Alan Moore. This retrospective highlights Lovecraft's continuing influence on contemporary writers. **Plus**, to go with our feature on Lovecraft in the cinema (p20), we've got copies of two movie adaptations of his work, *The Re-animator* and *Dagon* on DVD. Complete the crossword and the shaded squares will reveal the name of an avenue and university in six across. Entries by noon on February 20, 2004 to: matrix.competition@ntlworld.com

Across

- 6 New England town (6)
7 Immortal undersea amphibians (4,4)
9 Thawed (8)
10 Monsters (6)
11 Grimoire, Al Azif (12)
13 Town of horror, home of Wilbur Whateley (7)
15 If this god calls, pretend you're out (7)
18 Story of a town with no mouse problem (4,2,6)
21 No Clue
22 Dirtily (8)
23 & 24 Fictional author, narrator of *The Unnamable* (8,6)

Down

- 1 Turned to maximum (7,2)
2 Part of scrum in rugby (5,3)
3 Bookselling business, it's a jungle out there (6)
4 Pre-sliced (5,3)
5 Get closer, but keep remote (4,2)
7 Author of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (5)
8 A lively person is electric (6)
12 Second world war opponents of The Axis (3,6)
14 You can't fight it, it runs the town (4,4)
16 Struggling to keep your head above water? (2,2,4)
17 Scrub that! Someone who behaves like 22 across needs one of these (6)
18 Maple leaf nation (6)
19 Open (6)
20 He fell and won't get back up again (5)



Crossword 164

Because Matrix 164 was delayed at the printers (beyond our control again, we're sorry), the competition deadline had passed before members received the magazine. Therefore, the **Doctor Who** competition deadline has been extended, all entries received before the closing deadline for this issue's competition (February 20th) will be accepted. And if you've lost the puzzle (how could you?) email me (at the competition address) and I'll send it to you as a small rtf file (or post it if you send your address and a stamp to me, Martin McGrath, address at front of magazine).

WANTED EDITORS FOR MATRIX

One design and production editor. Martin says: "Please, I really can't do the next issue - but if you don't enjoy it, I'll take it back in June. Scout's honour."

One news editor. Just three pages every two months. Easy.

One "Editor in Chief" - manage the schedule, badger people for work, set up features.

There is no pay, but sometimes the job is its own reward.

Timewasters

Competition 165

There have been many collaborations in sf. Here are some that have never graced our bookshelves. Can you provide a title plus 25 words of blurb for any of the resulting stories?

Arthur C Clarke & Ron Goulart
Edgar Rice Burroughs & Jerry Pournelle
Clifford D Simak & Terry Pratchett
A E van Vogt & E E 'Doc' Smith
Joanna Russ & Robert A Heinlein
Olaf Stapledon & Colin Greenland
Ray Bradbury & William Tenn
Frederic Brown & Eric Frank Russell
Stephen Baxter & Douglas Adams
Kurt Vonnegut & J K Rowling

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

Competition 163 Result

Because of the printer error which caused Matrix 163 to arrive late, we will run the winners of this competition in our next issue.

Contributors

All material remains © 2003 individual contributors as credited
News: Mark Greener and Martin McGrath.
Flicker, Goggle Boxes, and Crossword: Martin McGrath