



# matrix

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

November/December 2004 No. 170

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## Ewok and roll

The original *Star Wars* trilogy finally comes to DVD.

**Ian Watson**

On his journeys with fandom and crazy taxi drivers in Eastern Europe

**Stephen Baxter**

Travels through time with *Timeslip* and *Doctor Who*

**James Bacon**

Reports from Boston and the beast that was WorldCon

**Mark Roberts**

Talks about publishing, fandom and discredited diseases

**Plus**

News, reviews, features and much, much, more...

# matrix

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## Welcome

I was talking recently with an SF author who, in that tangential, six-degrees-of-fandom, kind of way, you could say was responsible for my whole induction into the SF community and ultimately my now being involved with *Matrix*.

I won't tell reveal their identity, although anyone really curious can obtain the full story for the usual bribe price of a pint at the next BSFA meeting if they must. What I will say is that they apologised profusely for my having been inadvertently involved with this onerous editorial task.

Not at all, I replied, it's great fun. Plus as a newer fan (or the slightly more worrisome term 'new blood' some SF veterans seem to prefer) it's a great way to get out and meet people across the whole genre community and have something intelligent to talk about when you get there. A bonus I would recommend to anyone.

As if interesting people saying intelligent things isn't an editorial policy, I don't what is, but either way that's what *Matrix* has always been about and it's what keeps the contributor team going, no matter how we all got here.

**Tom Hunter**

## DEADLINES

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

## NEWSBITS

Matrix caught up with SF author Colin Greenland at the regular SF night at Oxford Street's Borders where Colin's wife Susanna Clarke was reading alongside other top Brit author China Miéville.

Asking about the alleged release date of Feb 2005 listed on Amazon for Colin's next novel *Losing David*, a follow-up to his last *Finding Helen*, Colin revealed that he was still on the second draft and that Amazon were lying because they just want your money.

Colin is currently supporting Susanna in the promotion of her own book, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, and thoroughly enjoying it, so his own fans are going to have to wait a little longer yet for his own brand of cleverly constructed contemporary fantasy; assuming that's what *Finding Helen* was.

Both *Finding Helen* and *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* are available now.

Despite the unsuccessful *Beagle 2*, British scientists are keen to return to Mars, with the UK recently agreeing to join a European programme to explore the solar system. The first missions will continue to focus on the search for life on The Red Planet, with robot probes being dispatched on a two-way journey to return vital soil samples to Earth for comprehensive study.

*Smart-1* is about to begin a series of close orbits around the moon. Launched on a widening elliptical spiral around Earth, *Smart-1* has been steadily accelerating as it 'surfs' the moon's gravitational pull while its solar-powered ion drives provide an ion-exhaust pressure of only seven grams. *Smart-1* has been travelling for over a year, surviving bombardment in Earth's inner-radiation belt and encountering the worst solar-storm ever recorded. It is due to arrive in Lunar orbit in November, the first European spacecraft to visit the Moon.

# Banking on Iain

Claire Weaver gets hyped up for return to sf of Iain M Banks.

It's been four years since Iain M Banks graced UK genre readership with *Look to Windward* – the sequel (in title at least) to *Consider Phlebas*, Banks' SF debut way back in 86.

All we've had by way of a Banks fix recently has been the pedestrian (with ratty bits) *Dead Air* and that book on whiskey. The one which looks like it must have been fun to research but offered little by way of real sustenance for those readers more used to a diet of belligerent drones, dry-witted violence and the occasional exploding grandmother. So it's no surprise that *The Algebraist*, his return to science fiction, is being billed as 'the most eagerly awaited SF novel of the decade'.

For his legions of readers, Iain M Banks has been setting the standard against which all other SF is measured for many years – indeed the popularity of New Space Opera can be traced back to his early novels, such as *Consider Phlebas* and *The Player of Games*. He is widely regarded as one of the finest writers of his generation – in any genre – and his influence can be seen in any number of new SF authors.

The news that this wasn't to be a Culture novel left some people more than a little disappointed, but with or without that respectably hedonistic society, the world of *The Algebraist* is still drawn in typically relentless Banksian style.

Set in 4034 AD in a universe where Humanity has finally made it to the stars, the central character Fassin Taak is a Slow Seer at the Court of the Nasqueron Dwellers. The Nasqueron Dwellers inhabit a gas giant on the outskirts of the galaxy, in a system awaiting a wormhole connection to the rest of civilisation. In the meantime, they are dismissed as decadents living in a state of highly developed barbarism, hoarding data without order, hunting their own young and fighting pointless formal wars (so not so very far from the Culture after all then).

And so the next chapter of Iain M Banks' enduring dominance of popular (because it's good) SF

Iain M Banks: eagerly awaited



continues unabated.

The launch party on 5 October, held in the swanky environs of Cavendish Square, London, was suitably fine, stuffed to the gills with Brit authors, publishers, agents, and (of course) *Matrix* representatives Tom Hunter, Claire Weaver and Simon Gilmartin.

There was even a 'real' celebrity in the form of magician Derren Brown. A fact which later proved useful to editor Tom Hunter when he tried to explain exactly where he'd been – and why he was so drunk on the free wine – to a bunch of non-readers. He was able to name-drop someone off the TV who they actually recognised.

Banks himself mingled happily with the crowd, taking time out to make sure he chatted with everyone he could and wearing a rather fetching burnt-orange leather jacket, a garment only an eccentric Scotsman could ever get away with.

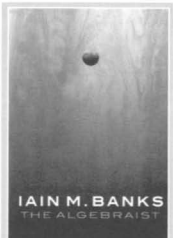
Free wine flowed freely; posh-looking nibbly things were nibbled and speeches were made at what the PR folks were almost certainly calling the most eagerly awaited launch party of the decade.

At the time of writing, *The Algebraist* had only been out a handful of days but everyone there had seemingly already devoured its five-hundred-plus pages and no one

was in any doubt that this was the moment Iain M Banks stepped back on to the stage of modern SF and made it his again.

As Orbit's PR department will happily tell you *The Algebraist* is a complex, turbulent, flamboyant and spectacular novel – so just like old times then really.

Welcome back Iain, says *Matrix*. Here's to your latest future.



*The Algebraist* is currently available in hardback from Orbit books. More info at:

[www.iainbanks.net](http://www.iainbanks.net)  
[www.orbitbooks.co.uk](http://www.orbitbooks.co.uk)

# NEWSBITS

# Moore returns to past

Cory Doctorow was announced as this year's winner of the Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic for his collection *A Place So Foreign and 8 More* (Four Walls Eight Windows Press). Cory received a prize of \$1,000 and a handcrafted Sunburst Medallion. Everyone else got to rejoice in him beating Margaret Atwood to the top-spot. [www.sunburstaward.org](http://www.sunburstaward.org)

The once wild frontiers of Cyberspace take another step towards being tamed as telecommunications regulator Ofcom announces the internet is to get its own area code. The prefix 056 will soon be used by those wanting to make telephone calls over high-speed internet connections. Hackers everywhere are weeping into their Jolt Cola's as we write.

The membership cost of attending Interaction, the 63rd World Science Fiction Convention in Glasgow, is due to rise to £110 from 1 December 2004. Still, at only £20 a day, it represents incredible value for money. And, if you haven't booked your accommodation, get a move on! Many of the most convenient sites are full or filling up fast!

From cut-up to thrown out, the cult films of William Burroughs (including *The Cut Ups* and *Towers Open Fire*) would have been lost in a skip back in 1980 if it hadn't been for the heroic action of art-punker Genesis P. Orridge. Nobly cashing his dole cheque to pay for a cab, the Throbbing Gristle frontman salvaged the footage from a bankrupt Soho Film Distributor as workmen set about clearing the building. The newly restored films are now available for the first time on DVD at [www.screeneedge.com](http://www.screeneedge.com)

And finally... Karen Traviss, author of *City of Pearl*, is to write three more *Star Wars* novels for Lucasfilm/Del Rey, this time set in the New Jedi Order series. Anyone wondering why *Matrix* is running news of movie tie-ins would do well to skip ahead to the back page of this magazine now. If *Star Wars* isn't SF, we don't know what is, and now we know it's being done properly! The next title in her own trilogy, *The World Before*, is due from HarperCollins Eos at the end of 2005.

A lost generation of classic British comic characters are undergoing a 21st Century revival, thanks in no small part to a collaborative project between two generations of comic's writers.

*Allion*, a six-issue series from Wildstorm/DC, is a collaborative project plotted by Alan Moore (*V for Vendetta*) and written by his daughter Leah Moore and her partner John Reppion (*Wild Girl*), with artist Shane Oakley joining the team. The series will recreate vividly memorable, but long out of print, IPC characters such as The Steel Claw, The Spider and Doctor Sin. Moore has often played with characters from this era – in the eighties he revamped *MarvelMan* and let *The Fury* slaughter proxies of these heroes in *Captain Britain*. Recently, Toybox from Moore's *Top Ten* has a similar toy-based power to *The Beano's* Colonel Jumbo.

These characters have been lost to comicdom not only due to complicated corporate buy-outs and rights issues, but also because a whole generation of comics fans haven't heard of them. For younger fans, who first discovered comics during the graphic novel boom of the late eighties and nineties with comics like Alan Moore's own *Watchmen*, this represents a golden opportunity to discover the rich comics-heritage that inspired their own favourite writers.



The Spider as villain in an early appearance

## Diabolical ideas?



"Where do you get your ideas from?" It's a question that has plagued authors in Q&A since the invention of the book-reading, but only now are we discovering that perhaps the true reason authors fear this question so much is because the truth

of their inspiration is stranger than any of their fictions.

*Matrix* recently received alleged evidence of master-fantastist Jeff VanderMeer's own ongoing search for inspiration in a series of photos that reveal the author of modern classics *City of Saints & Madmen* and *Veniss Underground* reportedly quaffing absinthe from a bowl made from a human skull at this year's WorldCon.

That the source of these images was the author himself can only lead this publication to speculate about what other inspirational rituals he was trying to conceal via this new-found transparency...

Jeff's latest collection, the aptly named *Secret Life*, is available from Golden Gryphon Press now.

An interview with Mark Roberts, co-editor on the *Thackery T. Lambshead Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*, can be found on page 14 of this issue.

## Aliens versus Cromwell

Whoever wins, the Irish lose?

B SFA favourite Ben Jeapes is back with a new novel *The New World Order* (David Fickling/Random House).

Despite being set in 1645, during the English Civil War, this is not a historical novel – at least not in any conventional sense. Instead it's being described as a 'spectacular firecracker mix of science fiction, parallel worlds and English history: Cromwell, cavaliers and machine-guns'

"I thought it was time someone did a *Turtledove* on one of the most important conflicts in English and indeed British history," Ben revealed to *Matrix*. Adding that anyone wanting more explanation should refer to the author's postscript at the back of the book, although he suggests reading the rest of the book first.

*New World Order* was actually finished two years ago. Since then he has also been busy writing, under the pseudonym of Sebastian Rook, the three-part *Vampire Plagues* series for kids (and inner children!), chronicling the battles of three Victorian children against the Mayan equivalent of Dracula. Exactly the kind of fun, exciting genre books everyone everywhere should be reading and exactly the kind of thing you'd expect from the mysterious and debonair-sounding Mr Rook.

The many incarnations of Mr Jeapes can all be found at [www.sff.net/people/ben-jeapes](http://www.sff.net/people/ben-jeapes)

The *New World Order* is out now.







## Old tech for new writers

The Speculative Literature Foundation (SLF) announced a new Technology Exchange program aimed at helping struggling writers by finding new homes for second hand technology. Individuals are being encouraged to make any spare equipment they may have lying around the place available via a bulletin board on the Foundation's website.

The Exchange aims to match those in need of equipment with those who no longer have a need for it. The Exchange is designed to act purely as a matching service, with no equipment being made available for sale.

Anyone wanting to donate their old tech to a good cause should check out the Foundation's website at [www.speculativeliterature.org/awards/technologyexchange.php](http://www.speculativeliterature.org/awards/technologyexchange.php)

## New Rose Hotel

A Gibbnesque vision of the future takes one step closer to becoming reality with the news that Yo! Sushi mastermind Simon Woodroffe is planning to import the Japanese coffin-hotel concept into the UK.

If the scheme goes ahead, guests of the so-called 'Yotels' will be able to recreate the nightmare-future of Gibson's novels, sleep in 10m square rooms with no natural light and pay £10 an hour for the privilege. The absence of external windows means that the hotels can be built anywhere, including in crowded city-centres, airports and even underground. Each room will be put together from a kit then assembled into units.

Matrix currently has no information on whether the chain is proposing to offer discounts to patrons with implanted mirrorshades or razor-nails, or whether customers will reach their rooms by means of a giant conveyor belt.

A Yotel room design: needs more neon



## SF film festival returns



Sci-Fi London 4: The fourth London festival of science fiction and fantasy film will take place between 2-6 February 2005. Organisers are promising that this year's festival will be the biggest ever and have already announced UK cinema premieres of four Shaw Brothers movies – including their 1966 classic *Monkey Goes West* – and a UK premiere of *Cube Zero*, the third and final film in the *Cube* series.

Returning to the Curzon Soho and The Other Cinema, Sci-Fi London 4 will feature

the same mix of all-night movie marathons (again sponsored by "energy drink" Redbull), premieres and one-off screenings, but organisers are also promising some surprising new twists to this year's events. They have also signed a promotional deal with genre magazine SFX, which should see the festival gaining a higher profile this year.

You can find out more about the festival by visiting the Sci-Fi London website at: [www.sci-fi-london.com](http://www.sci-fi-london.com) – its worth the trip just for the random sf movie name generator. Personally I can't wait for *Attack of the 50ft Insomniacs*, evil never sleeps!

## Gaylactic Spectrum Award

The winners of this year's Gaylactic Spectrum Awards have been announced from a shortlist including novelists Geoff Ryman and Robert Sawyer, stories from *Strange Horizons* and TV shows including *Buffy*.

The Gaylactic Spectrum Awards were created in 1998 by the Gaylactic network to honour works in science fiction, fantasy and horror which include positive explorations of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered characters and themes.

Awards are juried with an open nomination process and are presented in a variety of forms each year, with works released in the previous calendar year eligible for consideration. In addition to these annual awards, a selection of works released prior to the inception of the awards are inducted into its Hall of Fame.

### Winners:

Best Short Fiction: *Lark till Dawn*, Barth Anderson (Mojo: Conjure Stories)  
Best Novel: *The Salt Roads*, Nalo Hopkinson (Warner Books)  
Best Other Work: *Angels in America* (Tony Kushner/HBO) and *Gotham Central #6 - #10 Half A Life*, Greg Rucka & Michael Lark (DC Comics)



## Hugo Awards

Are the Hugo's controversial anymore? Or is it the absence of controversy in their recent popular choices, perversely, that keeps everyone in Fandom debating them so fiercely?

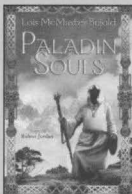
Matrix has been hearing mixed reports from both sides of the fence (and the Atlantic for that matter) and is still can't make up its mind.

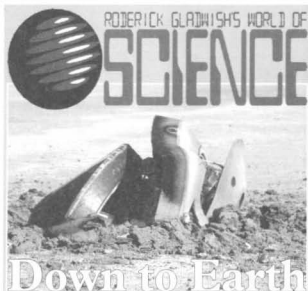
Still, one thing is certain, you shouldn't name your award after the person most famous for popularising the SF in the first place, if you don't want to be seen as the 'People's Choice' award.

Matrix would like to congratulate this year's winners, and remind those who would like to see a little more edge in next year's selection that M John Harrison's *Light* has just been published in the US and is thus eligible despite coming out in the UK in 2002.

By the time this issue reaches publication the results will be widely known by anyone who follows this sort of thing, but still, these are the Hugos, so here are some of them again anyway.

Best Novel: *Paladin of Souls*, Lois McMaster Bujold  
Best Novella: *The Cookie Monster*, Vernor Vinge  
Best Novelette: *Legions of Time*, Michael Swanwick  
Best Short Story: *A Study in Emerald*, Neil Gaiman  
Best Related Book: *The Chesley Awards*, Grant, Humphrey and Scoville  
Best Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois  
Best Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton  
Best Fanzine: *Emerald City*, Cheryl Morgan





In early September the loudest, most sickening thud in the history of science was heard when the Genesis return capsule slammed into the Utah Desert. Before that, the probe had travelled close to the sun exposing delicate collectors to gather solar wind materials. The last thing they needed was a violent return to Earth. There were fears all was lost, but it appears something useful can be extracted.

According to Project Manager Don Sweetnam the team have recovered about 75 to 80 percent of the collectors in the lid of the capsule. It is possible that particles in the main collector array are recoverable too. The four collector arrays were the main particle gathering system and were successfully removed from the damaged probe in one piece. Several large pieces of aerogel, the particle catching material, including one completely intact collector were recovered.

Getting solar particles is one thing, what they will reveal is another. Source: Spaceflightnow.com

## Germans keep glaciers mint

The next German Antarctic base may use space technology. Designer Fritz Gampe has entered his pod-house into a competition for a replacement Antarctic station. The pod uses materials and systems from the European Space Agency's Technology Transfer Programme including solar power, energy-efficient water recycling and air filtration. The structure uses lightweight high-strength carbon fibre.

A new station will have to survive 220 kph winds and one metre annual snowfalls. There are environmental requirements too. Protecting Antarctica means it must be entirely removable leaving no damage to the ecosystem.

Gampe's design will also withstand earthquakes of seven on the Richter scale, three metres of flooding, and is virtually lightning and fireproof. He feels it should be considered for vulnerable places in Europe as well as on the icy continent.

The winning entry will be announced in early 2005. Source: ESA

## The eyes have it

Cornea transplants have been common for some years, but current techniques may not work when the eyes are badly damaged.

Using a sheet of cheek cells Osaka University have cured four patients with Stevens-Johnson syndrome which has symptoms of cloudy corneas and an inability to re-grow the cells.

Tiny (3mm) squares of tissue from inside the cheeks were extracted then grown into thin layers. A transparent film is then separated from the layer by using a low-temperature technique. Laid on to the eyes the film sticks without stitching and develop into cells that act like healthy corneas.

A year later the patients could still see clearly. Source: BBC Online

**Michael J. Cross writes:** Thanks for another interesting issue of *Matrix*. I've just been typing out the details for my Index site, and that prompted some questions:

Who can I credit for the cover? And for the *Matrix* 168 one too? Who wrote the (mini) reviews on page 20? And (nothing to do with the index) what happened to the shiny cover mentioned on page 2?

**Tom Hunter responds:** Thanks Michael, glad you're enjoying the magazine. For those not familiar with Michael's very impressive, amazingly comprehensive index of BSFA publications you can find it at: [www.mjckeh.demon.co.uk/topofthe.htm](http://www.mjckeh.demon.co.uk/topofthe.htm)

Now to answer your questions: Any copy in *Matrix* that is not specifically credited is usually a combination of us Ed's. For instance the majority of the captions are Martin's, while credit for any types usually belongs to Tom. In the case of the mini-reviews, they were co-drafted by Tom & Claire. The mystery of the missing shiny cover is entirely down to finances. We're always looking for ways to improve *Matrix*, but at the moment it's trade-off between more pages (which means extra printing and postage costs) and a more expensive shiny cover, so we've gone for the former for the time being. As for the image credits, the cover of issue 168 was provided courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox while 169 came from the European Space Agency (ESA).

**Tony Keen writes:** I was interested in Martin McGrath's claiming of *Went The Day Well?* for SF. I think one reason it seems like SF to us now is that the invasion literature of which it is part was very influential upon post-war British SF, especially the works of John Wyndham, and through that, on TV SF of the 50s, 60s and 70s. There is a clear line of descent from *Went The Day Well?* through *Day of the Triffids* to *Quatermass* and *Jon Pertwee era Doctor Who*.

The other interesting piece was Stephen Baxter on Alexander the Great, to which I would like to add a comment on Alexander's plans at his death. Much of what we know about the Last Plans comes from sources written after Rome had risen to world power status.

Naturally, Alexander's intentions towards the west tend to get exaggerated in the light of what happened afterwards. My own feeling is that Alexander would find very little to interest him in the west. He was not just a conqueror, but an explorer, and the Mediterranean was known territory. What interested Alexander was the unknown. So, his next planned campaign, had he not died, was to have been Arabia. After that, I think he would have looked east once more. His campaign in India was stopped by the refusal of his Macedonian troops to go further; with the new army he was raising in Asia, I believe Alexander would have returned to India, and, had he lived, continued through the



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sub-continent, and on into China. With both areas in a period of instability, you know what he might have achieved?

On the other hand, his later years are marked by increasing paranoia and distrust of his Macedonian friends. Such paranoia becomes self-fulfilling, and if he were not murdered in 323 BC, he might well have been soon after.

**Neal Asher responds to Anthony Nanson's letter in *Matrix* 169:** My rage against the use of the word 'organic' is wholly against the ignorance of many of those using it. How does organic manure differ from the normal kind? It has become a general term meaning good, healthy – a product of nice mother nature rather than of evil science, which is bollocks: nature is not a nice mother and our science has been a way of countering her cruelties. And no, I was not kidding around.

This idyll of a return to 'organic' mixed farming is amusing at best. It is the kind of unreality expressed by concerned urbanites who have no understanding of what farming really is and who also seem to have lost sight of the fact that 'evil science' governs every aspect of their lives. 'Organic' mixed farming is labour intensive. I can just see all those people stepping out of their nice warm offices to find employment shovelling cow muck onto the fields and pulling on their green wellies to go picking slugs from rows of cabbages. Yields are also much lower, so how will the green lobby square that with a huge and growing population?

Yes, our present methods of farming are unsustainable – too many nitrates ending up in our rivers, and too much wildlife being wiped out by the insecticides and herbicides used to maintain monocultures. But the real way to prevent those silent springs is through science and the new technologies it produces. GM is probably the only way to dig us out of the poisonous hole we presently occupy, but of course the same people who prattle on about 'organic farming' object to that as well. Totally industrialised farming and organic mixed farming are both unrealistic poles. Hopefully the pull of each of these will result in some workable amalgam – as always.

# Continental drift

*Islandia* is not so much an "alternate history" as an "alternate geography," says Andy Sawyer, and Austin Tappan Wright produced one of the last century's most remarkable literary works.

We all know the worlds of fantasy. We get there through wardrobes or (if we want to add a science-fictional gloss), stargates, or mysterious rays. Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter reached Barsoom through some unexplained force that transports him from a cave in the American West to a Mars that never was, but which still haunts the imagination.

On the other hand, John Lang, a young Harvard graduate, sailed there in 1908 to become the American consul to Islandia.

*Islandia* is part of the vast and sprawling imaginary world of an American law professor, Austin Tappan Wright (1883-1931). Like Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*, it was his life's work. At his death, he left a novel of almost 600,000 words, together with a "History and Description" of the country 135,000 words long. Reduced by two-thirds, the novel was published in 1942. Unlike *LOTR*, however, and many other fantasies stemming from the creative world-building of an imaginative individual, there's no hint of the fantastic in *Islandia*. Modern realistic fiction invents people. There is no such person as Bridget Jones, but a novel describing her problems doesn't challenge the imagination. We can assume for the purpose of the story that she exists. Wright invented an entire continent, and asked us to make the same assumptions.

"We knew," says Lang, the narrator of *Islandia*, "that it lay, facing the Antarctic, on the edge of the Karain semicontinent in the Southern hemisphere ... and that our school geographies gave it only a few lines because it was ruled by a peasant oligarchy, was agricultural and primitive, and had no trade." *Islandia* limits outside contact, to the extent that it imposes a strict medical examination on all who arrive to prevent disease (it's

strongly hinted that this means venereal disease) entering the country. But things are changing.

While at college, Lang befriends Dorn, a young man from Islandia and becomes curious enough to learn some of the language. On the strength of this, when he graduates he is offered the post of U.S. Consul to Islandia. Mora, the country's Premier, is opening up the country to foreigners, and the USA is determined to take advantage. There is the possibility of a power

struggle – the European Powers are already jockeying for advantage – and Lang is almost immediately torn between duty and desire.

In many ways, *Islandia* is a utopia. One of the books about the country mentioned in the novel is *Travels in a Modern Utopia* by John Carter Carstairs (is that "John Carter" an echo of another Carter who found his utopia on another planet?), and Lang soon finds his personal utopia among the Islandian people, whose pastoral simplicity and self-reliance he comes to admire. There, he regains contact with Dorn, and becomes increasingly uneasy with his role as a diplomat sent out to "open up" *Islandia* to the benefits of commerce and industry. He also becomes attracted to his friend's sister Dorna, and Nattana of the

Hyth family.

Lang's naivety with respect to the comparative sexual frankness of Islandians makes a delightful study of sexual tension, especially in an early scene where he and Dorna spend the night (chastely) together on a boat, and, later, when he, Dorn and Dorna go swimming: it is the custom in *Islandia* to bathe naked. The Islandians are by no means promiscuous, but fundamental to their way of thinking is the distinction between three forms of

love: "apia" (sexual desire), "alia" (the love for family and home), and "ania" (the desire to marry and live with someone). Dorna will not marry Lang – she weds the Islandian king – and he has to reconcile his straight-laced puritan ethics with the more complex views of his Islandian

friends. When he returns home after resigning as Consul and meets a former flame, more tension arises. At times, one forgets that *Islandia* is an imaginary place, and Wright's romance reads slightly like one of his times' "modern" novels of sexual exploration, in which writers like D. H. Lawrence explore similar aspects of love in very different ways. If I say that I prefer *Islandia* to much of Lawrence, I am not belittling him, but instead drawing attention to the skilful and poignant way

Austin Tappan Wright creates an imaginary world and examines our own. *Islandia* may have begun in childhood escapism and continued as a hobby, but the result is one of the century's most remarkable literary works.

I have used the language of fantasy to "place" *Islandia*, but it is significant that Wright is listed in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* rather than the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. It's "real" fantasy – in the sense that like Mervyn Peake's "Gormenghast" sequence it's an autonomous act of imagination, different from other books to which we apply the word. But, as I have said, there are no traces of supernatural, magical or gothic in it. The only "unreal" element is the "Karain semicontinent" itself. Everything else flows from that one act of speculation. Rather than fantasy as such, we might call *Islandia* alternate history, or, better still, "alternate geography." It's firmly in the utopian tradition of Thomas More's celebrated original text, but unlike *Utopia* it is a realist novel in the classic Nineteenth Century tradition. Or, perhaps, with its displacement into an imaginary, isolated rural setting and its focus upon the pleasures and pains of love denied it is one of the last survivors of the Pastoral; that odd and highly stylized form where disguised characters sing love-songs in Arcadia.

In short, it is in a class of its own, and Wright (who, according to his daughter Sylvia's account seems to have been an imaginative and delightful parent) is an unsung literary genius. At least *Islandia* was published – and indeed, it was returned to in continuations by Mark Saxton, who helped edit the original manuscript. How many other major works, we have to wonder, have been written for the creator's private amusement, and remain unknown and unread?



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

# Journeying back through time

Stephen Baxter considers what new science fiction television shows can learn from the past.

As I write, fandom is shivering like a defective TARDIS in anticipation of the return of *Doctor Who* to BBC TV. While working on *Time's Eye*, my latest collaboration with Sir Arthur C. Clarke, I was reminded of an early *Doctor Who* serial, called 'The War Games', with some resonance with our novel – and of another ancient bit of tele-fantasy, an ATV serial called *Timeslip*. (The central premise of *Eye* was all Sir Arthur's, however, and I doubt that he ever saw this stuff).

*Timeslip* (now out on DVD, and see [www.timeslip.org.uk](http://www.timeslip.org.uk)) was a tea-time kid's show that ran for 26 episodes from September 1970 to March 1971. I was twelve when it began. Two modern-day teenagers, Liz and Simon, climb through a fence in an old naval compound and go back in time: just as in our novel, you time-travel in the most human way, simply by walking across a 'time barrier'.

The show was a response to *Who*, seen by some at the time as becoming overly fantastic. The creator, script editor Ruth Boswell, drew on JW Dunne's (non-fiction) *An Experiment in Time* (1927), which described 'experiments with precognition'. Writer Bruce Stewart fancied doing a World War II conspiracy-theory story. These inputs melded into the first six-part serial in which the teenagers find themselves back in 1940, when the naval station is under attack by Germans of the 'Don't tell him, Pike!' school. Simon, a science buff, pleasingly figures out secretive projects on radar and lasers.

But the show's main themes are revealed when Liz meets her father, then a young Navy tar. This was to be a show about exploring your own past and future. And though the teenagers learn they can't be harmed in the 'time bubble', psychological risk is real.

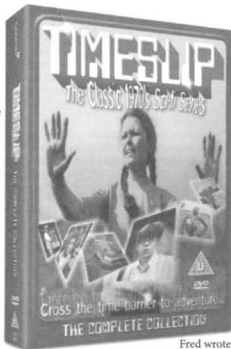
The second serial saw Liz and Simon projected into 1990, then an exotic future: in the 'Ice Box', a south pole research station, morally dubious experiments on cloning

and longevity are being run. Liz now encounters her own future self, twisted and cruel.

But the teenagers also learn that this 'time bubble' is a mere 'projection'. Thus in the next serial we are treated to a different 1990: the 'burn-up', in which governmental 'geographical reconstruction' schemes have led to wild global warming. (Corporate and governmental science get a rough ride generally in this show.) A new future-Earth is a long-haired Earth mother, but science-buff Simon has become an instrument of the geo-engineers. (Future-Simon was played by David Graham, voice of *Thunderbirds*' Parker.)

The fourth and last serial was a disappointment. Stewart seems to have run out of ideas, and the replacement writer tried to tie up all the dangling threads – cloning, mad government scientists, the lot. The show had lost its charm.

But at its best the series offered a mind-expanding escalation of ideas: walking through time, alternate futures affected by present choices. There was even a patina of science: Geoffrey Hoyle, son of Sir Fred, was a consultant. (In 1966 Sir



Fred wrote a timeslipping novel of his own, called *October the First is Too Late*.) Certainly the 'burn-up' was a prescient fable of modern concerns.

And the confrontation of Liz and Simon with their possible future selves was always compelling. The teenagers are the more complete characters, as if the adults were mere unhealthy projections of a trait of their adolescent selves. This was a fable about growing up – rich stuff for a young teenager like me.

And what of the *timeslip Who*? Written by *Who* veterans Malcolm Hulke and Terrance Dicks, 'The War Games' was a 10-parter, broadcast from April to June 1969

– I was eleven. It was the last outing for Patrick Troughton, my favourite Doctor.

The TARDIS appears to decant the Doctor onto a grisly First World War battlefield. But the story opens out to reveal more soldiers – Romans, Spartans, soldiers from the Crimean and Boer wars – in their own splintered time zones; no doubt the BBC costume department was in hog heaven. The evil genius behind it all is the 'War Chief', who plans to forge a conquering army from the soldiers of mankind, the most ferocious species in the Galaxy.

But the soldiers are carried about in time-space machines called *sidrats*, a not too subtle inversion of a more familiar name... Like our hero, the War Chief is a rogue Time Lord. This was in fact the first time we fans had heard of the Doctor's people.

The Time Lords intervene. But the Doctor, of course, is on the run himself, having stolen the TARDIS and meddled in history. The Time Lords decide that the Doctor's punishment must be an exile to Earth – and the era of Jon Pertwee was born.

This was a long, ambitious serial, unpredictable and strange – but, unfortunately, it bombed.

At a small convention called 'Odyssey 2004' (Taunton, May 2004), I met Barry Letts. Now a dapper 79-year-old, Letts was the producer of some of the first Pertwee shows. (Incidentally *Timeslip*'s Liz and Simon also showed up at Odyssey for a retrospective talk, but my own guest event clashed. Oh for a time barrier...) Letts tells stories of a viewing-figure graph that had to be extended downwards with taped-on bits of paper to capture the ratings-plummeting during 'War Games'. *Who*, it seems, came close to cancellation altogether (according to Letts, though I think some *Who* historians might dispute this).

What went wrong? 'War Games' was one of *Who*'s more high-concept outings – but, it seems,



In a different age there were different traditions of production, writing, even acting; of course the shows look strange to modern audiences. But the creators dared to try out high concepts...

Stephen Baxter

high concept doesn't necessarily make for a successful *Who* story. There is probably an argument that the Doctor isn't an sf figure at all but a derivation of a very English tradition of marginalized heroes, from Robin Goodfellow to Robin Hood. To Stuart Carter, in his review of three Telos novellas (in *Vector* 235), the Doctor is 'the Protean hero living in a world that despite some sf trappings is actually a gloriously rich fantasy, a tapestry of disparate ideas stitched together with some very strong thread'.

But personally I liked the high concept of 'War Games', even aged eleven. At one point the Doctor is threatened when the larger-than-the-outside interior of a sidrat begins to contract around him! And in his fearful defiance of the Time Lords the Doctor's character at last came into focus: 'All these evils I have fought, while you have done nothing but observe!' Without a back-story the Doctor is reduced to a set of elemental characteristics: an explorer who is unexplored, for whom nothing changes, and so nothing matters.

These shows haven't aged well. Characteristically of British telly sci-fi of its time, both were hastily written and shot, under-rehearsed, stiffly acted, and relied on basic effects and wobbly sets. And both suffered from uncertainty. The second *Timeslip* serial wasn't commissioned until the first proved a success, and the transition from past to future was a jolt. (But I think I enjoyed that sense of unpredictability: I recorded in my Schoolboy's Diary that the first 'Ice Box' episode was 'great'.)

However I sometimes think the longevity of certain sixties franchises (*Who*, *Thunderbirds*) makes us forget how very long ago all this was. It is more than forty years since the first *Who*; forty years before that, Fritz Lang was making *Metropolis*. In a different age there were different traditions of production, writing, even acting; of course the shows look strange to modern audiences. But the creators dared to try out high concepts, like the *timeslip* idea, which might seem risky today.

I'll be rooting for Christopher Eccleston, for it's not every actor who gets to play the Doctor and Stephen Baxter (in ITV's *The Second Coming*). And I hope the new *Who* is brave enough to dabble occasionally in high concept and fire the imaginations of a few young fans, as 'War Games' and *Timeslip* once did for me.

# Screen idols

Simon Gilmartin wonders when he'll get to read ebooks in the bath.

Nineteen Seventy One, and Michael S Hart is given free range on the University of Illinois department of Material Science's mainframe, a Xerox Sigma V. It is a punch-card chewing difference engine that could fit into a single room (if it were a fairly big room) and is the bleeding-edge of tech for its time.

He sits there hunched over his terminal, bathed in the phosphorous light of his monitor as he peeks out the American Declaration of Independence typing with his index fingers.

For the first time, as far as we know, he is realising the idea to give that text immortality, break it free from its ink and paper prison, make it digital. After he finishes he sends the text to everyone he could find on the rag-tag collection of networked mainframes in the pre-internet world of seventies academia.

Michael Hart went on to found Project Gutenberg, now on the Internet, turning public domain books into ephemeral code, freeing the book from cruel entropy; no more water damage, no more mold between the pages, no disintegrating spines or missing pages.

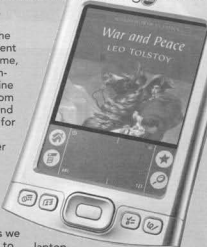
Applying a good dose of Moore's law and rolling the clock to the present day—where does that leave us in terms of the 'ebook'? Is the deadtree book a thing of the past now?

The answer to these questions lie in a quick trip to your local Borders or Waterstones, where the only thing likely to displace the old paper and ink variety of book at the moment in those thriving shops is a Starbucks coffee shop.

So what are the options for reading your prose off of a screen, and why would you want to do that anyway?

We've come a long way since the monochrome glare of the Nixon era cathode ray technology Michael Hart had to endure—and whilst the cost of printer ink (by weight more expensive than vintage champagne!) prohibits turning our ebooks into something more substantial and better suited to reading in the bath—relatively cheap high-resolution colour liquid crystal displays have released the ebook from its desktop shackles.

Ebooks can be read on your



laptop, on your personal digital assistant (PDA), they can be read on our mobile phone and, if converted into the right kind of file, an ebook can even be read on the display of your iPod.

In fact it could be argued that the natural home of the ebook is the PDA—it is an ideal compromise between something that fits in your hand and something with enough screen real estate to make reading more than a squinty-eyed chore.

To date I have read three full length novels on my PDA—China Miéville's *The Scar* and both Cory Doctorow's *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* and *Eastern Standard Tribe*. As deadtree books both of Doctorow's are quite slight in terms of their physical size, weighing in around two hundred pages each. On the other hand, Miéville's deadtree edition weighs in at a hefty six hundred and fifty six pages.

Though counting book pages may seem like a rather rudimentary exercise in literary terms, it's worth considering I carry those three books, 2003's Hugo nominations for short fiction, Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars*, Bruce Sterling's *The Hacker Crackdown*, Vernor Vinge's seminal essay *Technological Singularity* and much, much more, all in my top coat pocket when I travel to work each morning.

Sure my PDA doesn't have that evocative smell or the same tactile intimacy of a 'real' book and, as previously mentioned, you can't really take it into the bath. Also I've never quite worked out how you could get

a signed copy of your favourite ebook, and while modern PDA's have fairly good battery lives, there is always that slight nag in the back of the brain that as you reach those final few pages the juice will run out, the screen go blank, and you will be forced to spend the rest of your commute dying to know 'who done it'.

These small quibbles aside, at its best the PDA is to the written word, what the iPod is to music. Following this analogy then the MP3 is to the compact disc, what the ebook is to its deadtree version. Where this breaks down is that with an iPod you can go out and buy a stack of CD's at your local HMV or Virgin and rip them to your iPod via your PC within minutes of coming home from the shops. There is no equivalent process for the ebook, not in such user-friendly terms anyway. If you want long fiction ebooks and you want to pay some money so that the author sees gain from his or her labours, then you are stuck with on-line bookstores such as Fictiowise.com or Ebooks.com.

After my pleasant ebook experiment with *The Scar*, I seriously considered making the ebook one of my main ways of consuming fiction. The instant gratification that came from entering my credit card details one minute, and in the next reading my freshly downloaded piece of 'New Weird', was a joy in itself, but when I went back for more I was disappointed. The catalogue of ebook titles available at these online vendors seems to match that of a supermarket or a well stocked railway station bookshop, with *Star Wars* tie-ins and *Da Vinci Code* sequels and seemingly not a great deal more.

While ebooks are still a form primarily for the PDA owning minority, publishers will not bother to offer the kind of wide range, that a critical genre reader might want. Which is a real shame, as now the hardware is pretty much there I think the world is ready and waiting for its text iPod moment. And maybe if Apple invented themselves an iPatch, we'd even be able to keep on reading in the bath.

\* Ink in a typical replacement cartridge costs about £1.70 per millilitre, compared with 1985 Dom Perignon at 23p per millilitre.—Evening Standard July 2003

# WorldCono

**W**orldCon is a beast, a huge beast, for five days, running from about 9am until, well for me, 8am, in a vast conference centre and hotel. It's a non-stop rampaging, all encompassing, exhilarating and fun animal of a thing. I was fortunate enough to be here, at the gift of fans, who voted for me for the Trans Atlantic Fan Fund. It was my first time in the American form of this creature, and I was very excited. But enough of me, this is a con report, so lets dissect this animal.

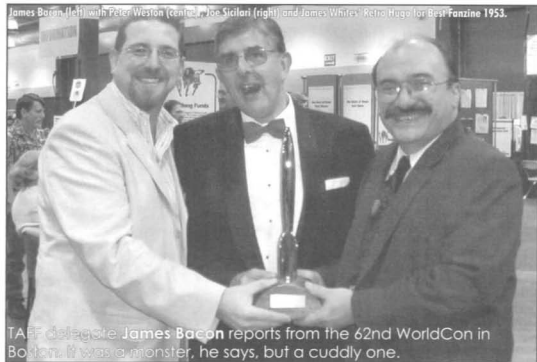
All animals need feeding, and a beast the size of this needs some amount of sustenance. In the loading dock, below ground level, huge American eighteen-wheeler freightliners pirouette in order to disgorge their loads. Its Wednesday and the con will only begin tomorrow afternoon, yet already it's organized bedlam as food, drink, books, dealers stuff, paper, machinery, is devoured by the beast.

No morsel is too small - This is the WorldCon.

Every beast needs its brain, and this beast's brain is broken down into many parts. The most amazing parts must be those that run the electrics, the tech-ops. These guys, and the tech support leg that keeps part of the beast moving, only help out because they are into tech. No payment or perk will suffice. These guys and girls just wanna play with leads and wires.

I got an opportunity to visit one brain centre, the TECH room at the rear of the auditorium, and it's like entering some hybrid mission control. As I enter, I am truly alien, yes; it feels and smells strange, like leaving a scalextric track. There are humming sounds and enough flashing lights to spark a fit. I leave.

Upstairs in the Hynes Convention Centre, next to the green room, is the Programme Ops brain, organised by Janice Gelb and planned by Priscilla Olsen. It's a WorldCon and the beast is like a chameleon, forever changing its colour, and as people drop out, or problems arise, these mortar women strive to plaster any crack and do so eloquently. I am amazed as they juggle over 1,000



James Bacon (left) with Peter Weston (center), Joe Sicilari (right) and James Whites' Retro Hugo for Best Fanzine 1953.

TAFB delegate James Bacon reports from the 62nd WorldCon in Boston. It was a monster, he says, but a cuddly one.

programme items.

Are there changes? Of course there are, even my last convention with a mere 24 programme items had two changes. This is con-running my friends, but not on the wombat scale. No changes interfere with my enjoyment, that's for sure.

Of course there is also the treasury room, where money is given out only after a considerable grilling and the Filk Office, which I avoided, I'm afraid. Then there is the Chairman's office. Although I often see the Chair, Deb Geisler, in nearly every corner of the con at some stage, she is always calm, as is her deputy, Elaine Brennan. From what I see of Deb she is a striking woman, strong and well-spoken,

decisive yet considerate and very warm. She is always busy, but purposely so, never ruffled. She reminds me of other women chairs, Maura McHugh of Octocon for instance, with a firm and positive hold on the leash of this beast.

The body of this convention is its vast halls. The dealer's room is very big, and has a great selection of products. I never got to buy much myself, although I did purchase two of the beautifully produced NESFA press books by Peter Weston and Terry Pratchett.

The convention built a pub in one corner. The Mended Drum, from which live, er, music, if you want to call it that, emanated. Fortunately the construction was

such, it emanated only a little.

The rest of the hall was filled with eating areas, various exhibitions such as past Hugos, a NASA one, stuff on the Lensman award and Doc Smith, then on to the sales of con merchandise, GOH displays, a real Rocket, information and internet access, the fanzine lounge and areas for future WorldCon's to feed.

This was also the main venue for 'First Night' a selection of mini extravaganzas, such as "Terry Pratchett on Trial," where once again he was found guilty, although perhaps not with the panache or expertise of the one true prosecutor, Jim De Liscard. Outside, in the hallway, everything from juggling, wand making and belly dancing was taking place.

I attended the Retro and Real Time Hugos where it was good to see fans from the UK and Ireland awarded Hugos. Neil Gaiman and Bob Eggleton were both excellent MCs.

A proud moment for me was collecting the Retro Hugo on behalf of James Whites' family circle when *Slant* won Best Fanzine of 1953. I was astonished, but pleased to be of assistance, as was Joe Sicilari who collected on behalf of Walt Willis.



A proud moment for me was collecting the Retro Hugo on behalf of James Whites' family circle when *Slant* won Best Fanzine of 1953.

James Bacon

# Saurus Rex

James White was *Slant's* Art Editor on issue seven, which was published in 1953.

Peter Weston proved to be an excellent choice as fan Guest Of Honour. He added a little flair and charisma to everything he was involved with, and his interviews with the other GOHs were excellent. Terry Pratchett also proved to be an excellent choice, and sparred very well with Peter.

The beast had another body, or rather a hindquarters, situated in the Sheraton Hotel. The join between hotel and convention centre was invisible. The hotel was connected directly into the concourse and the Dealers' room.

More programming was going on in the Sheraton. A 70mm movie theatre had been set up in the grand ballroom, which also hosted dances and Terry Pratchett's GOH speech. A large gaming room, con suite, where free food and soft drinks were plentiful along with children's services and a few more programme rooms including the filk, were all in this nice hotel.

So that's the beast, but what of the fodder, well, there were some 5,500 people there, so I was told, and all went very well. It was my first American WorldCon and I didn't find it overwhelming, rather very welcoming.

The parties were good. Japan threw a good one, with sake, beer and wine flowing freely, along with no end of good food. These guys were keen to impress, yet kind to what must seem like a savage bunch of fans. The best party, for me, was the Borders without Banners party. This one was run by fans of George RR Martin and was excellent, no shortage of free booze and pretty girls here. On average there were about twenty parties each night, open to the public, although in fairness, when Norman Cates, the DUFF delegate, and comrade in Fan Funds had the HUGO for best movie, we crashed mostly any party we wanted but got told 'no entry' from SFWA, which isn't surprising, as we weren't really writers.

The Interaction Hugo losers party was excellent, I didn't lose one, but I got in anyhow, Norman nearly lost the Hugo he was

Hugo night with the stars, Norman Cates and Neil Gaiman with James Bacon.



mindful though.

There were many other great parties. The key to this, lay in knowing the way the beast works. Every evening I collared James Peart, Rod O'Hanlon and the party tribe, and quizzed them on the location of free booze. This proved an invaluable way to meet people. (Who refuses directions to free booze?) I soon met many new people, who I now consider friends. A Taff thing, I reckon.

But what of programming, well I heard no complaints, and managed to go to the items I was programmed onto, which were all attended fairly well. My knowledge of UK comics stood me great stead. In a discussion about Alan Moore's work, I was shocked to find fans unaware of the Bo Jeffries saga, which is being re-released by AI, and urged them all to refer to Miracle Man (ugh) as Marvelman. If there was one comment about the programming, it was that maybe there was too much

good stuff going on, and I find that a paradoxical statement. There were not as many manic or mad programme items as one would expect at a UK or Irish Convention, but then I was told that if we tried the crucifixion of Tobes at a US con, we would be in real trouble, as opposed to having a laugh.

I am afraid I didn't get to much more as, being a con runner, I was keen to help out and ended up spending some terrific time with children's services, which had eight rooms and an amazing programme. This will not be the case at Interaction, such areas are now covered by UK Law, so it will be much different. I will be running along with Stefan Lancaster the YAFIA programme, (young adult, mad, dangerous, crazy stuff) which got some interest, and Colin Harris co-chair of Interaction even suggested we try to build a centrifuge. I can't wait.

But what of scandal? Were the beast's ears burning at any time?

Well the fact that Dragoncon was on the same weekend was mentioned a couple of times, not in reference to attendance figures, more in reference to the so-called greying of fandom. I dunno, I met various gangs of people younger than me and hung with them a good bit, and later met some of them in New York. So no, no real scandal I am afraid.

I enjoyed myself, but then how couldn't I? I was the TAFF delegate, so everyone was fairly nice to begin with. I was also elevated to staff within children's services, and despite many UK fans coming down to photograph this obvious travesty, I enjoyed it and it helped me meet many more fans. Get involved was the motto at the 'how to meet other fans' panel, and I take my own medicine seriously.

The accommodation was excellent, both hotels being within minutes of the activity with a shopping mall resting at the feet of the beast, which also included a great food court offering a fantastic variety of food at reasonable prices. In fairness I was rarely there, for the beast suckles its own, in the con suite, and for those who volunteer, the magnificent spread in room 608 needed to be seen to be believed.

I can only compliment the committee on a tremendous job well down, this beast pounced on me and definitely left its mark. I truly didn't hope to have such a wonderful time, and although some things were once in a lifetime moments, it was more of a cuddly beebear than a monster to me.

No evidence of greying fandom with the kids in the insanoorm



# East is East

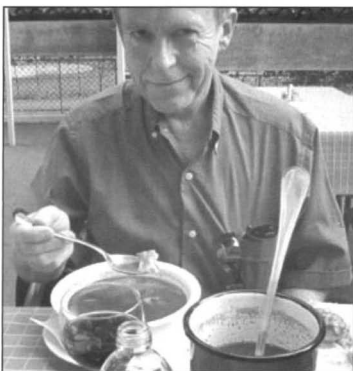
Ian Watson takes on insane taxi drivers, terrible local guides and corrupt Serbian border guards as he ventures into Eastern Europe, discovering places he's never heard of and towns you wouldn't normally want to visit. And what did he find? Science fiction fans, friendship and a restaurant with one waitress and 150 mouths to feed. Everyone should go, he says.

**R**ecently I've become addicted to attending SF conventions in Eastern Europe. In the past year and a half I've been to a con in Romania, three in Hungary, and also to the recent Eurocon in Bulgaria this August. Undoubtedly I'll go to the 2005 Eurocon in Kiev, and who knows what else in between.

This all began because Jonathan Cowie and other members of the Concatenation team who were organising The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Week of Science Fact and Fiction at Timisoara in Romania in May 2003 asked me to take part. This event was largely paid for and organised from England so that Romanian fans, who don't have much money, could enjoy some contact and stimulation.

I went as myself and also as the Ghost of Honour of H.G. Wells, for which purpose the wardrobe department of the Timisoara opera house provided an ancient suit with tails. The building we were using rejoiced in a changing room, although since nobody had thought to obtain the key I struggled to become Bertie Wells in a hot wet toilet. Disconcertingly, I found that it took several hours to return to my previous personality, but maybe actors often experience this.

The week-long event was steered by the Concatenation crowd and by local fans with what a newspaper described as German punctuality mixed with British humour – things actually happened when advertised. Aside from Romanians, several British fans attended, not least Vince Doherty as Fan GoH hot-foot from Nigeria (but looking very cool, perhaps because of the Fan). Also there were two Hungarians who had come out of curiosity, and a Danish Spaniard, while Italian Roberto Quaglia presided throughout with splendid surrealism. Searing sunshine, requiring much resort to the



lovely local beers, alternated with occasional thunder and lightning. Guided tours of Timisoara (gorgeous architecture in need of much heritage fund restoration before it crumbles further) disclosed that it was the first city anywhere to have electric street lighting and that non-Euclidean geometry was first devised there, not to mention that it was a major shipping port although very far from the sea. All this was a bit of a revelation to me, who hadn't heard of Timisoara beforehand.

Romanian TV boggled viewers nationwide with its coverage. Such fun. And numerous new friends...

...including Hungarian Peter Michaleczky – who invited me and Roberto to Hungarocon in June, held traditionally in the second ugliest and somewhat out-of-the-way town in Hungary, Salgótarján. SF conventions are an ideal way to visit places that one otherwise wouldn't!

To be viable, such conventions often need the presence of an

actor or actors from *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* or *DS9* or *Xena*, consequently I met Darth Vader who became a bit irked at me and Roberto for spending too much time with fans – which we thought was the point, but priorities are otherwise in medieval. "Some idiot expected me to continue an interview after the closing ceremony," quoth Lord Vader to one of the organisers who happened to be one of the idiot's best friends.

Two more Hungarian conventions followed in quite short order, both of them *Atjárócs* named for the SF magazine *Atjáró*, which means "portal" or "passageway," both held in a cinema complex above a beautiful shopping centre in Budapest. By now I loved the Hungarians, although Roberto and I have needed to establish The Vergil Award for worst native guide, Vergil having guided Dante into Hell.

We decided to rendezvous in Budapest at the end of July – Roberto driving from Genoa by way of France with his Italian friend Big Max and me with Bob Sheckley flying from Stansted by Air Berlin which delivered me to Budapest exactly 24 hours late, ahem, so we could drive in convoy with Peter Michaleczky via Romania to Plovdiv for the first ever Bulgarian Eurocon. (Even though I have by now been to Plovdiv, this still sounds to me like a fictional name for an imaginary East European city – travel broadens one's sense of surreality.)

While in Budapest Peter was showing a few signs of Wrong Direction Syndrome, as if intent on winning the Vergil Award, but Szusza made a heroic bid by guiding us "completely reliably" in English and fluent Italian to a fine drinking place on the long island in the middle of the Danube, choosing the wrong bridge, and marching us along the dark island for an hour, taking us to the



**Bob Sheckley was particularly popular because his blend of satirical humour was allowable during the communist era**

*Ian Watson*



edge of insanity, exhaustion, and hypothermia. However, Peter was to drive impeccably all the way from Budapest to Plovdiv and back again (merely being robbed of chocolates by corrupt Serbian border guards), only to be fined by police in his own home town at his own front door for the first time in his life for exceeding the speed limit by 5 kph.

The fact that the Romanians neglected to stamp my passport, and Peter's, on the way in made us inexplicable unpersons when we tried to exit, but fortunately by then we had collected Dragosh (phonetic) from Budapest, an expert expediter, and undoubtedly a graduate of the Bene Gesserit Voice Academy, who explained, "First I announce my name with a strong manly middle tongue, don't give him time to think or be important. Then I name my function, such as EU Development Officer for Romania. Then I say I am the guide of these companions who are very important international delegates to a conference in Bulgaria, etc." Very effective.

But first we needed to traverse Romania itself. Entering Romania from Hungary was like going back 50 years. Or longer – hoping to take a short cut, we found ourselves on what looked like an original, unpaired Roman road made by Trajan. We stayed in a home-made hotel with beds out of Goldilocks. Next day Peter's walkie-talkies prove very useful for overtaking on blind bends. "No vehicles for 500 metres. Go now!" Romanian driving is mad. "Romanians are unaware of consequences."

Central Bucharest was bulldozed and rebuilt by Ceausescu in megalomaniac majestic style, although relics of villages remain in weird counterpoint. He copied the Champs Elysées to lead to his enormous palace. Tens of thousands of stray dogs doze and roam everywhere, but here is the only private educational TV station in Europe, and you can google anywhere from a mobile phone – the poorest shall be the most advanced in info-tech.

I'd thought that Bulgaria would also be a poor country, but it seemed much more modernised and prosperous than Romania. At last we could understand money again because 2 Leva equal 1



Euro instead of millions of Romanian Lei.

The Eurocon was taking place in a huge Stalinist building (but with jolly cafes just outside), the Syndicaldom na Kultura. We thought we had come a long way, but Imants Belogrivs, a Latvian publisher with wild white hair, had driven non-stop with a friend for 48 hours from Riga to Plovdiv; check that out on the map. A true enthusiast, he carried photos of every con he had been to in every land.

This Eurocon combined with Bulgacon, the annual Bulgarian SF con, and with Gamecon featuring the Balkan tournaments of *Magic: The Gathering* and *Warcraft 3: The Frozen Throne*. I, *Robot* had its European premier. Many side events happened, and talks about science, mythology, fantasy, by cosmologists, scholars, philologists, writers. Bob Sheckley was particularly popular because his blend of satirical humour was allowable during the Communist era, so he was massively translated behind the Iron Curtain.

People from 18 nations were present, a record for a Eurocon.

Such a feeling of international family. Among the Spanish sextet it was great to meet once again Léon Arsenal, whom I last saw at the 2003 Madrid Book Fair – now he was the first winner of a fiction prize worth a whopping 15,000 Euros newly established by Ediciones Minotauro of Barcelona. And to meet again German writer Eric Simon, whom I first got to know by letters when he was editor at the former East German publisher, Neue Berlin Verlag. Eric was already familiar with Bulgaria, and Bulgarians with him, because it was a country he was allowed to visit during the Communist era. And to see again Pascal Ducommun and meet Patrick Gyger, Pascal's successor as Director of the Maison d'Ailleurs, the museum of SF, utopia, and extraordinary voyages in Switzerland, the Francophone world's equivalent to our Science Fiction Foundation.

More of my friends from Hungary turned up, including Jun the Japanese-Hungarian who looks completely Japanese but can't speak any.

The Conan of Bulgaria kidnapped me for lunch in a park, to meet Bulgaria's leading SF publisher who had just produced a handsome 190-page bibliography of Bulgarian SF, so much unknown to me.

And I scarcely had a chance to speak to the Russians, although two of them invited me to Moscow in February for vodka and snow. It would have helped quite a bit if there had been any badges showing everyone's name and country – apparently this would have cost too much, though in hindsight the plastic sleeves could easily have been brought in from another country as a gift. One other weird thing that went slightly wrong was scheduling a certain huge restaurant as an evening venue for dinner without telling the restaurant that 150 people would turn up – to share the services of one waitress and one menu. Our meal arrived exactly 3 hours late, by which time we'd gone through all the stages of hope, anxiety, disbelief, panic, rage, despair, and sheer ironic resignation to fate.

And beware the taxi drivers of Plovdiv! Many would drive out of town at suicidal speed then back in again, to add a few extra Leva to the fare. Our taxi driver, on the way to the restaurant with one waitress, was definitely psychotic, a raving gesticulating bantam, a loop video in the middle of his dashboard showing cars crashing as he raced maniacally in the wrong direction. Only the two Serbs with us could control him somewhat by shouting threats in Serbo-Croatian which he chose to...

Eurocon in 2005 is part of the WorldCon in Glasgow, but for 2006 the vigorous, vivacious Ukrainian bid by Boris Sidyuk easily beat a Moscow bid uttered in hushed tones. "Speak up!" Dave Lally exhorted the Russian, to no avail. So it's onward to Kiev the Golden ([www.interportal.info](http://www.interportal.info)). I vow never to miss another Eurocon. They're an adventure, and an international family gathering, in interesting places. More UK fans ought to go. Insane taxi drivers and other perils and perplexities only add savour to the memories.



I have needed to establish The Vergil Award for worst native guide, Vergil having guided Dante into Hell.

Ian Watson

# Diseased mind

Tom Hunter talks to **Mark Roberts** about writing, getting published, being lazy and letting things mould. Plus, Mark exclusively reveals the shocking truth about his meetings with Jeff VanderMeer, his co-editor on *The Thackery T Lambshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*.

**Q.** So, starting at the beginning: You've always been a fan of genre, at what point did you start thinking seriously about writing?

**A.** I'd always written stories, since I was a young child. It was about nineteen years ago (when I was fifteen years old, according to official records) that I finally got the bottle to start sending them out. A couple of fanzine editors were very kind and me pointed out the flaws in my MS formatting and so on, but I was pretty lazy then (and haven't changed much), and it wasn't until I was twenty-one or so that I had my first acceptance from *Exuberance* magazine.

**Q.** Where have you been published so far?

**A.** The *Exuberance* story never made it – the editor folded the magazine the issue before it was due to appear. *Dancers at the End of Time* took the story after that. Since then, my fiction has appeared in *Albedo 1*, *Interzone*, *Monkey Butt Puppet Review*, and online at *Infinity Plus*.

**Q.** You once planned to set up and run your own small press, and maybe even publish the *Disease Guide* yourself, do you still have any plans in that direction?

**A.** I've been involved with various fanzines and magazines – more notably role-playing game-oriented ones than fiction ones – for about twenty years. I'd always harboured ideas of setting up a small press, and it would have complemented my existing business nicely. Then the dot-com bubble burst, and suddenly the opportunities for charging clients exorbitant rates for web design and development just disappeared – along with my cashflow. Plans for Chimeric Press were shelved. Probably indefinitely. I don't know – ask me again next year, I might have changed my mind!

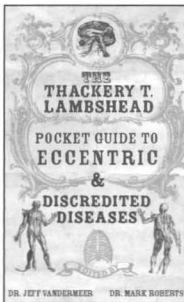
**Q.** You're active online making contacts, posting on bulletin boards etc, what do you make of the proliferation of online mags?

**A.** It's easy to get published. It just depends on how satisfied you will be with being published by an easy market – and it depends on your own definition of 'published'. There are quality thresholds at every level. If you post a story on your live journal, is that 'published'? Some people think it is. Many others don't.

Some writers pursue a market for a story untiringly. They aim at the top branches, the pro-magazines, and if it gets rejected from there, they work down through the semi-pro mags and so on through the fanzines, from beautifully produced and printed stuff right down to hand-written photocopied 'zines. And sometimes they are simultaneously following a parallel trail through web mags.

As I've already mentioned, I'm lazy. If a story doesn't get taken within the first five or so attempts, it then tends to just sit around, mouldering. (Note to aspiring writers! This, by the way, is no way at all to behave if you truly aspire to be a writer!) But if you just don't stop, it will get published. Somewhere.

It is still as difficult as it ever has been to get published in 'premium' markets, online or print. As to how new writers distinguish the premium markets... they have to get out there, go to BSFA meetings, go to conventions, talk to people and get their opinions. Get on the message boards at TTA and Night Shade, introduce yourself, be polite, ask the questions you want answers to. People will help.



**Q.** Before discovering the Storyville writers group, did you have any other less-successful ventures into networking?

**A.** I didn't get on too well on the forums at [www.ilovethelordjesu.shiemylight.com](http://www.ilovethelordjesu.shiemylight.com). I read little better at [www.nonotonotheroneformethanksimabittips.yalready.com](http://www.nonotonotheroneformethanksimabittips.yalready.com).

**Q.** When did you start going to conventions?

**A.** I'd started going to PBM and RPG cons when I was about thirteen, I think. But my first fiction con was Eastercon at Hinckley in 2001. Since then, I've become desensitised to the trauma (many may suggest 'anaesthetised' is more appropriate in my case), and have never looked back. Cons are

the bacchanalian festivals of genre. Without them, my life would be meaningless.

**Q.** Can you tell us what are you working on now?

**A.** There's a secret jungle book we can't talk about, for obvious reasons. I'm working on three short stories, two of which are very nearly ready to start the rounds. A (at least one) novel hovers like an unanswered question overhead.

The *Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases* is still keeping both Jeff and I very busy, with the UK Edition just round the corner and a US mass market paperback coming out next May (2005).

**Q.** You're also an artist. Where has your artwork appeared and do you find the disciplines crossover?

**A.** Just in terms of genre works... TTA, *Redsine*, *Albedo 1*, *Interzone*... ooh, and VanderMeer's *City of Saints & Madmen*. I've also worked on a wide range of commercial art – from corporate graphics through to character design and movie storyboards.

I draw characters, places, maps, plot diagrams. I've been building a city in 3d that features in some future stories, so I can have a wander around it. Sometimes I have a go at some more abstract stuff, like the 'shape' of a story, how I want it to look, and try to write it accordingly. I'm probably the only person who will ever realize that that has been done for that particular story, but I just liked the idea of trying it.

**Q.** And finally, *Matrix* isn't a kiss n tell style publication, but on behalf of our readers we're going to be nosy and ask about working with Jeff VanderMeer... Any particularly interesting or illustrative stories you'd like to share?

**A.** The last two times Jeff has come over from the States, I've picked him up from the airport, led him to my car, and gestured for him to get in. Both times he's wondered why the hell I wanted him to drive.

“It's easy to be published. It just depends on how satisfied you will be with being published by an easy market – and it depends on your own definition of ‘published.’”

Mark Roberts

# Amazing grace

Amazing Stories is at it again! The title that's escaped death more often than a comic book supervillain is back, this time as a media-friendly magazine with added fiction. Plus **Roderick Gladwish** leaps aboard *The Horror Express* for some old fashioned monster mashing.

The *Horror Express* is a new magazine for 2004. This is a pure horror publication. SF, mystery and crime stories are included but unless the free gift in the Corn Flakes is a cursed monkey claw don't expect to get in the door. The artwork is very strong with every story having a striking full-page black and white picture accompanying it. An A4 biannual, the Editor/publisher Marc Shemmans has plans to make it a quarterly.

There is an old-fashion style to the stories. Where *Midnight Street* or *The Third Alternative* tend to look at the psychological reality horrors such as children being groomed for sex or madness descending on a man like a suffocating blanket, *The Horror Express* goes for slash and gore. Monsters literally loom large. I was waiting for the story where a young couple's car breaks down on a stormy night and seek help at a lonely mansion, but it didn't appear. People do get lost, zombies walk, blood flows and pustules burst, visceral horror is the gig with this publication. No happy endings and lots of death, usually graphic. Poetry is present, dark and grisly to match the stories. There is subtlety in some of the fiction and supernatural horror is not everything.

All the authors in the first two issues have appeared in other magazines and some names such as Storm Constantine, Graham Masterton and Simon Clark are successful novelists.

Issue one carried seven stories and three poems. "Underbed" from the prolific Graham Masterton opened the first issue in fitting style. Masterton explored the imagination of a child in bed and dangerous worlds where a monstrous devouring creature is set free to devour. Storm Constantine's "Such a Nice Girl" was the cleverest story playing on the title several different ways. It was in fact upbeat horror counter to my general description of the fiction here. "Lick Your Lips" from Darrel Joyce was another monster tale with a sexually predatory male being consumed by a date – could happen to anyone.

Issue two, having consumed more flesh, had swelled to 84 pages from 64 and contained thirteen stories (exactly right for horror) and eleven poems. "Silent Night" by Shaun Hutson and "Amen" by Simon Clark had appeared in *Kerrang!* and *Nasty Naps* respectively. (I didn't know *Kerrang!* carried fiction either.) As with *Midnight Street* (*Matrix* 167) I wonder at the benefit of repeating fiction, unless it's classic. "She's Dead, Isn't She?" by Tony Campbell, has a guillotine at the start and you know that blade is going to drop.

Showing subtlety with zombies in "Mezots" (Carol Carmen) and "Amen" (Simon Clark), the former building slowly and the latter ending with a twist. Fear of the number 13 in "Death Stop 13" downplayed the gore, but death still waits in Jeff Skinner's work. The issue's final story, "Like Mother, Like Daughter" by Barry J House, was definitive science fiction with technology allowing something not possible before, a traumatised scientist takes her denied revenge, leading to a pitiful tragedy as all revenge does.

Amongst the interviews and reviews Kevin Etheridge summarised and organised the works of Graham Masterton to aid collectors. Thanks to him I now know where the term 'chapbook' comes from. This looks like it may be a useful regular feature. Interviews with Storm Constantine and Gabriel Strange covering their work for *Warhammer* RPG and *Immanion Press* are also included.

I always look for nepotism in small press and found Marc Shemmans had slipped one of his



shorts into Issue one and his wife, Joanne (Associate Editor), appears in issue two. Their tales are of equal quality to the rest so this isn't an ego job. A few of their poems appear too.

*Amazing Stories* is the oldest SF magazine of all, first coming out before the genre had a name. The magazine, or at least the title, keeps coming back when you're absolutely certain it's dust. Apart from hitting it over the head with a shovel and burying it at a crossroads nothing seems to stop it. First issued in April 1926 by editor and publisher Hugo 'Award' Gernsback, its highs and lows finally seemed to reach an end in 1995. Except now it's back. Again.

Paizo Publishing has resurrected it for the twenty-first century. Their other titles, *Dragon*, *Dungeon* and *Unfeared*, are centred on game play, in particular dungeons and dragons.

*Amazing Stories* has become a sort of SFX with fiction. This is a news and reviews magazine with a clutch of stories dropped into the centre. Reviews cover books, comics, films (cinema and DVD releases) and music.

Interviews include Robert Silverberg, George RR Martin

and Larry Niven. With these are a couple of in-depth articles. This issue covered *Batman Begins* – apparently it's going to have a globetrotting James Bond style to it – the development of other comic books to film and George R.R. Martin's *The Hedge Knight* being converted into a comic book.

Fiction was by some big names. "Proof" by Timothy Zahn, was an interesting tale in prisoner control. "The Spider's Amazement" by Bruce Sterling suffered from history overtaking him. An unnamed, but identifiable, tyrant awaits capture when his oil-rich, desert land is invaded by a superpower. He uses a cryochamber to outlive his enemies and humanity. I read it waiting for a twist and when it came it was neatly original.

Ray Vukcevich supplied an upbeat tale, "Human Subjects". Aliens may be experimenting with us or some guys need a push to express their feelings. Gene Wolfe produced a dark character driven short "Monster".

Neil Gaiman was in there with a surreal life summary of Harlan Ellison". This was an intro to a Harlan Ellison" short story based on an illustration involving rubber ducky, an underused SF element.

If *The Horror Express* taught me what a chapbook was, I learnt from *Amazing Stories* that Harlan Ellison" is now a registered trademark. The reviews and articles were good, a bit of fiction is exactly what SFX misses. It might achieve newsagent SF magazine status since Paizo Publishing's other products can be bought off the shelf. If that happens everyone should buy it to convince the marketers that fiction can boost sales.

The editor used Haiku to fill the empty letters page, if you don't send letters they'll do more Haiku – please send letters.

**Amazing Stories**  
Paizo Publishing, 3245 146th  
PL. SE, Suite 110 Bellevue,  
WA 98007 [www.paizo.com](http://www.paizo.com)

**The Horror Express**  
PO Box 11600, Birmingham,  
B30 2WQ  
[www.horrorexpress.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.horrorexpress.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

# Publishing with a sting in the tail

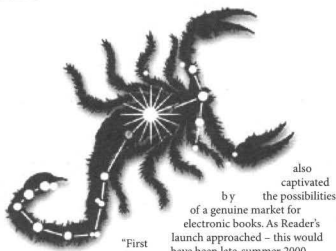
**Martin Sketchley** talks to Bridget McKenna of Scorpion Digital Publishing about the advantages and disadvantages of digital books, being years ahead of the market and chasing the American dream.

**S**corpion Digital is a publishing company specializing in science fiction, fantasy and horror e-books in Microsoft Reader format. "Physically located" in Seattle, US, the company was founded in the summer of 2000 by mother and daughter team (which sounds like something from *The Generation Game*, but isn't) Bridget and Marti McKenna. With interest in e-books growing, I thought I'd interview Bridget McKenna about the subject of publishing books in electronic format, from her perspective as one with "first-mover advantage".

I started off with the basics. I thought Scorpion Digital must have been set up quite early in the development of the technology used for e-books, and asked McKenna if things have developed much since then? "We knew we were starting early – just at the dawn of modern e-book technology, really – but we wanted to be well established by the time everyone else started getting into the act. The thing is, we thought we were starting a year or two too early. It was probably more like four or five. It's a good thing we didn't know that then!"

"The basic product we design for, Microsoft Reader (though we do convert to other formats later), hasn't changed a lot in four years. What's changed, though, is the potential audience. The popularity of hand-held computers has increased tremendously in recent years, and that's the backbone of the e-book market. Now there's also the Tablet PC, which is also a great platform for electronic reading, and more and more people have LCD monitors on their desktop machines, which makes onscreen reading no less pleasant than reading the printed page."

I wondered what made McKenna and her cohorts set up Scorpion? Was it just an obvious gap in the market? The American Dream? A desire to be different?



Reader team as an editor, and it was difficult not to become enamoured with the technology. I read material using that application for 40 hours a week, learned how to design and build books for it in the course of my contract there, and became quite the little evangelist for Reader as an electronic reading experience. It really is the most book-like of all the electronic reading platforms in existence, and the one designed with what we at Scorpion like to call 'respect for the book'.

"The American Dream? Sure. Who doesn't dream of having their own publishing empire, aside from sane people? A gap in the market? Definitely. Marti is also an editor with lots of experience, and was

they should. Also, the royalties for electronic rights at that time were still too low, based on production costs for a print book. We jumped right in, offering the authors 50% of our receipts from distributors, and setting our book price at \$4.99-5.99 – less than the price of a mass-market paperback."

So, given their early entry and clear strong background in the technology, I wondered if Scorpion has much competition. "Yes and no. There are a lot of e-publishers doing SF and fantasy. Most of them aren't doing good SF and fantasy, though, because they don't know the difference. Furthermore, they aren't packaging their books well or writing good sales copy. 90% of them aren't really competition for us. The people who do know what they're doing, such as Bob Kruger at Electric Story, are genuine competition, and we're glad they're in the market. They help stimulate demand for quality genre e-books, and help legitimise small press electronic publishing."

I wondered if authors are keen for their work to be published in e-book format, and how popular it is with readers. "Some authors have yet to be convinced regarding e-books, while others have embraced the format enthusiastically. The same is true for readers. I'd say authors get on board faster than readers, especially for reprints of existing books: more readers + more royalties = not much of a downside. For readers the issues are...well I don't think it would be too much of an exaggeration to say emotional. People have strong views on books, and readers can be quite hard-nosed about what is or isn't 'acceptable'. People love the qualities of books that are actually artefacts of manufacturing. In general we find the younger the person, the less resistance they have to a new form of book. Kids are all over the idea of e-books."

I asked McKenna what advantages e-books have over



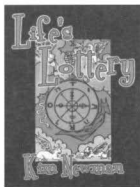
"The thing is, we thought we were starting a year or two too early. It was probably more like four or five. It's a good thing we didn't know that then!"

**Bridget McKenna**

normal books as far as readers are concerned, and whether there are any disadvantages? "The main advantages are cost and portability. I no longer have to decide which books to take on holiday: I take them all, and I've got hundreds on my laptop. Then there's the convenience of ordering a book while sitting at your desk, and having it there instantly, not having to wait four to five working days for it to be shipped. With some formats, such as Reader, you can highlight and make text notes (and erase them later), look up words in the on-screen dictionary (the definition pops up over your text) or search the text. There are other advantages, too: a reader can change the size of the text, making every book large-print, or you can even have your computer read the book to you, which makes every book accessible to visually impaired people.

"Disadvantages? Certainly. E-books can be beautifully designed – we like to think ours are – but they can't replace the feel of high-quality paper. They don't feel like a print book or, for that matter, smell like one. We believe that more people are going to be reading an increasing number of books electronically in future, although there will be a market for print books for the foreseeable future."

I wondered if all the books



Scorpius publishes are always "in print" or whether they get the e-book equivalent of being remembered? "Our contract specifies that if a book's sales drop below a certain number (set by agreement between us and the author), the author has the option to take the book back. If the author doesn't exercise this option, we can decide to declare it "out of print". So far, neither has ever happened. It costs us very little to keep a book in print once it's been published, so there's no disadvantage to just letting it earn royalties for the author, even if it is doing so slowly."

I asked whether Scorpius sells its books through retail outlets, or whether they're all downloaded directly. "All our books are sold through retailers, such as Fictionwise.com, eBooks.com, eBookAd.com. We give half of the

The main advantages are cost and portability. I no longer have to decide which books to take on holiday: I take them all, and I've got hundreds on my laptop.

**Bridget McKenna**

cover price or better to most of them, but they spend the money driving visitors to their sites, so it works well for everyone."

Presumably one of the attractions of publishing e-books is reduced costs and wastage compared with traditional publishing. I dared to ask if that means Scorpius is phenomenally profitable... "Oh, I wish! It's true we don't have to worry about printing, binding, warehousing, shipping, or returns, and frankly those are the main reasons why one can afford to start a small-press e-publishing business. But there's still plenty to be done to each title, and at Scorpius we do it all right here: converting the source files or scanning a print book and then converting, designing the covers and interiors, proofreading and testing the files, writing the sales

copy and other metadata, as well as getting the files to the distributor. The reduced costs in some areas are the reason we can get by with so little staff and do more than a couple of books a year. But half of everything we receive from retailers or distributors goes to our authors (compared with a much smaller percentage for print publishers), and we pay our expenses out of our half, so what's left over at the end of a quarter isn't that impressive. We do plan to be profitable someday..."

If you'd like to help Scorpius Digital along the rocky road to profitability, visit the company's website, making sure you're prepared to be astonished at the range of high quality e-books on offer. Scorpius recently published *American Sorrows* by Jay Lake, while other recent releases include *Neuron Tango* by Dana Williams Paxson, and *Life's Lottery* by Kim Newman. Other titles include *A Writer's Life* and *Meridian Days* – both by Eric Brown – *Hardwired* by Walter Jon Williams, *Nearly People* by Conrad Williams, and if that wasn't exciting enough, Scorpius is soon to publish *Dreadnade* by cuddly martial arts expert, John Meaney. If you need even more incentive, you can even download FREE STUFF from the Scorpius Digital website. There, I thought that'd get you interested.

# Spinnerets



Described as a structural analysis of 1980s "cyberpunk" films for literary and political content, *The Cyberpunk Educator* is a freely downloadable film made up entirely of clips from television and films. The focus is on films like *Blade Runner*, *The Terminators*, *Aliens*, *Akira*, *Mad Max* and *Robocop*. Once you get past a rather too lengthy opening section with clips from the films in question, and if you can put up with the computer generated voices, *The Cyberpunk Educator* is an interestingly made, sometimes amusing, sometimes thought-provoking, frequently mesmerizing documentary. Occasionally a little more exposition and a little less electronic dance music would have been welcome, but it is certainly worth your time.

To download the film you will need a BitTorrent client. For more information, try <http://btfaq.com>. Don't expect very high download speeds, you will need to be patient.

You can also purchase the DVD for just \$10. For more details see: [www.cyberpunkfilms.com](http://www.cyberpunkfilms.com). The filmmakers are currently working on an independent sf feature film, *Planet Weather Control*.



The URL for John Meaney's website is changing from something unfeasibly long and difficult to remember to the incredibly slick and professional-sounding [www.johndmeaney.com](http://www.johndmeaney.com). Visit it and check out his blog.



The website of BSFA Award-winning SF artist Dominic Harman is currently in the process of being revamped, and will be live shortly. Explore Dominic's visual weirdness at <http://www.dominic-harman.com/>.



My own website's also had something of a revamp recently – [www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk) – why not pay it a visit and reward my considerable efforts? If anything looks horrible or you fond and mistakes (sic), please let me know...

## URLs of relevance to this issue

For more information about Scorpius Digital Publishing, including details about how to order any of their books go to:

[www.scorpiousdigital.com](http://www.scorpiousdigital.com)

### Other relevant URLs

[www.johndmeaney.com](http://www.johndmeaney.com)  
[www.dominic-harman.com](http://www.dominic-harman.com)  
[www.cyberpunkfilms.com](http://www.cyberpunkfilms.com)  
[btfaq.com](http://btfaq.com)

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](mailto:www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)  
[msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk)

# Fandom begins at forty

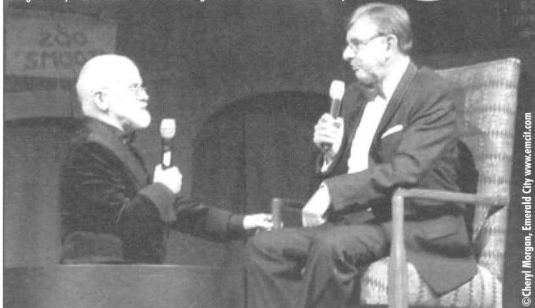
**CHECK  
POINT**  
Mark Plummer on fans and fandom

Sometimes it seems that the sixties never happened in British fandom. Of course it's ridiculous to assign a behaviour to a decade, and to assume that somehow everybody should change that behaviour on 31 December of years ending in nine, but we all do it, and in popular culture it's the sixties that probably has the strongest identity of all. Yet in fandom it seems strangely empty, a buffer zone that exists only to fill the gap between the fifties – the heyday of Irish fandom, of *Hyphen* and *Eye* and *Atom*, of the birth of TAFF and OMPA – and the seventies with its *Rats* and *Gannets*, *Stop Breaking Down* and *Maya*, and all culminating in the 1979 WorldCon.

But actually what happened in British fandom in the sixties was Peter Weston; and if you don't know about Peter – and even if you do – I'd recommend you take a look at *With Stars in My Eyes: My Adventures in British Fandom*. This is a memoir running from his first encounters with organised fandom through to the '79 WorldCon which Peter chaired. Along the way there's the story of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group and their first foray to an Eastercon in 1964, the birth and development of the multiply Hugo-nominated fanzine *Speculation*, the TAFF trip to the US in 1974 – back in the day when such a journey was still a big deal – and the long build-up to Seacon '79, then by far the largest convention ever held in this country. All this set against the background of life in Britain in sixties and seventies.

For anybody of my generation – I was born a couple of months after Peter's first convention outing – there's a strong sense of both familiarity and difference. The essential experience Peter describes may be familiar enough, and there are certainly enough contemporary names kicking around in the narrative to provide a strong link with modern fandom (you have to remind yourself that when Peter talks about Edward James and Terry Pratchett he's actually talking about *teenagers*), but, christ, it was *hard* being a fan in those days. You had to really go out and look for your sf. Fanzine production seemed to be such a substantial effort that you have to wonder how anybody ever

Youngster Terry Pratchett learns at the knee of grandmaster Peter Weston at this year's WorldCon in Boston.



© Cheryl Morgan, Emerald City www.emc.it

got anything done and travelling any significant distance within the UK was a major excursion.

*With Stars...* is very much a personal history; the subtitle *My Adventures...* is very relevant. It's an insight into the fannish roots of some people that we perhaps overlook – legendary bookseller Rog Peyton is the obvious example – but fandom wasn't all sweetness and light, and some participants are less than favourably portrayed; they may well have a different take on some of the events recounted here.

If you were there in the sixties and seventies you'll probably want to see what Peter has to say about you – and if you weren't but you have any interest in what made fandom the way it is today, I can't recommend his book too highly.

*With Stars in My Eyes* is published by NESFA Press, as a tie-in with Peter's guest of honour appearance at this year's WorldCon in Boston.

It's a hardback but don't wait for the paperback as there's almost certainly won't be one. It's also unlikely that there'll be a UK edition. In the UK, copies can be obtained from Andy Richards at Cold Tonnage Books ([andy@coldtonnage.demon.co.uk](mailto:andy@coldtonnage.demon.co.uk)) or Rog Peyton at Replay Books ([Rog@replaybooks.tinet.co.uk](mailto:Rog@replaybooks.tinet.co.uk)).

As a consequence of this book's publication, Claire and I ended up going to a reunion last weekend. This was a slightly odd experience as we

went without the usual prerequisite, that of having attended the event for which everybody was now reunited. But Peter asked us along as 'observers'. As a friend pointed out, we missed a trick in not donning silver jump-suits to deliver greetings from the future.

The 1964 Eastercon was held in Peterborough. At the time, conventions didn't really have formal names; you hardly needed them when there was only one such event a year. But the 1963 convention had also been held in Peterborough, and was popularly referred to as Petercon, so 1964's return inevitably became Repeatercon.

This was Peter Weston's first convention – other neophytes that year included Rog Peyton, Edward James and Terry Pratchett – and earlier this year he discovered that the venue, The Bull Hotel, is still in business. Initial soundings established that there was interest in a reunion, and thus was born Re-repeatercon with some twenty attendees, almost all of whom had been at the original 1964 Eastercon.

There were a few exceptions aside from us. Bill Burns is technically part of the 1965 Eastercon generation, but as he hasn't missed an Eastercon since (despite living in the US for nearly twenty-five years) he came over from New York with his wife Mary who's even more of a neo as she didn't start attending Eastercons

until 1970. Eileen Weston and Farah Mendelsohn – accompanying Peter and Edward James respectively – are both of later fannish generations, and if Gavin Shorrocks was there in 1964 he must have been incredibly young.

The '64 veterans came from all over. Some – Alan Rispin, Jim and Marion Linwood, Dave Barber, Dicky and Margaret Howett – hadn't been to a convention for decades; others like Ina Shorrocks, Susie Haynes and Peter Mabey remain active in the fan scene. A surprising number have ended up as booksellers – Ted Ball, Ron Bennett, George and Rita Locke, Rog Peyton and Ken Slater – but there were also BSFA stalwarts (Keith and Wendy Freeman, Doreen Rogers), writers (Harry Harrison) and critics (Edward James). There were plenty of artefacts to jog memories, and even films (from Dave and Dicky). Old stories were wheeled out, although I'm pretty sure a few people were genuinely hearing them for the first time.

I suppose it was almost inevitable that there'd be enthusiasm for another forty-years-on reunion for next year – when Bill can attend legitimately – and I don't suppose it'll stop there. I wouldn't mind betting that Pat McMurray has already booked the Hotel de France in St Helier for 2033 for his own fortieth anniversary, and if so I expect I'll be there too, just to remind him what a neo he still is.

# meditations

The observant amongst you (or just those who bother to read the magazine) will already have noticed that we've changed things around with this month's media reviews. Pushing this section towards the back of the magazine does not, however, mean that we're putting any less emphasis on our media coverage. Hopefully the changes will help us continue to improve our reporting of media science fiction and fantasy. Let us know what you think.

One change you'll notice immediately is that we've introduced the Matrix "Must See" award for those film, television or DVD releases we think that you, well, must see. We won't scatter these awards around like confetti, so if you see one, you'll know that whatever we're recommending is worth going out of your way to see.

Another difference in this issue of *Matrix* is the large number of non-American films we're reviewing. We didn't plan it that way, it's just that most of the really interesting stuff that's come out recently wasn't American – and wasn't even in English. Instead, we bring you the best of the Far East, a bewildering offering from Russia and a dose of oddness from France. Not that we're neglecting Hollywood, their best is here too. But take it as an indication that *Matrix* is willing to try anything, from anywhere to bring the best in sf to our readers.

In reviewing *Immortal*, *Casshern* and *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* in this issue we are marking, I think, a new era in film making. All three films were shot against blue screens and created almost entirely inside a computer. I have reservations about all three movies, and in particular about the relationship (or rather, the lack of it) between real actors and these virtual worlds. Nevertheless the economics of blockbusters (reports suggest *Sky Captain* cost between a quarter and a half as much as *Spider-Man 2*) mean that the future of film will be digital.

Enough prattling from me (there's plenty more of that inside), and on with the reviews.

Martin McGrath  
Media Editor

# Flicker

## Sony defeats Spider-Man?

Sam Raimi has said that Columbia, the Sony-owned studio behind his enormously successful *Spider-Man* franchise are considering pulling the plug after the third film. Raimi, who has gone on record as saying that he would like to continue making *Spider-Man* films for as long as he is allowed, has been told that the studio want the third film in the series to wrap up all the plot threads that he has set running in the first two films.

Raimi is widely reported to have said that studio boss Amy Pascal wanted "a proper ending to the the *Spider-Man* saga. I think she's thinking that the audience feels they want to see one more and no more. They want to have a proper ending to the story now." However *Matrix* understands that Marvel Comics have mapped out as many as six films with Sony.

It is, of course, possible that Columbia are concerned not to flog the critically acclaimed franchise to death, but one other possible reason for the proposed break is that majority of the cast signed contracts committing them to three films. Attempts to persuade them to return beyond that contractual obligation are likely to be both difficult and expensive – especially as the first two films' enormous success propelled both Kirsten Dunst (Mary Jane) and Tobey Maguire (Peter Parker) to superstar status. The studio may be setting the stage for some tough negotiating or they may prefer to stop now and proceed with a cheaper cast at some later date.

A hero no more?



## Christopher Reeves 1952-2004



The words iconic and heroic are frequently overused, but Christopher Reeves, who died aged just 52, deserved both.

For a generation of fans he was Superman incarnated – square-jawed, strong and handsome. Though Reeves himself would later concede that he stayed in the role too long, his desire to use his popularity as Superman to promote peace during the Reagan era was to his credit.

Off-screen he was an activist for human rights long before the accident that left him paralysed. After his fall he demonstrated true heroism – through both his personal struggle to walk again and his fight to open up avenues of medical research for others.

## Ashes to ashes

Sam Raimi has ruled out any prospect of a follow-up to *Freddy Vs Jason* featuring Ash, the lead character from *The Evil Dead*. Raimi has said he didn't feel confident in the proposed ideas to lend his character to the production. A *Freddy Vs Jason* sequel minus Ash will go ahead.

## Very big shark film

Jan De Bont (*Speed 2*) will direct an adaptation of *Meg*, the novel about a prehistoric shark by Steve Alten. The story is about one man's search for a *cacharodon megalodon* – the ancestor of the modern great white shark – which, he believes, is about to resurface and cause havoc.

## Neon dreamer

Living in *Neon Dreams* is a modern retelling of *Alice in Wonderland* by first time writer/director Jeremy Tarr. With a cast including Alan Cumming, Daryl Hannah, Marilyn

Manson, Nia Vardalos and Jonathon Pryce, *Living in Neon Dreams* is currently shooting in Cape Town.

## Buffy goes South

Sarah Michelle Gellar (*Buffy The Vampire Slayer*) has joined the cast of *Southland Tales*, the next film by Donnie Darko's Richard Kelly.

## Mars of Tomorrow

Robert Rodriguez is officially off the adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Princess of Mars*. He has been replaced by Kerry Conran (*Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*). Ehren Kruger (*Brothers Grimm*, *The Ring*) will write a new script.

## Looking dodgy...

The *Fantastic Four* are looking distinctly ordinary in the first publicity stills... Karl Urban (*Lord of the Rings* Eomer) will run around corridors shooting things in *Doom*... The trailer for *A Sound of Thunder* really sucks.

## New caper



Brandon Routh: new *Man of Steel*

Work on the new Superman movie gathers pace with the announcement that director Bryan Singer has selected the relatively unknown Brandon Routh as his lead. Singer has also announced that the new film will not be a "reboot" but will be tied into the Richard Donner/Christopher Reeves films, picking up the story after Superman has been missing for six years. Singer has also said that he will be using John William's music from those films.

# Acts of Heroism

**H**ero tells a story based on the King of Qin's (Chen) attempts to unify China in the third century BC. It is centered on a nameless hero (Li) who comes to court to claim the reward for the killing of three assassins. These three assassins have sworn to kill the king of Qin and have attempted to do so but have been thwarted. The King, in response, has put up a reward for whoever manages to rid him of this problem.

Once Nameless is presented to the King the story takes the form of flashbacks as both tell competing versions of the story. These flashbacks contain some excellent fight scenes and spectacular cinematography, each is also conveniently colour coded (so we don't get lost).

This movie is the most expensive film in Chinese history – even after Li took a pay cut to take part in the project. The casting is excellent; in addition to Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, and Donnie Yen are the assassins Broken Sword, Flying Snow, and Long Sky. Zhang Ziyi (*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*) plays the maid Moon. The camera work by Christopher Doyle is breathtaking. This is a visual feast. Even the action sequences are poetic and romantic in nature.



Denis Jackman gets into some serious martial arts action with Hero.

This story has it all: love (required and unrequired), revenge, heroism, sacrifice, honour and, added to all that, an exploration of the philosophy of martial arts. We are shown the poetry and ballet-like quality of sword-fights, the meaning of heroism and are told that it can be a double-edged sword. We see vast armies, skies full of arrows, fluttering banners and a forest fight sequence (between Flying Snow and Moon) which is dreamlike. The use of CGI compliments the wire-work nicely.

This movie will be compared with *Crouching Tiger Hidden*

*Dragon* and *Rashomon*, and may be found wanting by some. The central problem here is not the film work or the plot but the acting. I was never fully engaged with the characters especially with the central character Nameless. Throughout the course of the ninety-nine minutes we never seem to empathise with the characters, which is important especially in light of the ending.

This film is worth seeing; it is a remarkable spectacle and very enjoyable. It is not a typical martial arts flick, full of gratuitous violence, but more of an art film. However,

beyond the 99 minute running time, I doubt if you would come back for more. It has, however, primed me for the director's next film, *House of the Flying Daggers*, due for release later this year.

## Hero

Director: Yimou Zhang  
Screenplay: Feng Li, Bin Wang & Yimou Zhang  
Cinematographer: Christopher Doyle  
Starring: Jet Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Zhang Ziyi, Daoming Chen, Donnie Yen  
99 minutes

# A night out with zombies

**I**t's dark and you're alone. The hideous noise of relentless chewing echoes from every corner of the room. The sound punctuated only by ominous shuffling and the occasional, mindless gibber. You're surrounded and there can be no escape, but this is not the worst thing that can happen. After all you've paid good money to see this movie, and by God you're going to watch it – even if the rest of the audience (and their mobile phones) seem determined to thwart you...

It's Saturday night at my local multiplex and I'm trying to review *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, thinking maybe they shouldn't let people bring popcorn to popcorn movies anymore, and hoping, wishing, praying for a sudden zombie invasion, if only to raise the average IQ in the cinema.

Don't get me wrong, I love



Tom Hunter visits his local multiplex.

Big Dumb Movies. They're a classic part of what cinema is about for me, and *Resident Evil* doesn't disappoint.

If you've seen the first one, actually if you've seen anything by Paul WS Anderson, you'll know what to expect: There's explosions, crashes, fights and crap one-liners galore – 'We're expendable. And we've just been expended!' is up there with the greats if you ask me – and for half of the audience at

least there's always Milla running around in a chainmail vest.

In fact this movie is so utterly formulaic that WS can't even be bothered to direct it (some former second unit actually points the camera on this one) and still it doesn't matter. I believe scientific research (of the kind evil corporation Umbrella would sponsor) will soon prove that, taken in moderation, these movies are actually good for you. Not to mention the fact

they fund the kind of movies we like to call films. And yet there's still something gnawing away at me about this whole cinematic experience, and it's not the undead. No, because the one real flaw of this movie is that the bitey, moany ones never get a proper look in when they should be the stars of the show.

That aside, RE2 is possibly the perfect Saturday night movie, providing you barricade yourself away from the insensible living and watch it with pizza rather than people for company.

## Resident Evil: Apocalypse

Director: Alexander Witt  
Screenplay: Paul WS Anderson  
Cinematographer: Derek Rogers  
Starring: Milla Jovovich, Sienna Guillory, Oden Fehr, Thomas Kretschmann, Sophie Vavasseur  
94 minutes



# Shelling out

**Martin McGrath** reviews *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. It was a tough job following up one of the best anime movies of all time, but with amazing animation, complex philosophy and a satisfying story, *Innocence* is the kind of sequel the Wachowskis wish they'd made.

**MUST SEE!**

The original *Ghost in the Shell* (*GitS*) remains a landmark in quality animation and one of the most successful post-cyberpunk sf action movies ever made. Mingling philosophy with wild action sequences, *GitS*

remains an almost perfect blend of urban grittiness, large weapons, technology fetishism, big ideas and stylish violence.

In the wake of *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer*, many science fiction authors have struggled, and failed, to achieve the same, apparently effortless, unification of the weird and the wild. *Ghost in the Shell* deserves its place amongst the most exalted company and is marred only by a slightly abrupt ending.

Now writer/director Oshii (*Avalon*) has returned to the world of Batou and the crew at Section 9 with a sequel: *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. There is nothing abrupt about this sequel. *Innocence* is a thoughtful film, full of quotations from (amongst others) Buddha, Confucius, The Bible and John Milton, but it intersperses quite lengthy debates about what it is to be flesh and blood with high-octane, spectacular violence.

*Innocence* is a remarkably made film. Watching both the original and its sequel together, it seems ridiculous that *GitS* is less than ten years old. In *Innocence* the world of 2032 is so much more fully realised, more precisely detailed and beautifully rendered that the original now seems rather dowdy – though it still has its own power. Production IG, the animation house behind both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Innocence* (and the anime interlude in *Kill Bill: Volume One*) has excelled itself – this is a beautiful film to watch.

If there is a weakness it is perhaps that Oshii has overindulged himself in his philosophical ramblings. The former seminary

*Ghost in the Shell 2: Human obsession with recreating images of themselves*



student seems more at home considering why humans are so obsessed with recreating and understanding the world through images of themselves – from dolls to clones, pets to children – and the plot is sometimes overwhelmed by the philosophy. Once or twice the film chooses to batter the viewer

over the head with displays of erudition rather than enlighten us through the drama. Reports that Japanese producers wanted subtitles on the Japanese release because Oshii had his actors speaking in archaic Japanese demonstrates the risks taken with *Innocence*.

But this is no *Matrix: Reloaded*, despite a wayward middle third, *Innocence* is artistically and intellectually more coherent than its Western imitators. Unlike the *Matrix* films, *Innocence* rallies magnificently for a thrilling and almost completely satisfying climax.

*Innocence* doesn't quite have the razor sharp focus of *GitS* – the "villains" of the piece are not revealed until near the end and there isn't quite the same sense of dramatic tension that wowed us in the original. *Innocence* is very good, but don't expect a retread of *GitS*. Nevertheless, it is some time

since an American (indeed a Western) science fiction film felt as satisfying on this many levels. *Innocence* is both intelligent and exciting. This is quality science fiction by whichever measure you choose to judge it, as thoughtful and entertaining as anything in literary cyberpunk.

At the time of writing it seems uncertain when (or if) *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* will be released in UK cinemas and it will probably be available to import on DVD before it reaches cinemas here. That's a great shame because *Innocence* is a visual treat and really deserves to be seen on a very big screen to be fully appreciated. However, *Innocence* is to be released in France and Belgium on 1 December, and might just be worth the trip across The Channel on its own.

## *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*

Writer/Director: Mamoru Oshii

Starring: Akio Otsuka, Atsuko Tanaka, Koichi Yamadera, Tamio Oki, Yutaka Nakano, Naoto Takenaka

99 mins.

• A US region DVD of *Ghost in the Shell 2* is released on 28 December.



Julianne Moore watching the skies in *The Forgotten*

Taking a brief look at some new cinema releases.

**T**he pre-publicity for *The Forgotten* present the film as a psychological horror story. It is nothing of the sort, and is instead an X-Files-ish alien abduction story. In fact, the alien threat is rather too quickly and easily revealed, robbing the story of any real sense of tension or surprise. The ease with which a covert alien plot to monitor and experiment upon humanity is revealed by Julianne Moore's mourning book editor leaves one wondering quite how it had managed to stay secret for so long. Ultimately forgettable, *The Forgotten* lacks conviction or style.

Also in the not-terrible-but-really-not-very-good-either category is *The Exorcist: The Beginning*. It's another in Hollywood's long line of reliably unfrighting horror films that replaces genuine shocks with big budget BOO! moments. It isn't even close to being as effective as the original (*The Exorcist* being one of those rare movies that remains shocking even after repeated viewings) but this prequel is certainly no worse than the already extant and much inferior, sequels. The reliable Stellan Skarsgård's performance as the young Father Merrin is far better than the film around him deserves.

John Frankenheimer's original *The Manchurian Candidate* remains a pretty effective thriller, making Jonathon Demme's remake with Denzel Washington look a little pointless and anaemic. It joins films like *Rollerball* and *The Stepford Wives* on the growing list of remakes of sf films from the 1960s and 1970s that seem designed only to remove the political fangs of the originals and reinforce the sense that the passion has disappeared from mainstream Hollywood movie-making. The new *The Manchurian Candidate* is not a disastrous film, Washington at least is always watchable, but it leaves no lasting impression and will certainly not wear as well as the original. (MMcG)

# Casshern in



Geneva Melzack just goes with the flow and still gets lots of pleasure from Japanese superhero movie *Casshern*.

**C**asshern is apparently based on a 1973 anime series that is common cultural currency in Japan. Without the supporting structure of this ingrained cultural context, the film is more than a little bemusing. It offers up a series of iconic images, which, without the relevant referential associations, can appear lushly fantastical and surreal.

Presumably the Japanese have a general knowledge of the pre-existing cultural myths about legendary hero Casshern that will allow them to piece together a coherent story from these images. Those of us who are unfamiliar with the original anime series might, with the help of a heavy dose of speculation, be able to construct some sort of narrative from the raw images we're given, but *Casshern* is a film that can equally well be appreciated on purely aesthetic terms, without a concern for making sense of the story.

Director Kazuaki Kiriya is known for his music videos, and the visual style he has given to *Casshern* owes a lot to his experience in that field. Most of the time the colours are striking and super-saturated, though some scenes occasionally switch to a starker black-and-white look. As well as being super-saturated, sometimes the colours even begin to spill over into one another, particularly the lighter colours and the whites. People are outlined in haloes of shimmering light as the paleness of their faces bleeds into the surrounding darkness. Some of the visuals, the colours and lighting in particular, are reminiscent of Western science fiction film: an early scene has the distant orange glow of certain shots from *Blade Runner*, while some of darker indigo colouring and claustrophobic nocturnal setting of other scenes evokes shades of *City of Lost Children*. Curiously, there is one scene that feels strongly visually reminiscent of Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*: something about the violent scarlets and the luscious theatricality of it all.

The style is theatrical, and comic book: exaggerated, flamboyant, richly performative. The music video aesthetic is about

showmanship, about making images that look as cool as possible. *Casshern*'s images are carefully constructed to be as striking and as stylish as they can be, and this construction is often self-consciously stagey. Creating such images is not just about the post-production effects; it's also about the costumes and the sets, both of which are expressively dramatic. The super-villain character gets to wear a gorgeously expressive cape and a slightly campy bleached hair do, while the super-hero character is clad in an articulated white jump-suit.

Perhaps *Casshern*'s overall aesthetic is one of iconography. That's what the theatricality and the comic book and music video qualities all tap into, as does the story's dependence upon popular culture. The characters in *Casshern* are your archetypal heroes and villains, bedecked with the looks and the attitude and the iconic trappings that go with being a hero or a villain (so what if your heroic/villainous status doesn't come out in your deeds?).

What do you really need to know about *Casshern*? Just that it's an unstoppable stream of iconic imagery: mad scientists, vats full of body parts, giant robot armies, a team of twisted outcasts, a resurrected superman, a distant fortress, a panorama of burning destruction, and a whole lot more besides.

The English subtitled version of *Casshern* premiered at this year's FrightFest in August, a festival of horror, fantasy and SF on film. However, the Japanese film has now secured UK distribution so should hopefully be on general release over here from early 2005.

## Casshern

Director: Kazuaki Kiriya

Screenplay: Kazuaki Kiriya, Dai Sato,

Shotaro Suga, Tatsuo Yoshida

Cinematographer: Kazuaki Kiriya

Starring: Yusuke Iseya, Kumiko Aso, Akira Terao, Kanako Higuchi, Fumiyo Kohinata, Hiroyuki Miyasako, Jun Kaname.

141 minutes

# Immortal coil

Is this the secret of eternal life, or does it just feel like it lasts forever?

**L**ike *Casshern* and *Sky Captain and The World of Tomorrow* (see reviews on pages 22 and 24), *Immortal* (Ad Vitam) has been created almost entirely inside the guts of a computer. All three feature stunning visuals – easily the equal of traditional Hollywood blockbusters – but all three also demonstrate the weaknesses of a technology that remains some way from maturity and the continued importance of sticking to the basics – good stories, tight plotting and well written scripts.

Adapted by Bilal from his own comic books (*La Foire aux immortels* and *La Femme piège*) *Immortal* is set in 2095 in a world where eugenics is a commonplace and many people seem to be more machine than human.

We are introduced to Jill (Hardy) who is picked up by the corrupt Eugenics Corporation and revealed to be biologically unique. Meanwhile the Egyptian gods are hovering above New York in a giant pyramid. Horus, trying to escape punishment by Bast and Anubis, takes over the body of escaped anti-eugenics rebel Nikopol – a Che Guevara-type figure – and a giant "Intrusion Zone" is covering Central Park and killing anyone who tries to enter.

In many ways *Immortal* is a success – as the atmosphere, style and beauty of the images on the screen cannot be faulted.

In some ways the limitations of the technology evident in other films aren't so much of a



problem for *Immortal*, as it is such a deliberately fantastic world that we can expect some things to look odd. However the "human" CGI character don't convince and there remains a problem with real actors interacting with the digital world. And, unfortunately, throughout *Immortal*, some clunky animation sees computer generated characters wallowing as if underwater.

*Immortal's* plot is unnecessarily complex. I am reassured by those familiar with Bilal's work that the film makes perfect sense if you've read the original books, but I hadn't and at times I found myself frustrated by the film's perverse desire to baffle the viewer. The story should be straightforward enough – it bears more than a passing resemblance to *The Fifth Element* – with Jill being the chosen one capable of recreating

the world. But *Immortal* frequently wanders off down side roads and back alleys and never convincingly explains how all its diverse parts are supposed to hang together.

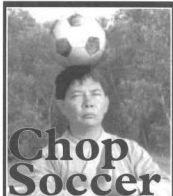
Released to somewhat disappointing box office in France in the summer, *Immortal* is currently in cinemas in Portugal, Holland, Italy and Turkey – but there is no date as yet for a UK release. The DVD has just been released in France (try [www.amazon.fr](http://www.amazon.fr)). (MMCG)

## Immortal (Ad Vitam)

Writer/Director: Erki Bilal

Cinematographer: Pascal Genesseeux

Starring: Linda Hardy, Thomas Kretschmann, Charlotte Rampling, Frédéric Pierrot, Thomas M Pollard  
102 mins



## Chop Soccer

**I** am pleased to be able to say, without fear of contradiction, refutation or reasonable argument, that *Shaolin Soccer* is the best movie of its genre ever made. And if that is because it is also the only film in the martial arts/musical/football film genre, it should take nothing away from my praise of this funny, strange gem of a movie.

With almost no exceptions, football movies are rubbish. *Escape to Victory* offers the perverse frisson of seeing John Wark on the same pitch as Pele and the *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery* is alright, but otherwise they're long dark halftimes of the soul. So, the first time Brother Number Five (Chow) rises, like a salmon, fifty-feet above the pitch and strikes the ball so hard it blazes like meteor across the screen, well its enough to make grown men cry.

*Shaolin Soccer* is consistently funny and never less than entertaining. And, if you need help to persuade a football-loathing other to accompany you, well it even features a cracking musical number, with people dancing in the streets and everything. Is *Shaolin Soccer* silly? Absolutely! But it is also tremendous fun.

At the time of writing it isn't clear which version of *Shaolin Soccer* is coming to our screens. Miramax released a butchered version in America last year (minus the song and dance routine) but they also released a somewhat restored version on DVD this month. Hopefully we'll get the superior original cut. If not, import the (region-free) Asian DVD (try [www.cd-wow.com](http://www.cd-wow.com)).

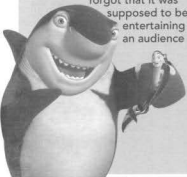
## Shaolin Soccer

Director: Stephen Chow  
Screenplay: Stephen Chow, Kan-Cheung Tsang  
Cinematographer: Pak-huen Kwen, Ting Wo Kwong  
Starring: Stephen Chow, Vicki Zhao, Mat Tat Ng, Patrick Tse  
113 minutes (Hong Kong): 87 minutes (American)

# The Godfather

**I** have given up trying to work out who Dreamworks are targeting with their animated movies. *Shrek 2* struck me as a self-indulgent exercise that

forgot that it was supposed to be entertaining an audience



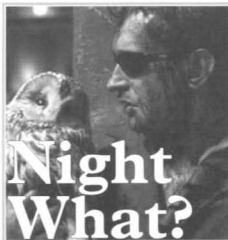
of (mostly) children. And now comes *Shark Tale*, a film so entirely reliant on in-jokes and movie references that it is hard to see how it qualifies as a family film. There simply isn't enough in the shallow story and terrible characterisation to keep anyone else entertained. The plot, with its final unconvincing and stomach-churning love-in, makes no real use of a starry cast and does no justice to some stunning CGI animation.

For those of us familiar with gangster movies there are some good jokes – especially when the shrimp (Soren) reprises Pacino's iconic line

from *Scarface*: "Allow me to introduce my little friends!" For those who get a thrill from spotting film references, there is probably enough here to justify a rental, otherwise watch the much superior *Finding Nemo* again. (MMCG)

## Shark Tale

Director: Bibi Bergeron, Vicky Jensen, Rob Letterman  
Screenplay: Rob Letterman, Damian Shannon, Mark Swift, Michael Wilson  
Starring: Will Smith, Robert De Niro, Renee Zellweger, Angelina Jolie, Jack Black, Martin Scorsese  
90 minutes



## Night What?

When I was a boy my mother had a habit that drove me mad. I'd rent some dodgy pirate version of the latest Hollywood "classic," pop it in the video and stretch out on the sofa to watch Eddie or Arnie strut their stuff. Fifteen minutes later mum would wander in and stare at the screen for a moment.

"What's going on?" She'd say.

The stropky teenage me would sigh dramatically and then explain the plot.

"Oh," she'd say, and wander off or, worse, start knitting scree-clic-clic-scree... Fifteen minutes later she'd be back.

"What's going on now?"

"Grumblegrrrshfrissfrissfriss..." the now infuriated teenage me would say.

"Oh."

Fifteen minutes later, she'd be staring at the screen and looking worried.

"This film's too complicated," she'd say. "I don't understand it!"

At which point the apoplectic teenage me usually had to be pried from the aertex with a fish slice.

Well now I know how my mother felt. No matter how I tried, *Night Watch* – a Russian fantasy film based on Sergei Lukyanenko's novels – was beyond me. And I never left the room or picked up a ball of wool. Either I was missing something in the translation or this film, with a plot that leaps around like a pissed-up kangaroo, doesn't make sense.

*Night Watch* is pretty in places and obviously a lot of effort gone into what I am told is the biggest budget Russian film ever. But try as I might, I couldn't care for the characters or work out exactly it was they were supposed to be doing.

Due for release here sometime next year, and with two sequels already in the pipeline, *Night Watch* is worth seeing for curiosity value and as an essential aid to understanding my mother. (MMCG)

### Night Watch

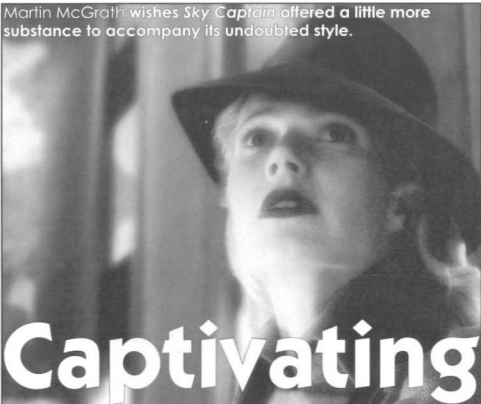
Writer/Director: Timur Bekmambetov

Cinematographer: Sergei Trofimov

Starring: Konstantin Khobensky, Vladimir Mashov, Valeri Zolotukhin, Mariya Pershina, Galina Tyunina, Yuri Kusenko, Aleksei Chadov, Zhanna Friske, Ilya Lagutenko, Rimma Markova.

115 minutes

Martin McGrath wishes *Sky Captain* offered a little more substance to accompany its undoubted style.



## Captivating

*Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* is a visual feast and something of a technical marvel. It is easy to get sidetracked by the remarkable story of how Conran created his all-digital world while "tinkering" at home with "off the shelf" software but miss the fact that he has created a very beautiful film. Yes, *Sky Captain's* look is derivative – blending a 1930's futurism with the same era's film noir aesthetic – but it is also frequently stunning. Technical tricks aside, Conran has immediately established himself as a director with an eye for arresting images.

As Polly Perkins, Paltrow in particular benefits from the director's choices. She looks every inch the film star illuminated by slashes of light and revelling in the film's sepia tones. *Sky Captain* Law's smooth cheeked freshness, however, ends up looking rather bland in comparison to his leading lady.

But all the actors are outshone by the locations created for the movie – from New York to Shangri-La and thence to the villain's lair – Conran creates a sumptuously beautiful and impressive world for his adventure.

Unfortunately, though the integration of the actors into this world is, for the most part, impressive, there are still moments when it is painfully clear that the actors are standing on a stage in front of these images rather than a part of them. Sometimes this is simply because they spend a lot of time in the near foreground looking out at the impressive sights but occasionally, and more importantly, at key moments during action sequences the relationship between actors and CGI effects break down and the illusion falls apart.

Though the visuals are impressive, *Sky Captain's* plot is nothing more as the launch pad for a series of set pieces. There are large robots attacking the free world, the heroes chase around the globe visiting a host of exotic locales until they hunt down the villain's secret base and then

they foil his wicked plans.

And here lie my most serious criticism of *Sky Captain*. When directors of the calibre of Lucas and Spielberg set about updating these Saturday-morning serials they delivered films that contained far more than the source material that inspired them. *Sky Captain* offers no such additional depth. In terms of storytelling, characterisation and plot, *Sky Captain* is as shallow and straightforward as the Republic serials on which it is based. As such, though it is successful as entertainment, when technology has moved on and the visuals of *Sky Captain* are surpassed, it is hard to imagine a good reason to return to this film.

A final criticism would be that while the film convincingly apes a 1930's look, the script simply isn't in the same league as the best films of that era. In particular the attempts at witty repartee between Polly and the *Sky Captain* are pale, pale imitations of the sharp wordplay in films like *His Girl Friday*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *The Awful Truth* or any of a thousand other films from that time.

All that being said, however, *Sky Captain* remains perfectly acceptable popcorn fodder. Sitting back and enjoying the ride delivers cheap thrills, a few laughs, beautiful stuff to look at and a talented cast of actors. For pop-culture buffs there are plenty of references to spot – Conran tips his hat to everyone from Orson Welles and King Kong to Godzilla and Nick Fury. It is only a shame that the film's ambitions don't extend much beyond looking pretty.

### Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow

Writer/Director: Kerry Conran

Cinematographer: Eric Adkins

Starring: Gwyneth Paltrow, Jude Law, Giovanni Ribisi, Michael Gambon, Ling Bai, Omid Djalili, Laurence Olivier, Angelina Jolie.

107 minutes

# American dream?



**Martin McGrath** laughed so hard at *South Park: Bigger, Longer, Uncut* that members of the audience complained to the cinema's manager. Can Trey Parker and Matt Stone repeat that feat?

**T**eam America: World Police contains some sublimely funny moments but is undone when filmmakers Parker and Stone stray into the world of politics.

The good bits – mostly the songs – include North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il's lament ("I'm So Lonely") and Gary's (actor turned super-spy) love song and anti-Michael Bay rant ("Pearl Harbour Sucks and I Miss You"). These are genuinely funny interludes, as is the cute use that is made of the "America: Fuck Yeah!" theme song – which reappears in various guises including a fabulously silly ballad. And there are some good running jokes – especially the one about the next terrorist attack being some multiple of 9/11 and the computer called INTELLIGENCE.

What the good parts add up to is a pitch-perfect satire of the modern action movie with nods to everything from *Top Gun* to *Star Wars*, reaching a peak with "The Montage Song," which perfectly skewers the whole genre. Team America began its gestation as an idea to remake *The Day After Tomorrow* in the style of Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds* – a brilliant scheme scuppered by studio politics. Had Parker and Stone stuck to that plan, I think I'd have been applauding heartily.

Sadly, however, with *Team America: World Police* they stagger into an attempt at political satire and, quite quickly, it becomes clear that they cannot carry it off.

The key problem is their choice of targets. Team America's super-spies are inept, arrogant and stupid – they flatten both Paris and Cairo in their attempt to stop terrorists – but ultimately they are our heroes. There's a cute jibe at America's insularity, every foreign locale is introduced by its distance from America – or in the Panama Canal's case "real America". But the main target of Parker and Stone's bile are liberal Hollywood stars and the final third of the film becomes obsessed with killing them in

increasingly gruesome ways.

Are these really the most deserving targets of ridicule that Parker and Stone could find? In a country with a warmongering president who hid behind his family's wealth when called to national service? Are they really more contemptible than Dick "Halliburton" Cheney? And then there's Enron, Ralph Nader's ego, the ineffectual Democratic Party... the list goes on. Team America takes a very large sledgehammer to a very insignificant nut and ends up feeling like a waste of time, energy and talent.

Alec Baldwin, Michael Moore, Tim Robbins and Sean Penn are all ferociously attacked. Their crime appears to be that they have spoken out on issues about which Parker and Stone believe they are ill informed. Worse they have used their celebrity and their relationship with the media to promote their message.

So, when Parker and Stone commit exactly the same "crime", by reducing world politics to a half-witted (though admittedly funny) philosophy about "dicks, assholes and pussies," it really is inexcusable. This might just be a silly movie by the people who make *South Park* but the idea that America should take a more simplistic view of the world is not what we all need right now. This dick-swinging, cowboy philosophising undermines any claim Team America's makers might have to lampoon others.

Team America has genuinely funny moments, but Parker and Stone have overreached themselves and end up revealed of being as guilty of preaching to their audience as those they lampoon.

## Team America: World Police

Director: Trey Parker

Screenplay: Pam Brady, Trey Parker, Matt Stone

Cinematographer: Bill Pope

Starring: Trey Parker, Matt Stone, Kirsten Miller, Mosasa, Daran Norris, Phil Hendrie

98 minutes



# Sawn off

**S**aw is a surprise – a genuinely unpleasant, exciting and entertaining American psychological horror movie from neophyte director Wan.

Two men, apparently strangers, awaken in a locked room. They are chained to the walls and there is a body on the floor. Soon they begin to find notes that offer clues to a way out of their predicament. They find hacksaws, but it becomes clear that they were not designed to allow them to cut through their chains, only their legs.

One of the men, the philandering Dr Gordon (Elwes) begins to piece things together. He has heard of a serial killer – indeed was once a suspect in the police investigation – who places his victims in traps where they must make horrible choices if they are to survive. The plot unfolds through a series of flashbacks interspersed with the action in the "here and now" and to reveal more would be to spoil much of the film's pleasure.

The film has plenty of twists and surprises and has widely been compared to David Fincher's work on both *Seven* and *The Game*. That it survives such comparisons shows how strong a debut Wan has made with *Saw*, though in truth his film is inferior to both Fincher outings.

Wan's direction is dynamic but in places he overuses clever effects at the expense of real tension – this is especially true in the scene in which the young woman is trapped and he attempts to show her frenzy by speeding the film up. It simply doesn't work. Nor, for all its thrills and tension, does *Saw* have the weight of *Seven* in terms of the intelligence of the script and the strength of the cast.

But, taken for what it is, a low budget, independent horror flick, *Saw* is refreshingly successful. It entertains, shocks and surprises and keeps you guessing right to the end. I went in with low expectations and came out delighted. (MMcG)

## Saw

Director: James Wan

Screenplay: James Wan & Leigh Whannell

Cinematographer: David Armstrong

Starring: Leigh Whannell, Cary Elwes, Danny Glover, Ken Leung, Dina Meyer

115 minutes

# Striking back



**Martin McGrath** sees *Star Wars* on DVD and wonders if he'd be sticking pins in George Lucas dolls if terrorists hadn't burned down his local cinema.

**I** have never understood the violent passion aroused by *Star Wars* – either for or against. I know some people hate it, regarding it as somehow debasing science fiction (and, indeed, the whole of cinema) though for me they remain an entertaining and imaginative sequence of films – not profound, certainly, but fun. More bewildering, though, are those who adore them with a frenzy that can border on the psychotic – the kind of “fan” who could scream about Lucas “raping their childhood” on the release of the recent (also entertaining) prequels – as if Jar Jar was in any sense a sillier, or more childish, creation than C3PO or an Ewok.

In 1978 I was nine years old and pretty much living in our local cinema – I was the only kid in school who'd seen both *Annie Hall* and *Smoke and the Bandit*. My hometown was (and remains) in the middle of nowhere, so the order in which films arrived at our local flea-pit could be somewhat erratic. Thus, it happened, that I saw *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* a fortnight before I saw *Star Wars: A New Hope*. It isn't too much of an exaggeration to say that *Close Encounters* totally freaked me out, but in a good way, a mind-expanding way. I was still reeling from that when I saw *Star Wars* and, though I enjoyed it enormously (I saw it at least twice), it was Spielberg not Lucas who had grabbed my imagination by the throat and curries.

Perhaps if I'd seen *The Empire*

*Strikes Back* at the cinema I'd have become a fanatic – but, at the height of “The Troubles”, some philistine burnt down our cinema and I first saw the sequel on a dodgy pirate video. If I'd been born in Crewe or Brighton (or even Cookstown) I might now be one of those people who list their religion as “Jedi” and sit at home at night sticking pins in George Lucas dolls.

Instead I approach the films with warm feelings, but not fervour. These are first and foremost children's films – not childish, but made with regard for the structures and archetypes of the traditional mythological tales told to children. This, I think, goes some way to explaining their longevity and influence – they are modern folktales with heroes and villains and bogymen and charm. They are also technically superb – some of the recently inserted digital shots are already showing their age while the (admittedly scrubbed and shining) original model shots retain all their power. And, if these are not truly great films – they lack any real depth of characterisation and too often lean on corny dialogue – they remain great cinema, extraordinary spectacle and huge fun. The original *Star Wars* trilogy is still unsurpassed as the standard by which all other popcorn movies must be judged.

Of the DVD releases it is enough, I think, to say that these films have never looked or sounded better on a home system and that within thirty seconds of the opening crawl of *A New Hope*

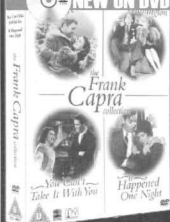
slipping away, I was spending as much time trying to work out ways of persuading my wife to let me build a cinema in our home as I was watching the actual film. Whatever one thinks of the digital additions to the films, Lucasfilm have done a stunning technical job of preparing the DVD release.

As for extras, well it is hard to imagine what more one could want. Lucas doesn't give great commentary, but then few directors do. However, the bonus fourth disc – and especially the feature-length documentary *Empire of Dreams* – is a fantastic, comprehensive and fascinating piece of work.

The films in the DVD box set are effectively the 1997 digitally enhanced re-releases, so yes Greedo still shoots first and (although some extra tweaking has gone on) yes the scene still looks stupid. No amount of grumbling by fans is going to get that changed, but I can live with it for the extra “thunk!” that they added as the stormtrooper bashes his head.



## DISCOVERY

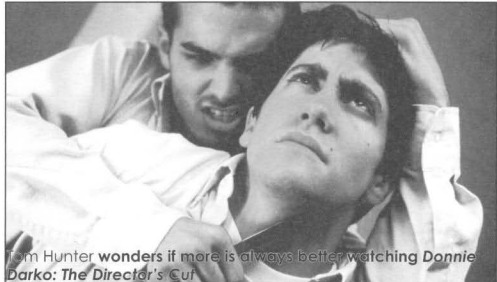


**O**f the four films in this Frank Capra “Classics” box set only *It's a Wonderful Life* is really fantasy, but Mr Smith Goes to Washington's tale of an honest senator standing up for what he believes in seems more fantastic every day. Plus, you also get the brilliant *It Happened One Night* and *You Can't Take It With You* as a bonus. If nothing else both are object lessons in how the dialogue in *Sky Captain* and *The World of Tomorrow* should have sounded.

If this issue's review of *Ghost in the Shell 2* whetted your appetite for more adventures of Section 9 then you could do far worse than pick up the first volume of *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* – the television spin-off. Short, sharp episodes explore solid sf themes in interesting ways. Not a brainy as the movies but there's plenty of action to compensate.

*Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* will be available on a five disc special edition in time for Christmas – including a disc devoted to the recording of the series' music. For those committed to ruining the holiday period for everyone else the ten disc *Ultimate Matrix Collection* will also be available – as well as the three films and *Animatrix* the set contains a disc devoted to the “philosophy” of *The Matrix* and another with profiles of the craftsmen involved in the production. With 24 hours of Matrix related musing that should easily see off the Queen's speech. (MMcG)

# Heart of Darko Work of Genie-us



Tom Hunter wonders if more is always better watching *Donnie Darko: The Director's Cut*

**U**K genre fandom has two reasons to feel justifiably proud of *Donnie Darko*. First off, all the best songs on the soundtrack belong to us (we liked one so much we even made it our Xmas number one last year) and secondly because in a very real sense we made this movie.

Ok, so wasn't in the actual 'UK industry makes good genre-movie sense', but at least we had the good sense to recognise it when it had been made. And it was this combination of good UK press coverage and good old word of mouth that saved *Donnie* from the dustbin of history and propelled its star Jake Gyllenhaal to the giddy genre heights of *The Day After Tomorrow* (oh well, can't have everything). And now we have *Donnie Darko: The Director's Cut* as our reward.

The original was a mind-bending, time-traveling (and perhaps even superhero?) take on 1980's small town USA played out through the fractured mind of troubled teen Donnie as he sought to make sense of his manipulated life and solve the apocalyptic riddle of Frank the six-foot bunny rabbit.

For many the plot was as borderline nuts as its central character. A deliberate exercise in obfuscation from a first time director with a genuine talent for ideas if only he could be bothered to tell anyone what they were. However, for many fans it was this refreshingly wormhole-ridden plot that had them hooked.

With an increased budget for extra effects alongside the more usual restoration of missing scenes and subtle re-edits (plus a whole bunch of extra songs on the soundtrack) the Director's Cut works hard to right these seeming wrongs while not alienating its original fanbase.

That is not to say that it is entirely successful. As with any Director's Cut, the new version often shows not how much meaning was excised but how much of value made it into the final cut. Most of the additional minutes are the usual round-up of extended or lost scenes: Small moments of character development that, while interesting enough, merely serve as extra

exposition to the central Donnie character, and not always in a beneficial way.

The central flaw of this version is that several reinstated scenes make explicit what was so intriguingly (and, okay then, frustratingly) implicit in the original.

This is further reinforced by the addition of the extra-effects scenes. Never a big budget movie in the first place, these swift new scenes are really effects montages dropped neatly into the edit to symbolize on the one hand Donnie's descent into madness, while simultaneously acknowledging that in his parallel world he's possibly not mad at all. This interpretation is lent further weight by the insertion of glimpsed pages from *The Philosophy of Time Travel*; a book written by

Grandma Death, the genuinely mad old (perhaps very old?) woman who haunts Donnie.

Everything works to provide a further guide to the Director's real intentions for his story, but whether these are successful or not seems to depend on how you felt about the original. For some the increased level of explanation will undoubtedly open up a new level of appreciation, although at times it can feel like cue-cards from the Director's Commentary track have bled over into the actual movie. For others the tell-not-show quality may prove more frustrating than the infinitely ambiguous original.

Still, this is a welcome addition to the *Darko* world and, if considered as a possible 'tangent universe' edit rather than a definitive cut, something that is well worth spreading the word about all over again.

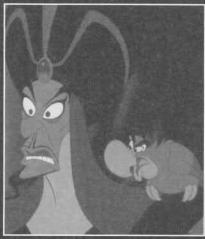
## Donnie Darko: The Directors Cut

Writer/Director: Richard Kelly

Cinematographer: Steven Poster

Starring: Jake Gyllenhaal, Holmes Osborne, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Daveigh Chase, Mary McDonnell, James Duval, Arthur Taxis, Patrick Swayze

128 minutes



**A**laddin ranks alongside *The Jungle Book* and *Beauty and the Beast* as one of my favourite Disney animated movies.

Twelve years on the quality of the animation still holds up wonderfully. Taking the computer control techniques pioneered in *Beauty and the Beast* to another level, and featuring some early work by Pixar (*Toy Story*), *Aladdin* places beautiful hand-drawn animation in a spinning, twisting world.

In "Arabian Nights", "One Jump Ahead" and "Prince Ali" it has great, funny songs and even the obligatory ballad, "A Whole New World", isn't as bad as some of Disney's other attempts at that genre. The DVD release also includes a number of songs omitted from the original, though while its clear that some of them have enormous resonance for the film makers, none are so good that the film misses them.

But the great strength of *Aladdin* is in the acting. Williams' Genie steals the show. It is a vast, lunatic performance that represents perhaps the only occasion when the actor's manic energy as a stand-up has been faithfully and effectively transferred to film. For my money, though, the stars are the villains, Freeman and Gottfried as Grand Vizier Jafar and Iago the Parrot. Freeman is a class act, his voices oozes menace, but Gottfried, (another manic stand-up comedian) gets many of the movies funniest moments as the devious, cowardly and smart-arsed hench-parrot.

This DVD set is packed with extras: informative interviews that give an insight into the rather troubled genesis of the project; reconstructions deleted sections; plus sing-a-longs and magic carpet rides for the kids. Everything, in other words, that one has come to expect from Disney's high quality special edition releases. (MMcG)



American television has a knack of cutting down promising genre television shows just as they are starting to look really interesting. The most prominent recent act of stupidity was the decision by Fox Network to pull the plug on Joss Whedon's *Firefly* after only a handful of episodes.

*Firefly's* cancellation brought howls of protest from fans and the subsequent hoohah (and high DVD sales) led to the filming of *Serenity*, a feature film based on Whedon's show. However, two less high profile genre shows, *Wonderfalls* and *Century City*, were also both axed in 2004 after just four episodes had aired and neither benefited from any sort of a reprieve.

Which is a shame, because both are really rather good. *Wonderfalls*, in fact, is something better than rather good, as the name suggests, it's rather wonderful. This funny, smart show tells the story of Jaye Tyler whose slacker lifestyle is thrown for a loop when everyday objects (pretty much anything with a face) begin to give instructions to help people.

Co-created by Bryan Fuller (*Dead Like Me* – see *Matrix* 169) and with Tim Minear (*Firefly*, *Angel* – is the guy cursed?) as producer, *Wonderfalls* was blessed with clever plotting and excellent writing that allowed it to balance romance, wackiness and drama. Plus it managed to remain entirely free of the doe-eyed god-bothering gooiness that plagues the similarly-themed (and still running) *Joan of Arcadia*.

Thirteen episodes of *Wonderfalls* were made and sensibly planning against the executive's axe they wrap up into one long, immensely satisfying and heart-warming arc. Fortunately, for UK viewers, Sky One has bought the rights to show all thirteen episodes, though there is still no news on when it will be shown. *Wonderfalls* will, like *Firefly*, be released on DVD in America – probably early in 2005 – I highly recommend it.

*Century City*, a legal drama set twenty years in the future, was doomed from the start. It had the temerity first to challenge what most people think of as science fiction (there are no spaceships or aliens or blasters) and, worse still, to make a serious attempt to deal with issues about the influence technology and science might have on our laws and mores.

Though far from perfect – sometimes both the acting and the scripting are a little stiff – *Century City* was a rare enough thing (an attempt at a serious, speculative, drama) to deserve the chance to find its feet and, perhaps, an audience. Only nine episodes were made and, at the time of writing, they are currently being shown on the UK's Sci-Fi Channel.

What do we learn from all this? Certainly that launching a new television show in America is a high-risk business. And also that quality is no guarantee that you'll get your contracts renewed or your programme broadcast. The unusual, challenging and just plain different aren't going to find an audience in a world where decisions are made after just two or three episodes and the result is a television landscape dominated by the safely familiar and the cheap – soap operas and "reality" television. (MMcG)



## Genre hits

American network ABC has launched this year's network television season with two new hit shows, both with genre elements. The one with the most obvious appeal to genre fans is *Lost*, the new show from *Alias* creator JJ Abrams, which features a group of plane crash survivors who end up stranded on a mysterious island with something very large and very nasty. At the time of writing *Matrix* has seen the first three episodes and is loving every moment of it.

ABC's second big hit is *Desperate Housewives* – though *Matrix* wonders how many "casual" viewers tuned in expecting something a bit more racy than this suburban comedy-drama. The genre twist to *Desperate Housewives* is the continued presence amongst her neighbours, at least in spirit, of Mary Alice – who commits suicide in the opening episode but serves as narrator throughout the show.

### Four animated, again

*Matrix Reloaded* did it, *Star Wars* did it, even *Van Helsing* and *The Chronicles of Riddick* have done it, so the news that Marvel's latest big budget superhero movie, *The Fantastic Four*, would be accompanied by an animated version wasn't a huge surprise. However the scale – twenty-six half hour episodes – marks this as the biggest such deal. It won't be Reed Richards' and the gang's first appearance in a cartoon – there have been at least three earlier animated outings for Marvel's first family in the sixties, seventies and nineties. *Matrix* is happy as long as they promise not to replace *The Human Torch* with an annoying robot, again.

### Grievous bodily harm?

Not to be outdone, Lucasfilm have announced that the lead up to *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* will be accompanied by further animated stories from Genndy Tartakovsky (*Star Wars: Clone Wars*, *Samurai Jack*). There will be five new twelve minute episodes that will, Tartakovsky told the *Chicago Sun-Times*, feature action relating directly to the information contained in the opening crawl to *Episode III*. The new episodes will begin airing on America's Cartoon Network on March 2005 with *Episode III* set for a UK debut in

May. The cartoon episodes will introduce a new villain, General Grievous (dodgy name!), who will feature in the new film.

### On the Threshold

It has some big names attached to it, but not a lot is yet known about *Threshold*. Screenwriter David Goyer (*Blade*, *Batman Begins*) is set to direct the pilot and producer David Heyman (*Harry Potters*, and also working on two Heinlein adaptations) will executive produce the project for American network CBS. Set to be an hour-long series, *Threshold* deals with the detection of a hostile extraterrestrial force and the (presumably American) government's reaction.

### Another Thing

The US Sci-Fi Channel will continue its emphasis on mini-series as it enlists some big names producers on remakes of classic stories. Ridley Scott (*Alien*) will act as Executive Producer on *The Andromeda Strain* based on the Michael Crichton novel (first adapted by Robert Wise in 1971). Frank Darabont will produce an adaptation of the John W Campbell short story "Who Goes There" – which was adapted for the cinema as *The Thing From Another World* (1951) and *The Thing* (1982). Both productions will be four hour mini-series but are unlikely to air before 2006.



## Eligibility criteria

### Best Novel

The Best Novel award is open to any novel-length work of sf or fantasy first published in the UK in 2004. (Serialized novels are eligible provided that the publication date of the concluding part is in 2004.) If a novel has been previously published elsewhere, but it hasn't been published in the UK until 2004, it will be eligible.

### Best Short Fiction

The Best Short Fiction award is open to any shorter work of sf or fantasy, up to and including novellas, first published in 2004 (in a magazine, book, or online) including books and magazines published outside the UK.

### Best Artwork

The Best Artwork award is open to any single image of sf or fantasy artwork that first appeared in 2004. Whether or not an image is science fictional or fantastic is perhaps the most subjective judgement call within these awards (but the more information you can give me about it, the better). Provided the artwork hasn't been published before 2004 it doesn't matter where it appears.

Anything published by the BSFA itself, whether in the magazines, in book form or on the website, is not eligible. But the awards are open to works by BSFA members (including Council and committee members) provided they have been published elsewhere. You can nominate as many eligible works as you like in any category, although to count the nominations will need to reach me by January 2005. Don't assume that because someone else has already nominated something you like that this means you shouldn't bother to do so yourself. Nominations should be submitted in writing but can be sent by post (please note new address on the inside front cover) or email or just given to me in person if you happen to see me.

# Sensational

I'm writing this with my mind all full of sensawunda, and yet still wanting more. And I wish I could say it's because of science fiction.

I've just watched a *Horizon* documentary on the BBC, *Derek Tastes of Earwax*. I realise that right now it doesn't sound like the stuff our dreams are made of – and the associated images that arise from that statement open up a whole new dimension of wrongness. But to me the programme was actually about a new dimension; one to which I can relate, as well, rather than likely to make my brane [sic] Deliberate attempt at science pun!] leak out of my ears. *Horizon* was exploring synaesthesia, the joining up of senses. It's a condition which has fascinated me ever since I first heard about it and realised I may have some mild experience of it, which has in turn made me want to know what it would be like to have full exposure.

There are science fictional resonances, of course. The classic narrative and typesetting rendition of Gully Foyle's synaesthetic experiences in *The Stars My Destination* is, for me, one of the jaw-dropping moments of sensawunda in sf. The effect on the imagination of both protagonist and reader of coffee experienced through synaesthesia in Jeffrey Ford's *The Empire of Ice Cream* (which should have won a Hugo Award) is not so much jaw-dropping as mouth-watering. And Steve Aylett mentioned during an interview at the BSFA London meeting earlier this year that he has synaesthesia: something which provided a new insight into his writing for me, particularly the way he uses language because of its shape and rhythm and texture as much as for its meaning. It's almost like looking at one of those Magic Eye pictures

only with a much sharper snap of awareness – and not without the background layer of concern that I'm doing something really weird to my 'normal' perceptions. (Insert your own allusions about discovering sf.)

The *Horizon* programme included people who have a sensory association of colours with words and numbers, people for whom sounds have texture and words have flavours (hence the title), people who see colour in music and for whom numbers and dates have a physical presence around them. And since approximately one in a hundred people are meant to be synaesthetic, some of you should be sitting there wondering what it's like not to be able to do this. Meanwhile, I desperately want to be able to access this way of experiencing the world. I feel pain in colour and shape, although much less so than I did as a child, and both those sensations and this programme make me feel like a character in a novel who gets to understand the next stage of human evolution even while realising that they are, at best, just the missing link.

With all the work *Horizon* needed to do to explain the variety of ways in which synaesthesia can manifest, it could only begin to explore what this might mean for the rest of us. Holding out the tantalising possibility that synaesthesia is simply the exaggerated, super-connected form of something most of us experience through our regular senses and that we can, therefore, all do it a bit, the programme floated some ideas about expressions of creativity and the evolution of language in humans. It seems at the very least to offer us another way of thinking and communicating about art, while also providing the beginning of yet more mind-expanding stuff about why and how art (and art forms of

all types) offer us another method of communication.

And this is the place for another set of connections, this time to the BSFA awards. I was quite surprised last year to end up with an art award shortlist featuring five book cover designs, after years of domination by the artwork on magazine covers; and I've been interested to see the wider range of sources for the nominations I've received so far this year. To be fair, of the nominations received to date just over half are book covers, but the others include concept artwork and publicity shots for films, magazine covers, and artwork from a comic.

It does make it harder in some cases to track down details of the artist; someone's already asked cheerfully how we'd get the award out to the Cassini probe for the cover of *The Algebrat*, and although the boring answer is that the artist I'm looking to identify here is whoever is credited with the book jacket design, if anyone asks me again I'm likely to tell them that they can take it... There's a serious question behind that, though, about what exactly is eligible as 'art', and I think that has to be somewhat subjective.

The general eligibility is for a single image of sf or fantasy artwork, and personally I consider that the artistic image can be a photographic one. The medium isn't a distinguishing factor in eligibility terms. The really subjective question is about whether an image is 'sf or fantasy art', on which all I can promise is that, if I really can't see it myself, I may ask you to justify it. But play nicely! What I really want you to nominate is stuff that gives you that sensawunda: sf or fantasy artwork that communicates to you, even if it doesn't do it through a sense you weren't expecting.

\* = New since last listing

# Nominations received

### Best Novel:

- Cloud Atlas – David Mitchell (Sceptre)
- Forty Signs of Rain – Kim Stanley Robinson (HarperCollins)
- \*Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell – Susanna Clarke (Bloomsbury)
- Newton's Wake – Ken MacLeod (Orbit)
- Recursion – Tony Ballantyne (Tor)
- River of Gods – Ian McDonald (Simon & Schuster)
- \*The Algebrat – Iain M Banks (Orbit)
- The Etched City – K. J. Bishop (Tor)
- \*The Flood – Maggie Gee (Saj Books)
- \*The Moth Diaries – Rachel Klein (Faber & Faber)
- \*The Seagull Drovers – Steve Cockayne (Orbit)
- \*The Snow – Adam Roberts (SF Gollancz)
- The Year of Our War – Steph Swainston (Gollancz SF)
- White Devils – Paul McAuley (Simon & Schuster)

### Best Short Fiction:

- \*Collateral Damage\* – Kristine Kathryn Rusch (Asimov's, August)
- 'Deletion' – Steven Bratman (Analog, January/

- February)
- \*Delhi\* – Vandana Singh (from anthology *So Long Been Dreaming*, ed. Nalo Hopkinson & Upinder Mehan)
- \*Footnote\* – Peter F. Hamilton (Postscripts #1)
- \*Inherit the Vortex\* – Ramona Louise Wheeler (Analog, January/February)
- \*Native Aliens\* – Greg van Eckhout (from anthology *So Long Been Dreaming*)
- \*Return to the Planet of the Humans\* – Will Self (from collection *Dur Mukti and Other Tales of Woe*)
- \*Steep Silence\* – Lena DeTar (Asimov's, June)
- \*The Opposition\* – Daniel Kaysen (The Third Alternative #38)
- \*The People of Sand and Slag\* – Paolo Bacigalupi (F&SF, February)
- \*The Voluntary State\* – Christopher Rowe (SciFiction on www.scifi.com, 5 May)
- \*The Wolf-man of Alcatraz\* – Howard Waldrop (SciFiction, 22 September)

### Best Artwork:

- \*Antares – David A Hardy (from *Futures: 50 Years in*

- Space* – also cover of *Analog*)
- \*Concept art from the film *I, Robot* – artist uncredited
- \*Cover of *Cowl* by Neal Asher – Steve Rawlings
- Cover of *Newton's Wake* by Ken MacLeod (UK edition) – Stephen Martinis
- Cover of *Newton's Wake* by Ken MacLeod (US edition) – artist uncredited
- Cover of *Recursion* by Tony Ballantyne – Dominic Harman
- \*Cover of *The Algebrat* by Iain M Banks – designer uncredited
- \*Cover of new edition of *The Cassini Division* by Ken MacLeod – Lee Gibbons
- Cover of *The Year of Our War* by Steph Swainston – Edward Miller
- \*Ministry of Space #3, page 7 – Chris Weston (Image Comics)
- \*n-trshn – Richard Marchand (Cover of *The Third Alternative* #39)
- \*Publicity poster/art work for the film *Howl's Moving Castle*
- \*Publicity shot for the film *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*

# incoming

## Events

### Novacon 34

One of the most prolific authors in British science fiction, Ian Watson is best known, of late, for his work on the story for Steven Spielberg's *AI*. His incredible list of publications includes SF classics *The Embedding* and *Whores of Babylon*, and more recently *Mockymen*. Novacon is a friendly, well-established con that's certainly worth attending, with or without such a impressive Goh!



5-7 November – **Novacon 34**, The Quality Hotel, Walsall. Guest of Honour Ian Watson. [www.novacon.org](http://www.novacon.org)  
5-7 November – **Armadacon 16**, The Cophorne Hotel, Plymouth. [www.armadacon.org](http://www.armadacon.org)

8 November and 13 December – **Oxford Street Borders SF reading**, top floor, 6.30pm; and afterwards at the Ben Crouch Tavern, Wells Street. Hosted by Pat Cadigan. Guest authors include Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Jay Caselberg.

13-14 November – **P-Con**, Ashling Hotel, Dublin. Guest of Honour Juliet E McKenna. [www.slovbooks.com/phoenix](http://www.slovbooks.com/phoenix)

20-21 November – **The British Costume Convention**, Quality Hotel Birmingham North. [www.britishecstumeconvention.org.uk](http://www.britishecstumeconvention.org.uk)

24 November – **BSFA London Meeting**, Graham Joyce, interviewed by Adam Roberts. Upstairs in the Star Tavern, 6 Belgrave Mews West, London, SW1X 8HT. There is no December meeting.

### Future Events

25-27 Feb 05, Redemption (B5/B7), Hinckley, Leics  
11-13 Mar 05, Mecon 8, Belfast  
25-28 Mar 05, Paragon2 (Eastercon), Hinckley, Leics  
29-31 Jul 05, Accio 2005 (H. Potter), Reading  
4-8 Aug 05, Interaction (WorldCon), Glasgow

## Movies

### Lemony Snicket

With *The Lord of the Rings* having finally rung its last, Hollywood fills this year's big Xmas fantasy slot with a series of events even more unfortunate than those befalling Gandalf and Co. Jim Carrey stars as evil Count Olaf, Jude Law voices author Lemony Snicket and Michael Moore is rumoured to be 'borrowing' the title for his next assault on the Bush Administration as we go to press.



5th November – *The Grudge*  
12th November – *Toolbox Murders*, Shaolin Soccer  
19th November – *The Incredibles*  
26 November – *The Forgotten*  
3 December – *Polar Express*  
10th December – *Blade: Trinity*  
17th December – Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*\*

## Comics

### Young Guns

Since being anointed as the up-and-coming artists to watch for over the next few years, interest in Marvel's *Young Guns* has reached a fever pitch! Each artist has a major project coming from the House of Ideas in 2005, and each is guaranteed to be hotter than a smoking gun. This special edition sketchbook preview features art so good it's making the entire industry sit up and take notice.

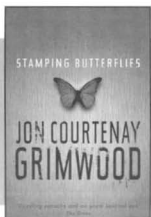


3 November • *Human Target: Living in Amerika* (Vertigo) • *Avengers Finale* (Marvel)  
10 November • *The Nikopol Trilogy* (DC) • *Iron Man #1* (Marvel) • *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe: Book of the Dead 2004* (Marvel)  
17 November • *Space Ghost #1* (DC) • *Wildstorm Winter Special* (Wildstorm) • *Spiderman: India #1* (Marvel)  
1 December • *Young Guns Sketchbook #1*\* (Marvel) • *DC Comics Rarities Archives Vol. 1* (DC)  
8 December • *New Avengers #1 – Director's Cut* (Marvel)  
15 December • *Trigger #1* (Vertigo)  
22 December • *Punisher – Red X-mas #1* (Marvel) • *The New Frontier Vol. 1* (DC)

## Books

### Stamping Butterflies

This highly anticipated stand-alone novel from the author of *redRobe* and the *Arabesque* trilogy (the third installment of which won this year's BSFA award) is definitely the author's best work to date. *Stamping Butterflies* is a fast paced novel of ideas that promises to change the reader's perception of time and fate – and succeeds.



November  
Courtenay Grimwood, Jon • *Stamping Butterflies* • (Orion/Gollancz)\*  
Dart-Thornton, Cecilia • *The Iron Tree* • (Macmillan/Tor UK)  
Davidson, Avram • *The Scarlet Fig* • (Rose Press)  
Heidel, R. Andrew • *Desperate Moon* • (PS Publishing)  
Jones, Stephen, ed. • *Don't Turn Out the Light* • (PS Publishing, anth)  
Pullman, Philip • *Scarecrow and the Servant* • (Transworld/Doubleday UK)  
Stableford, Brian • *Curse of the Coral Bride* • (Immanion Press)  
VanderMeer, Jeff, & Roberts, Mark • *The Thackery T Lambshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases* • (Macmillan/Tor UK)  
Williams, Tad • *Shadowmarch* • (Time Warner UK/Orbit)

December  
Esslemont, Ian Cameron • *Night of Knives* • (PS Publishing)  
Reed, Robert • *The Well of Stars* • (Time Warner UK/Orbit)  
Swanwick, Michael • *The Periodic Table of SF* • (PS Publishing)

If you have any forthcoming events, publications or other material you think should be included in *Incoming*, then please contact Claire Weaver at [matrix\\_editors@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk).

# Timewasters

## Competition 170

This is my last competition. Here are a few more last:

1. These are the last words of the first SF novel I read, in 1952: "The Martians stared back up at them for long, long time from the rippling water..." A point for each title.

2. In which year did John W Campbell draw his last breath?

3. What was John Wyndham's last published novel?

4. These are the last words of a 1960s Hugo winner – which? "The Baba Yaga touched down, its yellow jets dying, to a perfect landing."

5. Which is the last:

"Orbitsville" novel by Bob Shaw

"Mars" novel by Kim Stanley Robinson

"Rama" novel solely by Arthur C Clarke

Sequel to "Eon" by Greg Bear

6. Who was the last puzzle compiler in this slot.

Answers within three weeks of receipt of mailing to: John Ollis, 13 Berneshaue Close, Corby NN8 8EJ.

The editors would like to thank John for his work on the puzzles for *Matrix*. He has been a pleasure to work with and we're sorry to see him go.

## Competition 168 result

Theo Ross got as far as 14, which was one more than anyone else, except me: Tau Zero, One, The Two-timers, Three to Conquer, Four for Tomorrow, Five to Twelve, Six Gates from Limbo, Seven Days in Crete, Eight Keys to Eden, Nine Tomorrows, Ten from Tomorrow, The Eleventh Commandment, The Wind's Twelve Quarters, Thirteen O'Clock, Star Fourteen, Best SF of the Year – 15.

## Crossword 168 result

The answers we wanted were: "Our Mrs Reynolds" and "Serenity". The Firefly box set went to Fay Symes from Bournemouth

## Solution:

Across: 1 Adverb 6 Poplar 9 Mindplayers 10 Girder 11 Patterns 12 Shrimpers 14 Fools 16 Aside 18 Stone-deaf 22 Gogtha 23 Images 24 Metamorphic 26 En bloc 27 Repays.

Down: 2 Dervish 3 Elm 4 Bankrupt 5 On paper 6 Plaits 7 Pre-record 8 Arsenal 13 is Digital 15 Encipher 17 Snowman 19 Tea from 20 an Empty 21 Atomic 25 Cup.

# Contributors

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**News:** Claire Weaver, Martin McGrath and Tom Hunter

**Flicker, Goggle Boxes and Crossword:** Martin McGrath

**Incoming:** Claire Weaver and Tom Hunter

# COUNTERS

## Basingstoke

Genesis SF Club

Meets every four weeks on Thursday, starting 7:30pm. The Hop Leaf, Church Street, Basingstoke RG21 7QQ

Contact: Mark Simkins [genesis@thovian.demon.co.uk](mailto:genesis@thovian.demon.co.uk)

Web: [www.genesis-uk.org.uk](http://www.genesis-uk.org.uk)

## Belfast

Belfast Science Fiction Group

Meets alternate Thursdays, starting at 8:00pm. The Monaco Bar, Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB

Contact: Eugene Doherty [finnan@teledysk.com](mailto:finnan@teledysk.com)

Web: [members.belfastcity.co.uk/finnan/monico.htm](http://members.belfastcity.co.uk/finnan/monico.htm)

## Birmingham

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Meets 2nd Friday, starting at 7:45pm.

Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham

Contact: Vernon Brown: [bhndgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhndgroup@yahoo.co.uk)

Web: <http://help.birmingham.org>

## Birmingham

The Black Lodge

Meets 2nd Tuesday, 8:30pm. The Hoghead, Newhall Street,

Birmingham B3 3PU

Contact: Steve Green [ghostwork@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ghostwork@yahoo.co.uk)

## Cambridge

Cambridge SF Group

Meets 2nd Monday, starting at 7:00pm. The Cambridge Blue,

Cowley Street, Cambridge CB1 2LG

Contact: Austin Benson [austin@cam.sfg.org](mailto:austin@cam.sfg.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 (01255 812119)

## Croydon

Croydon SF Group

Meets 2nd Tuesday, at 8:00pm.

The Dog and Bull, Surrey Street, Croydon CR0 1RG

Contact: Robert Newman (020 8866 6800)

## Didcot

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

The Ladygrove, Cow Lane, Didcot OX11 7SZ

Contact: Nigel and Sabine Furlong [herford32@aol.com](mailto:herford32@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 [slubb@lesterpark.com](mailto:slubb@lesterpark.com)

Web: [www.lesterpark.com/dslubb/](http://www.lesterpark.com/dslubb/)

## Edinburgh

Forth

Meets every Tuesday, at 9:00pm.

The Doric Tavern, Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DE

Contact: Jim Darroch [el\\_gut@hotmail.net](mailto:el_gut@hotmail.net)

## Edinburgh

Meeting in K Jackson's

Meets every Thursday, starting at 8:30pm. K Jackson's pub,

Lady Lawson Street, Edinburgh EH3 9DW

Contact: Charlie Stross [charlie@satipoo.org](mailto:charlie@satipoo.org)

## Hull

Hull SF Group

Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 8:00pm.

The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull HU2 8DE

Contact: Mike Cross [mike@mjphib.demon.co.uk](mailto:mike@mjphib.demon.co.uk)

Web: [www.mjphib.demon.co.uk/hull.htm](http://www.mjphib.demon.co.uk/hull.htm)

## Leicester

The Leicester Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Group

Meets 1st Friday, starting at 8:00pm.

The Globe, Silver Street, Leicester LE1 5EU

Contact: Mark E. Cotterill [leicesterfans@hotmail.com](mailto:leicesterfans@hotmail.com)

Web: [www.leicesterfans.net](http://www.leicesterfans.net)

## London

London BSFA meeting

Meets 4th Wednesday, starting at 6:30pm.

The Star Tavern, Belgrave Mews West, London,

SW1X 8HT Forthcoming guests: Justina Robson (July).

Contact: Farah Mendlesohn [farah@fn3.demon.co.uk](mailto:farah@fn3.demon.co.uk)

Web: [www.lsfu.co.uk](http://www.lsfu.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 McIntosh [alexmc@yahoo.com](mailto:alexmc@yahoo.com)

## London

The City Illustrates

Meets every Friday, starting at 6:30pm.

The Windmill, Mill St, Off Conduit St, Mayfair, W1S 2AT

Contact: [london.pn.org/meetings/locations/windmill.html](http://london.pn.org/meetings/locations/windmill.html)

## London

The Tim

Meets 1st Thursday, starts at 7:00pm.

The Florence Nightingale,

199 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7UT

Web: [www.dia.gic.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Archieve/London.html](http://www.dia.gic.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Archieve/London.html)

## Manchester

FONT

Meets 2nd and 4th Thursday at 8:30pm.

The Crown and Anchor, Hilton St, Manchester, M1 2EE

Contact: Ashur Chappell [arthurchappell@clara.net](mailto:arthurchappell@clara.net)

Web: [www.arthurchappell.clara.net/tat.html](http://www.arthurchappell.clara.net/tat.html)

www.pn.org.uk/london/fn.html

## Northampton

Northampton SF Writers' Group

Meets once a month with SF author Ian Watson to workshop

members' fiction.

Contact: susoni@whin.co.uk

## Norwich

Norwich Science Fiction Group

Meets every second Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm,

people gather from 8:00pm. The Cellar Bar, Ribs of Beef, Eye

Bridge, Norwich, NR3 1HY

Contact: Andrew Stitt [n.s.f.g@cwani.net](mailto:n.s.f.g@cwani.net)

Web: [www.homepage.norwich.net/realityoptional](http://www.homepage.norwich.net/realityoptional)

## Oxford

North Oxford

Meets 1st Wednesday of the month, from 7:00pm. The

Plough, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8BD

Contact: Steve Jeffery [jefferys@oal.com](mailto:jefferys@oal.com)

## Peterborough

Peterborough Science Fiction Club

Meets 1st Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm.

The Blue Bell Inn, St. Pauls Road, Peterborough PE1 3RZ

Meets 3rd Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm.

Goodmans Yard, St. John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD

Contact: Peter D. [psfclub@btinternet.com](mailto:psfclub@btinternet.com)

Web: [www.psfclub.peterborough.co.uk/psf.htm](http://www.psfclub.peterborough.co.uk/psf.htm)

## Portsmouth

South Hants Science Fiction Group

Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 7:00pm.

The Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth PO1 5BX

Contact: Mike Cheater [mike.cheater@nwfworld.com](mailto:mike.cheater@nwfworld.com)

Web: [www.pampy.demon.co.uk/shsf.htm](http://www.pampy.demon.co.uk/shsf.htm)

## Preston

Preston SF Group

Meets every Tuesday, starting at 8:30pm.

The Grey Friar, Friargate, Preston PR1 2EE

Contact: Dave Young [pdg@hairy1.demon.co.uk](mailto:pdg@hairy1.demon.co.uk)

Web: [www.hairy1.demon.co.uk/pdg/](http://www.hairy1.demon.co.uk/pdg/)

## Reading

Reading SF Group

Meets every Monday, starting at 9:00pm except third Monday,

when they start 7:30pm.

The Corn Stores, Forbury Road, Reading RG1 1AX

Contact: Mark Young [marky@rnf.org.uk](mailto:marky@rnf.org.uk)

Web: [www.rnf.org.uk](http://www.rnf.org.uk)

## Sheffield

Meets every Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm.

The Red Lion, Charles Street, Sheffield S1 2ND

Contact: Fran Dowd [fran@demon.demon.co.uk](mailto:fran@demon.demon.co.uk)

## St. Albans

Polaris: The St. Albans SF Group

Meets 1st Tuesday, 8:00pm. The Plough, Tynghanger Green,

St. Albans AL4 0RW

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Web: [www.polaris.org](http://www.polaris.org)

# RAGE against snobbery!

Karen Traviss rails against the literary snobbery infecting science fiction and fantasy.

Those of us of a certain age will recall a comedy sketch where John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett line up in order of height and proceed to act out a social hierarchy.

Cleese, the bowler-hatted toff, says he looks down on both pin-striped middle class Barker and cloth-capped working class Corbett: Barker, with some relief, says that although he looks up to Cleese, he can look down on Corbett. And it feels like we're acting out that sketch in the SF/F community.

In our desperate bid to be taken seriously by the mainstream, whatever that is, we fall over ourselves to prove how literary we are. Whether we admit it or not, we're hurt by the Atwoods of this world who deny they're one of us, and by the insinuations that what we write (or read) is... rubbish. And if you're not literary, then you cling desperately to the second-best seal of respectability, that of being rigorously scientific.

Enter the New Snobbery: not all SF/F is equal. By creating an internal hierarchy, we the despised can find someone to actually look down upon within our own ranks.

It is the politics of the prison community come to life. If you wear the indefinable label of cutting edge, new wave, experimental or any other manly and respectable sub-genre, you're a gangland boss: you have carpet in your cell and the other lags give you a respectfully wide berth. Beneath you in the pecking order are the armed robbers, the traditional but serious SF/F writers, and beneath them are the burglars – populist SF/F writers.

But banged up in solitary for their own safety – with the granny-bashers and the nonces – are the slags who write media tie-ins and the peddlers of game-related fiction. Share a cell with one of those? I fink not, guv'nor. And some of the inmates in HM Prison UK feel they're a notch above their opposite numbers in the US State Correctional Facility.

At WorldCon this year I was on a panel that looked at respectability in SF/F. One of the debates was this: do we really want to be respectable? I suspect we don't. We want to keep the ghetto alive when the rest of publishing world – beyond the navel-gazing literary minority – doesn't really see us as geekdom, because it makes us feel a bit special, a bit rebellious. We're so addicted to this self-stigmatisation that we reinforce



**RAGE against the...**

Angry? Don't keep it in. Let us know. Let rip with your own "Rage against" whatever you loathe in sf in 650 words and send it to: [matrix\\_editors@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk).

it in our own ranks.

I'm happy to sloop out with the most despised. I've had the fascinating experience this year of being banged up both for an armed bag – serious SF in the USA, so perhaps plea-bargained down to breaking and entering by UK standards – and for the disgusting crime of media tie-ins. Some of my fellow lags have wondered aloud how an almost respectable writer allowed herself to sink into the pit of writing that sort of SF so early in her career.

Well, here's the answer: someone asked me to do it. And they pay me. I enjoy writing it, and readers enjoy reading it, and they buy my allegedly respectable titles, which they might never have done otherwise. And nobody stops

you applying the same professional skill to media tie-ins. You can write good SF within its walls if you want to.

There's a breathtaking arrogance about sneering at someone's leisure reading choices, and it smacks of a Victorian exhortation to self-improvement. Inevitably, it's often accompanied by not having read the despised work but holding an opinion anyway, and seldom having spoken to the readers of media fiction.

You know what? These readers currently shambling around the exercise yard with the old lags like we have taken courses and done their OU degrees. Some of them even had a fancy education and responsible jobs before they were sent down. They're not stupid. They just got caught.

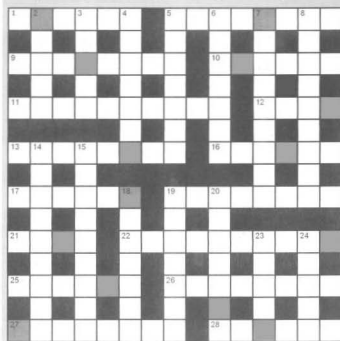
So let's not get too up ourselves about a pecking order within our genre. It's not just insulting to readers. It's also missing the point that there's no objective test for "respectable" fiction, so we're left with favourable opinion as our yardstick – and sales suggest that media fiction is seen more favourably than the respectable books (mine included) that these readers could just as easily buy.

But you'll have to excuse me – it's slopping-out time now. I just hope I don't run into any of those romance writers...

**Karen Traviss is a full-time SF writer, ex-journalist and general armed robber who does a bit of media tie-in now and then. She's currently on the run in Wiltshire.**

## Don't Panic

To celebrate the new audio production of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: The Tertiary Phase*, *Matrix* has the whole thing to give away on CD. Plus, we're throwing in the original broadcasts as well.



Complete the crossword and rearrange the letters in the shaded square to reveal a phrase linked to Douglas Adams' books.

Send the answer with your name and address to: [matrix.competition@ntlworld.com](mailto:matrix.competition@ntlworld.com), by 7 February 2005.

### Across

- Inventor of the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster (6)
- Accompanies 1 across, owns two mice called Benji and Frankie (8)
- American mountain state (8)
- Chews (6)
- Dramatist (10)
- Wharf (4)
- Don't go there (3,5)
- State of inactivity (6)
- Stops (6)
- Bits of grass, or newspaper (8)
- Jumping joint? (4)
- Homeless ape-descendant (10)
- Survive on very little, perhaps while saving? (6)
- Head of tribe (8)
- This girl is one in 587,000,000,000 (8)
- Android, big brain, miserable (6)

### Down

- Bikini, for example (5)
- A really together guy (5)
- Drawing, a plan (7)
- Deep \_\_\_\_\_, very big computer (7)
- Encourages, perhaps to violence (7)
- Asked 5 down the big question (9)
- Attractive, begging, returning to court (9)
- 12th Century Italian mathematician with a famous sequence (9)
- Thief (9)
- Doctor's blade (7)
- Some of them said thanks for the fish (7)
- People visiting sites (7)
- Put off (5)
- Mitchison, author of *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (5)

