

matrix

Mar/Apr 2004

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The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

NEW WORLDS

Stephen Baxter suggests we visit some old friends on Mars while Adam Bannister asks: "Why bother going?"

BSFA Award shortlists announced
Sci-Fi London: Louis Savy interviewed
Sandy Auden on capturing sf writers
Return of the King, Big Fish and Battlestar Galactica
Andy Sawyer sees the future in cigarette packets

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DEADLINES

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

matrix 167 (May/June 2004) copy deadline: 4 April, 2004

matrix 168 (July/Aug 2004) copy deadline: 6 June, 2004

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

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Win some stuff, if Martin can get the crossword to make sense.

Welcome

Well, here we are again and, in the immortal words of Dante: "You know what the real tragedy of this day is? I'm not even supposed to be here today!" So, shame on you all if I don't finish my PhD - not a single volunteer to take over *Matrix* for a couple of issues and now even Mark's gone for good. (Sob! I'll miss the dumb jerk! Sob! Thanks for the memories big guy. Sniffle!) Except that he's promised to keep writing for us. If this is going to go on, we really need more contributors.

ANOTHER EDITOR

I'll do the lay-out and get it all to the printer, but I need someone to help organise the content, commission features, hassle contributors etc.

NEWS REPORTER

Honestly, it's not that tough a job - trawl the websites and magazines, shuffle through the bins of important people like Dave Langford (don't really) and come up with two and a half pages of semi-interesting stuff six times a year. A monkey could do it! (Has anyone got a monkey going spare?)

CONTRIBUTORS & REVIEWERS

I do have an opinion on everything - but it would be more interesting if we could share stuff around a little. I know you'll find this hard to believe, but even I get tired of the sound of my own voice.

Martin
*That's the character from
Clerks, not the Italian poet.

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Editor:

Martin McGrath

48 Spooners Drive, Park Street, St Albans, AL1 2HL
martinmcgrath@btworld.com

Contributing Editors

Fandom:

Mark Plummer

14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6JE

matrix@fishlitter.demon.co.uk

Roderick Gladwin

27 Perth Road, Bridgemary, Gosport, Hampshire, PO13 0XX

roderick@gladwinfish.freeserve.co.uk

Martin Sketchley

232 Alvechurch Road, West Heath, Birmingham, B31 3PS

msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

Web/Internet news:

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BSFA Officers

President:

Sir Arthur C Clarke, CBE

Vice President:

Stephen Baxter

Joint Chair:

Pau & Elizabeth Billinger

1 Long Row Close, Evesdon, Daventry, Northants, NN11 3BE

billinger@enterprise.net

Treasurer:

Paul Hood

112 Meadowside, Eltham, London, SE9 6BB

paul@wonder.demon.co.uk

Membership Services:

(UK and Europe)

Estelle Roberts

97 Sharp Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2AE

estelle@hylands.freeserve.co.uk

US Agent:

Cy Chavvin

14248 Wilford Street, Detroit, MI 48213, USA

Membership fees

UK:

£21 pa or £14 pa (unwaged). Life membership: £190.

Europe:

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Rest of the world:

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

BSFA Services

Website:

www.bsfa.co.uk

Web mistress:

Tanya Brown

Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road, London, SE8 4LH

blaweb@cameronth.ariadnet

BSFA Awards:

Claire Brailley

26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA

awards@fishlitter.demon.co.uk

London meetings:

Farah Mendlesohn

22 Addington Road, Reading, RG1 5PT

farah@fishlitter.demon.co.uk

Orbiter Writing Groups:

Gillian Rooke

Sourbriev, Pilgrims Lane, Chilham, Kent, CT4 8AB

osimart@freeserve.co.uk

Publications manager:

Kathy Taylor

kathytaylor@blueyonder.co.uk

Other BSFA Publications

Vector: The critical journal of the BSFA

Production:

Tony Cullen

16 Wessers Way, Camden, London, NW1 0XE

tony.cullen@btinternet.com

Features:

Andrew M Butler

Department of Media and Arts, Canterbury Christ Church University College, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU

ambutler@enterprise.net

Book reviews:

Paul Billinger

1 Long Row Close, Evesdon, Daventry, Northants, NN11 3BE

paul@evedon.enterprise-pk.com

Focus: The writer's magazine of the BSFA

Editor:

Simon Morden

11 Egremont Drive, Sherriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5SE

focus.editor@blueyonder.co.uk

BSFA

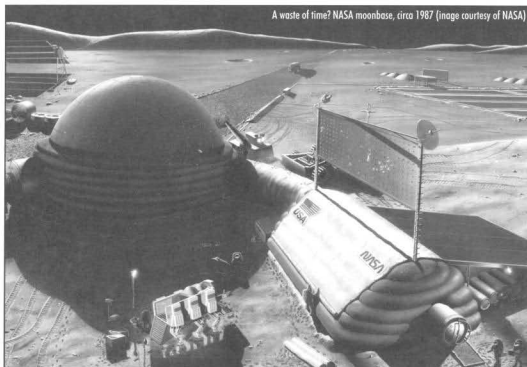
RAGE against the... ...exploration of space

Adam Bannister argues that we should abandon dreams of visiting other worlds and concentrate on making this one a better place to live.

Adam and Eve sit in the Garden of Eden, in Paradise. Eve turns to Adam and reflects on their good fortune: 'We have a beautiful home - bountiful food and water, a breathtaking landscape to explore and gaze at, the thrilling sight and touch of each other's bodies...' Adam ponders this for a moment, before saying: 'Yeah, that's true... but... it's just not enough is it?'

On the BBC News, on 07/01/04, there were two news items, which, though unconnected, exemplified the folly of mankind. The first item related to an environmental study; the second to space exploration. The former made a dire prediction that about a million species could be wiped off the planet by 2050 due to climate change - a quarter of the world's fauna and animal life, no less. Even for those who care only about numero uno this will have implications for the billions of people who rely on the Earth's abundant goods. The second item was about the failure of the Beagle 2 mission. Ironical, isn't it, that while our fertile, temperate, paradise is rapidly being destroyed, we spent between £35-40 million on the exploration of a barren, uninhabitable planet, which could not support any life more complex than an amoeba?

We are (understandably) fixated on the mystique and wonder of the stars, but, practically speaking, no other planet in our solar system could come remotely close to fulfilling our very specific criteria for a suitable home; not the atmosphere, not the range of food - animal or plant - not the sheer diverse, aesthetic beauty. Searching further afield hardly presents a solution either. To get to the next solar system, we would have to travel for several years at light speed, which is impossible if we accept Einstein's theory of relativity. Once there, we do not know if it will hold another life-supporting



A waste of time? NASA moonbase, circa 1987 (image courtesy of NASA)

planet, let alone another one as resplendent as Earth. It is as if God is saying: 'No second chances, folks.'

Some might consider the comparison tenuous. It is not as if we should expect the *Beagle* scientists to give up their jobs and become Greenpeace activists. There is no reason why we cannot explore space and arrest climate change - and indeed I think we should. Space exploration does deepen mankind's pool of knowledge, which is an end in itself, as well as having practical scientific benefits; for example, an improved capacity for the monitoring and the repulsion of, asteroids. Though the British *Beagle* inspired my article, there is evidence that Britain is at least trying to contribute to slowing down environmental degradation - investment in wind power, various direct and indirect taxes levied on the besieged motorist, and signing up to the Kyoto treaty, demonstrate that the problem receives a measure

of attention at Westminster.

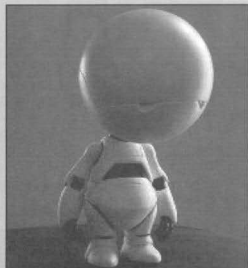
As is well documented, George Bush has not given Blair the same degree of cooperation over the environment, as Blair did for Bush over his military ambitions. The comparison shows just how little regard the latter has for the planet that has had the admirable fortitude to sustain him for almost half a century. He pulled out of the Kyoto treaty, for instance, because cutting emissions would cost super-rich corporations billions of dollars. Yet, having presided over sweeping tax cuts, and a budget deficit spiralling into billions of dollars, George is still willing to earmark billions for trips to a large uninhabitable rock. It seems that it is more important to explore (and perhaps even colonise) our desolate moon than to safeguard the most diverse, life-supporting planet in the known universe.

The Americans want to explore space because as the world's

wealthiest nation, they have a responsibility to mankind to explore space. As the world's biggest polluters they bear responsibility of much greater magnitude to the human race. Of course, a visit to the moon will be awe-inspiring. Just imagine, future lunar tourists can get the breathtaking view of a unique planet in its death throes. They can wonder why its custodians had considered that the proverbial grass had seemed greener in outer space, when Earth was the only place around that actually had any grass - or anything else useful for that matter.

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.



The new Marvin: "Here I am, brain the size of a planet."

Casting Hitch

The cast for *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* is starting to take shape, and producer/director team Nick Goldsmith and Garth Jennings are throwing up some very eyebrow raising choices alongside some very good ones.

The signing of Martin Freeman (*The Office*) to play Arthur Dent seemed rock solid, but American rapper/actor Mos Def (*Monster's Ball*) was certainly a less conventional choice for Ford Prefect. Sam Rockwell (brilliant in *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*) seems a good choice for Zaphod but Zoëy Deschanel

(*Elf*) a less convincing pick for Trillian. Bill Nighy (*Underworld*), however, seems perfect for Slartibartfast – though *Matrix* understand that despite being widely reported as a definite appointment, contracts have yet to be signed. Warwick Davis (*Willow*) will be climbing inside a robot suit to play Marvin (see picture opposite for an early look at the new Marvin).

Adams himself was reported to have believed only Arthur had to be played by a British actor; the other cast members should be cast solely according to their ability.

Baxtermania

It's shaping up to be a good year for Stephen Baxter. *Time's Eye* and *Sunstorm* are Baxter's new collaborative novels with Sir Arthur C Clarke. Stephen told *Matrix* that both are now in production with Hallmark Television. They are hoping to set this up at the Sci Fi Channel as a two-part miniseries, one part per novel, with five hours allocated to each miniseries.

Baxter and Clarke on CD

Time's Eye – the new book by Arthur C Clarke and Stephen Baxter – includes a bound-in CD ROM containing a conversation with the two authors. The CD also includes an essay on Clarke as well as the complete text of Baxter's *Evolution* and *Manifold: Time*. "Del Rey seem to be using this as a way

to promote the sales of the book," Stephen told *Matrix*. "They also like to offer early e-copy editions with exclusive extras. Interesting that print and electronic forms seem to be coexisting, with one being used to promote the other". Hopefully, it's a trend that will continue.

Wormwood Launch

Wormwood – a journal dedicated to fantasy – has been launched by Tartarus Press. See our review on page 14 or see www.tartaruspress.com.

Learn to write SF

The Arvon Foundation is running a Residential Creative Writing Course in SF between August 30-4 September 2004. "Modern science fiction is subtle, adventurous and diverse. The

best science fiction novels are as much about character and mood as scientific concepts," The Arvon Foundation says. Tutors include Christopher Priest, Alastair Reynolds and Molly Brown. Call The Arvon Foundation on 01409 231 338 for more information.

Lovecraft graphic novel

Hans Rodionoff's script suggesting that the *Necronomicon* and Cthulhu were real will debut as a graphic novel, by Keith Griffin. John Carpenter is slated to direct a film version.

Speculative Literature Foundation launched

The new Speculative Literature Foundation aims "to promote literary quality in speculative fiction", by encouraging new writers, assisting established authors, and facilitating the work of quality magazines and small presses in the genre. The SLF hope to accomplish this by creating a comprehensive, free resource website, developing materials for schools and libraries, and raising funds to redistribute as grants for quality work.

The first award will be the 2003

Fountain Award, a \$1000 prize for excellence in short fiction. A select jury will accept nominations from magazine and anthology editors, and announce the winner and honourable mentions on June 1st, 2004. For more details, see their website: www.speculativeliterature.org

Stretching a point

Elastic Press have announced that they are now open for submissions to a themed anthology scheduled for publication late 2004/early 2005. Taking its cue from works like *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury), 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (Clarke) and 1984 (Orwell), *The Elastic Book Of Numbers* will be edited by Allen Ashley. Guidelines can be found at: www.elasticpress.com

Paging Dr Jarrold

John Jarrold, former editor of *Earthlight*, *Orbit* and *Legend* has set up as a "manuscript doctor" working with agents and writers to improve sf&f manuscripts before submission to publishers. Rates start at £100 for four chapters and £350 for a novel up to 100,000 words. *Matrix* can't imagine anyone better qualified. For information, contact j.jarrold@btopenworld.com.



Sci-Fi London winners

Robot Stories was voted the winner of the London Science Fiction Film Festival award for best film. The award for best short film went to *Chaingangs*, a slickly-produced little film that, remarkably, was completed in just two days as part of the National 48 Hour Film Challenge. You can read a review of *Robot Stories*, plus an interview with festival founder, Louis Savy, in our extensive coverage of this year's festival, beginning on page 18. The Sci-Fi London website has now entered its between-festival stage, offering news, reviews and comment on the world of sf film: www.sfi-fi-london.com.

WANTED MATRIX CONTRIBUTORS

News reporter: Write the news, just two and a half pages every two months. Easy.

Editor - keep an eye on the schedule, badger people for work, set up features, talk to famous people - no really, Stephen Baxter, Brian Aldiss, David Langford - you could exchange emails with any of them and pretend you had a good reason. Honestly, this job is great for stalkers!

BSFA shortlists announced

Check out the details of the shortlist for this year's BSFA Awards on page 25. BSFA members should have received their ballot papers in a separate mailing. Please remember that the closing date for those not casting their votes at Eastercon is Tuesday, 6 April 2004.

Philip K Dick Award

The 2003 shortlist for paperback original: has been announced.

- M M Buckner *Hyperthought*
- Mark Budz *Clade*
- Jane Jensen *Dante's Equation*
- Richard K Morgan *Altered Carbon*
- Chris Moriarty *Spin State*
- Ann Tonsor Zeddies *Steel Helix*

Women dominate Nebula novels

The shortlist for this year's Nebulas has been published by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) and the novel ballot is dominated by women authors. Five of the six nominations are for novels written by women and include work by Lois McMaster Bujold, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Carol Emshwiller, Nalo Hopkinson and Elizabeth Moon. Jack McDevitt is the odd man out.

Clarke Award Shortlist

This year's shortlist for the Clarke Awards has been announced. The nominated works are:

- Stephen Baxter *Coelescent*
- Greg Bear *Darwin's Children*
- William Gibson *Pattern Recognition*
- Gwyneth Jones *Midnight Lamp*
- Neal Stephenson *Quicksilver*
- Tricia Sullivan *Maul*

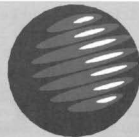
China Miéville: New Weird

In December's *Locus* China Miéville discussed the New Weird: a literary movement or moment that may or may not exist. He describes this as "somehow very British" and a "certain type of thematic and generic slippage" that stands on the shoulders of the New Worlds tradition. He claims it attempts to "lovingly... invert, subvert, culvert and convert the clichés of the fantastic". And he has suggested ten New Weird or proto-NW texts:

- S Cockayne *Wanderers and Islanders*
- S Swainston *The Year of Our War*
- J Robson *Natural History*
- A Reynolds *Revelation Space*
- C Miéville *Perdido Street Station*
- P Reeve *Mortal Engines*
- J C Grimwood "Arabesque" trilogy
- I R MacLeod *The Light Ages*
- M J Harrison "Viriconium" series
- M Peake "Gormenghast" trilogy

TTA changes schedule

The *Third Alternative* is altering its schedule slightly, pushing publication of each issue back one month. The change, editor Andy Cox announced, is so that each issue's appearance "better coincides with the season they're (supposed to be) published in." Issue 37 will now be published on March 1 2004 with subsequent issues following "seasonally". It remains to be seen if further adjustments will be necessary if global warming has the predicted influence on climate.



RODERICK GLADWISH'S WORLD OF
SCIENCE

Decided at birth?

University of Southampton researchers found strong evidence of a link between levels of growth promoters in umbilical cord blood at birth and the bone mass of the newborn child. Using dual energy x-ray absorptiometry, they examined 119 infants for levels of a bone growth promoter. [This may influence the final bone mineral density and, therefore, the risk of suffering debilitating fractures due to osteoporosis – brittle bone disease – in later life – Mark.] The study also investigated the effect of maternal diet and lifestyle on the newborn baby. Susceptibility to osteoporosis, heart disease and diabetes in later life may be significantly affected by the body composition of the growing foetus. The study may offer new ways to reduce these risks.

Source: University of Southampton



Nervous gel

Spinal injuries are almost impossible to repair. Nerve ends regrow, but almost always miss each other. Implanting materials, such as collagen, to guide the growth has been one option. Samuel Stupp and colleagues at Northwestern University, Chicago are using a liquid to reduce additional trauma. Turning into a gel-like solid when injected, the liquid is made up of negatively charged molecules and stays liquid because the molecules repel each other. Once they make contact with positively charged living tissue they form a mass of hollow tubes 5 nanometres wide and several hundreds of nanometres long. Nerve cells can grow through and around this structure. Problems still to be overcome include scar tissue blocking growth so enzymes that can break it down may be introduced. As usual rats will be getting it in the neck (literally this time) before humans will see the benefit.

Source: Northwestern University, Chicago

Dumb animals

Research by psychologists Dr W Tecumseh Fitch (St Andrews University) and Professor Marc D Hauser (Harvard) in the journal *Science* suggests a sharp limit to animals' capacity to perceive the vital elements of grammar necessary in language. Previous studies suggest that monkeys can grasp simple speech rules. However, they failed to grasp the more complex hierarchical structures. At Harvard cotton-top tamarins were played recorded examples of grammar based around the phrasing of sounds. Following this initial exposure, the tamarins heard a series of recordings, some of them violating the rules. When the animals perceived such inconsistencies, they tended to look at the speaker playing the sounds. They did not spot the complex grammar violations. This technique may be able to answer the question of whether newborn babies have the ability to perceive phrase structure, or whether it needs to develop until they start producing grammatically complex utterances.

Source: St Andrews University, Scotland

Sparrow takes flight

Mary Doria Russell's 1997 BSFA Award-winning novel *The Sparrow* is to be adapted into a film, with Mad Max/Witches of Eastwick director George Miller in talks to direct. *The Sparrow* is the story of a Jesuit-led mission to a newly discovered alien civilization, and the disastrous results that follow. Warner Brothers will produce with Michael Seitzman (*Class Action*) writing the script.



Science Fiction Residential Creative Writing Course

August 30 to September 4, 2004

The Arvon Foundation

Modern science fiction is subtle, adventurous and diverse. The best science fiction novels are as much about character and mood as scientific concepts. From near-future speculation to alternate histories and travel to other worlds, the field embraces vastly more than robots and ray-guns.

Christopher Priest, author of *The Separation* (Gollanz) and *The Prestige* (Pocket Books) has won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Arthur C Clarke Award.

Alastair Reynolds, author of *Absolution Gap* (Gollanz) and *Chasm City* (Ace Books).

Guest: Molly Brown's latest novel is *Invitation to a Funeral*.

Please call **The Arvon Foundation** on 01409 231 338 for enquiries. Bursaries available.

Letters to the Editor

Brian W Aldiss writes: I am grateful for your good opinion of *Super-State*. How does one feel when given such generous space for your interview? My response was 'How I do go on!' - an indication perhaps of how much I enjoyed our chat.

A comment, however, on what Paul Billinger says on behalf of *Vector* and its review of *Super-State*. I appreciate what he says about his review policy. However, I did not complain that the *Vector* review of *Super-State* was unfavourable; I have been getting adverse reviews for forty years now, and am perfectly hardened to the whole process.

What I complained about was **inability**! - The stupidity and inaccuracy of the review. Saying that 'nothing happens' in the novel is manifestly dotty and untrue; I won't go again into my listing of what unfolds if you read the book.

And to end with a personal insult, as did the reviewer, is simply not done. It is rude and unprofessional. It is also crap. I was told I should 'get out more!' What kind of impertinent advice is that to give a man of my age? For the record, I have been abroad seven times this year - not for holidays but for - er, Appearances! I'd bet *Vector's* reviewer can't say as much! So my complaint was and is against amateurism, snotty-nosed amateurism, which does the genre no favours.

Ah well, how I do go on!

Martin responds: On an altogether happier note, Matrix would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Aldiss and Harry Harrison on their induction into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame.

Martin Taylor writes: So Stephen Baxter thinks it was viable for the Romans to continue beyond the wall and turn all of Britain into a secure granary for the maintenance of the empire. Has he been up here lately, stood on the wall and seen those limitless plains of waving corn to the north? Has he buggery. North of the wall is bandit country, and that's before you get to Scotland!

Farming's hard work up here - sheep, grass and an awful of wind - which is why they've planted so many trash pines. And even if it had been his rural idyll, how would the Romans have transported the grain to Rome through an increasingly hostile mainland, or across the Bay of Biscay? Even if that was possible, Britannia Magna would just have created one more powerful provincial overlord who would have fancied the purple for himself. It's a self-defeating vision.

No, Stephen, Hadrian came up here, took one look and said 'Sod this for a game of soldiers'. Subduing the north wasn't worth the effort (even if he didn't know then what we know now, which is that the only way to subdue a Scot is through his wallet, and that's only until your back is turned - and I mean that in an affectionate way; we Northumbrians have long believed in warmly welcoming Scots on tour - with a noose.)

Empires come into being for two reasons - either the centre has an excess of young braves with



We want your letters and comments.

Send them to:
Matrix, c/o Martin McGrath, 48 Spooners
Drive, Park Street, St Albans, Herts, AL2
2HL. martin.mcgrath@ntlworld.com

time on their hands so they go off to shit on someone else's doorstep (Alexander, Genghis, Vikings) or the centre wants safe trade routes with an amenable market place for their goods (Roman, British, Ottoman). They fail for just one

reason - maintenance costs too much, the centre cannot hold and cultures like picking a corpse clean.

My answer to Adam Hart-Davis's question - "What did the Romans do for us?" - is not a lot.

Martin responds: Contrary to popular belief the Romans did control large parts of Scotland. Between 84AD (when Agricola defeated the Caledones at Mons Graupius) and the death of Septimius Severus in 212, the Romans invested considerable effort on expeditions in the north. Both Agricola and Septimius Severus fought their way as far north as Aberdeen and the Antonine Walls were built between Edinburgh and Glasgow (84) and Bo'sness to Old Kilpatrick (160s). There is evidence that Scotland south of the Firth of Forth was quite extensively Romanised. Rather than being defences the walls were probably the spines of pale-liche regions of control and surveillance.

As I understand it, however, Stephen Baxter's point was not simply that the wall was a physical limit but that it was representative of a significant shift in Roman

psychology that led to decline and fall. At some point the Romans lost the will to endure what was necessary to expand their borders, so they built walls and fixed boundaries. The Romans were acutely aware of this, which is why so many of their writers are concerned with 'back to basics' morality and a return to Republican values.

Sue Thomason writes: I found much of *Matrix* 165 very hard to read, particularly by artificial light. Could I make a plea for a) larger typefaces, b) fewer grey boxes, c) fewer illustrations that interfere with column layout, and d) NO use of background grey overlay illustration as on p. 21, which I gave up on. I don't have any problems reading *Vector*, and while I realise you want to create a different "feel" for *Matrix* and maintain a less formal style, I would hope that there are ways to do this without sacrificing legibility. Please?

Martin McGrath replies: To take your last point first, I'm happy to concede that the use of the background illustration to "Aiming at the Gut", the Marion Arnott interview in *Matrix* 165, was an experiment that didn't work - we won't repeat it. As for your other points; we try to cram as much as we can into *Matrix* while preserving readability - our font size in 165 was comparable with most professionally produced magazines. However, we have increased it slightly for this issue. Grey boxes will stay, but we're using less of them, we've lightened the shade in this issue and made the font stronger - I hope that helps.

Do other readers have (polite) suggestions for improving *Matrix*? We're always keen to hear from you.

Return to Tellytubbyland

Martin McGrath would like to remind readers that this is a review of the film of *Return of the King*, not the book, which he has not read and now believes he never will. If someone else not liking this film is likely to upset you, he suggests you turn the page now.

The last time I wrote about Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (*Matrix* 160) I received a couple of letters that can only be described as hate mail. The unsigned author was keen to point out my mental and genetic deficiencies as well as my ignorance of literature and film. The final paragraph of both letters ended with a question: Given that many millions love them, critics rave about them, awards drip from them and they make huge sums of money: "Why should anyone give a fuck what you have to say about *The Lord of the Rings*?"

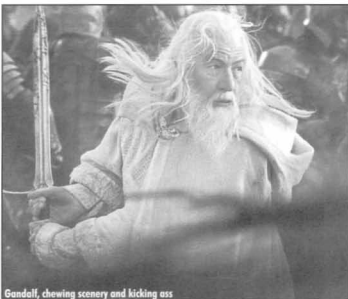
A fair point, if crudely made.

Nothing I say here will change the fact that *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has been the biggest thing to hit science fiction and fantasy cinema since George Lucas released *Star Wars* and will almost certainly have the same sort of long term impact. These have been more than movies, they have made a mark on the collective consciousness.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King is a technical marvel and a tribute to the determination of cast and crew to create something spectacular. No other film, indeed no other series of films, has come close to matching the richness of the fantasy world built by Peter Jackson and special effects company WETA. They have created beauty and terror, sometimes simultaneously, and deserve the highest possible praise. They have changed what we imagine is possible on the screen.

Sad that all this dedication, effort and whizzbangery should have been used in the service of such a hollow, conservative and unfulfilling film.

The Return of the King shares faults with its predecessors. It is determinedly "epic" in every aspect of its construction – with pompous dialogue, portentous images and an overblown sense of its own importance. Take, for one tiny example, the lighting of the beacons between Gondor and Minas Tirith. This could have been accomplished quickly and simply, but Jackson chooses to swoop from mountain-top to mountain-top, showing beacon after beacon being lit and doing even more for the



Gandalf, chewing scenery and kicking ass

New Zealand tourist industry. It is overdone and, crucially, it is without purpose. It is symptomatic of the trilogy's biggest weakness.

There is no economy in this film. The only rule appears to be that more really is more. Longer even than its predecessors, *The Return of the King* stretches interminably, lingering over minutiae and diluting any excitement or tension in the story through repetition. How often, to take another random example, did Sam need to smack Gollum before the director felt the point was made that he didn't trust him?

A knock-on effect has been the shrinking of the characters. None of them make an impact as human (or whatever) beings. McKellen does his best as Gandalf, chewing the scenery and kicking ass impressively, but Aragorn's (Mortensen) love stories are bloodless and without real passion. Frodo (Wood) is a moon-faced whinger; throughout the trilogy Wood has looked more like a teenager asked to tidy his room than a man with a terrible burden. Perhaps only Faramir (Wenham) and his father Denethor (Noble) give us a sense of real, though twisted, human emotions.

Much of this could have been forgiven if the film had something interesting to say: if there were, at its heart, something profound.

Through all their adventures, the hobbits can imagine nothing better than returning to the bourgeois Tellytubbyland that is the Shire and nestling back into the conservative little holes in the ground that they had to be winkled out of in the first film. Facing the wonders of the world they repeatedly eulogise their rural, Luddite, idyll. It is more than irritating, it betrays the essentially backward-looking nature of these films. Insofar as they say anything, they play into that increasingly common malaise – nostalgia for a fake, bucolic past.

Nor does the film possess moral or intellectual complexity. The good are blessed, the bad are wicked and that's just the way it is. No lost souls are redeemed and no truly good men are corrupted. The dead hand of Tolkien's moral absolutism weighs heavily on all the action. The literal (since Saruman has been banished) facelessness of evil in *The Return of the King* seems appealing. It is comforting to believe that our enemies are simply wicked – that way we can dispose of them without a stain on our conscience. They get what they deserve.

In the real world, however, where people just like you and I are willing to strap explosives to their chests and kill themselves to strike at those they hate, bad things happen for a

reason. In our tribal and divided world, *The Lord of the Rings'* black and white morality isn't just quaint, it's dangerous and wrong-headed. The fact that one man's terrorist or dictator is another man's freedom fighter or national hero has become a cliché, but it remains true. Even on rare occasions when the bad guy stands under a banner marked "wicked – please kick", tackling evil always has a cost to the innocent. Sauron's orcs may be dispensable canon fodder, born to be bad like their master, but from Dresden to Baghdad ordinary people suffer when monsters are dethroned. One might want to argue that such suffering is a price worth paying but what one should not do, even in a fairytale, is ignore the price altogether.

That's not to say that there aren't enjoyable moments in *The Return of the King* – it is the most accomplished of the three films and, when there are fewest hobbits on the screen, there is some tremendous action. The battle scenes are done on a vast and spectacular scale. The catapult exchanges that open the battle for Minas Tirith are jawdropping. There are thrills, but because I never felt I knew or cared for the characters on the screen, I never really felt involved. No doubt if I'd carried with me a knowledge or love of Tolkien's novel, this would have been less of a problem.

The Return of the King can be enjoyed as spectacle and admired for its technical brilliance but I, for one, could not love it.

The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King

Director: Peter Jackson
Screenplay: Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens & Peter Jackson
Cinematographer: Andrew Leslie

Starring: Sean Astin, Kate Blanchett, Orlando Bloom, Billy Boyd, Bernard Hill, Ian Holm, Ian McKellen, Viggo Mortensen, John Noble, Miranda Otto, John Rhys-Davies, Andy Serkis, Liv Ullmann, Hugo Weaving, David Wenham, Elijah Wood

201 minutes

Martin McGrath on the fabulous world of Tim Burton's *Big Fish*.

No small pond

Edward Bloom (Finney and McGregor), a storyteller without equal, has turned his own history into an epic. There is no doubt that Edward is the hero of his own life, but the supporting cast of giants, witches, werewolves and huge, shape-changing catfish seem to leave little room for his wife (Lange) and, most crucially, for his son.

Will (Crudup) does not understand his father and resents the tall tales that he believes are lies. So, when he discovers that his father is dying he comes home determined, at last, to cut through the mythology and find out the "truth" about his father's life. Edward, however, is determined to stick to the legend.

That's really all there is to *Big Fish*, the new movie by *Beetlejuice* and *Edward Scissorhands* director Tim Burton. This is a film about the stories we make of our life, the inadequacy of truth and the wonder of the imagination. In the wrong hands it could have been mawkish and sentimental and, in truth, it staggers too close to that line for comfort at times. But Burton is a better director than that and Albert Finney's Edward is no Forrest Gump he brings a much-needed bitterness to this sweet tale.

Bloom's stories borrow liberally from fables made familiar by their place in the world's mythologies – there are echoes of Paul Bunyan and of Tir na nÓg to name just two. And it blends in a whimsical Americana as the story unfolds through the second half of the twentieth century in the sort of small town American setting that is recognisable to anyone who watches film and television.

There are flaws with *Big Fish* – sometimes it wanders too far from the point for its own good,

and can be over-indulgent – but these are also the faults of the film's central character. Whether or not you forgive the film these flaws will depend, I guess, on whether you would be able to forgive Edward his meanderings and cherish his imagination. Are you on the side of the fantasists or the realists?

For me the presence of Albert Finney, giving a near perfect performance, as the elder incarnation of Edward Bloom sways the vote. He is amongst some very fine actors, Lange and McGregor in particular, but Finney dominates the film – so much so that I think I might have preferred to sit for two hours listening to him reciting the stories rather than actually watch McGregor (as Bloom in action) acting them out. Finney manages to be charming, witty, curmudgeonly and infuriating at the same time and gives his role a rare humanity.

That said, McGrath does a fine job playing the younger Bloom and looks and acts convincingly like his elder counterpart. (McGrath is making a bit of a habit of this, what with his portrayal of a young Alec Guinness in *Star Wars*.) But the truth is that the real star of *Big Fish* is the trips through Edward Bloom's youthful adventures is not an actor but Tim Burton's direction and the amazing cinematography of Philippe Rousselot (*La Reine Margot*) and the production design of Dennis Gassner (*Field of Dreams*, *Miller's Crossing*). As Edward Bloom tells us of his heroics we enter a world where the grass is ever so slightly greener, the daffodils more yellow, the sky a shade brighter. These sequences are beautiful – the sort of thing you imagine even Terry Gilliam looking at and feeling slightly envious.

As well as being a fantasy film, *Big Fish* is a film about the

importance of fantasy. Edward Bloom accepts the fantastic and, because of that he does fantastic things in his life – he makes the world a better place for all those around him. His son, by contrast, can see only the mundane and is, as the film begins, cold-calling clients from his job in a bank. No one, Burton seems to be telling us, ever made the world a better place without using their imagination. For all his faults, Edward Bloom is a kinder, more honourable and better man than his son is willing to believe.

Big Fish is also, partly, a personal statement by Burton (whose career marks him as Hollywood's finest fabulist) on behalf of the need to make art that exercises the imagination and not just the accounts – perhaps reflecting his experiences with the disastrous, studio-driven, *Planet of the Apes*. *Big Fish* is unlikely to make enough money to win that argument – it wanders just a little too far off the beaten track for the mass audience – but it has some great acting and some beautiful cinematography and wonderful storytelling. It is not Burton's very best work, but it is certainly good enough to command your attention in an otherwise bleak winter.

I found *Big Fish* both beautiful and touching.

Big Fish

Director: Tim Burton

Screenplay: John August

Cinematographer: Philippe Rousselot

Starring: Albert Finney, Ewan McGregor, Billy Crudup, Jessica Lange, Helena Bonham Carter, Alison Lohman, Robert Guillaume, Steve Buscemi

125 minutes

Monty Python's rubbish circus

Timeline is almost bad enough to be entertaining, says Martin McGrath

Timeline is a film made tolerable only by moments of gargantuan stupidity.

The film's "finest" moment occurs during *The Hundred Years' War* as the noble French launch a night attack on a castle held by the wicked English. The English launch a volley of their famous longbow shafts, tipped with flame. It looks spectacular (handy for a film) and dozens of Frenchmen die. Not content, the English lord twirls his (metaphorical) moustache and calls for "night arrows." Everyone gulps. What terrible new weapon is this? The British archers loose another volley.

"Night arrows!" Scream the French as more fall dead.

Night arrows indeed.

Timeline's idea of a sneaky, secret weapon is the non-flaming arrow! How nasty is that? The poor French can't see them coming in the dark! Cheating English swine!

It takes a lot for a film to get an Irishman hoping the English manage to turn things round and give the Americans, French and Scots a kicking, but *Timeline* achieved the impossible.

That a film from a Michael Crichton novel should turn out to be rubbish is no surprise but that Richard Donner (*Superman*, *The Omen*, *The Goonies*) directed this mess is just sad.

Timeline is so bad it's funny. I laughed often and loudly, though I seemed to be the only person to appreciate that this must surely be an homage to Monty Python's finest work.

Timeline

Director: Richard Donner

Screenplay: Jeff Maguire & George Naffi

Cinematographer: Caleb Deschanel

Starring: Paul Walker, Frances O'Connor, Gerard Butler, Billy Connolly, David Thewlis

116 minutes

Woo makes a balls of Dick

Martin McGrath on the latest "adaptation" of a Philip K Dick story that continues the losing streaks of Hollywood's favourite SF author and director John Woo.

The kernel of so many Philip K Dick stories is the exploration of the stuff that makes us each uniquely "us" – the core of our identity, the thing that makes us human. It isn't a theme that is uniquely Dickian but, by the same token, few writers have explored the idea so persistently or so often pushed the idea beyond its reasonable limits.

Dick's complicated attempts to understand the nature of his own identity, his problems with drugs and his ultimate failure to reconcile himself with his talent and his place in the world are well documented. It is his obsessive search for answers to these personal questions that mark out his body of work as worthy of continued study and distinguishes Dick from other, comparable, authors working in the same pulp tradition.

Sadly, *Paycheck*, the latest in a long line of Hollywood "adaptations" of Dick's work fails to utilise any of the author's native intelligence. Instead we have another in the procession of poor films from director John Woo since his relocation to Hollywood and proof from screenwriter Dean Georgaris that his *Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life* screenplay was not one-off: he is that bad a writer.

Michael Jennings (Alec Baldwin in wooden form) is an engineer for hire. He takes dirty jobs – reverse-engineering other people's work for their competitors – and then he has the memory of the work wiped so neither he, nor the people who employ him, can be caught. An old friend offers him the biggest job yet – three years of his life for a guaranteed fortune. But when Jennings wakes up, things have gone wrong. There is no money, just an envelope containing twenty seemingly ordinary items and a lot of people who want to kill him. On the run, but not knowing why, Jennings must try and solve the riddle before the bad guys catch up.

Some of Dick's trademark features do survive on screen in



Paycheck. There is the central hero, unsure of who he is and what is happening, pursued by heartless government agents and money-grabbing businessmen. There is even a spluttering attempt to consider the "philosophical" implications of the ability to see into the future.

But these themes are not seriously explored.

Instead of paranoia and confusion, we get car chases, explosions and slow motion backflips through plate glass windows.

Rather than characters, we get cyphers – people reduced to plot devices and their emotions displayed only so the audience can be manipulated.

In place of intelligence, we get a formulaic techno-thriller. In place of plot, action set pieces. People keep telling Jennings, that he is just an ordinary man, not a superhero, but Woo cannot resist making his protagonist super-powered. Jennings becomes by turn a martial artist, a crack shot with a variety of weapons, a motorcycle rider of stupendous ability and an irresistible lover.

One presumes that, if *Paycheck* had no pretensions to stimulate our

minds, then at least the intention was to plaster the screen with eye-candy to distract the audience from the characterless vacuum at its heart. Even here, on home ground, Woo fails to deliver. One car chase is so poorly edited that it makes no sense – and where once Woo's signature white dove seemed like a proud authorial flourish, all it achieves in *Paycheck* is derisive laughter, so ineptly it is used.

Only Thurman – a far more convincing "action hero" than Affleck – and the likeable Giametti (*Duets*) emerge from the film with their dignity intact. Thurman acts everyone else off the screen and while her "character" is an unlikely mix of high-kicking "Angel" and very clever (she wears glasses after all) research biologist, Thurman at least brings a certain charm and charisma to the role.

Where traces of the original short story survive, *Paycheck* retails some interesting ideas. Dick had a fertile and profligate mind. His stories are often filled with throwaway statements and flashing images that other authors would have expanded into full stories, novels and even careers. But Woo's *Paycheck* does not take advantage

of its source and, in the end, wastes even the good ideas it does pick up.

With a smaller budget and a better script this could have been a good film. The basic story, in which a man uses his intellect not his brawn to win the day could have been both thoughtful and significantly different from the run-of-the-mill Hollywood blockbuster. Sadly, what we get is a film indistinguishable from any of a dozen similar action movies produced last year and without a trace of originality or style.

Paycheck isn't even bad enough to linger long in the memory. Like its hero you'll remember going in and remember coming out but, if you're lucky, you won't remember what happened for the two hours in the middle.

Paycheck

Director: John Woo

Screenplay: Dean Georgaris

Cinematographer: Larry Blanford & Jeffrey L Kimball

Starring: Ben Affleck, Aaron Eckhart, Uma Thurman, Paul Giametti, Colm Feore

119 minutes

All change

Ghost Pain



If you believe the negative press, **The Butterfly Effect** is one of the worst films ever made. Not so, says **Martin McGrath**. It isn't great, but it does have an interesting story to tell.

Injoyed *The Butterfly Effect*. There, I've said it, try to think well of me.

If you've read some of the reviews this film received on its American release you'll understand that making that statement could have me locked up as a traitor to the fraternity of film reviewers.

First it has been mauled for the quality (or lack of it) of Ashton Kutcher's acting. That criticism seems to have more to do with the fact that he's Demi Moore's "toyboy" than a reasonable assessment of his limited but perfectly serviceable role as Evan, the film's troubled hero. Kutcher isn't the new Pacino but he is hardly playing against type as a bumbling, slightly bewildered young man and his performance here is no worse than, say, Tom Cruise or Bruce Willis when they attempt more "dramatic" roles.

Second *The Butterfly Effect* was slaughtered for inconsistencies in its plot. It is true the story has an apparent hole in its logic. Evan and his three friends Tommy (Scott), Kayleigh (Smart) and Lenny (Henson) are subject to a variety of traumatic childhood experiences. At the time Evan finds that the worst of them are blocked from his memory, but as he grows up he discovers a way to access what happened through journals he kept as a boy. Then he finds that he can do more than watch the

events replay, he can intervene and change them. The effects of these small changes on the lives of Evan and his friends, as of the flapping wings of chaos theory's infamous butterfly, are enormous.

The plot problem, which so many reviewers have harped on about, is that Evan's memories of other timelines and his journals stay with us no matter what the changes. It is true, it doesn't make much sense, but Evan's mind lets him travel in time, if you can accept that then it hardly seems an enormous leap to accept that he can also retain the memories of other "timelines" he's visited. The journals, or rather their contents, may be inconsistent, I'd need to see the film again to be certain, but if they are, it isn't the worst mistake ever made in a time travel film.

Thirdly *The Butterfly Effect* was slammed for the "inept" direction. This seems particularly harsh. It is the first film that writing team Bress and Gruber (*Final Destination 2*) have directed and, while they aren't going to be bothering the Academy members, their handling of the film is no worse than workmanlike. Wisely they start slowly and build the pace of the film to a peak. At a little under two hours the film is too long and there might be one too many shifts of reality, but by the end it has fully justified its inevitable but pleasingly bittersweet

ending. Importantly it moves fast enough so that you don't have too long to ponder the flaws.

The Butterfly Effect isn't profound, but it isn't stupid, unlike some of the more expensive studio films (*Paycheck* and *Timeline*) reviewed in this issue of *Matrix*. It isn't a classic, but it certainly doesn't deserve the opprobrium it has received. The worst I will say about it is that the execution fails to live up to the very strong idea at the heart of the movie.

Memory seems to be the big sci-fi theme of 2004. *Paycheck* was terrible while word is that *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* by music video director Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman (*Being John Malkovich*) is brilliant. *The Butterfly Effect* is somewhere in the middle.

The Butterfly Effect

Director: Eric Bress & J Mackye Gruber

Screenplay: Eric Bress & J Mackye Gruber

Cinematographer: Matthew F Leonetti

Starring: Ashton Kutcher, Melora Walters, Amy Smart, Eiden Henson, William Lee Scott, John Patrick Amedori, Irene Garovito, Kevin Schmidt, Jesse James, Logan Lerman, Sarah Widdows, Jake Kaese, Cameron Bright, Eric Stoltz, Ethan Suplee

113 minutes

Martin McGrath is underwhelmed by *The Haunted Mansion*, the latest Disney film based on one of their theme park rides.

Hot on the heels of their success with *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Disney's second theme-park-ride-based movie, *The Haunted Mansion*, arrives in cinemas. *The Haunted Mansion*, however, isn't in the same league as *Pirates*.

Mansion is not a total failure. There is a beautiful opening credits sequence that fills in the back story and the art direction is superb throughout. Director Minkoff does well, filling the screen with pretty pictures, CGI effects and, best of all, Rick Baker's (An American Werewolf in London) scary monsters.

Amongst the cast Stamp hams it up as the butler Ramsley and Tilly does a surprisingly good job as a head in a bowl (Madame Leota). But Murphy is miscast in the lead. He is likeable when he plays it straight but his hysterical (not funny, screaming) comedy performance lets him down.

It's a shame because, there is quite a nice ghost story at the heart of *The Haunted Mansion*. It features a few scary moments, so though the film is rated PG I'd think twice about taking very young children to this. One sequence in particular, involving skeletal zombies, is probably too strong for those of a sensitive disposition.

In the end, though, there simply aren't enough good jokes in *The Haunted Mansion* to hold everything together. And why is the UK version 12 minutes shorter than the American release?

The Haunted Mansion

Director: Rob Minkoff

Screenplay: David Berenbaum

Cinematographer: Remi Adefarasin

Starring: Eddie Murphy, Terrence Stamp, Nathaniel Parker, Marsha Thomason, Jennifer Tilley, 87 minutes

Island going Spares

Dreamworks

has paid

\$1million for

The Island,

a script by

Caspian Tredwell-

Owen (Beyond

Borders). The fee will

rise to \$1.5 million if

the film actually gets

made. Dreamworks

fought off interest

from rival studio

Paramount.

The Island is

being compared to

both Logan's Run

and Michael Marshall

FLICKER

Smith's novel Spares.

It is apparently the similarity to Spares that drove the bidding so high. *Variety* reports, with two of Hollywood's biggest names involved in a squabble over the rights. Paramount currently own the rights to Spares and had hoped to combine the two projects as a vehicle for Tom Cruise.

Spares was originally optioned by Dreamworks but languished in development hell, despite the interest of both Steven Spielberg

and Tom Cruise (who eventually teamed up on *Minority Report*). Adding spice to the bidding for *The Island* script is the fact that Cruise and Spielberg were

in opposing camps. Cruise now has his own production company – which has an exclusive deal with Paramount – while Spielberg is one of the founders of Dreamworks.

It is not clear whether Paramount will proceed with Spares but Dreamworks have approached Michael Bay (*Armageddon*) to direct *The Island*.

Tredwell-Owen is also working on another sci-fi thriller, *After Man*, for Dreamworks.

No Ender in sight

The glacial progress of *Ender's Game*, Orson Scott Card's sf classic, to the big screen took another step this month with the announcement that *X-Men 2* writers Dan Harris and Michael Dougherty had been hired by Warner Brothers to write a second draft of the script originally submitted last May by Card himself. Attempts to get the film into production have been going on since at least 1996.

Despite the delays, Card remains enthusiastic, praising the selection of the new writing team. "Dan and Mike know how to create a terrific action film that entertains the audience every moment," said Card. "And best of all, their scripts get made, and made well. The chance of an excellent version of *Ender's Game* actually getting on the screen just increased dramatically because they signed on." Wolfgang Petersen (*Das Boot*, *Enemy Mine*, *Troy*) remains the most likely director.

Card's draft was based on both *Ender's Game* and *Ender's Shadow* and featured both Ender and Bean.

Lords of War

David Cronenberg (*Scanners*, *Dead Ringers*, *eXistenZ*) will direct *Lords of War* based on a script by Andrew Niccol (*Gattaca*, *Simone*, *The Truman Show*). The film will star Nicholas Cage as a ruthless arms dealer being chased by an Interpol agent, Monica Bellucci (*The Matrix Reloaded*).

Suited and booted

David Reynolds (*A Bug's Life*, *The Emperor's New Groove*) has signed on to adapt Robert A. Heinlein's *Have Spacesuit Will Travel* for Warner Brothers. Reynolds was nominated for an Academy Award for his original screenplay

for Pixar's smash hit *Finding Nemo*. He will be working on his first live-action film with producer David Heyman (*Harry Potter*) who, as we reported here in *Matrix* 160, also holds the rights to *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress*. *Spacesuit* tells the story of Kip, a high school senior who wins a spacesuit but who has to sell it to pay for his college tuition. Going for one last walk he uses the radio, accidentally contacts a passing spaceship and ends up having to save the earth.

Batman R'ases up?

Ian Neeson (*Darkman*) and Gary Oldman (*The Fifth Element*) have joined the cast of *Batman 5 – Batman Begins* (not, as widely touted, *Batman: Intimidation*). London-born director Christopher Nolan (*Memento*) is assembling a distinctly European cast for the film with Welshman Christian Bale (*Equilibrium*) as Batman, English knight Sir Michael Caine (*Zulu*) as Alfred, London born Oldman, and three Irishmen: Neeson, Cillian Murphy (*28 Days Later*) and Larry

Holden (*Insomnia*). Japanese actor Ken Watanabe (*Tampopo*) may play villain R's Al Ghul. The only Americans so far confirmed are Morgan Freeman (*Se7en*) as head of Wayne Enterprises, Lucius Fox, and Katie Holmes (*Dawson's Creek*).

Bring me Sunshine

Fox Searchlight have signed up the director/writer team behind *28 Days Later* and *The Beach* to make the space-based British sf thriller (now there's a rarity), *Sunshine*. The story of a team of astronauts sent to deliver an explosive package to reinvigorate a weakening Sun (huh?), the film has been compared to French masterpiece *The Wages of Fear* in terms of tone but, as far as I can remember, that film doesn't turn into a run-of-the-mill slasher movie just after the half-way point.

Sinner on Mars

Robert Rodriguez (*Spy Kids*, *El Mariachi*) is going to be very busy. His next project is *Sin City*, an adaptation of Frank Miller's crime comics. He plans to use a

special tri-colour film process to retain some of the strip's original look. Then he will direct *Princess of Mars* for Paramount, based on the first of Edgar Rice Burroughs's John Carpenter tales. *Variety* claim that Paramount executives want this to be the first in an ongoing "tentpole" franchise.

No end to Dick

The underperformance of *Impostor* and *Paycheck* has done nothing to slow the stream of works based on stories by Philip K. Dick. *Variety* reports that at least four new films may be in the works.

Utopia Pictures have bought the rights to three Dick novels; *Valis* (the story of a detective hunting God), *Radio Free Albemuth* (an alternative history of America) and *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* (a celebrity has fame stripped away). No one has attempted an adaptation of a Dick novel since *Blade Runner* played fast and loose with *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

Meanwhile Richard Linklater (*Slacker*, *School of Rock*) wants to adapt *A Scanner Darkly* using the unsettling "animation" technique employed in *Waking Life*. Don't expect to see this one in your local multiplex.

Cameron to return

James Cameron has announced that he is working on a new science fiction film. Answering questions at a screening of *Terminator 2* in Hollywood, Cameron said that the film would not only be shot in high definition digital video but also make use of the 3D process Cameron has been perfecting in his recent underwater documentaries. A number of sources claim that Cameron has been working on an adaptation of the manga strip, *Battle Angel Alita*.



Team 1: The Movie isn't aimed at the BAFTA set. Featuring a cast of martial arts experts the material online (www.team1themovie.com) has a distinct video game-meets-*The Professionals* feel. Directed by Ray Brady (*Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*) and starring the Rayment twins (*Matrix Reloaded*) filming has just been completed.

It's the sound of Cylons

Martin McGrath watches the return of one of the most embarrassing shows in the history of science fiction, and doesn't hate it.

Good television space opera is rarer than elected Scottish Tories. Of recent vintage I can think of only *Firefly* and *Space: Above and Beyond* (both short-lived) that I have really enjoyed. *Farscape* and recent *Treks* do little for me and, elsewhere, television's small budgets and the need to appeal to a broad audience means that the space opera sub-genre has been responsible for some of sf's lowest moments.

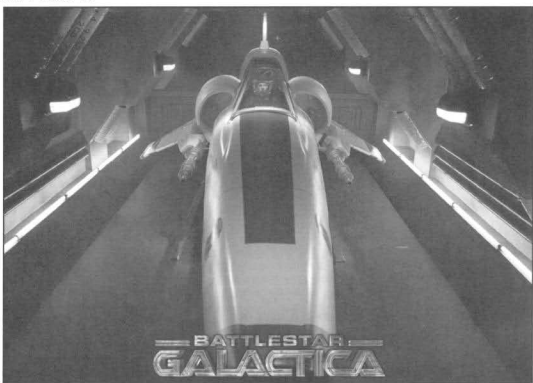
Shows such as *Lost in Space*, *Space: 1999* (sorry Gerry, but that second series...) and *Star Trek: Enterprise* are a major contributory factor to the "As Other See Us" view of all sf as childish, silly and worthless. Bad space opera has blackened the reputation of the whole genre and no one has contributed more to the smudging of our good name than writer/producer Glen A. Larson.

Apart from the earth-bound *Knight Rider*, Larson was also responsible for *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, with that irritating robot and its twin obsessions with disco dancing and revealing female clothing. And he created *Battlestar Galactica*, one of the most consistently inept and silly television programmes ever created.

Therefore, I approached Sci Fi's revamped *Battlestar Galactica* mini-series with rock-bottom expectations. I had no attachment to the original, no concern that the new version should be "faithful" and no desire to see this particular piece of television history reshaped. Several times I sat down to watch the programme and several times I found an excuse to watch something else (*Time Team* repeats on Discovery, starlings squabbling, paint drying).

Imagine my surprise then when, after all other excuses were exhausted, I watched this three-hour mini-series and discovered that I'd enjoyed *Battlestar Galactica*.

Larson remains involved with *Galactica*, but the input of Ronald D Moore (*Star Trek: First Contact* and *Carnivale* – reviewed in *Matrix* 165) is obvious from the start.



The new show is light on shiny robots, though a few do appear, and heavy on sex (especially in the first half-hour) and violence. It has a story that is full of over-familiar elements – the tense relationship between military commander father and his rebellious son, hard-living insubordinate soldiers and paranoia over aliens who look just like us – but *Galactica* still managed to weave together a reasonable evening's entertainment.

It is helped by some excellent special effects. Things have come a long way since we had to watch the same "Viper" fighter perform the same right turn twenty times in a single episode. This mini-series has some excellent space battles and, as a bonus, they (roughly) obey the laws of physics with no *Star Wars*-style swooping fighters but little reaction jets puffing and inertia playing its part. The effects are obviously CGI, but work well, and these sequences have been directed with considerable style.

Galactica is also helped by two particularly strong performances. Mary McDonnell (*Independence*

Day) is excellent as the minor politician thrust to power but Edward James Olmos (*Miami Vice*) is even better as Commander Adama, leading the *Galactica* with an iron will and a world-weary passion that reveals just enough humanity to make him believable.

Less successful are the "eye-candy" – the young crew of the *Galactica* include Katee Sackhoff (*Halloween: Resurrection*) as (the now female) Starbuck and Jamie Bamber (*Hornblower*) as Apollo. Neither have much to do beyond looking pretty and pouting like spoilt teenagers. Better is James Callis (*Bridget Jones's Diary*) as the haunted scientist Baltar.

Perhaps my expectations beforehand were so low that the modest success of *Battlestar Galactica* was bound to win it a good review. And perhaps other viewers should be warned that, in reminding me favourably of *Space: Above and Beyond*, it might have appealed to a particular weakness of mine, not broadly shared.

Battlestar Galactica certainly isn't mould-breaking and there are

flaws, some overly languid pacing, clumsy religious references and stiff acting but, as a pilot for an ongoing series, the question has to be whether, on this evidence, I would want to travel further with this crew. My answer? Well, if Sci Fi can maintain this quality of production and if they can develop the characters, especially the younger cast members, in interesting directions, then (and I can't believe I'm typing this) yes, I would like to watch more *Battlestar Galactica*. Oh my!

▪ *Battlestar Galactica's* first UK showing is on Sky Movies from 16 February, 2004

Battlestar Galactica

Director: Michael Rymer
Screenwriter: Ronald D Moore & Christopher Eric James

Cinematography: Joel Ransom

Starring: Edward James Olmos, Mary McDonnell, Katee Sackhoff, Jamie Bamber, James Callis
180 minutes (2 episodes)

Horrific

Neil Nichols of *Hard Gore Magazine* talks to "the titan of horror" about his long lost horror classic: *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace*

Garth Marenghi happily concedes that he may be the greatest horror writer of all time. He is the genius responsible for the four books of the *Slicer* trilogy and, of course, his seminal *Crab!*, perhaps the finest novels ever written about mutant crabs. Marenghi has himself said: "I believe if she had been around today, Mary Shelley would have been jealous of *Crab!*"

Phenomenally popular though his works are, the "titan of terror" is probably most famous for a television programme that, until now, had been seen only by a handful of lucky Peruvians. Yet the legend of *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* has grown day by day as fans, academics, scientists – but mostly fans – speculate on how awesome the programme must have been with Marenghi not just writing but directing, executive producing and starring as Dr Rick Dagless, a former warlock fighting evil in a Romford hospital built above the very gates of hell.

However, from the start production on *Darkplace* was dogged by controversy. There were budget restrictions, insanity, strange deaths (at least six people died on set), industrial action, and, of course, the disappearance of co-star Madeleine Wool (Dr Liz Asher) – she has never been found.

Marenghi, though, blames the government for the cancellation of *Darkplace*. "M18, which is actually three levels above M16, pulled the plug. And they did it because I knew the truth. They had files on everyone. But mainly on me."

The writer angrily denies rumours that Channel 4 never commissioned *Darkplace* and were bewildered when the videotapes turned up in a taxi outside their offices. Dean Lerner, Marenghi's svengali-like manager and co-star producer of *Darkplace* refuses to comment calling such questions "inappropriate".

I asked Garth what it was that drove him to produce television programmes, given his success as



an author. "In a book, I might describe a character, and the reader, through no fault of his own, but basically through his or her own ignorance, might picture that character wrongly – might make him too tall, or too short, he might get the voice wrong, and so on, and so on." That could never have happened in *Darkplace*. "The

actors I'm working with are the precise heights I want. You know, they're wearing the clothes that I pictured when I wrote the parts, and they're doing the voices that I did to them... and they're leaving the gaps between words that I told them to leave. So it's far more complete as a work."

Of course television has moved on a long way since *Darkplace* was made. I wondered whether he might be concerned that the production would look dated. Again Marenghi scoffs at the notion. "*Darkplace* rendered all subsequent and previous television irrelevant," he says. "I think TV is at a stage where people will run screaming from other channels, hoping to catch a show like this. Hopefully, they'll run screaming from us as well! For different reasons, though, i.e. because the show is scary and not sub-standard."

What about the special effects? Weren't they a bit primitive even at the time? "Oh sure a pedant can see the wires in some of the shots," says Lerner. "But if you're concentrating on the wires, you're not concentrating on the story."

At last we can stop dreaming, at last Channel 4 have seen the light. Twenty years on we can at last see *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* in all its glory. And Marenghi believes we'll still find it as radical and downright terrifying as when it was made, all those years ago.

I can't wait.

● **Garth Marenghi's *Darkplace*** recently completed a run on Channel Four and E4 until March. More information check out the website at www.garthmarenghi.com

Go for Galactica

The US Sci-Fi Channel has confirmed that it has commissioned thirteen new episodes of the relaunched *Battlestar Galactica* (see our review opposite).

Despite the fact that the production proved to be the third highest rated programme in the history of the channel, it appears that negotiations were protracted and difficult. *Battlestar Galactica* was also the most expensive programme in the history of Sci-Fi and it is thought that they fought to reduce costs. One likely result is that the series will use fewer of the groundbreaking special effects that caught the eye in the mini-series.

Most of cast from the mini-series will return, as will writer/producer Ronald D Moore (*Carnivale*, *Star Trek*, *Roswell*). Moore has been a vocal advocate for *Galactica* and is promising that the new show will strive to maintain the quality of the mini-series. "The series is going to take its cues from the mini-series," he told Sci-Fi Wire. "We want to do that quality of show every week." Moore also promised to develop the characters' relationships, especially the one between Adama (Edward James Olmos) and Laura (Mary McDonnell) in ways that may surprise and to avoid the "planet-of-the-week" episodes that blight so many space-set television shows.

Who plans confirmed

The BBC has confirmed the format for the new *Doctor Who* series. Thirteen episodes of 45 minutes each have been commissioned, seven of which will be written by Russell T Davies, the man the BBC has put in charge of the new series. Other writers will be contracted for the remaining episodes.

Angel cancelled

Good news for *Battlestar Galactica* and *Doctor Who* but it seems almost every other science fiction programme has been axed or is only weeks away from extinction.

Angel, the last Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*) series in production has been staked by US network Warner Brothers. The programme will come to a close with the end of season five, currently being broadcast on Sky One, unless a new network can be found.

The decision to cancel the show came as a shock to the writer/director/producer. Whedon is working on a *Firefly* movie called *Serenity* and has announced he will write the first twelve issues of Marvel's new *Astonishing X-Men* comic.

No competition

Shortly before announcing the demise of *Angel*, WB Network head Jordan Levin announced that work was beginning on *Dark Shadows*, an update of a 1960s vampire soap opera by America's big-name television producer, John



Wells (*The West Wing*, *ER*). Levin assured *Angel* fans that he didn't believe that "the two shows will be competing against one another." How right he was!

Departed

Also biting the dust in this season's cull are the enjoyable *Six Million Dollar Man* update *Jake 2.0* (just starting on Sky One), JM Straczynski's *Jeremiah* and *Fearless* about an FBI agent who (go on guess) can't feel fear – cancelled without even being broadcast.

Enterprise threat

Underperforming *Star Trek* franchise, *Enterprise*, also faces an uncertain future. Leslie Moonves, head of US networks CBS and UPN, has confirmed that they are giving serious thought to the future of the disappointing show. At the very least *Enterprise* could be moved from its current prime slot in the US networks schedule. Despite recent changes, including the introduction of new writing staff, the slightly better third series of *Enterprise* continues to do poorly in the ratings.

Survivors

Only two of the genre shows launched in America in the last television season have confirmed that they will return. One is the excellent *Carnivale* (reviewed last issue) and the other the miserable *Joan of Arcadia*, featuring a young girl helping people thanks to advice from the voice of God. Also continuing production are *Stargate SG-1* and *Smallville*.

Fantastic comics

Mark Greener takes a look at the latest adventures of Marvel's first family and, below, he reviews *Wormwood*, the new journal of fantastic, supernatural and decadent literature.

Until last spring, I'd not read *The Fantastic Four* for several years. But something of a 'buzz' surrounds the books these days and, after reading a couple of issues, I could see why. *The Fantastic Four* is, once again, one of the better superhero team comics. The FF were always at their best fighting Dr Doom – and the recent "Authoritative Action" storyline takes this deadly rivalry to a logical and tragic culmination.

In *Authoritative Action*, a facially scarred Richards (his flexible skin means it won't heal), uses the FF to invade Doom's homeland and 'liberate' the inhabitants. His actions are mistaken as US imperialism and bring the region to the brink of war. Richard eventually believes he's beaten Doom. However, critically, he doesn't expect the other FF members to be able to intervene.

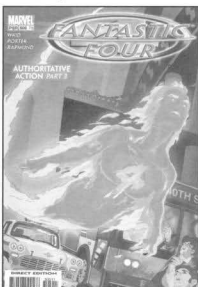
This leads to tragedy: The Thing's death. The Thing will no doubt return through some machination: but it is still a shocking and moving demise. The death is all the more potent because at times the relationship between Reed and Ben seems stronger than that between Richards and Sue, or even with his children.

It's a remarkably potent storyline. *Authoritative Action* is rife with subtle insights into

Richard's psychology; his tendency to underestimate the other three members of the team; and his monomania with Doom. His obsession supervenes his relationship with his wife, children and country. It leads to Richards becoming secretive, nefarious and closer to Doom. In some ways, his domination of his immediate circle is analogous to, and as complete as, Doom's tyranny over his country. By the end, The Thing is dead, the Richards' family face financial ruin, and the American public's love affair with the *Fantastic Four* is over. Richards realises his mistake. But it's too late.

Doom leaves Reed as scarred mentally as he is physically. Of course, this further underscores the similarities between the protagonists. And Richard's mental breakdown offers a compelling narrative. You wonder just how far he's willing to go. At one point, Richards isolates himself and Doom in an alternative universe with, Reed believes, no hope of escape. It's as if Richards and Doom gain full actualisation of their mental and emotional drives: battling, one against one, for eternity.

Authoritative Action is also a timely reminder – in common



with recent *Avengers* storylines – of current US political concerns. When *Authoritative Action* comes out as graphic novel, grab it or track down the back issues (FF v3 74-79).

All this meant that writers Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Millar had to attain a high standard in their reinvention of the iconic *Fantastic Four* in the latest addition to Marvel's Ultimate line. They take the story back to its origins: even beginning with Reed Richards' birth. The book shades in the background to the close relationship between Grimm and

Richards, which begins at school. It explores some of the familial background that helped make Richards so insular and obsessed. His parents show a pervasive lack of understanding and empathy that, at times, verges on anger and outright hatred. Perhaps the lack of empathy in Richards' background is one reason he seems so aloof from his children and wife.

When the government talent scouts Richards for a special project run by Professor Storm – father of Johnny and Sue – they say they'll pay the family for their son becoming part of the project. His father's only response is 'how much are we talking about?' The comment pitifully summarises Richards' dysfunctional family dynamics. Anyone that endured a 'difficult' adolescence arising from familial incomprehension or hostility will identify with Richards. Grimm is Reed's only link to a 'normal' adolescent life, which helps explain the exceptionally close bond between the two. And it makes his a much more sympathetic, understandable character.

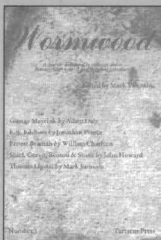
By the end of the first issue, all the pieces are in place for that fateful flight. It's unfair to judge a comic by the first issue alone. But I will anyway: this reinterpretation of the *Fantastic Four* myth is the first 'must read' new comic of 2004.

Welcome to Wormwood

Wormwood – a new "journal dedicated to writings about fantasy, supernatural and decadent literature" – fills an important gap in the UK critical market. SF fans have *Foundation* but, until now, fantasy fans did not have an equivalent. *Wormwood* fills that gap perfectly.

The first issue includes an article on Gustav Meyrink, who seems to be in Kafka's shadow in the way that Lovecraft overshadows Ashton Smith. I'd heard Meyrink's name but not read him. After reading Adam Daly's fascinating feature, he's now on my list. Other features cover Edlison (*The Worm Ouroboros*), Ernest Bramah (creator of Kai Lung and Max Carrados) and Thomas Ligotti. *Wormwood* rounds off with

reviews including some rare fiction. Brian Stableford offers the first in a series of feature on "The Decadent World-View" beginning with Baudelaire, one of my two or three favourite poets. In particular, Stableford focuses on the influence of Sainte-Beuve's novel *Volupté*. It's the type of thought-provoking article we've come to expect from Stableford. I'm not sure I fully agree with all his comments. I suspect, for example, that the dandy-esque, frigid, opium-addicted Baudelaire was



intellectually, spiritually and emotionally unsuited to a life of the cloth. So I doubt if he'd have "done better to go into the church". I suspect it would have destroyed him more rapidly than his actual lifestyle. And the literature would be poorer.

Stableford's feature is an excellent introduction to some of influences on this 'notorious' poet. (*Fleurs du mal*, despite its notoriety, is a remarkable

poetic achievement, vibrant and provocative even today.) *Volupté* is only one of several intellectual, artistic and social trends that culminate in Baudelaire's poetry. But Stableford makes the case intelligently. Sartre's existentialist psychoanalytic critique of Baudelaire – brilliant if controversial – could offer valuable further reading.

There's only one seemingly superfluous feature: a somewhat dysfunctional interview with Muriel Spark. She gives "typically succinct responses". In fact, they're so succinct that they don't tell you much or offer many insights. This aside, *Wormwood* is an excellent first issue and highly recommended to anyone with a penchant for dark, decadent fiction.

For more information contact Tartarus Press at www.tartaruspress.com.

Plenty on offer from webzines

Roderick Gladwish with his regular look at new sf magazines.

It's all webzines this month. Low production costs make these the easiest route into publishing and may become the only way for budding writers to get read.

Aphelion is a bimonthly that has been around since 1997. Its front page is like a traditional magazine, but the next is more like a scroll. Low on graphics, this page lists all the stories, novellas, and shorts. This issue (number 77) had over 80,000 words of fiction and included their 'best of 2003'.

Fiction dominates, diluted by one TV review, one book review and a non-SF cartoon strip. The editorial is a passionate call for getting into space - preaching to the choir - suggesting we use any technology, old or new, to get us out there.

Two novellas for this issue were 'The Butterfly Collector' by Kenneth O'Brien and 'Forlorn' by Jeff Williams. O'Brien's Scot which showed in his choice of location, but initially the style made me think of a suburban US setting; maybe that's a damning prediction of our future (or present?). God and genetic engineering mixed with sinister representatives of The Church of Technology. Although long it felt rushed in places. William's tale was horror/SF about fulfilling fantasies with magic or technology and extracting revenge *Marathon Man* style.

Darren Joy's 'The White Lady' was conventional fantasy with duty-bound warriors etc, but it did have a merry scar.

'Doctor Kulik's Folly' was Colin Harvey's take on time travelling and changing history. Chopped up into paragraphs randomly covering out-of-order years all working, but having *Soyuz 13* said, Baikunur, we have a problem! grated.

David L. Erickson provided more time-travelling with 'Fortune From Time'. Why are criminal time travellers interested in stealing treasure? That's so twentieth century. It had humour from an ordinary Joe - OK a slightly dodgy Joe - joining in on a time-crime spree then taking his revenge when

he's left with half a face.

'The Forty-Eighth Ronin' by Francis Eaden was building into a nice little mystery in a Palm Beach marina with a yachtsman sailing a ship he should be unable to handle alone. Suddenly it's samurai and ninjas done with a huge lump of back story.

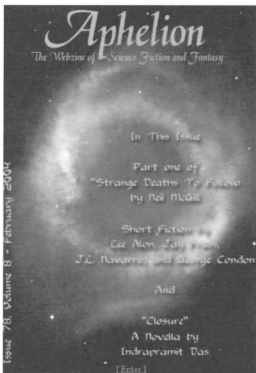
More 'God genes' turned up in 'Saint Valentine's Day' by McCarney Taylor (one of their Best of 2003). Viewed from the point of view of a psychopath with a government-encouraged talent for killing, guarding (or stalking) another with a gift for healing, it is the most imaginative and disturbing present.

There is also a shared universe created by editor-and-chief Dan L. Hollifield, Marc Inebrium. Set mainly in a bar, it has echoes of L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt's *Tales from Gavan's Bar* and Spider Robinson's Callahan's Bar. There is a full guide to the history and characters of the bar. The best bit was finding a Bruce Lee clone (not literally, sadly) as a bouncer and Ed Bishop in his *UFO* days as some mysterious persona. Elvis may not have left the building.

Mizu Ash's contribution to this universe, 'Unsung Heroes' ('Best of 2003') covered aliens going back in time to help humans achieve space travel by becoming teachers, kite sellers and SF writers.

Aphelion has stayed away from chasing the more sophisticated web formats and is definitely trying to give new authors exposure.

Distantworlds is smaller than *Aphelion* with less, but more consistent fiction. An extra is Chef E'Lien, a chef providing culinary



advice and recipes. Most of these sites offer merchandise to help fund them: however, this is the first selling a baby's bib plus logo so you can indoctrinate your progeny at the earliest stage.

Lisa J. Binkley's editorial 'The First Step to the E-Publishing Future' was unintentionally ironic. While she discussed ebooks and webzines being the way of the future, the site announced their first print version of the magazine is now available. This presents the best fiction from the site plus new stories from their more popular authors.

Once more the best of 2003's crop was included in this issue.

'The Crèche' by Leonard Varasano was a Christmas tale of miracles for a cop carrying guilt over the 11th September attacks.

In 'Falling Bodies' William B. Swift describes the fate of a spaceship crew falling into a black hole witnessing sweep of human history from their time-dilated trap.

William Ledbetter's 'A Beast Named Winter' refreshingly had no humans and preached tolerance to mutation/deformities because it's the way of evolution. Neat and well

written, best of all reviewed here.

'A Friend is Another Self' by Greg Beatty ran it a close second. About a master of bioportraiture, that is, using gene sampling and biometrics to create a creature to match the sitter's character. Artist and subject talk and reveal each other's monsters and fates.

These two sites were US based. In *Matrix* 165 Martin McGrath reported on the sorry state of UK magazines, it seems like cost is getting too much, people aren't buying, or both. Webzines seem to be one solution. A definitely UK based site *Scifantastic* would have been reviewed, but it has gone on hiatus due to return in January, but at time of writing it hasn't.

Not all are going quietly into the night. *The Third Alternative* has reached its tenth anniversary. To celebrate, cover art this year will have a linking theme and special paper suited to each particular season will be used. Pigasus Press is to relaunch its fiction title *Premonitions*. This small press magazine managed four issues a few years ago. Already they issue a number of review, poetry and fiction magazines such as *Scar Tissue* and *Dragon's Breath*, and webzines such as *The Zone*.

Contacts

Aphelion
www.aphelion-webzine.com

Distantworlds
www.distantworlds.net

The Third Alternative
UK subscriptions: TTA Press, 5 Marlins Lane, Wiltcham, Ely, Cambs, CB6 2LB
US subscriptions: TTA Press, 360W, 76th Ave, #H, Anchorage, AK 99518

Scifantastic
scifantastic.tripod.com

Premonitions
Pigasus Press
13 Hazely Combe, Arretton, Isle of Wight, PO30 3AJ
www.pigasuspress.co.uk
www.zone-sf.com

Garbage in... rewind

Martin McGrath says it's time people started to take the rubbish films from the 1980s as seriously as they do the rubbish films from the 1950s.

Most people will tell you that the high point of the sci-fi B-movie was the 1950s. Most people are wrong. There never was a better time to see schlock movies than the 1980s. Technology, politics and the zeitgeist all combined to create a golden era of cheap sci-fi. With Reagan and Thatcher railing against the "evil empire" the world was more paranoid about war than at any time since Cuba. Get rich quick, screw the other guy economics left people vulnerable and angry. Best of all, home video recorders meant that there was a new way of watching movies.

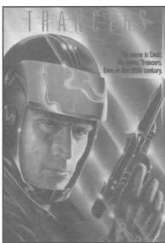
The list of silly, low or mid-budget 80s movies appears endless. A few of these films (*The Thing*, *Mad Max 2*, *The Terminator* and perhaps *RoboCop*) have become rather respectable – the clever children of the class held up for everyone to admire. Others are widely remembered but treasured only as guilty pleasures of nerds – like me (and you?) – *Battle Beyond the Stars*, *Outland*, *Buckaroo*

Banzai. And a few have become genuinely cool – *Scanners*, *Repo Man* and *Escape from New York*.

These films, as Jim Bowen would have said on *Bullseye*, are safe, no one can take them away. But what about the others? What about the B-movies of the 80s?

Who now cares for *Ice Man* (1984), director Fred Schepisi's (*Plenty*, *Roxanne* – these were big hits!) tale of scientist Stanley Shephard (Timothy Hutton) unfreezing a Neanderthal in the Arctic. This is not a good movie, but that's no reason why it should be unavailable on DVD.

Or what about *Trancers*. Charles Band directing B-movie stalwart Tim Thomerson and a young Helen Hunt (Oscar winner in *As Good as*



script, from the terrible special effects to the dodgy music number – a punk Christmas carol – *Trancers* is fun and funny. The hero's called Jack Deth! And he beats up old women and Santa Claus.

Even the DVD release does its best to recreate that authentic 80s pirate video feel with possibly the worst transfer ever committed to disc. This looks like it was recorded from a television in North Wales.

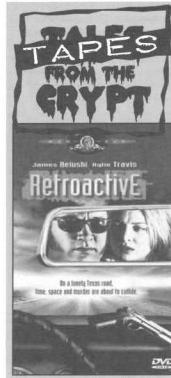
it Gets) in the film that launched at least five sequels. *Trancers* came out in 1985, a year after *The Terminator*, and takes the same basic plot to a drive-by shooting, filling it full of holes. Still, this might be the perfect 1980s B-movie: from the irritating electronic score to the groan-worthy

Widescreen? Dolby? Forget it. But you do get some great ghost images – hey, if a film's worth watching, it's worth watching in stereo.

And then there's *Robot Jox* by Stuart Gordon (*Re-Animator*) – this 1989 outing is not on DVD and I've seen one cheeky sod asking £200 for a VHS copy. The film opens with a black screen and the three little words every sci-fi fan longs to hear: "In the future..." A sure sign the film is so daft, they have to explain it to us. But that's not all! This film also has giant robots, unconvincing special effects, cheap sets, a stupid finale and an incoherent plot. A B-movie *par excellence*.

Films like *Ice Man*, *Trancers* and *Robot Jox* may lack fancy things like good acting, great scripts or high production values, but the B-movies of the 1980s should be cherished just as much as those from the 1950s.

So, I want my anamorphic prints, digitally restored. I want commentary tracks from directors and film historians. I want special editions and I want them now!



Retroactive, a stupidname for a film with one of the worst endings in the history of cinema, reckons Martin McGrath and his invisible friend.

Retroactive? Great name for a time travel film. Yeah, it's like Skinner said in the Bee Sharps episode. "We need a name that's witty at first, but that seems less funny each time you hear it."

I have no idea what you're talking about. Nothing new there.

So what happens?

Well there's Karen (Kylie Travis), she is a police psychologist who has just got a load of people killed in a hostage situation gone terribly wrong – Oh! I get it. She travels back and saves the day? The thought never crosses her mind. She's driving through the desert when her car breaks down, so she hitches a ride with two strangers.

Now I've got it. She's a hitchhiker, so she must be a maniac. SHE killed the hostages and she'll gradually kill the rest of the cast in unlikely but entertaining ways.

Not even close. Frank, (James Belushi) the driver of the car who picks Karen up turns out to be a psycho who kills lots of people, including his girlfriend Rayanne (Shannon Whirry).

You've ruined the ending, and what happened to the time travel?

I've only just started. Karen escapes from Frank and runs off into the desert and she finds a secret government facility where they are testing a time travel device. Not that this hugely important device is guarded or anything, there's just nerdy Brian (Frank Whaley).

That is lucky. A time machine, in the middle of nowhere, with no guards? How lucky! What are the chances of that? She's just so lucky!

Yes, it was very lucky. Sarcasm is a particularly low form of wit, you know.

Really? I didn't realise. So Karen goes back in time, saves everyone and everything is better? Wrong again. You aren't very good at this, are you? She goes back in time and makes everything worse. More people die. Things blow up.

So then what?

She goes back in time again.

And? Don't think I'm guessing again – I'm not just here for you to make fun of.

Yes you are. What happens is that things get even worse. So she goes back in time again and again.

Cool. She must come up with a great trick to get herself out of this mess. What does she do? Nothing.

Sorry?

She does nothing.

That sounds a bit dull.

Well, she goes back in time and smokes a cigarette and watches Frank drive past. It is incredibly dull. Infuriatingly dull! So dull that even your ideas sound better than the one the makers of *Retroactive* came up with. And you're an idiot.

That's the worst ending to a film I've ever seen. Don't tell lies, I know you've seen *AI*.

How do you know that?

Because we're the same person, remember. We only pretend to be separate for the sake of this column.

That's what they think. Shut up

Rover and out

Stephen Baxter takes a look back at the history of our exploration of Mars and suggests that visiting the sites of past conquests (and reverses) might provide more than an interesting sightseeing day out or archaeological curiosity.

The sometimes hair-raising exploits of this year's armada of space probes to Mars have caught the world's imagination.

But our attention will soon move on. Even if there were human astronauts aboard, that would be so. Of course, Mars is a prime site to search for extraterrestrial life and remains the most likely destination of human colonists off the Earth. But that's all long term. The lesson of *Apollo's* journeys to the Moon is that once the footprints and flags have been planted, it is hard to motivate the public imagination. 'There's nothing there but rocks', we will say – just as was said, even by some astronauts, about the Moon.

But there is already 'something there' on Mars, already human stories to be told. This year's ships are just the latest of a line of unmanned spacecraft that have striven to reach Mars since 1962, and relics of these missions survive. These unwitting monuments could provide headline-grabbing targets for early expeditions.

The first human artefacts to be encountered at Mars may be in orbit rather than on the Martian surface. The first craft to enter orbit around another planet was NASA's *Mariner 9*, which reached Mars in November 1971. The first Soviet orbiters were *Mars 2* and *3*, which also reached Mars in late 1971. Of course, the first European probe to orbit another world, *Mars Express*, awaits a visit too. Future visitors may be intrigued by some of the technology; one Soviet probe actually carried on board a chemical film-processing laboratory!

Mariner 9, as the first orbiter of all, would naturally attract the greatest interest. As early as 1973 Carl Sagan was dreaming of *Mariner 9's* retrieval (in *The Cosmic Connection*, 1974): 'Perhaps, then, sometime around 1990, as a small side-trip in a grand manned-orbital exploration of Mars, there will be a rendezvous with *Mariner 9*. The old and battered spacecraft will be taken aboard a large manned station and returned home – perhaps to be put in the Smithsonian Institution ...' Sadly 1990 has come and gone, and time

Keeping a date with an old friend. An astronaut catches up with *Sojourner 2*



Image courtesy of NASA/Pat Fordings

may be running out for *Mariner*; its orbit will probably decay before 2020.

The earliest Martian pioneers of all were flyby probes. *Mariner 4* sent back 22 images from Mars in July 1965, to be followed by *Mariners 6* and *7* in 1969. These probes are surely still intact, but, lost in their orbits around the sun, must await a later period of space exploration for their retrieval.

The Soviets achieved the first landings on Mars, although they were not complete successes. In 1971 the *Mars 2* and *3* orbital probes delivered landers to the southern hemisphere of Mars. The first appears to have crashed, while *Mars 3* landed successfully but fell silent only 20 seconds after the start of a TV scan. In 1973 the *Mars 6* lander returned data during its atmospheric entry, but contact was lost an agonising 0.3 seconds before touchdown.

The first American probes to land on the surface of Mars

were the spectacular *Vikings*, which reached Chryse and Utopia Planitia in July and August 1976. The next American lander was the *Pathfinder*, which reached the Ares Vallis in 1997. In January 2004, NASA successfully landed its two 'Marsokhod' rovers with their rather soppy names, 'Spirit' in Gusev Crater, and 'Opportunity' on the other side of the planet in Meridiani Planum.

The ownership of the probes should be decided long before trophy hunters get their hands on these monuments. The Soviet probes may be problematic given that the nation that sent them no longer exists!

With a world with the land surface area of Earth to explore it might seem extravagant to 'waste' a Martian surface expedition solely in pursuit of a human artefact. But as well as sentimental goals there are technical purposes: the old craft are test-beds for the behaviour of materials and systems like

electrical insulation and solar-power cells over decades in the Martian environment. And many of the relics are situated in areas of exceptional scientific interest, *Mars 3* in the southern highlands, and the *Pathfinder* in the Ares Vallis outflow region; going there would be worthwhile anyhow.

For safety, the *Viking* probes landed in relatively uninteresting areas. But these landers were massive machines containing rare metals and thousands of electronic parts. Perhaps the *Vikings'* first visitors will seek them out as a scavengable lode of raw materials; the *Vikings* may not have discovered life on Mars, but they may save human lives in the future.

The most compelling scientific reason for visiting these old probes is the possibility that life from Earth may have been transmitted to the Martian surface. Sterilisation procedures for spacecraft dating back to the 1960s have to be questioned, especially for the Soviet probes. It would be unfortunate to have contaminated the planet – even though, ironically, the survival of organisms over such long periods would teach us a great deal about the viability of terrestrial life on Mars.

Besides the science, imagine visiting these silent sentinels! It would be fascinating to explore the *Pathfinder* 'rock garden', and perhaps to resolve long-standing mysteries such as the *Vikings'* ambiguous biological results.

And of course Mars has its own mysteries.

Two-thirds of all missions to Mars have failed. Of course there is no 'Martian jinx'. It's just that getting to Mars is very hard: one strike and you're out. The most frustrating thing of all for wistful mission planners, who put years of their lives into such projects, is that they often never get to learn what it was specifically that went wrong. It would be intriguing to learn the fate of lost craft such as the *Mars Polar Lander* at the south pole, or even the 1993 *Mars Observer* and 1999 *Mars Climate Orbiter*.

And it would be fascinating to learn at last what befell *Beagle 2* as it fell towards Isidis Planitia on Christmas morning, 2003.

Spending the night in Soho

Martin McGrath spends some time admiring the haircuts and the movies at *Sci-Fi London 3*, the London Science Fiction Film Festival, and chats to founder and organiser **Louis Savy**

Smart. Trendy. Cool. These are not words immediately associated with science fiction fans in the minds of the general public. And yet, sitting in the bar of the Curzon Soho cinema, watching *Sci-Fi London*, the London Science Fiction Film Festival, flow around me, one can't help noticing that a fair proportion of these people look like they might have had these words used about them in casual conversation.

Except for the dweeb in the *Red Dwarf* tee-shirt. And me. Obviously.

Partly this has something to do with the location. The Curzon Soho is one of the cooler cinemas in London, from the café in the foyer serving freshly cooked crêpes to the trendy bar area and the concessions stall that pushes the packets of Revels to one side and presents you with the entire range of Green and Blacks organic chocolate and ice cream. Mhmm.

But it is also true that this isn't your average sf convention crowd. That will be why the festival website goes to some lengths to persuade readers that this is a non-geeky event. I asked *Sci-Fi London*

founder and organiser, Louis Savy, why he thought it was important to create a distance between the film festival and traditional fandom. "We say non-geeky because we want to keep a fresh audience coming and to keep sponsors aware that 'real' people come too. They need to be reminded that they could sponsor a film festival."

He's laughing, but I wonder, does that mean that they'd seek to discourage or even exclude input from traditional fans? "I hope not... fans of sci-fi movies, geeks or not will come to see the movies – they are smart enough to not be offended I think. The 'Hoxton fins' who are not sure about attending a sci-fi event can be reassured they won't need to do a Vulcan salute."

The festival does, however, have some corners where geeks can find

solace. The "No Fear of Fandom" section featured two hours of fan films – including the funny *Run Leia Run* (an inspired mix of Lucas and Tykwer in Flash animation), a Lego version of how Darth Vader first met everyone's favourite bounty hunter, and "Roddenberry on Patrol" a short revealing the true sources of Gene Roddenberry's inspirations for *Star Trek*. All fandom's favourites live long and prosper here.

So, is the "non-geeky" tag intended for film industry consumption? Has he encountered resistance to the creation of a "science fiction" film festival in this country? "Yes, yes and yes. It amazes me. As a genre SF is probably the biggest money earner for the studios. Most of the inward investment in films is in the big title

horror/fantasy/sci-fi titles and our TV screens are full of series that seem more popular than ever. Yet try to get a marketer to see this or the 'film' organisations. They see us as a convention I think, expecting guys in rubber suits to turn up... whilst I have no problem with that, we are first and foremost a film

“The ‘Hoxton fins’ who are not sure about attending a sci-fi event can be reassured they won’t need to do a Vulcan salute.”

Louis Savy

festival... oh well, early days!"

That attitude isn't only in the film industry. Waiting for entry into one of the festival films, I was earwigging on the conversation between two of the young women acting as runners, stewards and general dog's bodies for the event. "Of course I'm not really into science fiction," said the first. "Oh, neither am I," the second eagerly agreed. "I want to work in the film industry."

So, it is still early days, this is just the third year of the event, but why would you want to start a science fiction film festival?

"Two reasons really. Firstly, I wanted to see some rare and unusual movies at the cinema instead of DVD. I looked about for a film festival showing sci-fi and there wasn't one, not a dedicated



Robot Stories, with writer/director/co-star Greg Pak as Archie (right)

one. So the idea to start one came. Then over dinner with friends one night, a female colleague said she didn't like sci-fi. I argued that that was like saying one doesn't like jazz. It is something that influences so much that one cannot dismiss a whole genre because you don't like *Star Trek*... or the Dixie Stompers." I don't know, the Dixie Stompers seem as good a reason as any to dismiss anything, but what happened then? "I wanted to impress the girl and as she did PR - I challenged her. I start the festival, you PR it - getting to an audience who wouldn't otherwise consider sci-fi movies. I think she did a good job! ...and I got the girl!"

See, life can be just like the movies!

So, three years on and *Sci-Fi London* is beginning to plant itself firmly in the calendar as a significant event. How does he feel the festival is developing?

"It felt more like a festival this year. Many more filmmakers and directors attended and we had some serious approaches from larger film companies. We will always look for rare and classic movies - I love to see new rich, fresh content and we need to be taken seriously as a film festival for that, not a convention. I hope this year seemed more mature to those who attended."

While there isn't anything on the same scale in this country, Europe already has a major sci-fi and fantasy film festival, Spain's Sitges, though that presents itself as much as an industry gathering as a fan festival. Which way would Louis like to see *Sci-Fi London* develop?

"Both. I think that there is a place for both types of screening and audience, after all isn't the industry trying to find/sell movies to create a fan audience? Why can't

they co-exist at a film festival?"

And, I suggest, if Britain had a festival of that type it might encourage more home-grown science fiction and fantasy films. Was he disappointed that the festival didn't have one new British feature to show this year? "I do think there is a lack of Brit sci-fi, Ray Brady seems to be pioneering with *Team 1*...

[see *Flickers* on page 11 - Martin] and the Film Council did announce three movies about two years ago...

though I am not sure what happened to them."

I mention that I'd hoped for a chance to see Mike Winterbottom's *Code 46*, which has done the festival circuit in Europe and America but still hasn't been released in the UK. "I was hoping to get it too... Ask the BBC why they never returned any

calls, or even acknowledged us as a festival. I am continually surprised by the film industry. They make films then sit on them, afraid that one screening to 300 people in the Curzon Soho will ruin their future business I guess... perhaps by *Sci-Fi*

"I still do not want us to become a convention... I would like to see us as a calendar item for anyone serious about sci-fi and sf film."

Louis Savy

London 12 we will be approached a bit more often."

Still, despite the absences, this year's festival had an entertaining line-up with a number of British premieres, including Korean duo *Natural City* and 2009: *Lost Memories*, *Tamala 2010* from Japan and a slice of French weirdness - *Luminal*.

But it was *Robot Stories* (reviewed with *Natural City* and *Luminal* on pages 20-21) from American writer/director/actor Greg Pak that won the festival's award for best film. What did he think set it apart from the other films in the festival?

One of the most enjoyable parts of the festival, for me, was the "Shorts @ Six" segment, featuring ten short films: they ranged in length from a little less than five up to twenty minutes long. They were an entertaining but mixed bunch, like the best science fiction short stories the real joy was the bombardment of great ideas in small packages.

Two notable British inclusions were *Mobile Phone Bill* and *Chaingangs* from the "National 48 Hour Challenge" - a contest to produce a short film in just two days. Teams were given a title and a genre and told to get on with it.

I asked Louis how he got involved. "I helped kickstart the national event, developed the identity and concept of the national event... and wrote most of the film titles. I launched the London leg of the challenge - it was incredible to see about 250 teams turn up on a Saturday morning to the Curzon Mayfair. The movies I picked were submitted/completed movies to the challenge and I thought they were exceptional."

"It was great to see a movie that had stories to tell and didn't rely on special effects, violence and a number of set pieces. Whilst not a perfect movie, it stood out as being a real sci-fi film, dealing with human issues in an intelligent way. An excellent first feature for Greg Pak too."

There's a lot going on at *Sci-Fi London*. I spent a happy hour listening to the producer and writer of the proposed *Blake's 7* relaunch discuss their plans, hopes and ambitions. There was the Douglas Adams Memorial Debate, which this year talked about the links between sex and technology, and which managed to be thought-provoking, entertaining and funny in the way that the author himself was. There was beer and chat. And, if all else failed, there were loads of great films, both old and new.

Highlights among the older films this year included Klaus Kinski's eccentric *Android*, Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal*, and a schools' only (jammy kids) 35mm screening of *Forbidden Planet*.

For the adventurous, young or single there are the allnighters - this year's festival had three allnight programmes - with stocks of Red Bull, Ben and Jerry's and a breakfast of jam donuts from Greggs for those who made it through the night.

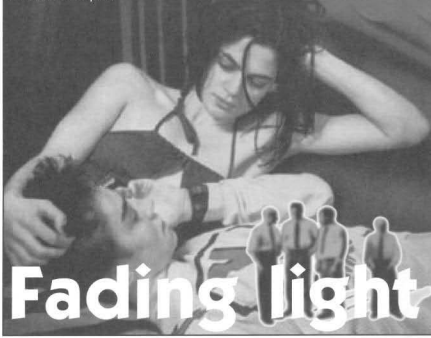
So, all in all, *Sci-Fi London 3* was a great success but, I asked Louis, where next for *Sci-Fi London*?

"Bigger, better, less technical issues, more movies... and perhaps a tie-in with the literary world of SF. I still do not want to become a convention - these are run already in the UK and very well. But I would like to see us as a calendar item for anyone serious about sci-fi and sf film."

Sci-Fi London 3 was entertaining and fun, I'm already looking forward to next year.



Martin Lewis casts some light on *Luminal*, as it roams across Europe.



Fading light

Luminal is another name for the barbiturate sodium thiopental and *Luminal* is a film about drugs. There's not really much more to it than that. Although it is set in 2010 it is no more sf than Martin Amis's *London Fields*, its only concessions to the year being some well-judged design touches. Despite being described by its creators as a "futuristic urban dystopia" it could easily be set in contemporary Europe.

Based on two novels by Italian author Isabella Santacroce, *Devi* (Maria Papas) and *Demon* (Jameela Mustchin) are eighteen-year-old prostitutes living, working and playing in Paris. These three activities tend to shade into one another thanks to their constant drug use and the fact they work in an exclusive nightclub. This existence is interrupted when another girl dies during an auto-asphyxiation sex game. This leads *Demon* to brutally assault the club owner, their trollish pimp Ryu (Denis Lavant). Fleeing Paris they easily find new lives in the art wank, style cunt strata of London.

All this suggests that the film has rather more narrative than is in fact the case. It follows the inescapable drugs logic that what goes up must come down but this takes place in the first half hour after which we are treated to a plateau of degradation. The film becomes a road movie stuck in an Ouroboros-like loop, a circular lurch through the night side of the cities of Europe. Rather than narrative there is an expression of mode or, at best, an exercise in the shallowest philosophy imaginable. We are presented with a squalid form of hedonism where sensuality is elevated to a virtue above all others. It is in this context that when the pair's sometime travelling companion, rentboy Damien (Thomas Orange), asks whether the relationship they share is love he receives the answer no, "this is more

than love." It's a grotesque lie and it is no coincidence that any attempt at portraying humanity is leaden.

Purely as an exercise in sound and vision the film is a resounding success. The beautiful and very clever costumes and design are enhanced by the various post-production techniques (discounting an intrusive rewind effect) and the totality is well-married to Michael Nyman's score. While you can be impressed by the stylistic intent and execution you are simultaneously appalled by its callowness; its pretension masquerading as insight; its characters wading neck deep in a sewer, oblivious to the corpses and excrement surrounding them. Darren Aronofsky's study of addiction, *Requiem For A Dream* (2000), made similar brilliant use of sound, light and technique but that film was wedded to a bleak and remorseless narrative that had a sense of authority. In comparison *Luminal* feels like a distasteful dressing-up game.

It is the mantra of the film that "we have not seen the light of day for two years" which makes the climax of the film inevitable but no less visually compelling. However cinematography cannot stand in for character development. As the blue sky of morning burns out through the screen it signals release for the viewer but we never believe *Devi* and *Demon* have transcended and escaped their purgatory.

Luminal

Director: Andrea Vecchiato

Screenplay: Isabella Santacroce, Andrea Vecchiato

Cinematography: Mark Lebon

Starring: Jameela Mustchin, Maria Papas, Denis Lavant, Thomas Orange, Jo Reynolds

90 mins

We, Ro

It won the Sci-Fi London film festival and 23 other awards worldwide – but is it a at *Robot Stories* by first time writer/dire

Robot *Stories*, a collection of four thematically linked shorts, isn't going to win any awards for special effects or costume design or make-up and prosthetics. Of the two really obvious special effects in the film, one is a robot that looks like Mr Potato-Head and the other is, quite obviously, a corn plaster stuck to the back of someone's neck. Not that any of that should count against the film – though of course it will. You're unlikely to see this at your local multiplex.

Robot Stories is an American film, but it feels European. This is an independent production from first-time director Pak – and the list of friends, charities and public bodies who funded the film, not special effects crew, takes up most of the credits.

In this situation a sf filmmaker has two choices. They can try to ape the style of the studio blockbuster and hope they can disguise their budgetary inadequacies. If the director is good this can work brilliantly, but it is more often a recipe for straight-to-video disaster.

The second road is less travelled. A filmmaker can choose to try to make an intelligent, grown-up film that concentrates on characterization rather than explosions, and on storytelling not eye-candy. For all *Robot Stories*' faults (and there are a few) it is to the film's credit that it takes this more difficult route.

The mood here is of classic *Twilight Zone* episodes and "golden era" short stories. Like all good science fiction, the robots here are only a means to consider the human condition.

The film has nice opening credits, an animation that will make most people smile and wins the film some goodwill right from the start. It needed it because the least successful episode is the first; "My Robot Baby" was too sugar-coated for my taste,

The robot baby meets its new parents in *Robot Stories*.



oot

ard for best film – and has collected
y good? **Martin McGrath** takes a look
tor/actor Greg Pak.

though the baby itself is a brilliant, low-tech creation.

The film quickly strengthens, however, and the second part "The Robot Fixer" is the best segment. A young man (and sf nerd) has an accident and is in a coma – his mother, who doesn't really know her son, comes to see him and becomes obsessed with completing his collection of Transformer-style robot toys. It is only marginally sf, but it is touching, clever and funny with a fine performance by Wai Ching Ho as the mother.

"Machine Love" is also strong – a G9 iPerson (geddit?) is introduced into a new firm and tries to make friends and find love. This does everything right, with cute little touches like the robots' Steve Jobs-style outfits adding to the pleasure. Finally came "Clay" – the story of an aging sculptor who refuses to have his mind "scanned" into a computer even though he knows he is dying. This raises a lot of thoughtful and interesting questions about what is "real" and "authentic" but doesn't really have the space to answer them.

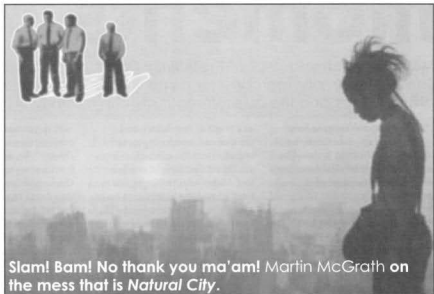
Robot Stories adds up to more than the sum of its parts, with each segment reinforcing those around it. In places it is touching and thoughtful though, being American, it can't help over-sentimentalizing things at crucial moments. Still, as a change of pace from the mindless norm, *Robot Stories* can be recommended, if you get the chance to see it.

Robot Stories

Writer/Director: Greg Pak
Cinematography: Peter Olsen
Animation: Daniel M Kanemoto
Starring: Tamlyn Tomita, Sab Shimono, Wai Ching Ho, Greg Pak, John Cariani
85 mins



Nature calls



Slam! Bam! No thank you ma'am! Martin McGrath on the mess that is *Natural City*.

N*natural City* isn't the first (relatively) big budget sf action movie to come out of South Korea in the last few years. With films like 2009's *Lost Memories* and *Yesterday*, the Korean film industry is developing a reputation for flashy, violent but ultimately stupid films that, while they may please the action movie fans, will do little for those who want something more mentally engaging from their movies.

Natural City seemed to promise something more. The "buzz" around this film was that it combined stunning visuals and action with a *Blade Runner*-esque love story. Sadly this is mostly hype.

There are some stunning visuals in places – though in others the lack of resources shows through. The opening sequence, where "dirty cop" R (Yu) and Ria (Seo), the android he's fallen in love with, sit in a virtual world dreaming of escape, looks amazing and the mood promises that this might be more than the usual kung-fu and guns bruiser. It isn't.

What we get is the story of R's attempts to save Ria from her impending scheduled expiration. He gets into a plot with a mad scientist Dr Giro (Chan) to catch Cyon (Lee) who, he believes, holds the key to saving his android. However a Rutger Hauer-style military android called Cypher (Hong) is also after the girl. Cue violence, an extremely unlikely plot twist and big explosions.

From the moment the opening scene ends it all starts going wrong for *Natural City*. There is a huge backstory that is hinted at, but never explained, so the next few minutes are, at best, confusing, as the audience try to work out what the hell is going on.

Then it becomes clear that this film will not even deliver on the most basic action level. The first fight scene is a mess. A badly edited and mishandled gunfight fails to make sense and, most seriously, fails to deliver any

sense of excitement.

The tone is set. The action sequences are almost uniformly disastrous. The bits in between are tedious. So much of the film is in slow motion that I began to wonder if there was something wrong with the projector. Director Min has obviously seen *The Matrix* and John Woo movies, and has repeated the mistake of assuming that anything shot in slow motion is (a) beautiful and (b) profound. Whether it is through repetition or just sloppy use here, supposedly balletic, slow-motion fight scenes are rapidly losing their attraction. Sam Peckinpah will be spinning, quite slowly, in his grave.

Natural City doesn't make a lot of sense, and even when it does most of the characters are so shallow and empty you won't care.

I couldn't shake the feeling that I was watching this film shot from the wrong point of view. We spend most of our time with R, who is stupid and nasty in the least interesting of ways, and wallows in self-pity while good cop Noma's (Eun-Pyo) attempts to catch the renegade robot, solve the crime and figure out what is going on.

That *Natural City* chooses to follow the wrong protagonist rather sums up the whole misguided mess. A promising idea has been twisted into a fundamentally flawed and rather tedious film. One for Asian-cinema completists only.

Natural City

Director: Byung-chun Min
Screenplay: Byung-chun Min
Cinematography: Lee Jun-Gyu
Starring: Ji-tae Yu; Jae-un Lee; Rin Seo; Jeong Du-Hong; Yun Chan; Jeong Eun-Pyo
113 mins

Those woohoo moments

AN IRONING BOARD
ON A DICK, POA

Martin Sketchley (author of *The Affinity Trap*, buy it, it's good - Martin the Editor) talks to Sandy Auden, photographer and interviewer, about her early memories of science fiction, photography and the quiet strength of John Meaney.

Ironing Boards seem to have featured several interviews of late, so I thought it would be interesting to interview someone who has become somewhat famous...or should that be infamous...or notorious - for conducting interviews herself - Sandy Auden.

I started by asking Auden how long she's been into science fiction. 'Since I was five years old,' she replies. 'I cried so much on my first day at school that the teacher was really fed up of me. She got me out of the way by sending me to see the educational film being shown to fourth-year pupils about the first space walk. Talk about a defining moment.' So what happened then, I wondered. 'After that, I spent many Sunday lunchtimes watching *The Invaders* with my dad. Ah yes, back when Sundays were proper Sundays, with roast beef for dinner, *Space 1999* and *Thunderbirds* on the telly, a Raleigh Chopper on the drive, jumpers for goalposts...sorry.' Then my Mom bought me this supernatural comic for girls called *Misty*. Forget *Bunty* - that one didn't have people getting bumped off in gruesome (but highly moral) ways, or megalomaniac women obsessed with spiders and bent on taking over the world. It was great stuff!

Apart from that space walk film, was there anything else that was key to the development of Auden's SF interest? 'When I was 11 *Star Wars* absolutely ripped through my life.' I asked Auden what it was about *Star Wars* that she liked, particularly. 'It just hit home on so many levels,' she says. 'For the first time I could talk to anyone about science fiction and they would understand what I was on about. As long as it was *Star Wars*-related, that is. I was at a girl's school, and up to this point I hadn't found any other eleven year old girls who were up to a discussion about solar systems, robots or spaceships. The ability to talk about such things

as a result of *Star Wars* - and the awe and wonder it generated overall - was like a breath of fresh air. I identified with Skywalker too,' Auden admits. 'Young, life in front of you, the potential to make something of your existence. OK, I was idealistic back then, but it was important nonetheless.' So, the chance to discuss the cosmos with your young counterparts and the fact that you identified strongly with one of the main characters - that's not bad going. 'And then there was Harrison Ford,' enthuses Auden excitedly. 'He was a good looking, upwardly-mobile, lovable rogue and I was a primordial soup of rampant hormones. I thought I'd go off him after a couple of months, but it seems some of those original Ford-crazy hormones are still lurking in my blood stream. They've lasted twenty-five years, the durable little sods.'

'After that I started pinching my brother's books,' Auden admits. 'Titles such as *Tower of Glass* by Robert Silverberg and *I, Robot* by Isaac Asimov. I managed to avoid my brother's wrath by returning them before he knew they were missing.

'The rest,' says Auden,

'was the standard fare of TV SF programmes such as *Blake's 7* and *Doctor Who*, and reading stories from writers such as Arthur C Clarke and Larry Niven. By the time I was 18 my virtual SF anorak was welded to my back and I've never looked back.' That would be due to the snorkel hood, I suggest.

So what kind of SF does Auden like? 'I'll read almost anything - new authors, established ones, SF, fantasy, horror, sword and sorcery, weird fiction, short stories, trilogies, genre non-fiction, poetry - anything. If there's anything that puts me off, though, it's gratuitous blood and gore, sensationalist, exploitative fiction or formula fantasy. Although I have been pleasantly surprised by the latter on occasions.'

Are conventions a large part of her life? 'Conventions changed my life!' says Auden. 'At my second convention - The Wrap Party in 1998 - Joe Straczinski and Harlan Ellison did a panel about how passivity got their backs up. Why didn't people just go out and fulfil their dreams and ignore negative comments from so-called friends?' So what happened? 'Well at this

time I was on the verge of starting the first SF club at work. A lot of people had told me it'd never work, and I guess for a while I wasn't sure myself. But after that convention I started the club, ignored accusations of being a sad anorak, and was happily joined by fifty other anoraks. We're still going strong.'

So how did the writing for *Starburst* and The Alien Online website begin? 'The Club I'd started joined the BSFA and British Fantasy Society communities, and at the BFS's Fantasycon I met David Howe

John Meaney: "Just one of those woohoo moments"



and Mark Chadbourn. Mark was desperate for newshounds for his new genre website At The World's End, and David needed help organising Fantasycon. In a moment of madness I volunteered for both jobs. Six months later David - who was then editing the book section of *Starburst* magazine - offered me a news column. It was the easiest decision I've ever had to make.

'As Mark Chadbourn's website grew he and Ariel - who was then editing The Alien Online - agreed to join forces. At The World's End



Spinnerets

Here's a tip for all potential subscribers to *The Third Alternative* who live outside the UK: if you subscribe online for twelve issues instead of six, you'll get those extra six issues post-free – a bargain! Go to www.thepress.com/onlinestore.html and stake your claim.

If you're into spooky weirdness, you might like The Most Gigantic Lying Mouth of All Time. Go to www.vapourbrothers.com and click the link.

In a competition for the most useless stuff you can find on the Internet, a Sam Coupé emulator would place pretty highly. Essentially a souped-up ZX Spectrum, the Sam was a huge

flop when released in the early 1990s. No one bought it and there's almost no software, but now you can run this obsolete monster on your vastly superior 21st Century PC. Why? No idea, but there is a very nice version of *Manic Miner*. Go to: www.samcoupe.org.

Who thinks the new Britney Spears single – Toxic – is the best pop record since Dancing Queen by ABBA? Me, that's who. And so should you if you've got any taste. Go to www.mtv.com/bands/02/spears_britney/audvid.html and you can watch the whole video for free.



the editorial duties involved, and asked if I could take on the News Editor's job. I still write the news and run a semi-regular interview column as well. I review whenever I can and contribute the occasional feature article here and there. With my *Starburst* column, reviewing and interviewing for *The Third Alternative*, and recent interviews for the UK SciFi.com website, I don't seem to have much spare time either these days. But that's just how I want it!

I wondered if Auden had ever had any problems interviewing people. I've always found that people love talking about their latest projects, she says. 'I can honestly say that no one has been difficult to interview. Most problems occur in the logistics surrounding the interview. When you're sitting on the back stairs in a hotel interviewing someone and the head waiter's trooping up and down between the two of you it can be frustrating. Or if an interviewee is delayed you can find yourself sitting alone in a hotel bar for hours, eagerly looking to see if anyone walking in is your prey. Sorry, victim. No, um, target. You know what I mean.' Well, I think I do. 'Then you realise that the waiter is eyeing you suspiciously, and probably thinks you're a call girl looking for a mark and is wondering whether to call security.' That's not a problem I seem to have, I point out. 'I once conducted an interview in a Pizza Hut,' says Auden, 'and the cheesy background music drove me nuts when I came to transcribe the tape. Once I interviewed someone who'd clearly forgotten to put in their teeth – there's only so many times you can say "pardon" before you appear rude, deaf or as if you're taking the wotsit. It took me a long time and many runs through the tape to get it transcribed properly.'

I then asked Auden about the photographs for which she's become so well known. 'I've always taken photos,' she admits. 'I still have some (pretty appalling) photos I took at an ice skating event when I was 14. Before that I can remember my excitement when my gran showed me her box camera. It was the sort with the concertina nose and a viewfinder on top. I was fascinated by it. Then in the 1980s I bought a standard automatic 35mm Ricoh to take holiday snaps. Did she have a natural flair for it? Even then I was getting some great portrait shots of people, so I just kept going. When I started going to conventions the hobby took on a life of its own. Now I just have to be observant enough to back off before I'm shouted at by my subject.'

I wondered which of her author photographs – if any – are particular favourites. 'Blimey, I've got over a thousand photos from various events, collected over the last six years, and many of them can be classified as favourites because of the memories they evoke. If I really had to pick favourites, then I'd go for Michael Marshall Smith, Neil Gaiman and John Meany? John Meany? 'Michael Marshall Smith liked his

photo so much that it is now his author photo, and can be found on the slip cover of *The Straw Men* hardback [published under the cunning pseudonym of Michael Marshall]. The Neil Gaiman photo became my first cover – on the BSFA's very own *Vector* magazine. The John Meany was just one of those "woo hoo!" moments. I have many photos of John but somehow my camera and I failed to capture his wonderful playfulness and quiet strength before then. I've snapped him serious, in conversation, getting the round in, doing panels...but I just wasn't happy till Eastercon 2003 when I finally got it right.'

Finally I asked Auden what plans she had for the future. 'I got into interviewing and reviewing to help spread the word about how the worlds of science fiction, fantasy and horror hold huge creative potential, and have the power to present highly relevant examinations of the limitless concerns of humanity. I suspect I'll continue in that role for a long time to come, through magazines, websites or just telling my mates until I turn blue in face.'

Long may it continue. Thank you, Sandy Auden.

URLs of relevance to this issue

www.mistycomic.co.uk
www.thealienonline.net/ao_010.asp

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



many
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longer had any spare time, what with maintaining the site and

Card carrying futurists

Foundation
favourites
Number seven: The "World of Tomorrow"

SFF Collection administrator **Andy Sawyer** finds the future in some old cigarette packets.

Up until now, in this series, I've followed the old tradition that libraries are about books. But a science fiction library has, at some stage, to come to terms with the fact that sf appears in a number of different forms. True, the Science Fiction Foundation Collection largely confines itself to printed media, although this is due more to lack of space and money than to ideological grounds. (So if you disagree with that stance then you know where to send the cheque.) But even within the realm of "printed media", there's a wide range of material: magazines, fanzines, maps, authors' typescripts and cigarette cards.

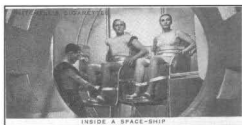
Cigarette cards started off as a way of strengthening the packs cigarettes were sold in, until some bright spark in the USA around 1870 realised that these cards could be used to sell advertising space. Shortly afterwards, the idea that you could develop brand loyalty by issuing cards in sets which people would collect resulted in a massive upsurge of cards. According to the website (www.franklynycards.com), in 1910 WH & HO Wills produced a set of cards on Aviation, only a couple of years after the first flight by powered heavier than air machines, and by 1913 movie star cards were popular. At first, cards were largely devoted to sporting themes and figures or film celebrities. Soon, manufacturers cottoned on to the idea that more packs would be sold to more people if the topics of the series got wider and wider, and soon just about every interest-group developed a motive for sucking at cylindrical tubes filled with poisonous and narcotic substances. Cards devoted to nature, dogs, cats, railways, flowers and royalty (of course) blossomed.

The heyday of the cigarette card

was the period between the First and Second World Wars. In 1936 the Stephen

Mitchell brand of the Imperial Tobacco Co issued a set of 50 "World of Tomorrow" cards to explore that brave new world — the future! These cards pictured the world that would develop out of the scientific developments being considered at the time. It would be a future of atomic and solar power, weather control, transformed cities, robots, and rocket post. The series wasn't quite science fiction — it was far too serious for that. *Things to Come* (released that year and produced by Alexander Korda, directed by William Cameron Menzies, and based on H. G. Wells's script adapted from his novel *The Shape of Things to Come*) was an obvious source for images. Card 40, for instance, illustrating "Anti-Gas Armour", is the celebrated image

of "Wings over the World" leader John Cabal emerging from his plane, with his black armour and towering helmet. Card 29 ("House Builder") turns out to be one of the machines that construct the new, utopian Everytown of the film. Others illustrate more directly science fictional ideas. Card 37 shows a robot, referring to Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.* and showing a rather clumsy humanoid form which it claims is "a Russian invention [which] can



INSIDE A SPACE-SHIP

Things to Come with two worried-looking characters sitting in chairs, which despite the text don't look nearly well-padded enough to overcome the shock of being propelled into orbit at seven miles a second.

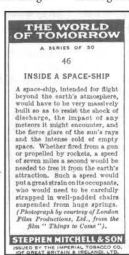
Like many science fictional futures of the time, this is a weird world that we're in some respects almost living in, in other respects have completely bypassed. We'll be working, for instance, in large offices! Air-conditioned! With television screens! (Card 10) There'll be giant telescopes to enable astronomers to take better observations of the stars! (Card 49) The motor-coaches of the future, for instance, would have "beds for night travel and kitchens for cooking and serving hot meals. To

handle and carry loads far too heavy for a man." Card 46, "Inside a Space-Ship" returns to

receiving set, or "on a smaller dial, like that of a watch, carried in the pocket or on the wrist" or even greater than life-size, above the heads of the crowd, in public places. (Card 22)

Far be it from me to make jokes about "if you smoke enough cigarettes you'll be able to get a FULL SET of pictures of the future you won't be able to see because you've smoked too many cigarettes". Looking back at these images we can already see suggestions of a future that is going to happen and which isn't the kind of thing you joke about. Wells's John Cabal, specially suited so that none of these new poison gases can be absorbed through bare skin, isn't a particularly optimistic figure. One ominous pointer towards the immediate future (Card 39) tells us that the Russian army and air force had developed a new form of warfare involving parachuting whole battalions of men and artillery behind military lines into the heart of an enemy's country.

Skimming through these "World of Tomorrow" cards, though, gives us an interesting glimpse into a future presented outside the usual channels of science fiction. Many of the people who smoked these cigarettes would not have read science fiction books or magazines. Were they inspired to — at least to see the film so heavily promoted within this series? And it is genuinely interesting to consider the sort of future that was thought likely. Some of these things — like the new methods of warfare, television, and factories — are with us. Others, like humanoid robots, we'll have to wait a lot longer for. Meanwhile, the thought (Card 42) of popping your Christmas mail into a rocket, standing back and lighting the blue touch-paper, is something which is probably better left in the cigarette packet.



THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

A SPACE-SHIP

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The Science Fiction Foundation Collection is the largest collection of English-language science fiction and material about it in Europe. Administered by the University of Liverpool, it is a resource for anyone with a research interest in it. It has been developed thanks to the generosity of publishers, writers, and fans who have donated books, magazines, and money to buy them. For new purchases, and for the preservation and conservation of the existing collection, it depends entirely on such generosity. If you would like to support the collection in any way, contact Andy Sawyer at The Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, P.O. Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA (asawyer@liv.ac.uk). Science Fiction Foundation Collection. www.liv.ac.uk/~sawyer/sff/home.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.

Ballot time

Any of you who've been checking out the BSFA web site or who have studied the ballot form you should have received in the post may have seen the shortlists for the 2003 BSFA awards. The shortlists are also set out below for ease of reference. Congratulations to all those shortlisted, and thanks to everyone who submitted nominations.

The awards will be announced and presented at the British national sf convention (Eastercon), Concourse, on Easter Sunday (11 April) in the Winter Gardens in Blackpool. As usual, attending members of the Eastercon will be eligible to vote for the awards, as will all members of the BSFA. You should have received a ballot form separately (if you haven't and want to vote, please get in touch as soon as possible), and all postal ballots should be sent to me to arrive by Tuesday 6 April; the address is on the form. If anyone prefers to vote at the convention, additional ballot forms will be available there—and I'm sure you don't need me to spell

out that even if you are attending the Eastercon, you don't get to vote twice as a result!

A few people have asked for some more information about nominations for the awards, so apologies to those who don't find such statistics interesting: 92 nominations were submitted for 36 different novels, while in the short fiction category 54 nominations were spread across 39 different stories, novelettes and novellas. There were 45 nominations for a total of 23 different pieces, and 26 nominations for 11 pieces of non-fiction writing. A full list of all the works nominated is currently included on the BSFA website.

I don't know how this compares to previous years, but experience of this year's process confirms my suspicion that there's still a lot of uncertainty about the non-fiction category in particular. In the next issue of *Matrix*, when I intend to open nominations for the 2004 awards, I'll provide some more clarification about eligibility. In the meantime, if you have views about

eligibility for any of the awards categories, please do get in touch. And carry on reading new sf so you're ready to start sending in new nominations in a few months' time...

In the meantime, the main statistic I'm now interested in is the number of ballots cast for the awards—although as I say this I don't know the numbers from previous years so won't be able to claim any improvement! I'd strongly urge anyone who's interested in voting to do their best to become familiar with all of the candidates in each category you're voting in; you don't have to prove what you have or haven't read in order to be able to vote, but I'd like to think that everyone's voting on the basis of the best information available to them. We've included links to the shortlisted works on the website wherever possible, and are continuing to try to improve this before the voting deadline.

Otherwise, I look forward to seeing those of which who are planning to attend Eastercon.

Claire Briale

2003 award shortlists

Novel:

Pattern Recognition by William Gibson (Viking)

Felaheen by Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight)

Midnight Lamp by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz SF)

Absolution Gap by Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz SF)

Natural History by Justina Robson (Macmillan)

Maul by Tricia Sullivan (Orbit)
(There are six novels on the shortlist because there was a tie for fifth place)

Short Fiction:

'Dear Abbey' by Terry Bisson (PS Publishing)

'The Wolves in the Walls' by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean (Bloomsbury Children's Books)

'Entangled Eyes are Smiling' by John Meaney (*Interzone* #190)

'Birth Days' by Geoff Ryman (*Interzone* #188)

'Nightfall' by Charles Stross (Asimov's, April)

Non-Fiction:

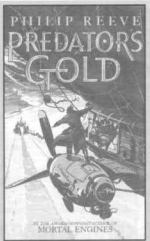
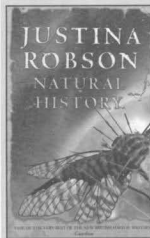
'Nothing is Written: Politics, Ideology and the Burden of History in the Fall Revolution Quartet' by John H Arnold and Andy Wood (from *The True Knowledge* of Ken MacLeod, edited by Andrew M Butler & Farah Mendlesohn; SF Foundation)

'The Profession of Science Fiction #58: Mapping the Territory' by Mike Ashley (*Foundation* #87)

'Reading Science Fiction' by Farah Mendlesohn (Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn; Cambridge University Press)

'A Sick Mind' by Cheryl Morgan (Review of *The Thackery T Lamshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*, edited by Jeff Vandermeer and Mark Roberts; *Emerald City* #97)

Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams by M J Simpson (Hodder & Stoughton)



Cover of John Clute's collection *Scores: Reviews 1993-2003* by Judith Clute (Becon Publications)

Cover of Philip Reeve's novel *Predator's Gold* by David Frankland (Scholastic)

Cover of Tricia Sullivan's novel *Maul* by Lee Gibbons (Orbit)

Cover of *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod* by Colin Odell (SF Foundation; edited by Andrew M Butler & Farah Mendlesohn)

Cover of Justina Robson's novel *Natural History* by Steve Stone (Macmillan)

Artwork:
a science fiction novel of sex, shopping and terrorism

Consolation prizes

Eastercon will probably have been and gone by the time this reaches you, but as I write this the gathering in Blackpool is still a few weeks away. To me Blackpool will always be associated with National Union of Students and political party conferences. I've been there about 15 times, but always in the middle of winter. While other people think of Blackpool as a place to go on holiday, my abiding memory is of freezing in a cheap B&B in 1992 because the landlady turned the heating off between October and May. Brrrr!

5-8 Aug 04 Bulgacon (Eurocon 04)

Plodiv, Bulgaria. Including Gamecon - a discussion of the impact of computer games and a Bulgarian/European film festival. No accommodation/site/GoH details. FREE, but please register at website. 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.

5-7 Nov 04 Novacon 34

Walsall. Further details to be confirmed. xl5@zoom.co.uk

13-14 Nov 04 P-CON 2

Ashling Hotel, Parkgate St, Dublin. Guest of honour, Juliet E 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): Attending £35, supporting £15, junior £17.50, child £5 and infants free. Email: memberships@paragon2.org.uk Web: www.paragon2.org.uk

Take note:

Are you attending a convention?

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

Are you organising a convention?

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

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.tolkiensociety.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

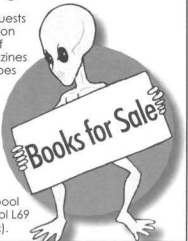
L.A. CON IV

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/fantasy books and magazines for sale. Income from this goes to support the work of the Foundation, including its sf library at Liverpool.

For further details look at the website at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/sale.html> or contact Andy Sawyer, Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA, UK (email asawyer@liv.ac.uk).



Obituaries

Julius Schwartz 1915-2004

Julius "Julie" Schwartz died at the age of 88 on February 8, 2004. While Schwartz will be remembered primarily as the man who laid the foundations for the *Silver Age* of comics, he also had a significant role in the creation of modern science fiction fandom.

In 1932, aged 17, Schwartz along with Mort Weisinger and Forrest J Ackerman, created one of science fiction's first fanzines, *The Time Traveler*. Later, with Weisinger, he set up Solar Sales Services – the first literary agency that specialized in sf, boasting clients such as Ray Bradbury (selling the author's first stories), Alfred Bester, HP Lovecraft and many others. In 1939 he was part of the team that organized the very first World Science Fiction Convention.

In 1944 he moved into the world of comics, taking a job at All Star Comics (a predecessor of DC) and working on a variety strips in all genres.

In the mid-1950s, with superhero comic sales in the doldrums, Schwartz was asked to relaunch *The Flash*. He took the clunky pre-war hero and, in *Showcase #4*, transformed him into something as sleek and desirable as the fins on fifties Cadillac. The Green Lantern, Hawkman and The Atom all received similar treatment but it was the appearance of the Justice League of America (in *The Brave and The Bold* #28) that caused Marvel publisher Martin Goodman to encourage Stan Lee to try his hand at a superhero team. Lee, who'd been considering quitting comics, had to be persuaded by his wife to give it a try. The result was *The Fantastic Four #1*. The basis for one of the most productive periods in the history of the comic strip medium had been laid, and Schwartz and Lee would lead the way.

Schwartz's contribution cannot be underestimated. In 1961 he created the DC multiverse with the creation of Earth 2. In 1964 he relaunched Batman, whose sales had fallen precipitously, as a darker, moodier detective. In the 1970s he oversaw the (often controversial) Denny O'Neill/Neal Adams title *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* – featuring stories that dealt with contemporary issues – and stepped in to reestablish Superman's fading fortunes.

After finally retiring from editing monthly comics in 1985 he returned to sf, editing a range of graphic novels based on sf classics, and took on the job of "Goodwill Ambassador" for DC – impressing all who met him at conventions with his storytelling and energy – especially at parties.

Throughout his career he maintained good relations with the artists and writers he worked with and had, in the words of artist Joe Kubert, a reputation for being "a good guy and a straight guy. He came off as a curmudgeon, but he had a soft heart underneath it all." – Martin McGrath

David Hemmings

1941-2003

David Hemmings died 4 December, aged 62, following a heart attack while filming in Romania. A child soprano, Hemmings played Miles in Benjamin Britten's adaptation of Henry James' *Turn of the Screw* before moving into movies in 1954. Genre roles included *Barbarella* (1968), *Profundo Rosso* (recut as *Deep Red*, 1975), *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (television movie, 1981) and *Equilibrium* (2002). His latest appearance was in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003). In recent years, he'd concentrated on work behind the camera, including the pilot episode of *Quantum Leap* (1989): "People thought I was dead. But I wasn't. I was just directing *The A-Team*." – Steve Green

Basingstoke

Genesis SF Club

Meets every four weeks on Thursday, starts 7:30pm.
The Hop Lead, Church Street, Basingstoke RG21 7QQ
Contact: Mark Sinclair
genesis@rewriter.demon.co.uk
Web: www.genesis-sf.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 monico@technologist.com
Web: members.burtoncity.co.uk/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://btf.birmingham.org.uk>

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.org

Colchester

Colchester SF/Horror Group

Meets 3rd Saturday, starting at 12:30pm. The
Playhouse pub, St. John's Street, Colchester CO2 7AA
Contact: Des Lewis (01225 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

Didcot SF Group

Meets 2nd Wednesday, starting at 7:30pm.
The Ladygrove, Cow Lane, Didcot OX11 7SZ
Contact: Nigel and Sabine Furlong furlong32@aol.com

Dublin

Dublin Sci-Fi Club

Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm.
Upstairs bar in Bowes Pub, Fleet Street, Dublin 2
Contact: Frank Darcy slub@lontarpark.com
Web: lontarpark.com/slub/

Edinburgh

Edinburgh SF Group

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

Edinburgh

Meeting in J. K. Rowling's

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

Hull

Hull SF Group

Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 8:00pm.
The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull HU2 8DE
Contact: Mike Cross mike@mjghk.com
Web: www.mjghk.com

Leicester

The Outlanders: The Leicester Science Fiction, Fantasy
and Horror Group
Meets 1st Friday, starting at 8:00pm.

The Globe, Silver Street, Leicester LE1 5EU
Contact: Mark E. Cottrell
theoutlanders@hotmail.com
Web: www.outlanders.leam.co.uk

London

2250 Planet Z Alpha – the Official Hitchhiker's Guide to
the Galaxy Appreciation Society
Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:00pm.

Pendler'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
White Hart, 119-121 Bishopsgate, London, EC2M
3TH. Forthcoming guests: Steve Aylett (Mar), Steph
Swainston (Apr), Ken MacLeod (May).
Contact: Farah Mendlesohn farah@fn3.demon.co.uk
Web: www.bsfa.co.uk

London

East London fans

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

London

The City literates

Meets every Friday, starting at 6:30pm.
The Red Lion, Kingsly 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 9EJ
Contact: Ian Brown red42uk@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@btinternet.com
Web: www.arthurchappell.demon.co.uk/fant.html
www.gennel.demon.co.uk/fontsize/font.html

Norwich

Norwich Science Fiction Group

Meets every fortnight on Wednesday, starts 8:00pm.
(The web site says 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, this is
apparently wrong.) The Celler Bar, Ribs of Beef, Eye
Borough, Norwich NR3 1HY
Contact: KGF@btinternet.com
Web: www.nsfwg.net

Oxford

North Oxford

Meets last Thursday of the month, starting at 7:00pm.
The Pough, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8BD
Contact: Steve Jeffery severell@aol.com

Peterborough

Peterborough Science Fiction Club

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

Portsmouth

South Hants Science Fiction Group

Meets first Tuesday, starting at 7:00pm.
The Maggie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth PO1 5BX
Contact: Mike Chester mike.chester@ntlworld.com
Web: www.pompey.demon.co.uk/shsfj.htm

Preston

Preston SF Group

Meets every Thursday, starting at 8:30pm.
The Grey Friar, Friargate, Preston PR1 2EE
Contact: Dave Young psfg@heiry1.demon.co.uk
Web: www.heiry1.demon.co.uk/psfg/

Reading

Reading SF Group

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

Sheffield

Meets Every Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm.

The Red Lion, Charles Street, Sheffield S1 2ND
Contact: Fran Dowd fran@dowd.demon.co.uk

St. Albans

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

Brain food

Three great books about sf.

This issue we've got three great but very different books about science fiction to give away. *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* and *Genre at the Crossroads* are superb primers on sf literary criticism, with essays on the widest imaginable range of subjects from some of sf's biggest names. *Eye on Science Fiction* might be less essential, but it couldn't be more entertaining. Twenty interviews by Tom Weaver with stalwarts from sf's B-movie past, dishing the dirt on Hollywood's secrets. Great fun!

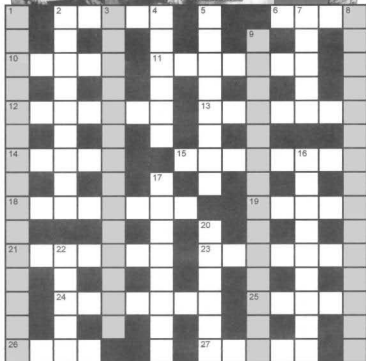
Complete the crossword, the shaded answers are (deliberately) unclued and make up the titles of three novels by a well-known sf author. The titles please, plus the author's name, to matrix.competition@ntlworld.com by 7 June 2004.

Across

- 2 Warrior, from the *New World* (5)
6 You'll hear that again (4)
10 Foolish behaviour (5)
11 Italian composer, chiefly of operas (7)
12 Joseph H _____, author of *The New Untouchables & Valentina* (7)
13 Quake (7)
14 Talk, to an audience (5)
15 Aide de camp (8)
18 Bad, even for a penny! (8)
19 Stumpy giraffe (5)
21 Roman small change (7)
23 Persuades, with flattery (7)
24 _____, *Ask Not*, Gordon Dickson novel (7)
25 Suffuse (5)
26 The not-so-fair sex (4)
27 Wash (5)

Down

- 1&8 Unclued - see above (15)
2 A sharp-edged woman? (6-3)
3 Unclued - see above (14)
4 1976 Rock Hudson movie, grows into something bigger? (6)
5 Annual celebration, could be by the sea? (8)
7 Go up (5)
8 See 1 (15)
9 Unclued - see above (14)
16 Obtainable (9)
17 Carefully judged (8)
20 Sacred beetle (6)
22 Whining voice (5)



Crossword 165

Last issue's crossword turned out to be a little trickier than intended because I messed it up, sorry. Still, you're a very clever bunch and we still got a number of right answers, the word was MISKATONIC. Well done David Langford, surely this must be his greatest achievement?

ACROSS: 7 Arkham 8 Deep Ones 9 Unfrozen 10 Demons 11 Necronomicon 13 Dunwich 15 Cthulhu 18 Cats of Ulthar 21 Hannah 22 Filthily 23 Randolph 24 Carter DOWN: 1 Cranked up 2 Third row 3 Amazon 4 Ready-cut 5 Zoom in 6 Verne 8 Dynamo 12 The Allies 14 City hall 16 Up to here 17 Loofah 18 Canada 19 Unlock 20 Satan.

Crossword 164

Congratulations to Kevin Smith from Oxford who provided the correct answer: MARCO POLO. DVDs and videos on the way.

ACROSS: 1 Autons 5 Davros 10 Time and relative dimension in space 11 Kraal 13 Larva 14 Eclipse 16 Data 18 Anna 19 see 10 21 Acid 23 Tout 26 see 10 28 Ripen, 29 Defer, 32 William Hartnell 33 Kronos 34 Eureka DOWN: 2 Unmeant 3 Oracle 4 Side 5 Duel 6 Viable 7 Omicron 8 Staked 9 Tegana 12 Kidnaps 15 Ski 17 Add 18 Ant 20 Men 21 Arrows 22 Impaler 24 Off-peak 25 Thrill 26 Indian, 27 Editor 30 Imps 31 Babe

Contributors

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News: Mark Greener and Martin McGrath.
Flicker, Goggle Boxes, and Crossword: Martin McGrath

Competition 166

For questions 1&2 please state the odd one out and why:

- Valentine Michael Smith, Louis Wu, Lazarus Long, Andrew Libby
- Gwyneth Jones, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Peter F Hamilton, Stephen Baxter, Paul McAuley, Connie Willis, Justina Robson.
- Given that *Blade Runner* is the odd one out in this list, can you say why? *Blade Runner*; *Total Recall*; *Second Variety*; *Minority Report*.
- Other than being sf writers what do Arthur C Clarke, William F Nolan, Richard Matheson, Harlan Ellison and especially Fritz Leiber (amongst others) have in common?

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

Result of competition 163

The answers were 163 and 231, being the issue numbers of *Matrix* and *Vector* respectively. The mixed-up mailing not prearranged – not THAT would have been an ideal! confused everybody except Andy Mills.

Result for competition 164

Thanks to Theo Ross for nineteen examples of errors (some people will do anything for a *Matrix* prize), including a Pierson's puppeteer with two eyes in each head instead of one (*Ringworld Engineer*) and a chimpanzee librarian instead of an orang-utan (*Soul Music*).

Timewasters