

matrix

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

£2.25

Sept/Oct 2005 No. 175

Sunburn

Order extra sunblock!

Stephen Baxter on the sun
and the end of the world

Worldcon

News and gossip from Glasgow

Podcasting

Paul S Jenkins on a growing sf community

Punk publisher

David Barnett on Immanion Press

NewCon 3

Big plans in Northampton



Win fantasy
classics and
a goody bag
as Voyager
celebrate their
tenth birthday

VOTE for the greatest British SF of all time & WIN cash prizes

matrix

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Words of wisdom

They think its not genre... It is now!

"Our approach is the *Close Encounters* approach, which has Richard Dreyfuss in his truck and the radio gets screwy and he looks out the window and gets a sunburn. You don't know what the hell happened, but at the end of the movie, its full on spaceships landing and aliens coming out! You need to take the journey to get there and I feel that's what *Lost* is. Anyone who watches knows by now that thing are happening on that island that have no rational explanation within the world of science. Hopefully we've tricked it out in such a way that people are now hooked on the characters as much as they are in what is this mystery of the island. A polar bear is not genre and an island is not genre, but when you put them together, its now genre."

Carlton Cuse, executive producer on *Lost*.

DEADLINES

If you wish to contribute to future issues of Matrix, the deadlines are:
matrix 176 Nov/Dec 2005 copy deadline: 10 October 2005
matrix 177 Jan/Feb 2006 copy deadline: 28 November 2005

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£26 pa or (Unwaged) £18 pa).

Life membership:

Ten times annual rate

Outside UK:

£31 (Airmail) – £37

Joint/family membership:

Add £2 to the above prices

UK and Europe, make cheques payable to: BSFA Ltd and send to Estelle Roberts at the address above. US cheques payable to: Cy Chauvin (BSFA).

The BSFA was founded in 1958 and is a non-profit making organisation entirely staffed by unpaid volunteers. Registered in England. Limited by guarantee. Company No. 9215000 Registered address: 1 Long Row Close, Eversdon, Doveney, NN11 3BE

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Sound, sound the Clarion

Justina Robson on the difficulties of launching EuroClarion.

I am writing this editorial note as a basic report to readers on the attempt to set up and run an sf&f writing workshop in the UK, because I thought you might like to know about it.

There was hope that 2006 or 2007 might see the start of a new interactive experience for sf&f writers in Europe – EuroClarion. Modelled closely on the Clarion workshops of the USA, which have been so successful in launching new writers onto the genre scene (myself included). However, sadly I must report that it is not to be, at least for the time being.

Although efforts to start the workshop were undertaken with great enthusiasm by Geoff Ryman and Leslie Howle (Clarion administrator from the USA) a series of unfortunate situations have caused it to founder. At Eastercon this year Geoff, Farah Mendlesohn, myself and others of the committee presented our plans and received volunteer offers of help from a few ex-Clarion and would-be Clarion alumni. Things looked like we might be able to get moving for 2006. We had a teacher list, we were close to getting a good site and facilities, we even got some of the necessary financial donations that we had to collect in order to qualify for grant funding. However, with the sudden, unavoidable departure of Geoff and Farah from the committee a short time later, the remaining members were unable to give enough time and energy to continuing the dream, and so it has gone into hibernation.

To be honest we did not manage to gather nearly enough support for what is a Herculean administrative task – managing the preparation and running of a six-week residential course at a UK University, using only a volunteer labour force (teachers excepted, they always get paid). We were short of money, short of bodies and



Clarion
The Science Fiction and Fantasy
Writers' Workshop



Writer's block?

Justina Robson (above) is the author of *Silver Screen*, *Mapa Mundi* and *Natural History*. Her new novel, *Living Next Door to the God of Love*, is published in October.

"Although efforts to start the workshop were undertaken with great enthusiasm... a series of unfortunate situations have caused it to founder"

very short of time.

What a tale of woe! By the time July rolled around the committee received a report from Gwyneth Jones, another of our number who had just completed a teaching week at Clarion West. She expressed reasonable doubt about our ability to create a Clarion in the UK – and we all had to seriously consider how much effort we could really put into such an undertaking. Nothing less than 100 per cent would do it and nearly all of us had one or more major commitments elsewhere. As an unhappy silence descended after the loss of Geoff, Farah and Gwyneth we decided to call it a day.

So, everyone reading this who

was hoping to attend a UK-based Clarion, please apply to the US workshops immediately. The committee has decided to redirect its energy towards supporting the US workshops, which are also facing hard times in terms of their charitable status and financial affairs. All of us involved in the EuroClarion attempt still hope that one day we will establish a strong workshop for genre writers in the UK, although maybe it will not be able to be a 'Clarion'. Perhaps we must devise one of our own that is more suited to our needs.

I have high hopes that this can be done, perhaps via an existing body like The Arvon Foundation which holds courses in SF writing

already and has the facilities ready to use. From my own experience of both Clarion and Arvon courses, both of which helped me to develop as a writer and a person, I know how valuable they are and also how difficult they are to attend: money, time and space being the commodities most in short supply for aspiring writers, and often established ones too.

- For more about Clarion East: www.msu.edu/~clarion/ and Clarion West: www.clarionwest.org
- To see more about the Arvon Foundation go to: www.arvonfoundation.org

Hu-goes there?



Photo courtesy of Anna Freggillo Dal Don

Is that a rocket in his pocket...
...or is Charles Stross just happy to have
won a Hugo? Nice kill, mighty boots!

Congratulations to all the winners, the runners-up (especially the ones we voted for) and also all the organisers of this, the Oscars of the SF & F genre.

Message boards were already up and humming over the results before *Matrix* had even left the building and figured out how to smuggle itself into the Hugo losers party, so if you're looking for controversial opinion then those are the places to start checking out.

What *Matrix* decided was that the venue looked great, the presenters Paul McAuley and Kim Newman were on top form and that the voters got more right than they got wrong, in our humble opinion, and even when we thought they got it wrong they also probably got it right anyway.

Seriously, if you're looking for Hugo gripes then this isn't the place. A full list of the 2005 winners is on the right.

Editors to split?

Ok then, just for you, here's a little news on a Hugo debate that's definitely worth having. Chris M. Barkley and Patrick Nielsen Hayden have submitted a proposal to split the Hugo Award category for Best Editor into two categories – Best Book Editor and Best Magazine Editor – and opinion is divided.

Initial responses were favourable, with the case being made that while a vast amount of the daily grind was done by the book editors it was typically the magazine editors who were winning Hugos. People know the names of most magazine editors, while many book editors prefer to remain behind the scenes (and surely the Best Novel category already recognises their work).

Naturally things are never that easy in fandom as many of the pro editors are also

active above and beyond the call of duty in terms of not only supporting their own line but also contributing to the genre as a whole, having become personalities in their own right or even made the jump from fandom to editorship in the first place.

It's a tricky call that relies as much on the perceived knowledge of eligible voters of who edited what as it does on any genuine understanding of the editorial process. Should you get the nod for a top-notch book that sailed over your desk with barely a copy-edit or should it be the real graft that's awarded, and in which case how do you rate that?

At time of press a first version of this motion had been passed and now awaits final ratification at next year's Worldcon.

The full argument can be found at www.trufen.net

NEWSBITS

Hugo winners 2005

Novel: *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, Susanna Clarke

Novella: "The Concrete Jungle", Charles Stross

Novellette: "The Faery Handbag", Kelly Link

Short story: "Travels with My Cats", Mike Resnick

Related book: *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn, eds.

Dramatic presentation (long form): *The Incredibles*

Dramatic presentation (short form): *Battlestar Galactica* – "33"

Professional editor: Ellen Datlow

Semiprozine: *Anisble*, David Langford, ed.

Fanzine: *Plokta*, Alison Scott, Steve Davies & Mike Scott, eds.

Fan writer: Dave Langford

Fan artist: Sue Mason

Web site: *Sci Fiction* (www.scifi.com/scifiction/), Ellen Datlow, ed.; Craig Engler, general manager

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer [Not a Hugo]: Elizabeth Bear

Fantrails 1

Does your idea of a great holiday include a visit to a sf convention? Then a subscription to *The Genre Traveler*, the free ezine on travel for people interested in sf& and horror, is for you.

"In every quarterly issue, readers can look forward to the best genre-related attraction information and vacation ideas," says editor C.S. Pothite.

The Genre Traveler will debut with its October 2005 issue in late September. For more information visit www.thegenretraveler.com.

Fantrails 2 (billionaires only)

We are the payloads of the future," says Peter Diamandis, the man with the plan behind the X-Price Foundation.

With the cost of manned spaceflight getting ever lower (providing you don't mind the odd spacewalk to fix your own wagon – Ed) the crossover point for potential for space holidays has never looked closer.

"For the first time ever... the power to go into space is now resident within the hands of individuals, not in the hands of governments." Watch this space for news of a lunar version of the Transatlantic Fan Fund.

Och Aye The New

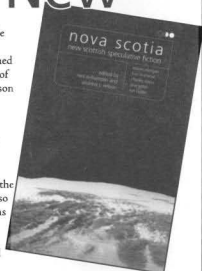
Forget Worldcon, this is the real Scottish genre event of the year.

If *Matrix* had a book of the month feature *Nova Scotia* would be our first choice. Cannily timed to launch at Worldcon this original anthology showcases the best of new Scottish speculative fiction. With contributions from authors running the gamut of genre writing from SF, slipstream to fantasy it includes hot new properties like Hal Duncan (whose *Vellum* was also in the running for our fictional book of the month, read his interview here next issue instead) alongside big name authors like Ken Macleod

and, um, Charles Stross (one of the anthology's adopted Scotsmen).

Talking about their well informed but less than literal interpretation of Scottishness editors Neil Williamson and Andrew J. Wilson said: "The authors are all Scots. They're Scottish in the broadest sense... and this gives us an extraordinary range of perspectives. We wanted this collection to be inclusive, not exclusive, and we wanted not only the tight focus of introspection, but also the ability to see ourselves, as Burns had it, as others see us."

Nova Scotia is published by Crescent Books and available in all the usual places right now.





atoms

Fujitsu have unveiled what they are calling 'electronic paper'. It is a flexible colour substrate that can store an image after a small electric charge is applied. The picture remains without the need for further electricity thanks to the internal memory it contains.

There are similar technologies that offer black and white images but Fujitsu's version is in colour, giving it the edge for changeable posters or supermarket displays. Expect to see it appearing next year. Moving pictures may be possible in later versions.

Source: Professional Engineering

NASA is developing NUGGET, (the Neutron/Gamma ray GEologic Tomography instrument) using neutrons to penetrate a surface and create a three-dimensional image and allow robotic landers rovers to search for fossils.

The neutrons are focused by a lens made from thousands of long, hair-size glass tubes. An atom capturing a neutron gives off a gamma-ray signal. Scan the focused beam, detect the location of the ray and an image can be created. Since different atoms give different signals, materials can be differentiated. With processing and atom-scale accuracy even fossilized bacteria could be imaged.

If it becomes a practical device it will give future space exploration another tool in the search for extraterrestrial life. It might also transform terrestrial archeology.

Source: NASA Goddard Space Flight Centre

Discovered two years ago, 2003 UB313, the so-called "tenth planet" appears to be larger than Pluto. Here are some facts to memorise to demonstrate your expertise on distant bodies.

At 97 Astronomical Units from the sun it is over 3 times farther away than Pluto, making it the most distant object known to orbit our star. Near-infrared spectra show strong signatures of methane ice, just like Pluto. Methane ice is unusual and indicates a primitive surface that has not been heated since the solar system formed 4.5 billion years ago. To date, no one has seen methane on any other Kuiper Belt Object, apart from Pluto and Neptune's moon Triton.

Source: The Gemini Observatory

Soft tissue from a Tyrannosaurus Rex may have been discovered by US palaeontologists. Dissolving away the fossilised bone what remained were translucent vessels with red-brown dots that may be nuclei.

It has not been proven that this is tissue rather than a new process of fossilisation. If it is soft tissue then it could answer the warm-blooded, cold-blooded dinosaur debate.

Source: Focus Magazine

Fly again

Spacecraft crashing are not failures, says Roderick Gladwin.

You can't say you've worked in the space industry until one of your creations gets blown into a million pieces or suffers some other catastrophe.

It took eleven years for something I had sweated blood over to finish up at the bottom of the Atlantic. I laughed; all those long days and tough deadlines for nothing. Most feel sick and close to tears.

Then it gets branded a failure.

Cosmos 1, a solar sail demonstrator followed in these pages, didn't make it to a viable orbit.

If the people involved can get more money and support they may try again. It was as daring as the successful *SpaceShipOne*, except there wasn't a \$10million prize for the "winners", just the knowledge that they had expanded the boundaries of the envelope of technology.

Cosmos 1, like *Beagle 2*, and like my job, failed in their prime objective; however, the valuable knowledge gained in getting to the point of disaster will go on to be used elsewhere. When a child learns to walk, it falls down a lot, this is not failure it's progress. I just hope the *Cosmos 1* team get the chance to try again.

Source: Planetary Society

Down the tube

The converted Volna ICBM bearing *Cosmos 1* is lowered into the Russian submarine, *The Borogolebik*.
© The Planetary Society



Batty viruses kill

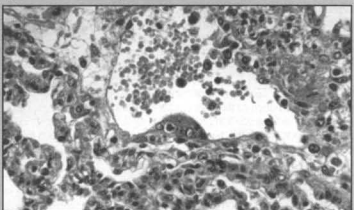
Forget bird flu, worry about the bats. Watch the skies!

While bird flu grabs the headlines there are plenty of other deadly viruses waiting out there in the animal kingdom, and two (Nipah and Hendra) may already have reached the human-to-human transference stage.

Identified in 1994, Hendra is a respiratory and neurological disease in horses and humans first seen in Hendra, Australia. It killed two people and recently reappeared in Queensland. Nipah virus was isolated in 1999 when an outbreak killed more than 100 people in Malaysia and Singapore. Lethal outbreaks in Bangladesh have followed. Scientists are disturbed by the fact that many of these recent cases involved human-to-human transmission of Nipah.

Both viruses are members of the family *Paramyxoviridae* and their natural hosts are believed to be fruit bats.

They have drawn military interest because of their potential to be weaponised by terrorists. Cooperative



This Nipah isn't kidding! This slide shows Nipah virus in a pig lung from Malaysia. Note the multinucleated (giant) cell caused by the virus.

Images: Dr Peter Hoopes, Australia's National Health Laboratory

research across the US and Australia has identified a functional receptor for this lung from Malaysia. Watch the skies! looking at how to block the viruses from infecting cells.

Source: The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine

Monkey business

Tom Hunter is a plonker – now it's official!

Never let it be said that our crack newsgathering team of laboratory-fresh media monkey brains here at *Matrix Towers* are anything less than thorough when it comes to combing every juicy tick of genre-gossip from the hairy back of the body fandom.

We've got our opposable thumbs firmly on the pulse of the British SF scene, and those rare times when we're not out lushing it up at glamorous publishing parties we're probably getting our paws dirty trashing the contents of Iain Banks' dustbin or buzzing J.G. Ballard's back garden in a low flying aircraft; telephoto lenses clicking away in search of the perfect paparazzi money shot.

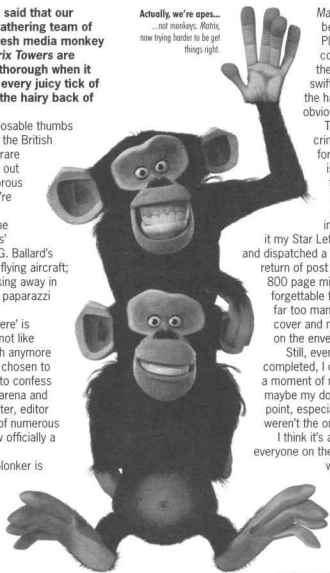
'The truth is out there' is our motto – well, it's not like Mulder's using it much anymore – which is why I have chosen to take this opportunity to confess my sins in the public arena and admit that I, Tom Hunter, editor of *Matrix* and author of numerous other crimes, am now officially a plonker.

The reason I'm a plonker is simple enough: It's because I edit *Matrix*. Correct that, it's because I chose to edit *Matrix*, a decision that I still feel surprisingly happy about even when the deadlines are crashing past, half the copy is missing in action and the printer gremlins have snacked out on our proofs (again).

Maybe I was a Mills & Boon editor in a previous life and this is my punishment, or maybe I'm just stupidly naive enough to think that actually paying hard cash to join the BSFA in order to take on a load of unpaid work editing this fine mag is in some way a good idea. Either way, it seems that I can finally add another tick to my list of accomplishments because after over a year at the helm I've finally started to get some decent abuse in my mailbag, and to be honest it has come as something of a relief. They'd warned me about it, of course, but I was beginning to think that perhaps nobody cared enough to write anymore.

I needn't have worried because my moment of truth was waiting for me on the doormat when I arrived home from Glasgow, Worldcon-weary and weighed down with next year's stash of reading materials, in the form of a letter addressed to the

Actually, we're apes...
...not monkeys, *Matrix*,
now trying harder to be get
things right.



Matrix Editor that began well ('Dear Plonker...') and then continued on in much the same style to swiftly expose me for the hapless amateur I obviously am.

The details of my crimes are apologised for elsewhere in this issue, but suffice to say I was so impressed with this accusation that I immediately declared it my Star Letter of the Month and dispatched a suitable prize by return of post – in this case the 800 page middle-volume of a forgettable fantasy trilogy with far too many dragons on the cover and not enough postage on the envelope.

Still, even with my revenge completed, I couldn't help feeling a moment of nagging doubt that maybe my doomsayer had a point, especially when they weren't the only one making it.

I think it's a great credit to everyone on the *Matrix* team that

we've received a high volume of praise for the direction and variety of content in our recent issues. Clearly we're

getting some things right, but that doesn't mean we're

not getting stuff wrong too, and while we always appreciate any comment about the mag (constructive or otherwise) I think it's important to note that when it comes to spotting when things have gone wrong, we're always the first to know.

The reason we like criticism is because it represents a willingness to get involved, and while we groan louder than anyone whenever a mailing gets delayed or a feature gets reset or we attribute a quote to entirely the wrong person, at the same time we can only take comfort in the fact that at least people are bothered enough to notice. Getting involved is the essence of SF fandom, and as long as people keep making the effort to notice our mistakes we'll keep trying to learn from them.

I think the second rule of editing *Matrix* is sometimes it helps to be a plonker.

But the first rule is as old as the monkey brain itself: If you want your readers to only notice the juicy stuff, you need to learn how to nitpick.

Monkey see, now monkey do.

It's all a load of ballots

There was a mistake with the 'Best of British' ballot in the last issue of *Matrix*. Martin McGrath explains that all is not lost.

Many of you noticed the error in the last issue of *Matrix* regarding the closing date printed on the ballots for voting in the 'Best of British' awards. Most people received their mailing after the polling date had closed.

We apologise for the confusion and concern this caused some readers. The cause for the delay was beyond the control of the *Matrix* editors – the magazine was printed in plenty of time and copies were received from the printers several weeks before the deadline – but that is little consolation.

However, we are pleased to be able to say that there has been a change of plan and, instead of announcing the Best of British results at the Worldcon in Glasgow, it was instead used to launch a much larger debate about who should win. An interesting discussion, chaired by Paul Billinger and featuring Stephen Baxter, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Kincaid Speller (look out for a report in *Vector*), was used to encourage people to vote and the results will now be announced at Concession, the 2006 Eastercon.

That means that you can still vote by post or email. The new closing date for ballots is:

21 January, 2006.

The ballot paper is rerun in this issue (see centre pages 16&17).

Once again, we apologise for the confusion, but don't let that put you off having your say.

Glasgow Worldcon was worldclass

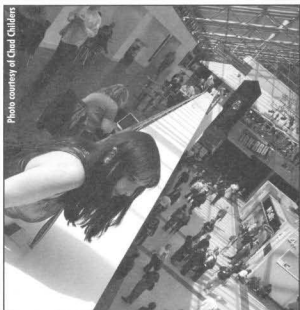
Interaction was a roaring success and *Matrix* would like to congratulate everyone involved in making it so much fun.

The organisation was very close to flawless, the programme was full of interesting stuff, the venue worked well and the big events (such as the masquerade and Hugo ceremonies) were a model of smart planning. Everyone who contributed to the running of the convention deserves a giant pat on the back.

Thanks should also go to all the fans who contributed to a fantastic atmosphere. One *Matrix* editor will never again think of Norwegians with anything less than warmth, despite the sore head that followed their party. Whether they were dressed as Clangers, Klingons, elves, pirates, animé characters or just in jeans and a tee-shirt, the conventioners were an overwhelmingly friendly bunch.

And, of course, all the professional writers, artists and editors who were unfailingly polite and generous with their time when we forced ourselves upon them.

The *Matrix* team had a great time in Glasgow.



Worldcon in a flash (clockwise from top)

Happiness is a warm Hugo: the winners celebrate en masse

Pirates abroad: *Matrix*'s Claire Weaver with Ian Watson

Rocket woman: Farah Mendelsohn gets to know her Hugo

Nippon over to Glasgow: Japanese fans promote Nippon 07

Fluff Chihuahua strikes: Charles Stross falls victim to the stuffed toy from hell

Looking down on SF: taking in the concourse at the SECC

Preparing for take-off: the SECC and Armadillo

Photo courtesy of Chad Childers

Photo courtesy of Angus Fungillo Dal Dan

Photo courtesy of Angus Fungillo Dal Dan

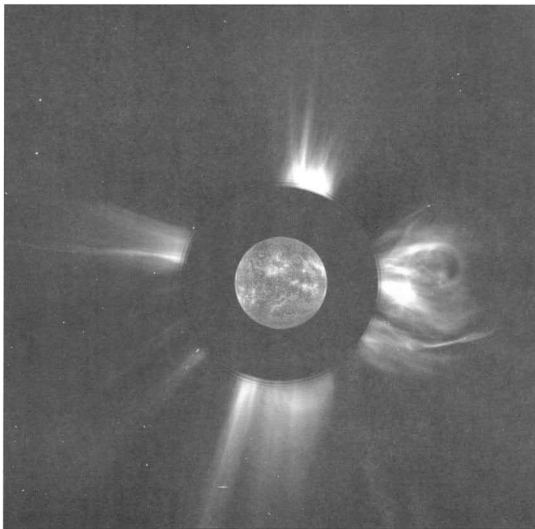
Enjoying the sun,

My latest novel is a collaboration with Sir Arthur C Clarke called *Sunstorm* (Gollancz, July 2005), in which a disorderly sun threatens Earth. The misbehaviour of the sun has featured in many of Clarke's works, beginning with 'Rescue Party' (1946), and including his novel *Songs of Distant Earth* (1986) in which mankind has a thousand-year warning and scatters to the stars. In *Sunstorm* we're doing the idea justice, we hope.

The first sfal depictions of solar disasters concerned the running down of the sun's power. The best guesses of the nineteenth-century physicists up to Lord Kelvin were that the sun was powered by gravitational contraction, which would last only a few million years. An expiring Kelvin-esque sun is memorably mentioned in a catalogue of possible ends of the world in Camille Flammarion's thoroughly astonishing *Omega: The Last Days of the World* (1893). The dying sun is also glimpsed by HG Wells's Time Traveller in *The Time Machine* (1895), in a passage which seems heavily influenced by *Omega*. Conversely in Olaf Stapledon's still-stunning *Last and First Men* (1931) the Eighth Men are driven to migrate to Neptune by a flaring sun destabilised by a collision with an interstellar cloud.

In the early twentieth century it was realised that nuclear fusion, the sun's true power source, should enable it to shine for thousands of millions of years, and concern about the longevity of the sun was replaced by speculation about what might happen if it misbehaves. I first came across such ideas in the pages of the marvellous 1960s comic *TV Century 21* (first series, issues 83-98; see my article in *Vector* 224), when the Thunderbirds race to subdue an unruly sun with immense bombs.

Usually, though, there's nothing to do but flee. In JT McIntosh's *One in Three Hundred* (1954) a brightening sun ruins Earth but brings Mars alive. So a fleet of life-ships is hastily assembled, and the inexperienced 'lieutenants' who will pilot them are ordered to select the 'one in three hundred' who



"Maybe we should count ourselves lucky. The astronomers have observed 'super-flares' on stars superficially similar to the sun. As far as we know our sun has never misbehaved as badly as that."

will be spared the fire. The book, by a Scottish writer now mostly forgotten, is realistic for its time and enjoyable; the central section, as little ships retreat Dunkirk-like across the gulf of space, is particularly affecting. But at heart the story is all about power: the life-or-death arbitrariness wielded by the lieutenants, the power accrued by a tinpot gang lord in the chaotic colony on Mars. This jars with modern sensibilities, but born in 1925 McIntosh grew up

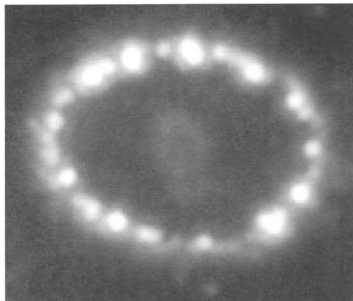
through wartime, and the discipline has a military feel to it.

The exercise of power seems to be a common theme in solar-powered sf. In Richard Lupoff's *Sun's End* (1984) a treacherous Sol is heating up, slowly enough to be all but unnoticed by the mass of the population. The protagonist is Daniel Kitajima, a blue-collar orbital construction worker in a Heinleinian 2009, who suffers an accident and is revived, Steve Austen-like, as a cyborg 80 years

later. Kitajima's episodic adventures take him to cargo cults on Mercury and Titan, and to the moons of a previously unnoticed giant planet. A complicated mix of Japanese culture and space-operaic pastiche, this is an odd, disjointed book, overfull of ideas and ultimately unsatisfying, but with some intriguing facets. And it is another book about power, in this case wielded by Kitajima as he submits himself to a cyborg destiny, and Earth's billions, 'pathetic grubs that

while it lasts

Stephen Baxter considers the different ways the sun has caused the end of mankind in SF.



Explosive flare-up (far left)

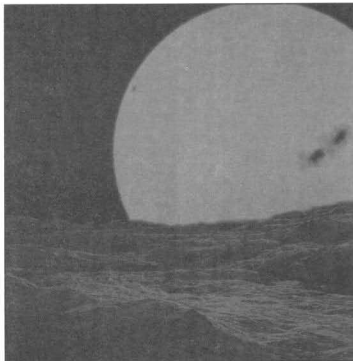
Solar flares, as observed by the SOHO satellite, are tremendous explosions in the Sun's atmosphere and can disrupt communications and powerlines. (NASA-MSCF)

Remnants of an exploding star (left top)

Supernova 1987A photographed by the Hubble Space Telescope, November 28, 2003. (ASQ)

A giant rises and shines (left bottom)

A future earth sees down under the glare of the sun turned red giant. (Image by Jeff Bryant)



squirmed on a planet somewhere' (chapter 16) are left to fry.

Norman Spinrad's *The Solarians* (1966) is an exception, for here the usual power relationship is reversed, when humanity actually causes an instability in the sun. We are losing a war of attrition with the relentlessly logical Dulgaari. But the Dulgaari fleet is duped into entering the solar system, 'Fortress Sol' – where it is vapourised by an artificial Nova Sol, 'like a swarm of moths caught in a flamethrower'

(chapter 12). This is a commercial effort by a pre-Bug Jack Barron Spinrad, but the book is fast-paced, enjoyable and quite deep, and the scenes of the destruction of an evacuated Earth are affecting.

Such works reflect ancient perceptions. Political power has always flowed from the sun. Significant solar cults tended to arise in organised, heavily centralised states – the Egyptians, the Aztecs – the sun serving as an obvious metaphor and source

of authority for the one ruler on Earth. One of the last great pagan gods was *Sol Invictus*, the Unconquered Sun; his cult flourished in the late Roman empire just before Christianity became the state religion (and assimilated Sol's feast day as Christmas Day). Similarly in our modern SF fables the sun's superhuman power is co-opted by the Competent Men who deal with their fellow strugglers harshly but fairly. Even in the comics, the source of Superman's powers is sunlight – a signifier of the depth of that particular modern myth.

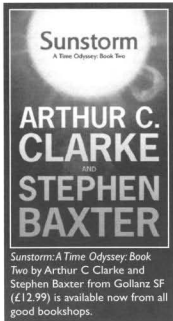
Perhaps we moderns are too blasé about the sun. Certainly our understanding of the sun exceeds that of our ancestors manifold, but we are just as dependent on its power.

The sun's variability affects our climate. For over seventy years, from around 1640 to 1710, very few sunspots were observed on the sun's face – and the Earth was plunged into what the climatologists call the 'Little Ice Age', when London children ice-skated on the Thames. Today our dependence on high technology makes us vulnerable to even mild solar tantrums. A flare once knocked out communications on Air Force One; on 24th April 1984 President Reagan, over the mid-Pacific, was left incommunicado for two hours. The most powerful solar flare ever recorded occurred quite recently, on 4th November 2003, enough to saturate X-ray detectors on several satellites; we were saved from more significant damage only

by a chance alignment of celestial magnetic fields.

Maybe we should count ourselves lucky. The astronomers have observed 'super-flares' on stars superficially similar to the sun. As far as we know our sun has never misbehaved as badly as that.

But in the long term we face more serious problems. Since its birth the sun has been increasing its luminosity, slowly but surely. Up to now Earth's feedback processes have kept the planet's temperature stable, but in a billion years or so the regulators will be pushed to their design limits – and later still, when the sun ends its 'main sequence' lifetime and balloons into a red giant, even International Rescue may not be able to save us.



Sunstorm: A Time Odyssey: Book Two by Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter from Gollanz SF (£12.99) is available now from all good bookshops.

Loudon clear

Foundation
favorites
Number sixteen:
The Mummy! by Jane Webb

Andy Sawyer wants his Mummy!

Ask any three critics where sf actually started and you'll almost certainly get three different answers. Was it 1818, when Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein*, the first novel to extrapolate from contemporary scientific theory? Or in 1516, when Thomas More's *Utopia* suggested that somewhere out there could be a radically different society? Or was it as late as 1926, when Hugo Gernsback published a magazine dedicated specifically to "the Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story – a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision"?

I generally answer by saying "all of the above; and more". But lately, I've been wondering whether there is an answer, and the date of sf's birth is 1827.

In that year, a young woman named Jane Webb, recently orphaned and hoping to earn a living through literature, published "a strange, wild novel" called *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century*. Although it reached a second edition it has long been out of print in its original form. An abridged edition, edited by Alan Rauch, was published in 1994 by the University of Michigan Press. It is this edition which I've read, and to which (and to Paul Alkon's review of it in *Science Fiction Studies*, March 1996) I am indebted for what I know about Webb.

The action begins in 2126. England has gone through numerous political changes and is now Catholic in religion and ruled by a despotic Queen. The complicated plot involves an invasion from Ireland, the strange electoral politics by which the next queen is to be chosen, and the revived mummy of the Egyptian Pharaoh Cheops, who acts as a kind of moral chorus to the events of the story. However, central to the argument for suggesting that this weird Gothic romance is a science fiction novel are three factors.

First, it is set in the future. Such fiction was rare at that time. *The Tale of the Future* (JF Clarke) gives



Flowering talent (far left)

Jane Webb Loudon's books on horticulture became best sellers. She was influential both as a writer and illustrator of scientific precision. This example is "*Hibiscus and Palawia*".

Mummy dearest (left top)

Original copies of *The Mummy!* are rare.

Portrait of a lady (left bottom)

Jane Webb Loudon died in 1858, aged 51.

1664 as the date of the earliest composition of a "future-fiction" but it was the second half of the 19th century before such tales became anything like commonplace.

Second, the revival of Cheops' mummy is not magical, but via "new technology": electric current from a "galvanic battery".

And third ballooning, then a recent advance (the first hot-air balloon flight was in 1783) is extrapolated as a normal mode of transport. Webb has the Duke of Cornwall order "get a balloon ready and let us be off directly!" While Edric plans to travel to Egypt by balloon. In fact, in Webb's future, transport has moved beyond balloons. With heavy-handed (to modern tastes) humour this exchange between Dr Entwurfen and Edric foresees the development of new technologies.

"Surely you don't mean to travel the whole distance in the balloon? I thought, of course, you would adopt the present fashionable mode of travelling, and after mounting the seventeen miles or thereabouts, which is necessary to get clear of the mundane attraction to wait there till the turning of the globe should bring Egypt directly under our feet."

"But it is not in the same latitude."

"True; I did not think of that!"

In her introduction, Webb presents her account of the 22nd Century as an answer to her search for literary novelty. "[T]he deep mine of invention cannot be worked out; there must be some new ideas left, if I could but find them," she writes. Her inspiration is to offer a "Chronicle of a future age." Writing the future is something unknown, untold: "I read your thoughts, and see you fear to sketch the scenes of which you are to write, because you imagine they must be different from those with which you are acquainted. This is a natural distrust: the scenes will indeed be different from those you now behold; the whole face of society will be changed; new governments will have arisen; strange discoveries will be made, and stranger modes of life adapted."

The idea of the future as a legitimate area of literary speculation, especially for satire, and that the future will be very different from the present – is the heart of what we now call sf. But there's more to it than that. The creation of artificial life by passing electric currents through dead tissue is, of course, the means by which Frankenstein created his "monster". Furthermore, Frankenstein's creature acts as commentary upon

humanity's moral failings in much the same way as Cheops in *The Mummy!* And in *The Last Man*, the year before *The Mummy!* was published, Mary Shelley had also written about a future England where ballooning was common.

If, as some have suggested, the crystallisation of science fiction is the point at which one can identify other, similar works, then 1827, the year of a novel which is such an obvious homage to Mary Shelley, must be that point. Here, sf becomes a genre.

The Mummy! did not make Webb's fortune, but it changed her life. In 1830, a reviewer and landscape architect named John Claudius Loudon asked to be introduced to the anonymous author of the novel that had so impressed him. Shortly afterwards, they were married, and Jane Webb Loudon became a best-selling author of handbooks on gardening and horticulture. It is tempting to speculate what would have happened if she had remained a writer of popular speculative novels. Could she have been an earlier version of H.G. Wells? Or would *The Mummy!* with its acute summary of the very nature of science fiction, have remained a one-off?

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

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

Turning a corner

Roderick Gladwish discovers the Apex of dark sf and gets under an AlienSkin

Apex Science Fiction and Horror Digest is a new US-based magazine. Apex wants to help writers to get known by sending their issues to *Locus*, *Whispers of Wickedness*, *Tangent*, *SciFiDimensions* and others. Editors of 'Best of' anthologies will receive copies too. Hopefully this means if they find some new talent it will get spotted quickly. Or it might just annoy said editors and copies of Apex will be used as coasters across the genre landscape for years to come.

The print version *Apex* is at issue two while the online version, somewhat confusingly, is at issue eight. The *Apex Online* carries extra interviews, reviews and different stories from the print version. When members of the editorial staff write fiction it goes here rather than turning the dead tree *Apex* into a vanity production.

Apex Digest is an A5 magazine with a colour cover and black and white interior illustrations, which vary in quality from striking to rough. Their tag line: 'Science Fiction and Horror' needs the 'and' removed. Every story had a horror element and all were science fiction.

A good start came with 'The Falcon' from James P Hogan. In a police state a woman, who is part of the system, rebels. Or is this a woman having a mental breakdown in a gentler world? *Nineteen Eighty-four* in style, except with hope.

In 'Thick and Thin' Peter Hagelstad presents Venus as an evolutionary 'hot house' with technological experiments battling for resources. Two competing technologies develop a symbiotic relationship. 'Union Dues' by K A Patterson has a creature in a crate but it is rather predictable. In Jonathan Moeller's 'Bugs in the Wall' nanotech is maintaining a pristine city, but the people have descended from this technological peak.

James R. Cain's 'A Flash of Light' has obsessive 'Jane-no-mates' building a ship to save her from the end of the world when a nearby star goes nova. Luckily she has warning dreams and spacecraft technology dreams too. Unluckily she's the only one left to restart humanity.

'An Odd Day in I-Forgot' was refreshingly different. Athena Workman describes a penal colony that survives by digging holes in a desert to discover objects from a past civilisation. Another different tale, 'Crucifixion' from Lavie Tidhar had a robot beggar in Jerusalem living on faith because nothing else would

Title contenders

Apex Science Fiction and
Horror Digest
4629 Riverman Way,
Lexington, KY 40515
www.apexdigest.com

AlienSkin
www.alienskinmag.com



keep it going through the day. 'Not For Children' has Bryn Sparks giving us another post-apocalyptic society with a 'witch' telling a twisted story of Hansel and Gretel. He should have told it straight.

'Apex Parting shot...' is a flash fiction tale on the last page. 'Orders' by Jon Hansen has classic SF (a first contact story) and classic horror (giant spiders) plus humour – all in less than a page – clever.

There are weaknesses in the fiction, but *Apex* has a lot of potential. The editorial staff, especially Editor-in-Chief Jason Sizemore, work hard to push the publication so I hope its long future is brighter than their stories.

AlienSkin is a monthly webzine aiming to help new writers. Around since 2002 it offers a positive critique of all submitted work plus advice and

help. There are articles on the craft, a FAQ section answering questions about writing and Mass Interrogation where the writers published in each issue are asked one question about writing. There is also the Zap Room, where merciless criticism is unleashed upon a submitted story in public. This must be cathartic for editors forced to bite their tongues more often than not, but I wonder how it fits with helping new writers. You do get a free T-shirt after your self-confidence has been shattered.

The archive, the strength of webzines against their print rivals, is only one issue deep for stories and two for articles. This is compensated for by 'Shed Skins' which carries the first paragraph of past stories. Readers may request a copy of any story that catches their interest.

AlienSkin carries fiction in several

forms. The core is 20 pieces (all under 3,500 words) plus a few poems. There is also the Round Robins, where would-be writers submit a potential next paragraph to extend a growing tale. Competitions give a further opportunity for writers.

Although fiction is segmented into sf, fantasy and horror it was hard to tell which was which. The quality of writing is weaker than *Apex*; I suspect *AlienSkin's* aim to nurture talent means they are softer editors.

Talent on the right path can be found in three tales: 'Middling', 'Benny vs. The Mutans' and 'Around The World In Eighty Minutes'. All were short, but still wordy. In 'Middling' AD Conrad has an infallible intelligence test troubling the son of genius parents. He feels he's nothing special, but discovers he is wrong; he is precisely average. In 'Benny vs. The Mutans', Gary J Beharry comes up with a neat tale of a child going to the dentist. 'Around The World In Eighty Minutes' by Philip Hamm explores how technologically enabled hyper-tourism leaves travellers iaded.

"The Hideaway" by Lou Antonelli has a hunting party find ancient Atlantean technology. There's another hunting party and another story inside a story from CT Suddeth in "Hunter's Moon". *Alienskin* have missed pushing the 'show don't tell' rule of writing with both of these.

Kurt MacPherson's 'Drawing Hope' was under the horror banner, but was more fantasy with magic tattoos and abruptly introduced robot spiders. 'Caught In The Oort' by Sheila Crosby was supposedly a humorous tale about a bath cult. Brutal acts of violence on frail victims didn't have me laughing.

Does *AlienSkin* help writers? They are encouraging and supportive but the Zap Room is the complete reverse of encouragement.

Interzone: 200 not out

This year *Interzone* reaches issue 200. It has published over 1100 stories by around 330 authors. Writers who have appeared most often are: Stephen Baxter (36 stories), Brian Stapleford (35), Eric Brown (33), Kim Newman (24) and Greg Egan (23). David Pringle and now Andy Cox have encouraged and inspired generations of writers.

Interzone is the benchmark against which all UK sf magazines are measured and it is the goal of most budding authors to be published there. I gave up on *Interzone* a decade ago but bought some issues to see what TTA Press was doing when they took over. I have just renewed my subscription because I have enjoyed the fiction and TTA's skill picking talented illustrators.

Plans are afoot to expand distribution and the design has been modified to make it jump out on the newsstands. SF on newsstands? One can only dare to hope!

To celebrate, the bicentennial issue will be in full colour. I have always been impressed in TTA team's sense of the design and a full colour magazine should be something to behold.



The joys of punk n

There are published writers, and there are budding writers, and somewhere in the middle is a lost, grey, limbo-land populated by writers who have completed one or more full-length novels but have not yet had their genius recognised by Grub Street.

It's a terrible place, this limbo-land. It's cold and unforgiving and the ash-grey landscape stretches off interminably in every direction. And it's populated, too. Snappy little demon-things which rip at your heart and tear at your soul and, invariably, come disguised as A4 Manila envelopes.

These buff-brown packages are the scourge of any writer seriously trying to get published. There can be nothing worse than hearing the clatter of the letter-box and rushing to the door to see your name and address in your own handwriting glaring balefully up at you from the doormat.

That's because you know, you really do know, that if the literary agent or publisher to whom you'd sent off your precious three chapters, synopsis and covering letter to 12 weeks previously really wanted to publish your novel then you wouldn't be getting back a stamped, self-addressed envelope about the thickness of three chapters, a synopsis and a covering letter. You'd be getting phone calls and e-mails and couriered bottles of Dom Perignon.

But still, you rip open that Manila envelope, just in case. Just in case it doesn't actually say thank you for allowing us to see your work and you will appreciate that the market is very competitive at the moment or I'm afraid I wasn't sufficiently moved by your novel to consider representing it.

I'd had all that. I was fed up to the back teeth of it. Which was why, when I contacted Storm Constantine's Immanion Press regarding my novel *Hinterland*, I was both ready to completely call it a day if they weren't interested, and also quite gratified that they accepted e-mail submissions, which meant I wouldn't have to face another one of those bloody Manila envelopes on the doormat.



"For them to say yes, we're considering publishing *Hinterland*, was just like the most natural, unimportant thing in the world... and where had I put that Cuban cigar again?"

I could just read their rejection, quietly delete it from my inbox, and forget the whole thing.

So I was surprised when I got an e-mail within a few days asking to see the rest of the manuscript. I sent it off and duly forgot about it. That was February 2004. By June I had another matter-of-fact e-mail from Immanion's Gabriel Strange, talking about editors and rewrites and the like.

I had to re-read the e-mail a couple of times, wondering if I'd missed something. I sent Gabby a cautious e-mail back: "Does this mean you're considering publishing *Hinterland*?"

"Yes, we're considering publishing *Hinterland*," he replied, as though the last couple of years of rejections and near misses and

umming-and-ahing, followed by eventual apologetic rejection (worse than an outright no!) had never happened, and for them to say yes, we're considering publishing *Hinterland*, was just like the most natural, unimportant thing in the world... and where had I put that Cuban cigar again? Storm Constantine, author of the hugely successful *Wraeththu* series of books, set up Immanion Press in 2003 initially to keep her own back catalogue in print.

Storm says: "Unless you're one of the very few 'big name' authors, you can't expect to see your work staying in print for long, which is annoying for both writers and their loyal readers."

"At the beginning, I think both Gabriel and I just regarded IP

as an extension of other services that we offer fans, but then other author friends began to get in touch with us, asking, 'will you do my back catalogue too?' and then a few new authors sent us great manuscripts that we couldn't bear not to publish! So we had to think again, and decided to press ahead as a bona fide small publisher."

The first non-Storm books signed up by Immanion were new novels from two unknowns: Neil Robinson's post-apocalyptic (but not really; no marauding biker gangs or zombie hordes) *Oliphant Onas* and Steven Pirie's supernatural comedy *Digging Up Donald*. Then bigger names followed, in the shape of re-issues from veteran SF writers Michael Moorcock and Ian Watson, and a

ock publishing

David Barnett finds relief from Manila envelopes with Immanion Press.



Constantly in print (far left)

Storm Constantine initially created Immanion Press to keep her own works in print.

Rubbing spines with giants (left)

David Barnett's (far left) *Hinterland* now rubs spines with novels by genre giants such as Ian Watson (centre) and Michael Moorcock (right).

short story collection from Michael Cobley, author of the Shadowkings trilogy.

And now my own work was among their august company, rubbing spines with work from established giants who had seen their older work fall out of print and new writers whose books were considered too weird or way out by the mainstream press.

Storm says: "It especially galls me that good writers get shunted to the side, because their work is challenging or cross-genre, and typically the lesser talented writer is more vocal, pushy and confident than the highly talented one, who is often loathe to blow her own trumpet."

"Publishers want to publish new writers constantly, flinging wads of them at the wall in the hope that some will stick. Most of them are one novel wonders, who you never hear of again, because they don't get the long term back up from their publisher that they need."

Hinterland was published by Immanion Press on April 1 – yes,

I know. But I felt anything but a fool when I held my launch party on the day of publication at Waterstone's in Bradford, West Yorkshire, in front of a crowd of 60 or more who seemed to actually like what I read out from the book and, more importantly, bought copies to take home.

Then the reviews followed – some good (thank you *Interzone*, the *Big Issue* and, most bizarrely, *The Sun*), some not so good (I believe a mauling from *SFX* is considered something of a rite of passage for new authors).

Of course, I am under no illusions that *Hinterland* will ever make me rich. Immanion Press, for all the enthusiasm, professionalism and love of publishing exhibited by those involved, is still a small press which can't compete with the mainstream publishing houses in terms of marketing, distribution and big liquid lunches for promising new authors.

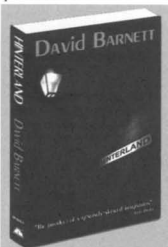
But money isn't the point. Well, not the total point. When I finished *Hinterland*, I knew I'd

written a good book. It might have been a bit of a weird one to pitch – journalist stumbles on to fortune conspiracy after life goes down toilet following rash or urban legend-flavoured weirdness in unnamed Northern town – but I knew I had something.

If I'd been disheartened by the "well, it's okay but it's not really like anything else, so we're not sure if we can sell it" attitude of the big publishers then *Hinterland* would still be sitting in the sock drawer. Fortunately, there's a burgeoning small press community out there prepared to take chances. And for me, at least, it paid off: not only have I had my book published, I've also now secured the services of a literary agent on the back of it.

Joolz Denby, the Orange Prize-shortlisted author of *Billie Morgan*, *Conazon* and *Stone Baby*, kindly wrote a "shout line" for the cover of *Hinterland*, and offered me some sage words: "You're doing it the right way, going the small press route. You'll learn more about publishing that way, and if you

do get a bigger deal you'll have a better idea of how it all works. And besides, it's a hell of a lot more punk rock!"



David Barnett's *Hinterland* is in bookshops now, priced £12.99.

You can order *Hinterland* (and all the other books in their catalogue) direct from Immanion Press at: www.immanionpress.wox.org.

Follow the signs to

Ian Watson and his cohorts from the Northampton SF Writers' Workshop (NSFWG) are planning NewCon3. Taking place at the Guildhall in Northampton over the weekend of 1-2 October the "concept convention" is themed around time travel and will feature Guests of Honour Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Liz Williams and Fangorn (Chris Baker). Additional participants will be Gwyneth Jones, Steve Cockayne, as well as Watson himself.

Having attended NewCon2 at Northampton's Roadmender arts venue myself and enjoyed its intimate nature, I thought I'd ask Watson just what made him want to run a con in the first place.

'The Northampton SF Writers Group burst into existence three years ago (to workshop in depth a couple of stories per monthly session, with me as author-in-residence) partly due to the enthusiasm of Tom Hunter [yes, he of *Matrix*'s editorial team] who was then working for the Northampton arts and gigs venue Roadmender. We gelled wonderfully,' says Watson, 'so we decided to hold a one-day con at Roadmender in October 2003. Steven Baxter was writer Guest of Honour, and Ben Jeapes was publisher Guest of Honour. (Before its sad demise Big Engine was to reissue my rewritten *Whores of Babylon*, accomplished later by Storm Constantine's Immanion Press.) Dominic Harman was our artist GoH. I got to know Dominic when he did a cover for *Asimov*'s featuring a story of mine about alien absinthe. Roadmender had a fine gallery for an exhibition, so we made good use of it.

'So that was NewCon2,' says Watson. 'New, because it was a new convention, run by a new group of emerging local writers, and definitely something new to Northampton. Numbered 2, to inspire confidence! But also, we'd previously organised an afternoon with Colin Greenland, so in retrospect that could be considered NewCon1. Some Masters of Fandom turned up at NewCon2 and gave a nod of approval. Encouraged, we decided to go bigger and even better, hence the two-day NewCon3, to be held the first weekend of October this year.

'By now Tom had left for London, however, and a new broom at Roadmender swept

us clean out. As a result we shifted our meetings to the RAF Association Club, thanks to our Treasurer being its Treasurer too – and for NewCon3 we hired Northampton's gorgeous gothic Guildhall in the centre of town.'

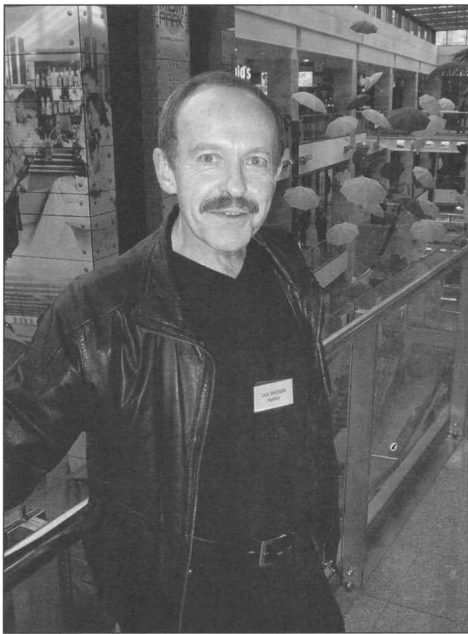
NewCon3 has "time" as its theme, and the con will include the administration of the NewCon Award – this year awarded to the piece voted the best science fiction work ever written on the subject of time or time travel. I wondered whether Watson wanted to do something different to the standard con format, or was he trying to meet local demand? Or fill a gap in the calendar? Or perhaps, I dared

to suggest, it's all just a crazy power trip...

'We're definitely trying to do something different,' Watson affirms. 'That's why we're calling NewCon3 our first "concept convention", with the concept being journeying through time from the past to the future.' Apparently Saturday at NewCon3 is to cover 'medieval to the present day', which seems relatively easy to quantify, and that Sunday is to cover 'present day to the future', which seems considerably less easy to quantify. I asked Watson to expand briefly on these themes. 'We haven't finalised the programme yet,' he says, 'but basically the Saturday will

include historical items such as a sword-fighting demonstration, and long-time con-goer and medieval historian Dr Kari Maund will probably talk about Viking towns, including Northampton. We'll also be running one of the Guest of Honour interviews and Fangorn's slide show on the Saturday as well, so that day won't be exclusively historical.

'Sunday will be much more present and future-oriented. For instance, how well was the present predicted in the 20th Century? Trends in SF, and what the future holds. Over the two days we're trying to present the momentum from the past through now into



Sol Central

Martin Sketchley talks to Ian Watson about the plans for NewCon3 in Northampton.



move around. Quite a few other writers plan to turn up, such as Gwyneth Jones, Storm Constantine with the Immanium Mob, and Steve Cockayne, perhaps with one or two of the giant puppets that inspired his *Legends of the Land* novels. HG Wells will also be present intermittently due to time travel, and Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, on which Fangorn worked. For that matter, Fangorn was also involved in the most recent film of *The Time Machine*.

So how is the preparation going? 'We're busy creating local interest by leafleting schools and libraries, issuing press releases, and all being well, courtesy of Virgin Rail and other rail companies, our posters will appear on many stations—Virgin itself will soon be going into space—so we're trying to advertise innovatively across the region. Actually, as regards the NSFSG, we have members who travel from as far as Oxford and near Huntingdon, so it seems that there's nothing quite like our workshop, nor the con, in quite a wide area.'

I wondered if there was anything else behind Watson's motivation. 'Myself, I've hugely enjoyed going to cons for the past 30 years, so chairing one contains a bit of "giving something back" to the fan community. Or if you feel naughty, you can regard it as a rake's progress. SF writers often emerged from the ranks of fandom, it's said, so I'm trying reverse-evolution—I felt quite a glow when someone called me filthy conrunner recently! However, NewCon3 is the product of the whole NSFSG, and I'm just a part of it. So don't worry about a power trip—although if you're into conspiracy theories it's interesting that two of our former members now edit *Matrix*, and we're in close alliance with the Immanium people (see page 12), to the extent that we might organise a future con as a co-production with them, bringing in gamers.'

I asked Watson if he's learned anything as a result of running a con. 'Due to previous, um, bitter experience, the real ale didn't run out at NewCon2! But it was only an hour before NewCon2 started that I finally managed to get hold of name-badges, so people needed to write their own names—though that's better than the Eurocon in Bulgaria last year, with about 18 nationalities present and not a name in sight the whole time. This time

we're putting the dealers in the main flow of the con, so they get constant traffic, as opposed to being isolated in a mezzanine art gallery. We have quite a bit more function space at the Guildhall, too, most of which is rather opulent.'

'Mainly, though, I've learned about methods of attempting to raise funds (I stress attempting to), since even with Borough Council support the Guildhall and its facilities and staff are going to cost us a substantial sum. We're keeping the registration price as low as possible, however, just £20 for the two days (or £12 for Saturday only, £10 for Sunday only). A bargain! We decided to hold a ceilidh rather than having local bands play (which was our first idea) because this seemed more popular with prospective attendees, consulted at Eastercon and elsewhere.'

'We're putting our guests up in the nearby Ibis Hotel, which is inexpensive but new and quite posh, which we were very happy with for NewCon2. Anyone from a distance is advised to book there. A delight is that the Ibis is in the "Sol Central" complex, so road signs actually point to Sol Central—as if you're a spaceship pilot heading in Earthwards from the stars!'

'We intend NewCon3 to be a great success, so that the future—whatever else it holds—will include a NewCon4.'

I asked Watson about his own work—what's coming up from this popular, and prolific SF author? 'My main imminent

publication,' says Watson, 'is my 10th story collection, *The Butterflies of Memory*, from PS Publishing this autumn. With an introduction by Paul McAuley, this book includes among others my 2005 Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award finalist "An Appeal to Adolf". All of the stories have special introductions written by myself. One is a collaboration, written with my Italian surrealist SF chum Roberto Quaglia. Roberto—whose www.robertoquaglia.com is a wonderfully weird website—also runs my own website. Together we're writing a volume of linked, crazy stories, one of which—"The Grave of My Beloved"—is due soonish from *Weird Tales*. Another—"The Colonoscopy of My Beloved"—will soon appear in John Grant's anthology *Strange Pleasures*, from Prime. Elsewhere, Storm Constantine's Immanium Press recently produced a British edition of my latest novel *Mokymen*, with a number of textual improvements upon the American first edition. Next year they'll also be reissuing three of my earlier novels: *Alien Embassy*, *God's World*, and *Queenmagic*. Meanwhile, translations pour forth, in Catalan, Spanish, Russian, Hungarian, Japanese...'

Quite dizzied and somewhat in awe of the scale of Watson's output, I can only encourage you to attend NewCon3 and support the Northampton Science Fiction Writers Group's first ever 'concept convention'. I know I will.

NewCon-spiracy theories

If Tom and Claire are part of some Ian Watson (left) led, Northampton-based (Guildhall shown) conspiracy to take over of London, where does that leave the only Martin editor not part of their secret cabal. Martin is worried.

futurity and onward to... the stars? The swords? The official Northampton town jester will also be doing his thing, and strolling players will roam and play. On Saturday night there'll be a ceilidh, called by the best caller in the area. For Rennie Mackintosh fans on Sunday morning at 11.00am there'll be a limited-numbers tour of a nearby Georgian terrace, which Mackintosh remodelled in his unique style—it's one of the jewels in Northampton's crown.' But what about the panels?, I asked. 'There'll be less predictable panels at NewCon3, such as on what panelists would do if time stood still but they, uniquely, could still

Contacts

Ian Watson — www.ianwatson.info
NewCon3 — www.newcon3.co.uk
Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Northampton — www.78deringate.org.uk
Fangorn (Chris Baker) — www.fangorn.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Charmawow_web/Page_1x.html
Gwyneth Jones — <http://homepage.nflworld.com/gwynethann/>
Immanium Press — www.immaniumpress.wox.org
Jon Courtney Grimwood — www.j-cg.co.uk
Liz Williams — www.arkadybtinternet.co.uk
PS Publishing — www.pspublishing.co.uk
Paul McAuley — www.omegacom.demon.co.uk
Roberto Quaglia — www.robertoquaglia.com

Speaking of Dominic Harman, both he and Justin Robson have given their websites revamps in recent times. Meanwhile, our old friend Ian R MacLeod also has a funky new site.
www.dominic-harman.com
www.ianrmacleod.com
www.lula.co.uk

Martin Sketchley
<http://www.martinsketchley.co.uk/>
martin@martinsketchley.co.uk

the BSFA's greatest

BRITISH

science fiction ever

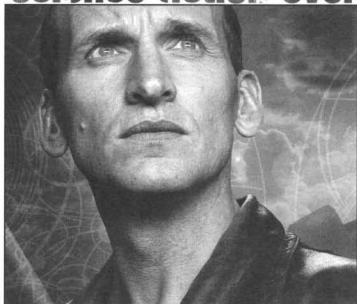
In August, Worldcon, the world's biggest science fiction convention returned to Britain for the first time in a decade. To celebrate, the BSFA launched a vote to discover what fans think is the very best British science fiction of all time.

We want your opinion. What is the best British novel ever? The best newcomer? Best television show? Best film? And who belongs with Mary Shelley, HG Wells, George Orwell and Arthur C. Clarke in the Order of Merit, as one of the all time greats?

We've made some suggestions, but **you can vote for anyone you want**. And to thank you for helping us decide who should win, **we're offering a top prize of £50 in cash and £25 to two runners up** pulled from the hat.

Who will you vote for?

- The best British SF novel ever;
- A great British SF author to join the BSFA's new Order of Merit;
- The most exciting new British SF author (who has published their first novel in the year 2000 or later);
- The best British SF film ever;
- And the best British SF on TV.



BSFA Order of Merit

At this year's Worldcon in Glasgow the BSFA launched the Order of Merit to mark the brilliant careers of the best British SF writers. The BSFA committee have **already selected** four undeniably great SF writers for the first year:

- Mary Shelley
- HG Wells
- George Orwell
- Arthur C Clarke

An **additional**, fifth candidate will be chosen by popular vote.

So, who else do you think deserves a place alongside these four greats on this list of the Best of British?



Mary Shelley

Frankenstein is far more than a monster story; it is the founding myth of the age of science.



H.G. Wells

Socialist and utopian, Wells combines insight and adventure as one of the founders of modern SF.



George Orwell

Intelligent, moving and fierce, Orwell's *1984* remains the high-water mark of SF as social criticism.



Arthur C. Clarke

One of SF's great visionaries, Clarke's novels practically define "sense of wonder" for generations of readers.

Vote and win

By simply taking the time to vote and return this ballot paper, you could be in with a chance of winning up to £50 – don't delay. Vote today.

Ballot papers must be received by:

21 January, 2006

Complete the ballot paper (you can use this page, a photocopy of it or just write down your favourites in each category) and send it to:

Great British SF,
48 Spooners Drive,
Park Street, St Albans
Herts, AL2 2HL

or email your choices to:
greatbritishsf@ntlworld.com
Remember to include your name and address so we can contact you if you win a prize.

The winners will be announced at Concussion, the 2006 Eastercon. Matrix will keep you up to date.

We've made some suggestions, but you can vote for anyone or anything. Newcomers must have had a first novel published in 2000 or later.

Best novel

1984 – Orwell	
Frankenstein – Shelley	
Greybeard – Aldiss	
Hitchiker's Guide... – Adams	
Pashazade – Grimwood	
Stand on Zanzibar – Brunner	
The Centauri Device – Harrison	
The Chrysalids – Wyndham	
The City and the Stars – Clarke	
The Drowned World – Ballard	
The Separation – Priest	
The Time Ships – Baxter	
Use of Weapons – Banks	
War of the Worlds – Wells	
Other:	

Best film

1984 (1984 version)	
28 Days Later	
A Clockwork Orange	
Brazil	
Code 46	
Doppelganger	
Dr Who and the Daleks	
Island of Terror	
Quatermass and the Pit	
The Curse of Frankenstein	
The Day the Earth Caught Fire	
The Man in the White Suit	
The Man Who Fell to Earth	
Things to Come	
Other:	

Best newcomer

Neal Asher	
Tony Ballantyne	
Susanna Clarke	
Jon George	
Gary Gibson	
David Mitchell	
Richard Morgan	
Adam Roberts	
Alastair Reynolds	
Martin Sketchley	
Charles Stross	
Steph Swainston	
Karen Traviss	
Liz Williams	
Other:	

Best television

Blake's 7	
Doomwatch	
Dr Who	
Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy	
Quatermass	
Red Dwarf	
Sapphire and Steel	
Space 1999	
The Avengers	
The Clangers	
The Day of the Triffids	
The Prisoner	
Thunderbirds	
Ultraviolet	
Other:	

My nominee for a place alongside Mary Shelley, HG Wells, George Orwell and Arthur C. Clarke on the BSFA Order of Merit is:

Name:

in full, please print

Address:

Postcode:

E-mail:

Choose your award

Claire Bradley plays it by the

1.

Welcome to the BSFA Awards action adventure game, which offers you opportunities for discovery, enjoyment and influence unparalleled in British fandom.

If you are a new member of the BSFA, go to paragraph 2.

If you have just rejoined the BSFA, go to paragraph 5.

If you are a longstanding member of the BSFA, go to paragraph 8.

If you are not currently a member of the BSFA, go to page 31 or to the website at www.bsfa.co.uk to find out how you can join.

2.

Welcome, in turn, to the British Science Fiction Association. As a member of the BSFA you have the opportunity to nominate works first appearing in 2005 for the BSFA awards for the best novel, short fiction, artwork and non-fiction of the year. You also have the opportunity to vote for the shortlisted novel, short fiction and artwork at or before the next British national SF convention, where the awards will be presented over Easter 2006.

If you joined the BSFA at Interaction, the World Science Fiction Convention held in Glasgow in August, go to paragraph 7.

If you joined the BSFA through some other means, go to paragraph 9.

3.

Eligibility for the 2005 BSFA awards is as follows. Works published by the BSFA itself (whether in book form, on the website, or in one of the magazines) are not eligible for any of the awards. Works by BSFA members (including Council and committee members) which have not been published by the BSFA are eligible, subject to the conditions below.

The novel award is open to any novel-length work of science fiction or fantasy which is published in the UK for the first time in 2005. (Serialised novels are eligible, provided that the publication date of the concluding part is in 2005.) If a novel has been previously published elsewhere, but it hasn't been published in the UK until 2005, it is eligible.

The short fiction award is open to

4.

any shorter work of science fiction or fantasy, up to and including novellas, first published in 2005 (in a magazine, in a book, or online). This includes books and magazines published outside the UK.

The artwork award is open to any single science fictional or fantastic image that first appeared in 2005. Again, provided the artwork hasn't been published before 2005 it doesn't matter where it appears.

The non-fiction award is open to any written work about science fiction and/or fantasy which appeared in its current form in 2005. Other decisions about eligibility will be for the judges in each year.

If you think you might want to make some more nominations for the awards, go to paragraph 3.

If you won't be making any more nominations, go to paragraph 11.



any shorter work of science fiction or fantasy, up to and including novellas, first published in 2005 (in a magazine, in a book, or online). This includes books and magazines published outside the UK.

The artwork award is open to any single science fictional or fantastic image that first appeared in 2005. Again, provided the artwork hasn't been published before 2005 it doesn't matter where it appears.

The non-fiction award is open to any written work about science fiction and/or fantasy which appeared in its current form in 2005. Other decisions about eligibility will be for the judges in each year.

Now go to paragraph 11.

5.

Hello again, and welcome back to the BSFA. Remember the BSFA awards? You must do. Best SF and fantasy of the year. Awards presented at Eastercon. Really meaning to get round to nominating something except that you can't remember what you read or whether it was any good and anyway the deadline's gone past. It's all coming back now, isn't it? Well, the awards have been changing a bit over the past few years, so carry on reading to find out how to get involved.

If you rejoined the BSFA in Glasgow at Interaction, go to paragraph 7.

If you rejoined through some other means, go to paragraph 9.

6.

Don't panic, there's still time. Remember, you can nominate as many eligible works as you want to in each of the categories up to the deadline of Saturday 21 January 2006. Contact me by post or email (there's also an email link from the website, www.bsfa.co.uk); remember to include your name and BSFA membership number, and as much publication information about new nominations as you can as well as the obvious stuff like title and author/artist.

If you think you might want to make some nominations for the awards, go to paragraph 3.

If despite everything you think you won't be making any nominations, go to paragraph 10.

7.

I hope you enjoyed Interaction. Did you go to the Hugo ceremony? Agree with the results? Vote in any of the categories? Nominate anything? The BSFA awards differ from the Hugos in several ways. There aren't nearly as many categories. As a member of the BSFA you can nominate as many eligible works as you like. You can make nominations at any time between now and the deadline. And there are fewer members of the BSFA than at VWorldcon, so your nominations and votes could have a real influence on these awards.

If you've already made some nominations for the 2005 BSFA awards, go to paragraph 4.

If you haven't yet nominated, go to paragraph 6.

BSFA path

numbers to get you to vote in this year's BSFA Awards.

8.

Yes, it's me again, with this issue's attempt to remind you that you can nominate now (or at any point before the deadline in January) for any BSFA award: not just the novel, short fiction and artwork awards but also the newly reconstituted non-fiction award which I announced in my column in the last issue. You've got a real chance to make a difference here and if you don't get involved this year then all those keen new members who are actually interested in SF and fantasy will get to set the agenda and, effectively, the shortlists.

If you've already made some nominations for the 2005 BSFA awards, go to **paragraph 4**.

If you haven't yet nominated, go to **paragraph 6**.

9.

OK, I won't keep going on about the Worldcon. But I had a pretty good time, all things considered. And because I'm funny that way I always find the Hugo awards to be one of the good parts. It gives me a chance to see things winning that I think are good and to grumble and moan and complain if the things I think are best don't win – or even make it to the shortlist. However, if I haven't nominated or voted I find my opportunities to grumble are limited. I don't need to spell out the lesson in this, do I? You're intelligent science fiction fans who can work it out perfectly well for yourself.

If you've already made some nominations for the 2005 BSFA awards, go to **paragraph 4**.

If you haven't yet nominated, go to **paragraph 6**.

10.

OK, this is me giving you a Hard Stare, just a little bit. I realise that not everyone will have read anything eligible that they think is good enough to nominate, and some won't have enough time to read everything they want (that would be all of us, wouldn't it?) or an opportunity to see new stuff as it's published or access to the interweb. However, you can still get involved in this process: the shortlists can give you a steer about what other people think is the best of the year. And then you'll have the chance to consider them for yourself, and vote for them. All members of the BSFA and attending members of Eastercon can vote for the BSFA awards for the best novel, short fiction and artwork (the non-fiction award is chosen by a panel of judges: in 2005 Niall Harrison, Steve Jeffery and Geneva Melzack), and you'll have from the end of January, when the shortlists will be announced, until Tuesday 11 April 2006 to do so.

Now go to **paragraph 3**. In case you change your mind.

11.

Nominations in all categories are listed on the awards page of the BSFA website, www.bsfa.co.uk. Nominations received up to 15 August 2005 in the short fiction and artwork categories are listed opposite. These nominations are provided to remind you of what's out there. If something is included that you also like, remember to nominate it too since the shortlists will comprise the five works in each category with the highest numbers of nominations; if something you like is notable only by its absence at the moment, get the ball rolling by nominating it and alerting or reminding other people about it. If you're curious about stuff that's getting nominated that you've never heard of, there's still time to follow it up.

Now go to the rest of the magazine.

Short fiction nominations

- 'A World of His Own' – Christopher East (*Interzone* 197)
- 'Dee-Dee and the Dumpty Dancers' – Ian Watson & Mike Allen (*Interzone* 197)
- 'Ducks in Winter' – Neal Blaikie (*Interzone* 196)
- 'Going the Jerusalem Mile' – Chaz Brenchley (*TTA* 41)
- 'Heads Down, Thumbs Up' – Gavin Grant (*SciFiction*, 27 April)
- 'I, Robot' – Cory Doctorow (*Infinite Matrix*, 15 February)
- 'Keyboard Practice, Consisting of an Aria with Diverse Variations of the Harpsichord with Two Manuals' – John G McDavid (*F&SF*, January)
- 'Kivam' – Dave Hoing (*Interzone* 197)
- 'Magic For Beginners' – Kelly Link (*Magic For Beginners*, also *F&SF*, September)
- 'Magic in a Certain Slant of Light' – Deborah Coates (*Strange Horizons*, 21 March)
- 'Planet of the Amazon Women' – David Moles (*Strange Horizons*, 16-23 May)
- 'Smile Time: The Comic' – Astrid (LiveJournal community ATS_ENDOFDAYS)
- 'SS' – Nathan Ballingrud (*TTA* 41)
- 'The Emperor of Gondwanaland' – Paul Di Filippo (*Interzone* 196)
- 'The Face of America' – David Ira Cleary (*Interzone* 196)
- 'The Kansas Jayhawk vs. the Midwestern Monster Squad' – Jeremiah Tolbert (*Interzone* 197)
- 'The Little Goddess' – Ian McDonald (*Asimov's*, June)
- 'The Tetrahedron' – Vandana Singh (*Interzona* 1, April)
- 'The Western Front' – Patrick Samphire (*TTA* 41)
- 'This is Where the Title Goes' – Scott Edelman (*The Journal of Pulse-Pounding Narratives*, volume 2)
- 'Threshold of Perception' – Scott Mackay (*Interzone* 197)
- 'Totems' – Wil McIntosh (*Interzone* 196)
- 'Two Dreams on Trains' – Elizabeth Bear (*Strange Horizons*, 3 January)
- 'Winning Mars' – Jason Stoddard (*Interzone* 196)
- 'Written in the Stars' – Ian McDonald (*Constellations*)

Artwork nominations

- 'Squid Girl' (cover of *Interzone* 197) – Kenn Brown
- 'Megara' (cover of *F&SF*, January) – Max Bertolini
- 'Olympia. ET/Danland City' (cover of *Leading Edge* 49) – Eugene V Marinin
- 'Weapon Shop' (cover of *Interzone* 198) – Kenn Brown
- 'Winning Mars' (cover of *Interzone* 196) – Josh Finney



'Cloud Dragon Skies'
Frank Wu (www.strangehorizons.com)



'Where the night trains shriek in'
Heather Kelly (Cover of *Meta* 2)



ZOO NATION 6
Lights in the Sky
Pete Young (Cover of *Zoo Nation* 6)

British worldcon: no fatalities

Mark Plummer takes a look back at the success of Interaction, Worldcon 2005.



It was a British Worldcon and, as Chris Priest noted during the closing ceremony, nobody died. And there are plenty of other reasons for rating Interaction, the 63rd World Science Fiction Convention, a remarkable success although it does all seem rather dreamlike and remote now, at a remove of, oh, seven days or so.

It feels a little weird to be writing about it for a print publication that won't appear for several weeks with the knowledge that the Internet has already been deluged with reports and reviews. By the time you read this, what will remain unsaid? So I'll skip the stories of wild late-night parties and scurrilous tales about the *Matrix* editorial team – actually I've no idea what they were up to as I think I only saw Claire and Tom once, for about three minutes, so perhaps they really were off doing scurrilous things – and I'll confine myself to reporting some of the fan news from the event.

First, the Hugo Awards – superbly MC'd by Kim Newman and Paul McAuley – which saw a clean sweep for the UK in the fan categories. UK nominees did well overall, taking eight of the fourteen Hugos, but this is the first time that British fans have won all three fan awards since fan writer and fan artist categories were added to the ballot in 1967.

Plokta (edited by Alison Scott, Steve Davies and Mike Scott) has been a regular fixture on the shortlist since 2000 but this was its first win. The latest issue (no. 34, published for the Worldcon) is packaged in a well-done spoof cover inspired by the old Target Books *Dr Who* novels.

Alison Scott has suggested that *Plokta* may well be the most frivolous fanzine ever to win a Hugo, and while this issue isn't entirely atypical in that respect it does contain another blast in the ongoing debate on the nature of the British Eastercon.

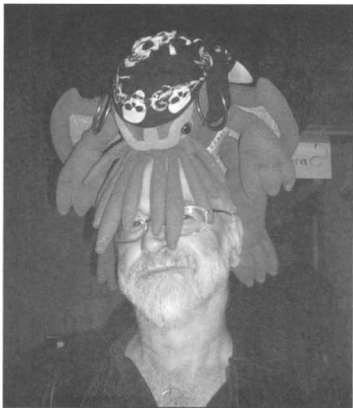
Dave Langford won best fan

Casualties low
Despite widespread predation by small, fluffy and ancient gods of doom and destruction, no fatalities were reported at Interaction.

writer, his seventeenth consecutive win in this category. Most people will be familiar with Dave through his writing in *Anisble*, which was itself a regular winner as best fanzine until it was voluntarily bumped to the semiprozine category – which this year it won as well.

And Sue Mason won a second fan artist Hugo (her first was in 2003, and she's still the only British fan ever to have won in this category). It's tempting to regard this almost as a second Hugo for *Plokta* – Sue is the house artist – but Sue's work is actually far more wide-ranging than that, appearing in numerous fanzines and convention publications including the excellent wrap-around covers for the 2004 Eastercon progress reports.

The Hugos proper are preceded by a number of other presentations, once characterised by Cory Doctorow as the 'oldest living fan' awards. The First Fandom Hall of Fame Award went to long-time US



fan and book dealer (and fan guest of honour at next year's Worldcon) Howard DeVore. There were also three Big Heart Awards, presented to Waldemar Kummung from Germany, John-Henri Holmberg from Sweden, and Ina Shorrock from the UK.

This Worldcon – rightly in my opinion – didn't attempt to categorise its guests of honour as fan or pro. Nevertheless, there were two guests whose credentials lie almost if not exclusively within the fan area.

I have to admit that I'd barely heard of Lars-Olov Strandberg when Interaction announced its guest list, but I now know that this is more a consequence of the man's modesty than any lack of achievement. As John-Henri Holmberg's guest of honour interview and contribution to the souvenir book make clear, Lars-Olov is very much a father to virtually every aspect of Swedish fandom, so it was entirely appropriate that he was the first

Nordic guest at a Worldcon.

Greg Pickersgill, who is incidentally a long-time BSFA member, will almost certainly be more familiar to fans in the UK, both as a fanzine writer and publisher, convention organiser, e-list moderator and all-round fanish presence. Greg was another fine choice of guest, and if you're unfamiliar with his written work a collection was produced for the Worldcon and is still available from me (contact details at the front of *Matrix*). *Can't Get Off the Island* is a seventy thousand word anthology of material previously published in fanzines and on e-lists. I co-edited it with Claire Brialey so yes, I'm biased, but I think it's a fascinating documentation of some of the key issues and debates in British fandom over the last thirty-five years. Cost is £4 within the UK including postage; we accept cash, cheques payable to me or Claire, or payment via PayPal to things@gostak.demon.co.uk. Get in touch for cost details for overseas copies.

meditations

Little things can make me love a movie far more than it deserves. This month it's *Fantastic Four*, a pretty poor movie by most standards but with the treat of a seeing Stan Lee cameo as one of his greatest ever creations, Willy Lumpkin – postman to the Baxter Building.

Stan Lee was a hugely important figure in my childhood in directing me towards reading generally and genre fiction in particular. I'm too young to have read Stan's best stories when they were first published, but as a child I inherited a comic collection that included a huge number of Marvel UK reprints of the classic Spider-Man, *Fantastic Four*, X-Men, Iron Man and Avengers stories. I devoured them all.

Indeed Stan once got me into trouble at school.

One teacher, when I was about eight, set us one of those makework things teachers do when they want a quiet afternoon. He gave everyone in the class a letter of the alphabet and a theme and told us to write down all the words we could think on the theme of starting with that letter.

I got the letter "C" and the theme "disasters". I happily scribbled away until the teacher finished dozing, or whatever it was he was doing, then when my turn came, I read out my list.

One of my words was "cataclysmic", I could only have learnt the word in a Marvel comic.

"That's not a real word," said teacher.

"It is!" I said.

"It isn't," said the teacher, and imparted some forgotten punishment for cheating and/or talking back.

Of course I couldn't leave it there. So that afternoon I visited the town's library and copied a page from the dictionary thirty times. Next morning everyone in my class and my teacher had a copy of that page, with the word cataclysmic circled in red pen.

Then the trouble really started. I learned two important lessons that day: that my teacher wasn't as clever as Stan Lee and that no one likes a smart-arse.

Thanks Stan.

Until the NUT bans elbow patches, Make Mine Marvel!

Flicker

Nolan pursues Prestigious project

One fascinating titbit of film gossip to come out of Worldcon was the news that Christopher Priest's novel *The Prestige* is under development by Chris Nolan (*Batman Begins*, *Memento*). Priest was clearly excited about the prospect, speaking in glowing terms about the script by Jonathan Nolan (who wrote the story on which *Memento* is based) during his Guest of Honour address.

Intrigued, Flickers did some sniffing around Newmarket Films who hold the rights to the novel and have recently renewed them for a significantly larger sum. Our source at Newmarket believes that the film will go into pre-production early next year and that, before then, the Nolan brothers will spend time polishing the script. The the project is, they say, "virtually certain" to go ahead.

The Prestige won the 1996 World



Magic movie
Christopher Nolan (right) is set to adapt Christopher Priest's novel *The Prestige* (above)



Fantasy Award. It is the story of two stage illusionists who become rivals and take their obsession with each other to extraordinary lengths. It features a teleportation device and Priest's frequent theme of doubles, twins and confused identity.

Coughs and sneezes spread ALIENS!

Though it started life as a remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Nicole Kidman's next film, *Invasion*, has morphed into an original project. Kidman will play a psychiatrist studying the personality-changing effects of a mysterious epidemic. Discovering that the disease has an extraterrestrial origin, Kidman must fight to protect her son, who may be the key to stopping the invasion.

The film will be the first English language production by Downfall director Oliver Hirschbiegel from a script by David Kajganich. It will go into production October with a release date set for June 2006.

Living life backwards

David Fincher has signed up for a two picture deal with Paramount and Warner Brothers. The director will make *Zodiac*, a thriller starring Mark Ruffalo and, of more interest to genre fans, then move on to his long-gestating adaptation of the F Scott Fitzgerald

short *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, the story of a man who lives his life backwards. *Benjamin Button* will star Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett.

Dive! Dive!

An extraterrestrial invasion is the basis for *Rebellion*. Set on board a new nuclear submarine that has been rushed into service, Chuck Russel (*Mask*, *Eraser*) will direct a script by Dean Widemann.

Ice-Nine unfrozen

Leonardo DiCaprio's production company, Appian Way, are developing an adaptation of Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Cat's Cradle*. The film, scheduled for a 2007 release, is based on a script by brothers Jake and James Hart.

There can be only five?

Well the characters are immortal, so it should be no surprise that the Highlander franchise is impossible to kill off. *Highlander: The Journey Continues*

will be the fifth big screen outing for the sword-wielding, head-chopping immortals, and extend the continuity of the television series.

666: The number of the sequel

There could be a lot of people wandering around wondering how they missed 662 sequels when *The Omen 666* is finally released next year. An "updating" of the original story, the new film will follow three other sequels that culminated with 1991's dire *The Omen IV: The Awakening*. John Moore (*Flight of the Phoenix*) will direct when production begins in October.

Looking dodgy...

The trouble with zombies is that, no matter how rotten they are, they just won't stay dead. Sony, apparently not content with two corpses, plans a whole new *Resident Evil* trilogy... Steve Oedekerk, director of the unwatchable *Kung Pow* to helm sequel to *Brave Almighty* without Jim Carey...

Chocolate treats

He had to be dragged into the cinema, but Martin McGrath loved Burton's Charlie.

I really didn't want to review *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Or, more honestly, I really didn't want to have to sit down and watch it. I have attempted to get several other people to write the review of the film for this issue so I wouldn't have to endure it. It could summon up absolutely no enthusiasm for this film, despite the fact that it featured two of Hollywood's outstanding talents.

I love almost everything Tim Burton does – even if *Planet of the Apes* is indefensible – and Johnny Depp is, in my opinion, one of the most interesting actors ever to walk in front of a camera. Perhaps my reluctance was because I never really “got” Roald Dahl – I didn't read “children's books” when I was young and so I don't have the emotional attachment that many people carry for Dahl's work, though I'm sure he's a fine writer. And perhaps it is because I really dislike the earlier adaptation, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971) – Gene Wilder's performance is egotistical and the Oompa Loompas irritating.

But as, one after another, the ranks of possible alternative reviewers thinned it became more and more obvious that there was no escape, I was going to have to get in line and buy a ticket.

So, imagine my surprise when, despite my misgivings, that ticket turned out to be golden.

The story is familiar. Poor Charlie Bucket (Highmore) lives in a crumbling shack with his family. Willy Wonka, owner of a mysterious chocolate company, announces a competition that will allow the finders of five golden tickets to tour his factory. The winners, greedy Augustus Gloop (Wiegatz), spoilt Veruca Salt (Winter), rude Mike Teavee (Fry), pushy Violet Beauregarde (Robb) and, of course, Charlie, are led through the factory by the oddball Wonka. One by one the children fall victim to their foibles, until only Charlie remains.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Unlike the Gene Wilder version this is primarily a story about the boy Charlie Bucket (Highmore) and the



Wonka vision (top)

Johnny Depp, the world's prettiest man, is not afraid of risking looking stupid.

Gloop up (left)

The group watches as Augustus Gloop goes up the tubes.



focus is very much on his family. Both Bonham Carter as Charlie's mother and veteran David Kelly as his Grandpa Joe give excellent, warm performances. There is only the tiniest trace of the sugary sentimentality common to many American films about children. Dahl's own cynicism surfaces throughout the story, offering bitterness when things threaten to become too candy-coated.

Amongst the particular delights of this film are Depp's performance as Willy Wonka – giggling, sly and very funny. Depp has all the film's most quotable lines, and though the chances to drop some of the lines into casual conversation are likely to be rare, it is essential that you are prepared. For example, miss an opportunity to say: “Everything in this room is *eatable*. Even I'm *eatable*. But that is called cannibalism, my dear children, and is in fact frowned upon in most societies,” and you will kick yourself.

Depp may be regarded as one of the prettiest men on the planet but the refreshing thing about his comedy performances is his willingness to risk looking stupid. He has superb comic timing and a gift for physical comedy that would put most so-called comics to shame.

The Oompa Loompa dance routines are another highlight. Infinitely funkier and funnier than those in the 1971 version, their musical interludes made me laugh out loud and the use of single actor (Roy) and CGI to represent the little folk works brilliantly.

However excellent the performances and however funny the script, there isn't any doubt that the real star of this show is Wonka's factory. Brilliant set design and special effects, clever cinematography and smart direction create an utterly immersive experience.

I forced myself to sit through *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate*

Factory before going to see *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The earlier version seemed interminably long while Burton's new adaptation zipped by. I was ready to assume that Burton's film had been made shorter to suit an audience with a reduced attention span. But when I checked the actual running times I found that Burton's film is actually longer, by a whole fifteen minutes. Far from being an example of dumbing down, it was simply proof of Burton's superior film-making.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Director: Tim Burton

Writer: John August

Cinematographer: Philippe Rousselot

Starring: Johnny Depp, Freddie Highmore, David Kelly, Helena Bonham Carter, Noah Taylor, Missi Pyle, James Fox, Deep Roy, Christopher Lee, Adam Godley, Franziska Troegner, Annasophia Robb, Julia Winter, Jordan Fry, Philip Wiegatz

115 mins

The ordinary four

Martin McGrath wonders whether it is possible to make a good Fantastic Four film

There will be those who, with the benefit of hindsight, will say that the idea of producing a Fantastic Four movie was doomed from the beginning. The heroes of Marvel's self-proclaimed "worlds greatest comic magazine" were never going to lend themselves to a leather-clad make-over in the style of the X-Men or Batman. And the kind of unreconstructed, uncynical heroics of this Fab Four were always going to be a tougher sell than, say, the teenage soap opera of Spider-Man.

Even in comics, and despite a recent relaunch in Marvel's Ultimate comics line-up, the Fantastic Four are not fashionable. For a start their nuclear family dynamic – mom, pop and squabbling kids – is a far less universal experience than it was when Lee and Kirby created the characters in the early sixties. Then there is the fact that there is no ambiguity in the Fantastic Four – they are the good guys, they fight the bad guys, and save the day. There is no Wolverineish anti-hero to add that dash of post-millennial cool. All these things were working against this production from the moment it received the green light.

That's said, the studio and producers of *Fantastic Four* did not do themselves any favours when they set out to make this film.

First, they took Marvel's scientific adventurers and put them in a story with neither science nor adventure. The retelling of the Four's origin – a risky journey into space, exposure to cosmic rays, the development of "fantastic" powers – is effective enough, though the decision to have Von Doom (McMahon) in space as well was unnecessary if understandable. However, from that starting point there is no sensible attempt then to supply a proper motivation for the conflict that develops between Doom and the Fantastic Four and so there is no emotional resonance in their struggles.

Second, their treatment of Doom is fatally misguided. They took one of Lee and Kirby's greatest creations, the regal and wicked Doctor Doom, and throwing away precisely those aspects that make the character unique, they turn him into a light-



The Human Torch (top)

There is not much wrong with the film's special effects.

Boldly going (right)

Ben Grimm (Chickie), Reed Richards (Frank), Sue Storm (Albe) and Johnny Storm (Evens) get ready for their flight.



weight Gordon Gecko rip-off.

Third, they employed a production team without obvious talent. Story's direction is leaden bringing nothing to the action or the character relationships. Writers France (*The Punisher*) and Frost (*Storville*) have no record of writing successful, engaging or exciting movies.

And, finally, instead of selecting convincing, capable actors in the crucial lead roles they chose large lumps of oak, or ash, or yew – without closer inspection I can't tell exactly which species, but they were definitely wooden. Gruffudd's (*Hornblower*) Reed Richards is about as unconvincing a portrayal of a genius scientist, adventurer and man in love as has ever seen light of day. But his incompetence is as nothing next to McMahon's (*Nip/Tuck*) portrayal of Victor von Doom. I can honestly say that I have never seen such a woeful piece of miscasting or an actor look

so completely incapable of filling a role.

There are small crumbs of comfort in *Fantastic Four*. Chiklis (*The Shield*) always seemed perfect casting as Ben Grimm and so it proves. I had serious misgivings about the film's use of costume and make-up to portray The Thing but after five minutes I'd stopped noticing and that was largely due to the actor's convincing performance. More surprising was Alba's Sue Storm, who rose above the story's leering obsession with her good looks to prove that she was more than a match for any of the boys. Best of all though, for a pure moment of geek-gasm, was seeing Stan Lee cameo as Willy Lumpkin.

I don't believe that it is impossible, in this day and age, to make a successful, entertaining, exciting film featuring the Fantastic Four, however, this film fails on almost every count. And it fails for the worst possible reason: not

because of a lack of money or special effects, but because of a lack of imagination and ambition. *Fantastic Four* doesn't take its central characters seriously enough to allow the audience to care about what is happening on screen. Worse, it doesn't take its audience seriously enough to risk straying from the overworked clichés endemic in blockbuster movies.

The one thing that is painfully clear about *Fantastic Four* is that the film makers' didn't believe in the story they were telling. And if they don't, why should we?

Fantastic Four

Director: Tim Story

Writers: Michael France & Mark Frost

Cinematographer: Oliver Wood

Starring: Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba,

Chris Evans, Michael Chiklis, Julian

McMahon, Harish Linklater, Kerry

Washington

140 mins

Artificial stupidity

Stealth is stupid and nasty, says Martin McGrath

Stealth is a stupid, stupid film. It is so stupid that it is almost critic proof. Where the hell does one start?

Take the name. *Stealth*.

Presumably someone thought that sounded cool, threatening, "now" – and they're probably right. Of course the fact that the planes in this film are about as stealthy as a very fat man in a lime green suit sounding a foghorn while standing in the middle of the M25 at rush hour is, it seems, irrelevant.

Stealthy planes do not attack targets in broad daylight. They do not fly at about four feet from the ground with vast trails of flame blossoming from their tails. They do not need to go into risky nosedives to fire a missile down into a target. And they don't... oh what's the point? I'd be here all night explaining how stupid the portrayal of modern and near future air warfare was in this movie.

Let me just leave it at this, despite the title, stealth plays absolutely no part in this film. And neither do subtlety, intelligence, wit, charm or excitement.

Stealth has three hotshot test pilots (Lucas, Biel, Foxx) flying experimental strike fighters. They find themselves joined by a UAV "piloted" by an artificial intelligence module. Now it should be obvious that something is seriously wrong when it is revealed that the AI has downloaded and stored every song on the Internet but only plays irritating (but soundtrack friendly) Yankee rawk. Surely any sane person would have been reaching for the off switch right then. But no, instead they send it to attack a nuclear weapon-stealing "warlord". When the lily-livered human pilots refuse to go through with the attack because of the risk of collateral damage (like that happens) the AI goes AWOL, blows up the nukes, poisons an innocent village then sets off to attack targets in Siberia. In the chase that follows the pilots fly from the Arabian Sea to Tajikistan, North Korea, Siberia and Alaska and then back to North Korea for a dramatic rescue.

It is possible to enjoy stupid films. *Top Gun* is suspect for all sorts of reasons, but director Tony Scott's fetishistic treatment of the



Hotshots (top)

Apparently they're the best the US Navy has to offer.

Stealth bummer (left)

The stupidest artificial intelligence in fiction loves adult orientated rock.



eye-candy – planes, ships, actors – is so overwhelming that it offers compensation for the film's other failures. The works of Michael Bay (*The Rock*, *Armageddon*) are almost sense free, have paper-thin characters and bewilderingly loud soundtracks, but Bay can make things go "bang" in exciting and interesting ways.

However, as with the work of Paul WS Anderson (*Alien Versus Predator*, *Event Horizon*) sometimes a stupid, nasty film is just a commercial exercise in exploiting and insulting the audience. If there is one thing that *Stealth*'s director Rob Cohen has succeeded in doing, it is to create a film that is even more offensive and thick-headed than anything even Anderson has produced.

Stealth is offensive because it assumes that America can invade, bomb and blast its way across the globe and still imagine that its military represent some heroic

ideal. And, of course, should any of the uppity natives object, be they Russian or Korean, they can be blasted to pieces without a second thought – because, after all, they must be the bad guys.

And it is stupid because it assumes its audience are as lazy and ignorant as its producers. The flight from Tajikistan to Alaska (via North Korea and Siberia, about 12,000 miles – I'm geeky enough to have checked), for example, takes place in an instant – as if the rest of the world amounted to no more than some distant corner of Tennessee. This film stinks of insularity and imperialism, its worldview is terrifyingly narrow and simplistic. This might not have mattered so much, if the US Navy had not been intimately involved in the production of this film – giving the film makers support and assistance.

More than this, however, *Stealth* is offensive because it indulges in stale and unpleasant stereotyping.

Foxx, an actor with talent and a recent Oscar win to his name, is reduced here to the action movies bog-standard black sidekick – his character is doomed from the moment he opens his mouth and is forced to endure a pointless and emotion-free death. And Biel, supposedly the film's strong female lead and super-competent "poster-girl" for the US Navy, ends up as nothing more than a frustrated damsel in distress – incapable even of telling a man she fancies him.

There is nothing in *Stealth* that could move me to recommend it. It is the sort of film that gives cinema a bad name.

Stealth

Director: Rob Cohen

Writer: WD Richter

Cinematographer: Dean Semler

Starring: Josh Lucas, Jessica Biel, Jamie Foxx, Sam Shepard, Richard Roxburgh, Joe Morton, Ian Bliss

121 mins

An Island people

Martin McGrath gets two for the price of one with Michael Bay's *The Island*

Michael Bay is known for big, loud, brash movies. When he's on form, in films like *Bad Boys* and *The Rock*, his films achieve a level of energy and adrenaline-fuelled fury that can scoop the viewer up and propel them along so that plot holes and turn-them-sideways-and-they'd-disappear characterisations are trivialities soon forgotten. These are cinematic experiences – films that engage only the visual parts of the brain – and, on that level, entertain.

But when Bay pauses, in films like *Armageddon* and *Pearl Harbour*, and allows the audience to see the cracks in his stories or, even worse, when he attempts to simulate emotion, his films fall apart.

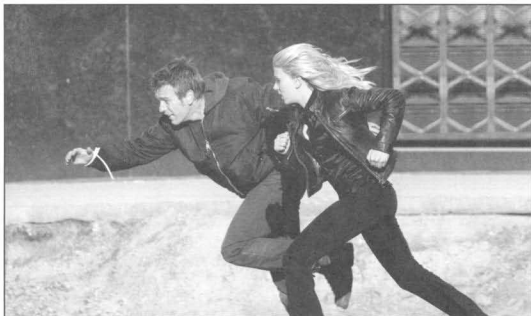
The opening half of *The Island* is a beautifully designed and tense sci-fi thriller, and is something of a departure for Bay. It is set in an underground facility whose inhabitants believe they are sheltering from some ecological disaster. They all live in hope of winning the lottery that will take them to the island – a paradise that they are told is the only remaining inhabitable area above ground.

The second half follows an escape attempt by two inmates, Lincoln Six Echo (McGregor) and Jordan Two Delta (Johansson), who discover that there is no island and that they are clones waiting to be harvested for parts. They are nothing more than insurance policies taken out by the wealthy in the real world. The second half is essentially one long chase sequence with explosions, crashes and gunfights.

The problem is that, while the first half promises a glossy but interesting science fiction conspiracy story the second half abandons many of the potentially interesting plot threads in favour of intensely kinetic thrills. Both halves have something to offer different audiences, but it is difficult to imagine anyone being wholly satisfied with both halves wedged together into one film.

Still, there are good things in *The Island* and I found myself concentrating more on the positive than negative as the credits rolled.

The cast is first rate. McGregor and Johansson are a photogenic



Don't look back (top)
In the second half of *The Island* Lincoln (McGregor) and Jordan (Johansson) run a lot.

Ewan wuz 'ere (above)

Lincoln finds a way out.

Hounsou looking at?

Laurent, formerly French special forces, now a merc with a heart of gold.

and likeable pair of leads and they have excellent support from Bean, Clarke Duncan, Phillips and, most notably, Hounsou and Buscemi. Buscemi, as the sleazy engineer McCord, offers fantastic comic relief in the opening half while Hounsou, as the ex-special forces mercenary Laurent, brings an unexpected weight and dignity to the second half.

The cinematography and set design in *The Island* is of the very highest calibre. The cloning facility is spectacularly realised and, though product placement is sometimes heavy-handed, the future created for this story is one of the most realistic and intricately detailed ever to put on screen – it is, in many ways, the equal of Spielberg's *Minority Report*.

There has never been any doubt that Bay can deliver vivid action sequences, and *The Island* doesn't disappoint, with one particular car chase standing out as huge train wheels bounce along the freeway smashing into vehicles. This section is only slightly marred by the nagging question of where those train wheels came from, as every train in the film is shown using maglev technology and utterly wheel-less.

There is even a subtext – not something I ever expected to say about a Michael Bay film – which compares the situation of the clones with slavery. The connection is crudely made in the film itself, but it is given extra depth by the use of Hounsou (best known for playing Cinque, the slave demanding his

freedom in, Spielberg's *Amistad*) to deliver the comparison.

The Island is, so far as blockbuster movies go, certainly neither the crassest nor the most stupid example of the species. Despite being much too long and unbalanced, *The Island* is probably worth a look, if your expectations aren't too high.

The Island

Director: Michael Bay

Writers: Caspian Tredwell-Owen, Alex

Kurtzman, Roberto Orci

Cinematographer: Mauro Fiore

Starring: Ewan McGregor, Scarlett Johansson, Djimon Hounsou, Sean Bean, Steve Buscemi, Michael Clarke Duncan, Ethan Phillips, Brian Stepanek

136 mins

Turn on, tune in, podcast

Paul S Jenkins takes us on a tour of the fast-growing world of audio-on-demand

With a computer and broadband internet, it's now possible to receive scores of SF-related radio shows for free. "Internet radio?" I hear you scoff, "I've tried that, and it's a real pain sitting in front of the computer listening to streaming audio...." I agree, but what I'm talking about isn't streaming audio, it's **podcasting**.

Podcasts are internet radio shows delivered to your computer automatically, without you going to a website to fetch them. You subscribe (mostly for free) to a show, and from then on each new episode comes to your computer as soon as it's available. You don't need to do anything except listen. Most podcasting software will also copy the new episodes automatically to a portable mp3 player.

Podcasting has been going barely a year, but it's exploding. Even the BBC is making selected radio programmes available as podcasts.

With the release of version 4.9 of Apple's free media player, iTunes (for Windows XP and Mac OS X), it's now even easier to subscribe to scores of shows, all for free. But what podcasts are available for the SF enthusiast?

Number one on your list should be *Michael and Evo's Dragon Page*, based in Phoenix, Arizona. This is not one but three separate, weekly shows of about 50 minutes each: *Cover to Cover* is focussed on books, with reviews and author interviews (a certain Mr Neal Asher appeared on the show recently). *Wingin' It* is a free-form chat programme with guests, comedy and much beer-drinking, plus a short, pithy essay from Mur Lafferty of the well-loved *Geek Fu Action Grip* podcast. Finally, *Slice of Sci-Fi* is the Dragon Page's media-related podcast, dealing with films and TV.

That's just a start. The *Science Fiction Podcast Network* (www.sfpn.com) has a growing membership of podcasts, including my own show, *The Rev Up Review* (available at www.revupreview.co.uk). See the sidebar for a selection of what else is available, plus a list of alternatives to iTunes.

So, if you've ever bemoaned the dearth of SF-related radio in



Britain, and you have broadband internet, download Apple iTunes 4.9 for free from www.apple.com/itunes/download and check out the iTunes Music Store Podcast Directory. Select *Arts & Entertainment*, subcategory *Science Fiction*, and you'll find over forty SF-related podcasts. That's not an exhaustive list; there are other shows not in the directory, but you can still subscribe to them from within iTunes (select *Subscribe to Podcast* in the *Advanced* menu, and enter the show's podcast address, which will be available on the show's website). Podcasting is a mutually supportive community, and many podcasters promote other shows covering related subjects. Most shows have a website with additional information, reference material and links to

items discussed. Once you start listening, your subscribe-list will grow. There'll be some duds, which you'll unsubscribe from after one episode, but there's stuff you're unlikely to find anywhere else

— podcasting is unregulated, and on many shows anything goes. Apple lists such podcasts with an *explicit* tag to warn that they might not be suitable for children.

Despite the name *podcast* you don't need an iPod. You don't even need an mp3 player — you can burn the shows onto CD to listen in the car or on the hi-fi. But an mp3 player, whether it's an iPod or something else, will make your podcasting experience complete.

- **The Rev Up Review**, a podcast by Paul S Jenkins can be found at www.revupreview.co.uk

Science Fiction podcasts

Escape Pod

www.escapepod.info

The world's first paying SF short story market, edited by Stephen Eley.

Geek Fu Action Grip

www.geekfuactiongrip.com

Mur Lafferty is a funny, RPG writer-mom who loves SF.

Mental-Escher.net

www.mental-escher.net

The Mental Escher Matrix: unique, weird, obscure.

Nuketown Radio Active

www.nuketown.com/podcast

Ken Newquist is a gamer who plays music and reviews SF.

Michael & Evo's Dragon Page

www.dragonpage.com

The daddy of all SF podcasts — not to be missed.

The Radio Adventures of Dr. Floyd

www.doctorfloyd.com

Short, fast, hilarious.

The Seanachai

www.goodwordsonrightorder.com

One of the shining jewels of podcasting — Patrick McLean is a sublime storyteller.

The Secrets of Harry Potter

www.catholicinsider.com/scripts/harrypotter.php

Father Roderick Vonhogen is indeed a Catholic priest, but he knows his JKR.

Sound Stages

ix.storiesonmp3.com/podcast

Jeffrey Adams' Icebox Radio Theater produces some fascinating live audio drama.

The Rev Up Review

www.revupreview.co.uk

My own fortnightly show: Reviews of spec-fic books, film, TV and audio, plus an instalment of original fiction.

Some other, non-SF podcasts to try:

Podcast411

www.podcast411.com

Interviews with podcasters.

Slacker Astronomy

www.slackerastronomy.org

Short, fun intros to complex astronomical ideas — Patrick Moore it ain't.

d out Summer round-up

ing podcasting phenomenon

fiction

Skepticity

www.skepticity.com

Discussion of junk science and interviews with debunkers and others.

The Word Nerds

www.thewordnerds.org

Three lecturers discuss the use of English.

Vox Monitor

www.voxmonitor.com

Eric and Cohy review other podcasts.

Daily Source Code

www.dailysourcecode.com

Adam Curry's audio blog – one of the inventors, movers and shakers of podcasting.

The Dawn and Drew Show

www.dawnanddrew.podshow.com

A married couple podcast from a Wisconsin farmhouse, entertaining the world with their smutty talk.

iTunes isn't the only directory. Try:

Indiepodder.org

www.indiepodder.org

Recent name change – used to be podder.org.

Podcast Alley

www.podcastalley.com

The Number 1 – until iTunes 4.9 came along.

Podcast Pickle

www.podcastpickle.com

New and growing, with genuinely fresh ideas.

And iTunes isn't the only podcasting client. Try:

iPodder

podder.sourceforge.net

Free, and available for Windows, Mac and Linux.

iPodderX

podderx.com

30 day free trial, then \$25 – Mac only, with a Windows beta recently available.

This is just a selection; there are at least a dozen podcasters and scores of directories. If you want to podcast, there's a growing range of software (much free) to help you record and publish, but that's a topic for another time.



MUST SEE!



In their Prime (above)

The boys from *Primer* prepare to take a trip as things start to get complicated.

Vampires, witches and monsters (left)

Night Watch, Russian weirdness as the men of the Night and Day watches do battle.



A number of films we've previously reviewed in *Matrix* have got long delayed UK releases this summer, so here is a round up of those you should look out for.

The best, by some distance, is *Primer* (first reviewed in *Matrix* 171) an ultra low-budget offering from first time writer/director Shane Carruth. A complex time travel story, *Primer* doesn't make many concessions to its audience, expecting them to be able to keep up with a twisty plot without much in the way of exposition. Indeed the dialogue is often muddled or mumbled, so it isn't always easy to hear what is being said on screen and, we might not always understand what they talking about anyway. The low budget occasionally reveals itself – not all the acting is polished and the rough-edges show themselves – but *Primer* is worth the time and effort.

Appleseed (*Matrix* 172) is a visually stunning anime from Japan but the storytelling is disappointing. A story of conflict between humans and artificially created "bioroids" in a post-apocalyptic landscape, elements of *Appleseed* will appear over-familiar to those well-versed in sf film though, in its defence, this is an adaptation of comic by Shirov Masamune that has been plundered by many Western filmmakers. However, even allowing for this, *Appleseed* is flawed. There are too many monologues and languid passages that allow the pace to drop and an over-complex plot attempts to cram too many threads from the source material into the final film.

Howl's Moving Castle (*Matrix* 173), the latest film from anime maestro Miyazaki, is every bit as

beautiful as his earlier work – *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away* – but the story of battling wizards and a young girl inhabiting an old woman's body doesn't quite have the clarity of his most recent work. Even so, in comparison to the vast majority of films released this year, *Howl's Moving Castle* is a rare treat and an exceptional achievement.

No one makes zombie films like George Romero, and *Land of the Dead* (reviewed last issue) sees the return of king of the flesh-eaters to something approaching his top form. Once again combining his ability to make great horror films with strong social commentary, Romero proves that American horror can be more than glorified music videos and Japanese remakes.

Finally, *Night Watch* (*Matrix* 170), a Russian fantasy/horror film based on the novels of Sergei Lukyanenko was completely bewildering when *Matrix* saw it last year. Reports are that new subtitles go a long way to making the film more accessible to Western audiences, though there will still be the matter of a plot that seemed to have too much going on to entirely make sense. Still, *Night Watch* is another film with fantastic visual style and is certainly worth seeing as a curio, if nothing else.

Release Dates

19 August: *Primer* and *Appleseed*

23 September: *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Land of the Dead*

7 October: *Night Watch*

BBC gears up for space race

Apart from *Doctor Who* the BBC's autumn and winter television schedule has no new sf. There are, however, a number of series that may be of interest to genre fans.

Space Race is probably the most obvious. This "docu-fiction" claims to use "revealing new research" to tell the truth about the race to land the first man on the moon. A co-production between the BBC and American and Russian broadcasters, the series uses the lives of two scientists to dramatise the struggle for the domination of space.

Elsewhere, Rob Brydon is an astronomer who moves to the Australian outback in the comedy series *Supernova*.

Rocket Man is a six-part drama starring Robson Green. Green will play a railway engineer now packing boxes in a chocolate factory. When his wife dies he determines to build a rocket capable of sending her ashes into space – finding a purpose for his life, use for his engineering skills and constructing a last love letter to his wife – while trying to cope with bringing up his young son and teenage daughter.

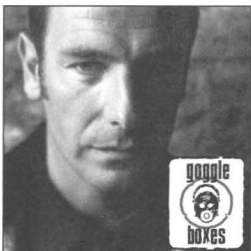
Is the best news that *Doctor Who* is guaranteed a third series, that Billy Piper is confirmed for the second series or that Sarah Jane, (Goggle Boxes' favourite companion) will return for one story?

Actually, it's none of the above. The best news is that Sarah Jane will be joined by K9! In an episode that will also feature *Buffy*'s Anthony Head, the Doctor, Sarah Jane and K9 investigate strange happenings at a school.

More details emerge of the plans for *Star Wars* television programmes. The 3-D animated *Clone Wars* follow-up will be produced in Lucas Animations' new facility in Singapore.

Meanwhile George Lucas told the Siggrow computer graphics trade show that a new live action series will be shot using Sony digital camera systems that can be bought on the high street. "We're going to take something that would normally cost \$20-\$30 million and try and do it for \$1 million," Lucas said.

Tim Minear (*Firefly*, *Wonderfalls*) has revealed that Joss Whedon has approached him with regard to "some blonde vampire



Rocket Man
Robson Green, dreaming of launching his wife into space.

movie thing" – a *Buffyverse* spin-off television movie for Warner Brothers featuring the character of Spike.

Head of the WB Network David Janollari has said publicly for some time that his organisation wanted to produce the film, but Whedon has been otherwise occupied directing *Serenity*, the movie adaptation of his short-lived space opera, *Firefly*.

Referring to the limited lifespans of many of the shows he has worked on, Minear told Whedonesque.com: "Should I do it? (I, of course, said yes right off, still...) Anything under 13 hours scares me. And anything over 13 hours... um. I got nothin'."

As well as providing fandom with regular doses of new *Stargate* and repeats of *Star Trek*, Sky One has two genre shows returning for second seasons in September.

Hex is a rarity, a UK-produced drama on Sky. The first season was almost unwatchable – see if it improves from 18 September. The *4400* is another American import, about the fate of returned UFO abductees who begin to display strange powers. Season two starts on 27 September.

Cut backs



Cutting costs
Fletcher (Caviezel) and Hakman (Williams) get to grips with their differences.

The combination of Robin Williams and science fiction has not been a happy one. From the potty *Toys* to the sickly *Bicentennial Man*, Williams name has never guaranteed quality. So the arrival, direct on DVD, of *The Final Cut*, eighteen months after its American release, hardly inspires confidence.

Alan J. Hakman (Williams) is a "cutter" – a man who takes the memories from chips implanted in people's heads and turns them into memorial films. He sees everyone's secrets. Hakman's job distances him from the rest of humanity, making his relationship with bookseller Delia (Sorvino) difficult, and there is a growing, violent movement against the use of the memory chips. Hakman gets a job cutting the life of an executive of the company behind the chips and is targeted by Fletcher (Caviezel), a former cutter now leading the opposition movement. It also tries up a traumatic memory from his childhood and uncovers a grubby secret in the executive's past.

The Final Cut has a strong cast performing well, including Williams, a peach of a core idea and a strong visual aesthetic, but it is fundamentally let down by the structuring of the story. Major plot threads, such as Hakman's relationship with Delia, start strongly but lead nowhere. Obvious points – such as why would people go to the expense of having implants when they can only be accessed after death (surely perfect recall would have uses other than for funerary rites) are never addressed. Worse, material that could have formed the basis for a tense and intriguing thriller is frittered away by writer/director Naim, who doesn't seem to know where the focus of the film should be.

The ending is most unsatisfactory. A generous assessment might be that the film takes a nihilistic turn and ends bleakly, but it feels as though there are a scenes missing that might have made sense of the whole thing. I found myself wondering whether production problems had forced the release of an unfinished film.

The Final Cut is by no means terrible, but it falls some way short of living up to its potential. (MM)

The Final Cut

Writer/Director: Omar Naim
Cinematographer: Tak Fujimoto
Starring: Robin Williams, Jim Caviezel, Mira Sorvino
90 mins

Slipping away

Martin McGrath reviews Sean Astin and Vinnie Jones in *Slipstream*

Slipstream is a television movie made for the Sci-Fi Channel in the USA and released here on DVD.

It is a gimmick story. The gimmick is a device about the size of a mobile phone that allows its creator Stuart Conway (Astin) to turn back time by a few minutes. Starved of research funds by the military he decides to rip off a bank by repeatedly cashing his employment cheque – anything you touch also travels back when the “slipstream” device activates.

Unfortunately for Stuart, the day he decides to enact his plan is the same day that the bank is targeted by a gang of bankrobbers led by Winston Briggs (Jones). Things spiral out of control as FBI agents trailing Stuart get involved in the bank raid and then discover the nature of his device.

The plot staggers through a siege on a bus and then onto an airplane before, predictably, rewinding itself.

Slipstream is a nice idea but poorly executed in detail. The



Firefight
Tonner (Milicevic) prepares to put out Briggs (Jones) fire.

device is implausibly handled, the criminals are unconvincing – especially Jones, whose appears to be acting in an entirely different and much louder movie – and the gunfights are laughable. Director van Essyen seems to entirely lose

the plot every time a gun is pulled. The promise of the opening section is entirely thrown away by the first big gunfight, in which the camera spins around while the characters stand in a circle firing guns. It's ludicrous, and it's

hard to know what the director was thinking. The sight of people standing just a few feet from each other firing automatic weapons without hitting anything or anyone is just silly.

Worse, van Essyen suffer from compulsive camera twitchiness – he simply can't resist spinning the point of view. This tendency reaches its nadir in a sequence featuring Briggs and FBI agent Tanner (Milicevic) in a bus toilet. The camera swoops around and around in the tight space until I felt sick.

Despite looking slick, especially giving it's television-based roots, *Slipstream* is a poor movie with little to recommend it. It is released in the UK in September.

Slipstream

Director: David van Essyen
Writer: Phillip Badger
Cinematographer: Sonke Hansen
Starring: Sean Astin, Cecil Carter, Vinnie Jones, Tasmin MacCarthy, Ivana Milicevic, Kevin Otto
93 mins



This is just shit, isn't it?

It certainly challenges one's preconceptions of what is funny, but I think it is more enlightening to view the film as a post-modern challenge to what we call “the joke”. Take the opening sequence which features a supposedly humorous conjunction of bare arses and nuns, no one has laughed at anything like that since the 1970s. Assuming, as we must, that a modern performer will be aware of the inherent inanity of such a “joke”, we are forced to conclude that this is actually a deliberate attempt to create an inversion in our expectations, a post-joke, post-comedic commentary on what it means to be “funny” in the post-Soviet era.

So Roy “Chubby” Brown isn't just a leering prick?

I think it is possible to see him as forming part of the great tradition of the Fool in motley, hence Chubby's ludicrous clothing. It is a tradition that has passed down through the generations from the courts of the great kings of the Dark Ages...

I think you've mistaken an Idiot for a Fool.

...The Fool is perhaps best known today through Shakespearean characters such as Bottom in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, Touchstone in *As You Like It* and, er, The Fool in *King Lear*...

Maybe you're on to something, none of them are funny either!

... And had licence to say those things that could not be spoken by others. Fools frequently caused offence by using bawdy language to undermine pomposity...

But they weren't just repeating the word “cock” in the hope of getting a giggle, were they?

... and to challenge the powerful. Such traits

may all be identified in the work of their modern-day successors, such as Chubby.

Challenging the powerful? Jokes about women being bad drivers challenge authority?

Well, my theory may not be perfect.

And how do his pisspoor song and dance routines challenge the powerful?

“The Back Scuttie” could be seen as a commentary on... no, you're right, it's pisspoor.

And I suppose the cunning plot in which Chubby is kidnapped by leather-clad feminists from the future who he “satisfies” with his enormous sexual prowess is actually a commentary on the...

Stop you've made your point!

And the gratuitous nudity is?

Sigh... a sad attempt to sell the film to compulsive masturbators and teenage boys. Actually, as the second group is a subset of the first, let's leave it at compulsive masturbators.

So is there anything good about this movie?

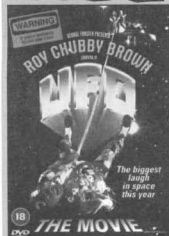
The brief snippet of Gloria Gaynor singing “I Will Survive” is a highlight.

Thirty seconds of decent music, is that all? Well, it's only 75 minutes long.

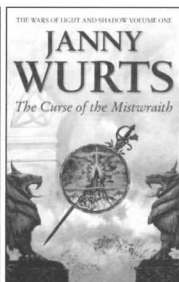
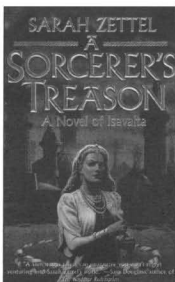
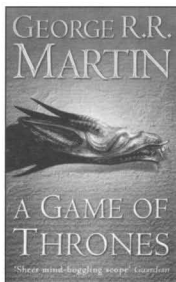
Does UFO: The Movie hold a lesson for fandom?

The idea that what women really want is the leering, pawing attentions of a sweaty, unfunny fat bloke with awful dress sense probably isn't funny anymore.

Tread carefully, for you tread on my dreams. Oh dear...

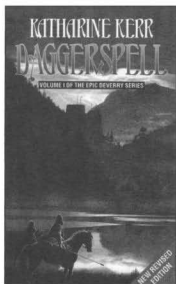


Descending further into the pits of hell to bring *Matrix* readers the bad and the ugly in science fiction film, this issue Martin McGrath reaches a new level of terror. *U.F.O. The Movie* (1993), starring Roy “Chubby” Brown.



Voyager is ten

Win a tote bag full of books and goodies!



It's ten years since HarperCollins launched their Voyager fantasy imprint at the last UK Worldcon. The line has gone to be one of the success stories of British genre publishing.

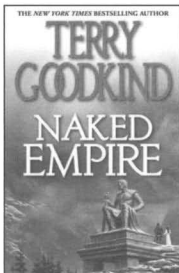
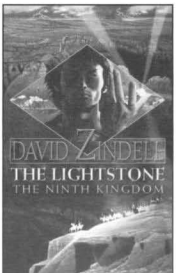
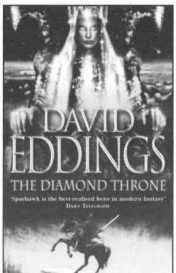
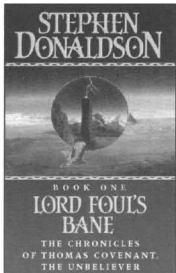
Skip forward to this year's Worldcon and the Voyager team was out in force, hiring a historic tall ship for their ten year birthday party and encouraging the revellers to don pirate costumes as they dished out goodie-bags of loot.

We've got one jam-packed Voyager tote bag of free books and other goodies to pass on to a lucky winner, although as any fan of quest fiction will know it's not going to be as easy as all that. Oh no, first you've got to solve our insidious riddle below then brave the vagaries of the postal service or the perilous wilds of the internet.

Question: Matrix recently interviewed Voyager editor Jane Johnson, as well as being a top-flight editor Jane is also a successful writer. We want to know both of the pen-names that Jane writes under.

Correct answers should be sent along with your name and address to: Matrix Editors, 46 Saltwell Street, London, E14 0DZ, or emailed to matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk with the header 'Voyager Competition'.

Closing date is November 31, 2005.



FEDERAL

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Signed _____ (parent/guardian signature if under 18)

RAGE against everything!

I'm being held hostage by FedEx. It's Thursday, day four of the siege and the milk in the fridge has turned sour, all the bagels have been eaten and I'm out of tomatoes. I haven't left the house in Winchester since Sunday night, in case the bastards decide to call in the very five minutes that I sneak out.

The cat keeps bringing me sparrows in case I'm hungry. Alternatively, his mews translate as, *Could you just grill this for me?* If so, my refusal to oblige probably explains why he's so permanently pissed off.

In truly mad, bodies-under-the-floorboards fashion, I've begun to make notes of who last accessed the phone at FedEx and what they promised.

Delivery Tuesday.

Delivery Wednesday.

Delivery Thursday... Well, that one could still happen.

Apparently FedEx called on Monday and I was out. I wasn't, but whatever. And again on Tuesday, when I was apparently also out, which was the day I left the front door open and stuck a note on it saying, 'I am in.' On Wednesday, I left the door open, as being slightly too barking, but left the front door open. That was the day I went

to shut the door and trod on a hedgehog. Not very hard, because treading on hedgehogs in bare feet rings very loud alarm bells in the brain.

Someone from FedEx in New York called that night to see if anyone had attempted delivery... I said regretfully that no one had attempted anything.

The package left my publisher in New York last Friday for overnight delivery. It's the only copy of a freshly-edited script, courtesy of not fantastically-clever production schedules and the script was supposed to be worked on and back in New York by tomorrow, which, obviously enough, isn't going to happen. Personally I'm beginning to doubt this parcel even exists.

Maybe it's been lost. Maybe it's been eaten by mice.

And I know, for a fact, that all those people who come to the phone after I've exhausted various push button options don't exist either. Because when someone from my agency called one back he was told, 'Oh we don't have anyone called that here.'

Of course, to get to the humans, you first have to get passed the machines. Thank you for calling. Please select from the following five option... Please enter your tracking



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

number and then press hash. We are retrieving your information. We are unable to retrieve your...

Am I cross? Yes, I'm fucking furious. Not with whoever decided that a script needed to be edited for the US market in 48 hours, although that's none too bright. Not even with FedEx, although in madder moments I'd happily blast their HQ into atoms if I had the requisite military satellite... (At least FedEx put you through to a human when you've finished playing with their machines.) No, I'm enraged by the moron who first thought automated answering systems were a good idea.

They're a crap idea. And they're crap for two reason. Number one is they let big companies bin staff and hide behind a bland smiley face, full of thank you for waiting

and we know your time is precious and sorry, which button was it you pushed again...? Why not just hire a Buddhist monk to chant. Fuck off, we don't care at regular intervals. It would be more honest.

Reason two is that computers don't have needs. No guilt, no hunger, no urges towards satisfaction... And since these are the only reasons most of us make any attempt to work at all it's pointless my swearing at something that can't understand why I'm angry. If something has an effect on my life and is talking to me then I want it to understand what I say.

Until we upload some good old fashioned guilt into the mix and let the machines start answering back, in all senses of that phrase, then automated systems will remain the corporate equivalent of a foul-mouthed monk.

Oh yes, and I've just talked to FedEx again. They're planning to deliver on Friday, the one day I'm not in. When were they told this? Checks bodies-under-the-floorboards notes. Ah yes, that would be Wednesday...

Anyone fancy a freshly-dead sparrow?

Jon Courtenay Grimmwood
is an award-winning author.

Illustrated Man

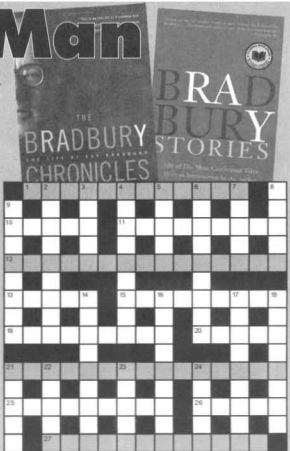
This issue we've got copies of Sam Weller's new authorised biography of Ray Bradbury, *The Bradbury Chronicles*, a unique insight into the life of one of genre's most accomplished writers. And, so you can judge for yourself, we've also got *Bradbury Stories*, featuring one hundred of his best shorts. To win, complete the crossword, which features the titles of four Bradbury collections, unclued. Work out the titles and send the answers to: matrix.competition@ntworld.com by 18 November, 2005.

Across

- 1 Unclued (12)
- 10 A paved area, with strings attached? (5)
- 11 Rebels (9)
- 12 Unclued (15)
- 13 Cut back, to save (5)
- 15 Atomiser, sounds like it makes clouds in space (9)
- 19 College, roll or process, gets the votes out (9)
- 20 Belonging to a duke (5)
- 21 Unclued (15)
- 25 Make and agreement, go in (5,4)
- 26 About (5)
- 27 Unclued (12)

Down

- 2 Desmond Dekker song (9)
- 3 Melted cheese or chocolate, for dipping (5)
- 4 Bootlegger, perhaps from Cuba (3-6)
- 5 Frequently (5)
- 6 Put in the dog house? (9)
- 7 Delay, conclude or get in knots (3-2)
- 8 Class (5)
- 9 Not tasty, impolite (3,5)
- 14 A variety, perfumed spices, a musical composition of songs (3-6)
- 16 A water pool, watch out for the swagmen (9)
- 17 Sugar replacement, too sweet (9)
- 18 Pretend, probably to be an elf or space marine (4-4)
- 21 Smooth and gleaming (5)
- 22 Placed (5)
- 23 Biblical mountain, Egyptian desert peninsula (5)
- 24 Distinguish oneself (5)



Congratulations to Dale Mellor of Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire who won of our Brian Aldiss competition in *Matrix* 173 and will receive a copy of *Jocasta*, published by The Rose Press.