

matrix

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

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Nov/Dec 2005 No. 176

spaceopera

Serenity takes flight
And no power in the 'verse
can stop Joss Whedon

Battlestar Galactica
At war with the Cylons and
itself, can humanity survive?

Hal Duncan on how
sf&f is becoming hip

Mike Carey on writing
comics and novels

Stephen Baxter on the
end of humanity

Richard K Morgan on
cool stuff and loud bangs

Plus news, reviews
and much more

VOTE: Last chance to pick the greatest British SF

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DEADLINES

If you wish to contribute to future issues of Matrix, the deadlines are:
matrix 177 (Jan/Feb 2006) copy deadline: 28 November 2005
matrix 178 (Mar/Apr 2006) copy deadline: 6 February 2006

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Words of wisdom

"I think the US is in a terrible state of denial. Worse than that, we seem to be caught in a kind of Gotterdammerung response: we'd rather have the world go down in flames than change our lifestyle or admit we're wrong. Even here in California, 50% of cars on the freeway are SUVs, and they're political statements: they say, we're going to take the rest of the world down with us because we don't give a damn [...] There's a really sizeable minority here who back measures to reduce emissions, but the political process is controlled by the Republican administration, which is basically in thrall to the oil industry. So it'll come down to another election - and with the last two elections both in their different ways perhaps having been stolen, we can't even really count on democracy anymore. It's pretty scary here."

Kim Stanley Robinson

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Flash! Bang! Codswallop?

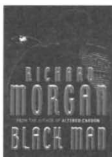
Richard K Morgan on the dumbing-down and blowing-up of sf cinema



Watching (far left)
Richard Morgan has his eyes
on the big screen and he's...

...a-llama-ed (above)
We'll alpaca our bags

Black Man (left)
His new novel
is available now



A couple of months ago, I had a moment of clarity in our local cinema. I'd gone with a few friends to see *The Interpreter*, which for those who haven't also seen it, is a rather good political thriller directed by Sydney Pollack with much the same old school focus and gravitas that Clint Eastwood brought to his recent crime drama *Mystic River*. *The Interpreter* is a violent film, in that it deals with political violence as a theme, but the violence is largely implied rather than evident, and when it does erupt from a general atmosphere of menace and tension, it has that much more impact as a result.

One such eruption is the destruction by bomb of a bus filled with New Yorkers.

It's a powerful and emotive moment in the film, captured in slow motion, and my own moment of personal clarity came immediately after, when, as the explosion died away and the resulting carnage was revealed, some idiot teenager sitting behind me was moved to exclaim to his friends

"Wow that was so cool!"

Perhaps I shouldn't have been all that surprised by this response. Said teen and his friends had spent most of the movie up to that point talking to each other in irritatingly loud voices about a host of subjects unrelated to the film they were supposed to be watching. It was pretty clear that they'd made a mistake in choosing their entertainment that evening. *The Interpreter* was clearly not fast, violent or noisy enough to engage their attention long term.

Well, that's fair enough. I've dozed off in the odd Bergman or Lynch movie myself, and generally I like my plots to move at a pace that would have your average European Arthouse fan wrinkling their nose in disdain. We all have our own engagement settings, and who am I to define someone else's (so long as they *shut the fuck up* while other people are trying to watch the movie). But that's not it. That wasn't my epiphany.

No, what I realised at that moment was that something is seriously wrong with the way we

design our entertainment because somewhere, a point has been missed. An exploding bus full of people is not "cool", however you may film it. It qualifies for a fair few adjectives – shocking, horrific, sickening, take your pick – but "cool" is not, or certainly should not be one of them. But, depressingly, my teen fellow audience members had obviously been weaned on a diet of movies in which such explosions are exactly that – cool. Gosh/wow, look at those flames! Did you see the way it blew those people off their feet? *Awesome!* Look at the wreckage, man! *Cool!*

So What does this have to do with sf and why am I bellyaching about it here?

Well, I'm complaining – worrying perhaps – because I think SF finds itself in the forefront of this particular battle for hearts and minds. sf, more than perhaps any other film genre, is a movie experience understood – at least by movie executives, and increasingly by audiences – as a story carried by two hours of *gosh/wow* special effects. Blame Lucas if you like

– he's the one who annihilated a whole planet full of people (two if you count the Death Star) on screen, and then led us to the end titles amid jubilant cheers and partying. SF means, *must* mean, big bangs – and oh haven't we all suffered as a result.

This is why we go from the sharp and edgy promise of *Pitch Black* to the bloated *gosh/wow/blam* pantomime inherent in the *Ridicules of Chronic*. This is why *The Matrix* trilogy degenerated Ayesha-like before our very eyes from cutting edge entertainment to tired CGI gluttony.

This is why sf gems like *Gattaca* and *Strange Days* remain almost unknown and unremarked outside the genre ghetto, why we are instead force-fed cinematic travesties like *Johnny Mnemonic* and *Psycheck*, in which all of the genuine wonder and imagination of the original material has been shunted aside to make room for – you guessed it – *cool stuff and bangs*.

Is that what we're all about as a genre?

Fuck, I hope not.

Avengers rescued



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Footage from the first ever episode of *The Avengers* has been found in the archives of the University of California. Originally broadcast by ITV in 1961, the series opener focuses on everyday protagonist Dr David Keel (played by Ian Hendry) rather than government agent John Steed, or any of his leather-clad partners. Keel seeks to avenge the death of his wife killed in a drive by shooting. The first twenty minutes of the episode, entitled *Hot Snow*, have been recovered and are believed to have survived thanks to syndication on Canadian television in an era when little thought was paid to preserving shows for posterity (or DVD bonus material).

the arthur c. clarke award

A new fund raising effort for the Arthur C Clarke Award has been launched.

Supporters of Serendip – named for Serendip Foundation, the organisation that now runs the Clarke Award – gives individuals and organisations the opportunity to make a regular donation that will help to keep the Award alive.

Ever since Rocket Publishing withdrew funding in 2003, the Award has been operating on a shoestring. Although it has now secured a promise of £1,000 a year for the next five years from

the Science Fiction Foundation, this is not enough to keep the Award going. Supporters of Serendip (SoS) can provide support while sponsorship is being sought.

There are three levels of SoS support with different levels of reward. *Mercury Supporter* (donations up to £25) will have their names featured on the website (www.clarkeaward.com) and at the Award ceremony, and receive an annual newsletter.

In addition *Gemini Supporter* (donations up to £100) receive an invitation to an exclusive

supporters-only party for the announcement of the shortlist, and £2 off *The Arthur C Clarke Award: A Critical Anthology*, due to be published in January 2006.

Apollo Supporter (donations over £100) receive all the above benefits plus an exclusive invitation to the annual Award Ceremony, further benefits will be announced later.

Anyone wishing to become a supporter should contact Elizabeth Billington, Serendip Foundation, 1 Long Row Close, Eversdon, Daventry, Northants NN11 3BE.

NEWSBITS



The Peterborough Science Fiction Club may be celebrating its 30th anniversary in May 2006 but its hardly resting on its laurels. A newly revamped website at www.psfcl.org.uk contains information on the club's meetings and lists a wide range of activities and events for SF fans, reflecting the groups broader spectrum of interests rather than focusing purely on science fiction – 'Not just rockets, robots and ray-guns' is the club's motto.

PSFC was originally founded in 1976, is currently working hard planning celebrations for its 30th anniversary next May.



The Birmingham Science Fiction Group's programme of author events gets off to a great start in 2006 with appearances

from Ian MacLeod (February 10) and Brian Stableford (March 10). Fans are also invited to attend the groups AGM on January 13, 2006, and possibly even join the committee if they feel daring enough. Meetings start at 7.45pm (with the talk itself starting at 8pm) and are held in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham City Centre. Entrance costs £3 for members and £4 for non-members.



Cinniplicity is a British small-press magazine dedicated to providing an eclectic range of short fiction and the opportunity for writers to showcase their skills as well as provide readers with some excellent entertainment.

They are currently looking for original stories, comic strips, articles and artwork, with a remit that stories follow a traditional structure, feature strong characters and finish with satisfying conclusions. Stories may range from very short to quite long and the magazine is happy for horror to nestle next to humour and for sf to rub shoulders with romance and fantasy.

Further details can be found at www.cinniplicity.co.uk



Farmer fresh

Fans of Phillip José Farmer can now check out a new fanzine created in his honour. *Farmerphile* is available via the Official Phillip José Farmer homepage and is published by the webmaster of the site on a quarterly basis. Content of the first two issues includes a serialisation of one of PJF's previously unpublished novels, *Up From The Bottomless Pit*, other unpublished stories, original art and articles, including one by Joe Haldeman.

Fans should visit www.pjfarmer.com/farmerphile.htm or email mike@pjfarmer.com for more information.

Manga on the move

For anyone thinking that the arrival of flip-open personal communicators (or mobiles as they're called these days) was the first true sign that we are finally catching up to the future, the second sign is surely the announcement that Japanese comic-book firms are gearing up to transfer hundreds of manga titles on to the new generation 3G handsets. The manga frames are formatted to fit on mobile phone screens using a technology called Comic Surfing with some stories employing pop-up frames and even vibrations during action scenes. *Matrix* thinks that this is probably the best use of the new mobile technology yet, and several warp factors ahead of the ability to watch goal clips or annoy fellow commuters with tiny versions of the Crazy Frog.



atoms



The world's first over-the-counter powered exoskeleton is on sale this month.

HAL-5 by Cyberdyne Inc. in Japan will retail at 1.5million yen (£7,500). HAL (Hybrid Assistive Limb) is designed to help disabled people walk using sensors and computers to predict how the wearer wishes to move and then assist the required movement. Future versions may respond to the thoughts of the wearer.

Source: www.cyberdyne.jp/ENG/



'Inventor turns dead cats into diesel' was the headline on the Annanova website. It went on to explain that a German scientist, Dr Christain Koch, had a method for producing diesel from tyres, plants and animal corpses, in particular cats. Animal lovers were up in arms.

Dr Koch has denied using cats. The process extracts hydrocarbons from biomatter by heating it up to 300°C to break down fatty acids then uses a catalyst to convert these compounds into biodiesel. It costs 15p a litre and Dr Koch's car has run for 170,000km on it without problems.

This has excellent potential for recycling and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, good for humans and cats a like, but could be scuppered by sensationalist reporting and knee-jerk reactions.

In case you're interested, a good sized cat will produce 2.5 litres of fuel.

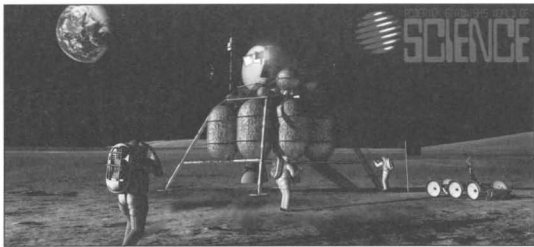
Source: Annanova.com, theregister.co.uk



Concorde is grounded but supersonic passenger flights may not be history. Japan and France have agreed to work together to develop a new supersonic airliner. Capable of carrying around 300 passengers and with a Pacific-spanning range it may be taking fare paying passengers as early as 2015. Concorde just made it over the Atlantic with around 100 passengers.

Before year end the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) will test a prototype driven by a rocket up to Mach 2 to acquire aerodynamic data. The final design will use an engine already tested up to Mach 5.5.

Source: NewScientist Magazine



NASA pitches moon return plans

NASA plans to return to the Moon. You must have read or seen something about it and may have an opinion too. I do, unfortunately I'm cynical and jaded.

The whole manned mission to the Moon concept was cooked up over forty years ago to win a race; not expand the boundaries of science.

The technology NASA plan to use this time is taken from a space vehicle designed thirty years ago (the space shuttle) which has elements (solid fuel rockets) that should never be used for manned flight.

Worst of all are the proposals for funding (NASA estimates a total cost of \$100bn but it is likely to cost considerably more than that before anyone ever steps on the Moon) will be spread over four presidential terms. Last time it was over two and was cancelled as the US flag was planted in the lunar regolith.

Space exploration is vital for humanity to understand itself and our universe, nothing less, but is this the way? If it is the only show in town — yes.

New Moon rising

In response to George Bush Jnr's demand that America should return to the Moon by 2020 (as phase one of a programme of human exploration of the solar system) NASA outlined their plans to Whitehouse staff in September.

They aim to put the first four astronauts on the lunar surface for seven days in 2018. The astronauts would travel into orbit aboard the shuttle replacement — launched on one shuttle solid rocket booster and a single main shuttle engine — to dock with the separately launched Earth departure and lunar lander vehicle. NASA claim that the position of the new shuttle on top of the rocket booster — reducing the risk from debris — and the presence of an escape capsule on top of the vehicle will make it considerably safer than its predecessor.

The lander would be launched

on a new heavy lift vehicle powered by five space shuttle main engines and two five-segment solid rocket boosters. The heavy lifter will be able to put 125 metric tonnes in orbit.

The reusable (up to ten times) lunar lander will look similar to an Apollo capsule but be three times larger and capable of landing anywhere on the Moon. The lander's engines will be powered by methane — NASA hopes to manufacture methane *in situ* on future Mars missions.

NASA is likely to use some of the missions to scout the possibility of there being usable hydrogen or even water at the lunar south pole — a potential site for a permanent future base.

The astronauts would return to Earth aboard the lunar lander, parachuting onto dry land and using airbags to cushion their touchdown.

Source: NASA (MMcG)

Superhero finally released from Cage

Hollywood superstar Nicholas Cage has bettered the usual celebrity craze for weird, wonderful and (allegedly) drug-induced children's names and named his first child with wife Alice in honour of his passion for comic-books. Kai-el Coppola Cage shares a birth name with DC's original Man of Steel - a role Cage was once poised to play under direction from Tim Burton - while Cage himself is already homaging another comic book hero, Marvel's Luke Cage, in his screen name.

Cage has, at one time or another, been linked to almost every comic book project under development - he was also associated with the Marvel's long-stalled *Iron Man*.

Ghost Rider (due in 2006) will see Cage finally achieve his goal of appearing in a comic-based movie when he stars as Johnny Blaze, cursed by the devil



he becomes a flame-skulled, burning-motorcycle-riding, demon battling to purify the souls of the

evil using his "penetance stare". *Matrix* suggests you watch out for Eilon Cruise-Holmes next.

Lucas for King

Star Wars supremo George Lucas has spent some of the money we've all given him in a \$1m dollar donation to support the construction of a memorial to Martin Luther King on Washington's Mall. The \$100m project aims to build on a site close to the Lincoln Memorial, where King delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech.

Cameron given Cosmos

James Cameron, director of *Terminator* and *Aliens*, has been selected to receive the inaugural Cosmos Award from The Planetary Society to mark his "outstanding public presentation of science." *Matrix* is just guessing, but we think it might have more to do with Cameron's series of underwater documentaries than the treatment of time paradoxes in the *Terminator* films. But we could be wrong.

Orbital verbosity

"Think about your mind which can think about itself and the whole universe."

Adrian Mitchell's *Human Beings*, with its theme of tolerance across cultural divides, has been voted the poem that people most want to send into space in the hope that it will be read in one hundred years' time, in a poll for National Poetry Day on Thursday 6th October.

Adrian Mitchell said of his win: "I'm very excited that so many people have voted for my poem. *Human Beings* is a poem for peace. It is about the joy of being human, but that doesn't mean that it's against animals or alien beings. When it goes into space and it's read by aliens, I'd hate for them to think that its anti alternative life forms."

Seth Shostak, senior astronomer at the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute in California, added:

"Contemporary writers often dwell on the down-side of our behaviour - war, environmental degradation - and make the assumption that these regrettable tendencies would somehow be of interest to the aliens. Adrian Mitchell's poem is very evocative,



although it seems rather more suitable for a human audience than one consisting of extraterrestrials. Consequently, we should either apologize or express the hope that in some way we will improve."

Human Beings was one of eight contemporary poems to be nominated

by the Poetry Society with votes coming from poets and scientists alike, including nominations from Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, Stephen Fry, author Dava Sobel and biophysicist Dr Mark Lythgoe. Simon Singh, science writer and broadcaster, suggested the opening lines of *Auriges of Innocence* by William Blake:

*"To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour."*

The Poetry Society are continuing to investigate ways to launch the poem into space...

Earth's mightiest fantasy writers

Fantasy writing is changing. At least it is according to *The Write Fantastic*, a cabal of professional authors who have joined forces JLA style with a mission to introduce fantasy fiction to new readers who have yet to experience the genre (and draw back those who have left the fold), and frankly given the pedigree of those involved we can only agree with them.

The Write Fantastic are authors Sarah Ash, Chaz Brenchley, Mark Chadbourne, Juliet E McKenna, Stan Nicholls and Jessica Rydell, and between them their work runs the fantasy gamut from orcs and dragons, through high fantasy and re-imagined myth to the new magics of matter, mind and spirit. Between them they can offer a range of resources to people and groups organising talks, literary festivals and bookshop events (to name but a few) and they can also come together to give readings and creative writing workshops.

Anyone interested in more information should email info@thewritefantastic.com.



Octocon buzzes

James Bacon reports from Octocon, Ireland's national SF convention, held in mid-October.

Octocon, the Irish National SF convention, took place on October 15-16 at the Glenroyal Hotel in Maynooth. It's Octocon's second year at this excellent facility, and it was a good one.

There was a welcoming crowd in the bar upon arrival on Friday afternoon. It's good to meet old friends, and there was much talk of the high chick quotient at Worldcon in Glasgow. The corner of the bar where we sat filled up, as more people arrived, including a good bunch of ex-pats and Londoners. Dave Farmer had a huge selection of cigars, and there was much tooting-and-froing as smokers popped outside.

Saturday started well enough. I got there early, to find that James Shields hadn't and there were no badges. It was quickly explained to everyone, that James Shields had the badges and no further explanation was needed.

This is a phenomenon, if a printer broke or if someone had left them at home, people would be annoyed, or at the least disappointed. But with the mention of James Shields, such feelings dissipate into thin air. James has been on eleven of the sixteen Octocon committees; undoubtedly the most of any individual, and his excellent time keeping is renowned and easily forgiven. Although he did mention that this may be his last Octocon for a bit.

Following the opening ceremony I took part in a Room 101 panel and got sent there myself. I was soon joined by Robert Stanek - a worthy companion. Much else followed us, from *Star Trek to Serenity*, into Orwell's room.

At this stage the badges turned up, out of breath and rushed, with James Shields in tow.

Octocon is fortunate to attract excellent guests and this year was no exception. Charlie Stross was a great GOH, with his interview and panels such as "Imaginative biology" and "Socioeconomics of virtual worlds" all proved popular.

Last year's GOH, Tanith Lee returned with her partner John Kainee, who is an equally a good participant. Harry Harrison was along, with great enthusiasm. Harry garners a huge amount of respect, yet somehow still, to me, seems more fan than pro while at the convention. I suppose that's his class.

Harry seemed in great form, and was brilliant especially in the company of fellow guest James P Hogan and the two of them seemed to spark. James (another one, I know) had just arrived back from the states where he was a GOH at a con in the deep south.

I enjoyed doing a panel on the



portrayal of Ireland in mainstream comics, and it seemed to prove popular. Other very good panels included John Vaughan's video vault where he showed Clive Barker's *Ramhead Rex*, a horrendous horror film, shot in early eighties; and "Intelligent design; Does God believe in Phillip K. Dick?"

Saturday evening was a "casino night" run by Mick O'Connor. As we both lugged in chips and roulette wheels, I was surprised to find nearly the whole convention in the "casino" where we were to set up. I was unsure of what was going on as a cheer was raised. Mick presented me with an inscribed hip flask. Knowledge of my impending departure for the UK had spread, and it seems I may just be missed. I said very little.

There was some amusement later, as James Shields turned up dressed as a 1920's dancing girl. About 100 people gambled, with baccarat proving a popular addition. The Scots who brought us Convivial have a lot to answer for; it was originally their idea.

There seemed to be a wonderful atmosphere and although membership was down (I reckoned they had about 200 members) the buzz was great. Worldcon was responsible for some people pulling out, due to the cost, this year. Whether that was balanced by members signed up at Worldcon, I am not sure, but three people sent apologies to me, for this reason. As always though, there was a good bunch of UK members, which Octocon always needs, but nowhere near the usual 50%.

The gambling, which was for charity, continued till about 1am, when those who were left departed for the residents bar, where the drinking continued until 5am.

A late start on Sunday due to the heavy socialising didn't dampen the spirits, and more chatting and relaxing happened in the convention bar come dealers room.

I was very impressed with Octocon's youngest committee member, Brian Macken who is about 20 - although he looks twelve. He is very charming and good fun, he is doing a Masters in maths, and his panel with John Kennedy - "The science of superheroes" - was brilliant. I thought that converting units of energy into Mars bars was a great way to make what they were explaining accessible. Its amazing how many mars bars (mb's) extra a yellow sun can give you compared to a red sun.

Brian had a posse with him from Maynooth who have a college of society. There was also a delegation down from Queens University Belfast - led by Sinead Larkin - promoting Mecon, their convention next year, now in August. P-Con will take the March slot.

Although there were no fanzines there were a good few small press comics available. Dublin seems to be brewing with comic creators at the moment, none have hit the big time, but at least one was recently listed by Diamond. A number of offerings were sold or given away.

I took much pleasure in introducing people to 'recent Hugo



The author proves... (top left)

...it is possible to pull in a Transformers tee-shirt

Oh god my eyes! (above)

James Shields gets his, ear, legs out

Guests do the honours (left)

From left to right: James Brophy, Rod O'Hanlon and Galt Charles Stross

All photographs courtesy of James Shields.

winner' Edward James, which took a lot of people by surprise, as he handed Eastercon flyers.

There was much talk of a revival of Dublin's Sci-Fi Club, as Ali Sugg had decided that she was going to take it on, and spoke before the auction and again at the closing ceremony with passion about a vision for the future.

Sunday flew by fairly fast, and soon enough it was the closing ceremony. Randy Sheppard was this year's Chair, and after he said his thank yous, he commented on the good times that he had noticed people having. Unfortunately the subsequent applause and cheering was too much and Randy broke up a bit. This only encouraged the audience to stand for an ovation and more cheering - a unique aspect of the convention. I had to head off early but I understand drinking went on to the wee hours.

There seems to be a considerable changing of the guard for next year's Octocon. James Brophy is standing down after 6 tumultuous years on the committee. Catriona McGrath is also leaving and, as mentioned, James Shields departs too.

Randy was a good chair, and continues in that capacity into next year, but with both the influx of younger blood and also the hoped resurgence of the Sci-Fi club, it is hoped numbers will improve. Randy stepped in half way through this year, so there is a strong hope that, with a full year in charge, he will enhance the overall convention and bring in more members.

A grand weekend for sure.

Death comes from

What does the future hold for humanity? In my latest novel *Transcend* (Gollancz, October 2005) I've described an expansive galactic future. But I've also considered futures in which man disappears quickly – for instance *Evolution* (2002).

But there is a middle possibility, explored by palaeontologist Peter Ward (*Future Evolution*, Times Books, 2001). What if we just stick around on the Earth – forever?

Ward claims that 'for the biological life span of the planet, humanity is extinction-proof': it is easy to kill vast numbers of us, but we are hard to exterminate completely. Furthermore, we're stuck Earth, says Ward, because other worlds will always prove too hostile. And we won't evolve significantly, because we will always be smart enough to manipulate our environment rather than have to adapt to it. Like young adults who don't leave home, we're here for good, trapped with Mother Earth.

You can argue with these assumptions, but let's take them as a starting point. What, then, can we sketch of the likely future of an Earthbound mankind? (I've dramatised some of these ideas in a story called 'The Children of Time', *Asimov's* July 2005.)

If we can avoid a catastrophic war, and if we muddle through the current bottleneck of resource depletion and environmental degradation (rather big ifs, granted) then it seems likely that human civilisation can continue for some time to come.

But, for the last two million years or so, wobbles in the Earth's orbital parameters have combined into hundred-thousand-year climatic cycles. Even within recorded history climate changes have curtailed empires; the Norse colonists of Greenland were frozen out by the 'Little Ice Age'. But these changes are nothing compared to the mighty swings of the past, and the future. In short, some day the ice must retreat.

Let's be optimistic. Perhaps some of us can survive in the tropics, retain our technological culture, and repopulate the high latitudes when the ice retreats. The ice will come

again, and again – but even if the ice keeps returning for another two million years, our civilisation might survive. We've no prior evidence on how long a culture like ours is supposed to last. Why not a couple of megayears?

But there is worse to come.

The fossil record echoes to the drumbeat of catastrophe. There have been perhaps eighteen 'extinction events' over the past quarter of a billion years. These include the dinosaur termination sixty-five million years ago, probably caused by a comet impact. Even if our culture survives the ice, sooner or later we will surely run into an event major enough to destroy our civilisation. The question is, when?

The frequency of comet and asteroid strikes is quite well understood by the astronomers. The 1908 Tunguska impactor, which could have taken out a city, was of a size that might come along once every few hundred years. A dinosaur-killer, 10 kilometres across, comes along only once every hundred million years.

But an impactor a 'mere' 2.5 km across, say, is due 'only' every one to ten million years – and it would deliver more energy than a hundred times all the world's nuclear arsenals. Surely our global civilisation could withstand a Tunguska. But a 2.5-km impactor?

Let's suppose, then, that in a couple of million years' time there is some new mass extinction event, possibly caused by an asteroid, major enough finally to destroy civilisation. What then?

The survivors will flourish, spread, and begin to shape the world once more. We did it before; with tools of stone and wood we cleared the post-Ice Age forests.

But it may be difficult for anything resembling our modern advanced civilisation to rise again. We have used up all the easily accessible metal ores, and all the fossil fuels; Earth's processes will not replace these lodes for tens or hundreds of millions of years. We will never again enjoy the kick-start we enjoyed since the last glaciation, for Earth will not be young again.

Imagine, then, a new Neolithic enduring as far as we can see.

Perhaps people will flourish in other ways, in arts, philosophy, drama. But human populations numbers will surely remain far below the present, perhaps a few million rather than billions. And every few million years we must expect another hammer-blow to smash all we have built.

And things will get worse still.

There are many other candidate hazards aside from impacts (see for instance *The End of the World* by John Leslie, 1996). These hazards have their own grim frequencies, such as nearby supernovas blowing every quarter of a billion years or so, to Galaxy centre explosions perhaps once every half billion years. The mother of all extinction events, the end-Permian catastrophe a quarter of a billion years ago, nearly ended the dominion of multi-celled life on Earth altogether (see Michael Benton, *When Life Nearly Died*, 2003). This seems to have been triggered by eruptions in Siberia of 'flood basalts'. We are overdue another major volcanic event...

Could mankind survive such a tremendous cataclysm? Well, life did make it even through the end-Permian. On land the lystrosaur, which looked something like pigs, were chance survivors in a world suddenly emptied of rivals and predators; soon ninety-five per cent of all the animal flesh in the world was lystrosaur meat. We are far more widespread than the lystrosaur ever were, and a lot smarter.

But what of the biosphere?

The empty world following a mass extinction is a gruesome playground for evolution. Even after the end-Permian the descendants of survivors like the lystrosaur diversified to fill all those empty niches, and a new world of dinosaurs and pine trees emerged from the rubble of the old.

In the future, however, the evolutionary rebound cannot be as rich as it was before. We won't allow it.

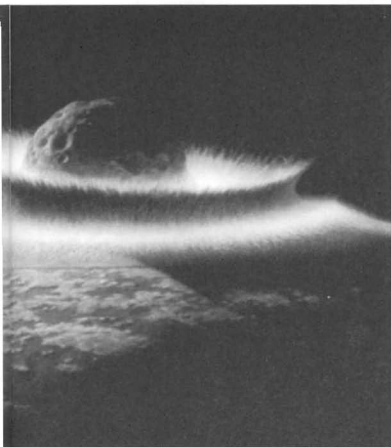
Even humans reduced to a low material culture will continue to dominate their environment. Stone Age human hunters, after all, seem to have been implicated in the extinction of the post-Ice Age megafauna, the mammoths and the cave bears. Other creatures must



find room in the small islands of ecological space left by us. There will be nothing exotic, no new body plans or fantastic large species – no new dinosaurs. The Earth's biosphere will probably never be as

om above

If you thought you were safe staying at home, think again says Stephen Baxter

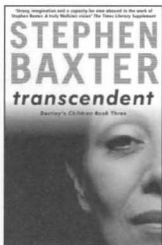


Crunch (left top)
Humanity might survive many extinction-level events and remain the dominant species on Earth (NASA-Dan Davis)

They don't have to hit us... (left below)
It isn't just physical impacts with asteroids or comets, a nearby supernova could finish us off

Stone age dominance... (bottom)
Even stone age technology could mean humanity blocks the emergence of new forms

Transcendent (below)
Stephen Baxter's new novel is available now



the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere: the less carbon dioxide, the less greenhouse effect there is.

But there is a limit. Plants need carbon dioxide for photosynthetic metabolism. Most plants couldn't function with a carbon dioxide level much less than a third its present value; we will reach this point in maybe six hundred million years. Some plants such as maize and sugar cane, with what is known as C4 metabolism, can function on much less. But they are a fraction of one per cent of all plant species.

So after six hundred million years the biosphere's carrying capacity must plummet to perhaps a hundredth of its size now. The human population will thin to perhaps a few tens of thousands.

We might endure another four hundred million years – another immense interval – but even now the grim regularity of extinctions will continue. Over the billion years of mankind we must expect a hundred lesser extinction events, and no less than ten catastrophes of the scale of the dinosaur-killer or worse.

But the final curtain must fall when the carbon dioxide levels fall too low even for the C4 plants. Some heat-loving bacteria, survivors of Earth's very early days, may still survive. But there will be nothing for us to eat.

Of course you can argue with this scenario. Even without resources from space, perhaps technological capability will advance to the point where we can avert even the most drastic of hazards. Or perhaps we will evolve after all, becoming something unimaginable.

Still, this is surely one possible future. And if it does come about, what a dismal legacy we will leave! – a baking Earth covered with strata a billion years deep, full of nothing but hearths and chipped stones and human bones – and a billion years of thwarted evolutionary possibilities. Maybe we should hope that we do remove ourselves from the Earth one way or another, if only for the sake of all that lost potential.



diverse again as it is now. And there will be no new kinds of intelligence. Perhaps this is a resolution to Fermi's paradox, the absence of aliens: maybe the first emergence of intelligence in a biosphere is a

singularity beyond which no more evolution is possible.

And still the pounding of extinction events will continue. But it won't go on forever. The final slow disaster awaiting us is the

heating-up of the sun.

When the Earth was very young the sun was only some two-thirds as bright as it is now. Earth's systems have steadied the planet's surface temperature by reducing

Things that came

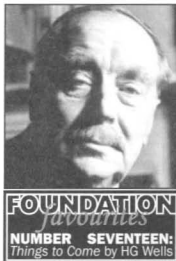
HG Wells wanted a future that worked in *Things to Come*, says Andy Sawyer

Note: not *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) nor even the 1936 movie *Things to Come* produced by Alexander Korda and directed by William Cameron Menzies, even though I have a great affection for that film despite (because of?) a certain pomposity and some hammy acting. This is Wells's script, offered up in 1935 and prefaced with an introduction that would get any aspiring screenwriter today kicked so far out of Hollywood he'd need a hyperventilator to get back. This is Wells as the Great Man in full reformist mode.

Opinions are divided upon the final film's quality. Wells was attempting to distill the essence of a book which is not only long but covers a span of several centuries and attempts to formulate a history of the future. Is it a novel? A history? A political manifesto? Perhaps only those (comparatively few) readers who had finished Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930) could have answered that.

Certainly, the hero is humanity rather than an individual, and as Wells points out, the book is "an imaginative discussion [his emphasis] of social and political forces and possibilities, and a film is no place for argument." Therefore a human-interest plot of sorts had to co-exist with the symbolic spectacle that would imply the greater historical forces at work. Wells could have chosen several dramatic points to develop, but the easiest and most effective is what the script presents: the fall of the old world and the rise of the new. Decades of war threaten to send humanity back to medieval warfare, so the experts and technicians get together and take control. In the book, there is a comic flavour to this at times: at the conference in Basra that is pulling all this together, the Russian commissar attacks this "treason" and threatens his pilot with dire consequences back in Moscow. "Ah," says the pilot in effect, "how do you think you're going to get back to Moscow? Who brought you here in the first place?" The film, in contrast, pulls no punches in its setups.

These range from the sentimental – the cute little girl lip-synching to her great-grandfather about how science has made things "lovelier and lovelier" now they don't have to be exposed to all that horrid fresh air – to the wonderful: the transition section's



fantasia of dynamic machinery and stirring music (by Arthur Bliss). In his 1935 script, though, Wells does not give us the book's stirring speech by John Cabal, the "living embodiment of the spirit of human adventure" setting up this transition. In these post-Hitler decades there are enough dedicated young men in black uniforms running around to make us uneasy. We must wonder if Wells trusted the good-will of his technical experts too much or overlooked the way such experts could be bought off. The final scene after the launch of the "space gun", in which Cabal offers the choice between the universe or nothingness, encouraged the rocketeers of the British Interplanetary Society but frightened C.S. Lewis so much he wrote *Out of the Silent Planet*.

Where Wells's book is most interesting however, is when he hectors everyone concerned in the costume and design team for not having "clearly grasped" the principles of imagining the future. This was, after all, less than a decade after Fritz Lang's momentous *Metropolis* – a film that Wells despised.

He hated it for a number of reasons. Reviewing it in *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 April 1927 Wells began with the sentence "I have recently seen the silliest film," and laid



into it because its aircraft and motor cars were hardly futuristic, its vast machines seemed to be producing nothing, and the whole idea of a city expanding vertically rather than horizontally into the surrounding countryside flew in the face of contemporary development. And because Wells recognised in *Metropolis* much of the city imagined in his own *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899; rev. as *The Sleeper Awakes* 1910).

Wells then took the opportunity to bait Lang again, not even spelling his name correctly. He instructs *Things to Come*'s designers: "All the balderdash one finds in such a film as Fritz Lang's (*sic*) *Metropolis* about 'robot workers' and ultra skyscrapers, etc. etc., should be cleared out of your minds... Machinery has superseded the subjugation and 'mechanisation' of human beings" (*TTC*, 13-14). In his future "you may take it that whatever Lange did in *Metropolis* is the exact contrary of what we want done here." The workers will be engaged in co-operative teamwork. Machinery is liberating. *Please keep that in mind, Wells thunders.*

And in particular, the costume team had better keep their wits about them. In the future, we will not be "plastered over with gadgets". Oh Mr Wells, how you would enjoy the

day of the palmtop, the ipod, and that strange multipurpose tool there was a craze for at science fiction conventions a few years back! In fact, Wells does admit that "Men and women of the future will carry the equivalent of the purse, pocket book, fountain pen, watch, etc." He also suggests that we will be carrying portable radios, or radio-telephones, torches and notebooks. Where will we keep all this? Well, in keeping with his feeling that the future will be both efficient and attractive, Wells suggests that male, and possibly female costume will extrapolate the padded shoulders of costumes designed to cope with the wallet and the fountain pen. We will be wearing cloaks, Renaissance-style, but updated to modern needs rather than "costumes of cellophane illuminated by neon lights."

As usual with Wells, the most irritating thing about this rant was that he was right. Too much science fiction gives us wacky costumes designed to look "futuristic". You try to find everyday clothes that won't bag and stretch at what we cram into them. (Look, I need my palmtop, pen, wallet, keys and mp3 player, all right?) Wells thought about all this. I bet the costume design team of *Things to Come* hated him, but he wanted the future to work.

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 (asawyer@liverpool.ac.uk). Science Fiction Foundation Collection: www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/sffcollection.html Science Fiction Foundation: <http://www.sff-foundation.org>

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

Going *Æon* and *Æon*

Roderick Gladwish takes a look at *Æon* and *Scifantastic* magazines

Scifantastic the webzine has faded in and out of existence over the last four years. Editor Sarah Dobbs is an optimist; she keeps coming back with new ideas. This time *Scifantastic* is back as an A4 sized bi-monthly print magazine. The editor's positive nature doesn't show in the stories which in issue one are mostly dark and horrific. The stories I've seen for Issue two are darker still.

From issue one, in 'The Shaft of Ultimate Truth' by Barry J House, an orphan escape from a workhouse to find out the big secret (he's on a generational spaceship), doesn't understand it, then die.

'The Cook's Tale' from John Grant has aliens come to exterminate us and stay for the deep fried babies. Celina Alock supplies more cannibalism in 'The Club'.

Children find all the adults have melted away in the aptly entitled 'Melt'. Gordon P Ramsay gives no explanation leaving it incomplete like the opening to a longer story.

A time travel tale, 'A Place in History' (John M Floyd) ends predictably with a deliberately stranded traveller. 'Ware, Man' is an inverse werewolf story by Cas Peace that succeeded in presenting the alien mind of a wolf.

The lightest tale was Aliya Whiteley's 'Voice Mail' which describes a sentient answering machine making contact with a passing starship. A Japanese demon kills a student teacher for no significant reason, (but that's demons for you) in 'Oni' by Ren Holton. 'Cold Hands, Warm Heart' by Neil Ayres was plotless. A centaur in the last wood on Earth meets a woman, they talk about another woman frozen in ice, first woman leaves.

Darkest of all is 'Still Life'. A police photographer gets his sexual excitement from rape/murder crime scenes. He is in league with the killer and they discuss the latest atrocity for further carnal thrills. Hard to stomach I only thrills. Claire Nixon's story because of reviewing it. Peter Tennant's 'Clouds' was flash fiction; a snapshot of a changed world.

It ends with a poem 'Cyber Rights' by Agnes Meadows. I still don't get it just like the comic 'Halfworld' from Joanna Scott which I've reread half a dozen times. Perhaps episode two will make

more sense.

Like the old website days you can enter competitions to win used magazines. In this case it's issue 8 of *Jupiter SF* – well worth a punt.

There's an interview with prosthetic artist Russell Hughes and author of *Troy: Lord of the Silver Bow*, David Gemmell.

Will it last? Probably not in the harsh world of SF magazine publishing, but I can almost guarantee it'll be resurrected by MS Dobbs in some new form.

Æon is an electronic magazine, not a webzine and not for free like most of the electronic ones out there, although BSFA members can contact the publishers to receive samples stories free. Visit the website and find out how, it is worth it.

It's a professional product with *Æon* making use of Microsoft Reader to produce a full colour, high quality magazine. MS Reader has two advantages and two disadvantages. Negatives first: Microsoft is involved. I'm not a Bill Gates hater, but Microsoft doesn't seem to be able to give anything away free without trying to control it (you have to register it, requiring a Microsoft passport) and then only use it on one machine. Without a laptop it's not very portable. I use a Pison which is incompatible. I hacked (in both meanings of the word) the thing and printed it off so I could read it on the train. Advantages: until I saw the full colour *Interzone* 200 nothing came close to its appearance. And two, Reader can be made to read stories to you. My default voice sounds like Stephen Hawking. SF read by Stephen Hawking? Yes, I say, oh yes.

In style it reminds me of *Analog* with little intros by the editors to set up the story. It has broad tastes from hard science fiction to fantasy although some are grim, lacking *Analog's* can-do spirit; none have the darkness of *Scifantastic*.

A quarterly it's reached issue four and each one is of consistently high quality. Issue three is a good sample of the sequence so far. It contained two novelettes and five short stories plus a science article.

The first novella was 'Wallamelon' by Nisi Shawl. Set in 60s America it looked at a black community in Michigan and a different kind of magic. The other,

'Angel of War' from Dev Agarwal, was a violent, cyberpunkish story that is part of a cycle of stories about a race of superintelligent slaves created by humanity that have liberated themselves. It follows damaged victims in the pause between the first fight and the next.

Another story set in India, 'The Garuda Bird' by Tom Doyle was a SF/Fantasy tale told Bollywood style mixing in an Indian folk tale too. (With the city now called Mumbai shouldn't that now be mubbywood?)

In 'You Will Go On' (Jay Lake) a feral human tribe inhabit a huge 'House of God'. Filled with twisted concepts; for instance praying to God involved hunting down an animal. I missed the obvious religious overtones.

Ken Rand supplied 'The Henry and the Martha' which describes humans in an alien zoo from the keeper's view point. Amusing and tragic in one story.

Manipulating luck in Jeremy Minton's 'The Wrong End of the Stick' was not as funny as it was supposed to be, but top marks for the death by elephant ending.

Just Chutney by E. Sedia is about making chutney and I didn't understand it, to the point that I suspect it was poetry.

The science article was about evolutionary tricks. Apparently up to a third of creatures in a system can cheat without destroying it, which means if aliens turn up spouting peace one in three may be lying, but so might we.

All products good or bad, live and die on awareness and access. Webzines are instant access; *Æon* took an effort to download and register MS Reader before I could read it. This could stifle *Æon's* future. This is a good SF magazine in content and layout but how do I pass it on to a friend to catch their interest? How could *Scifantastic* give it away as a prize?



Æon
www.aconmagazine.com

Scifantastic
www.scifantasticmag.co.uk

Facing up to life after

Looking back, was there ever a point when you realised that you were now a professional writer?

It was a long, slow, drawn out process because I'd been writing as a hobby for ten years or more. Initially novels as, you know, short stories are for wusses. I was writing these monumental five hundred, six hundred page novels and sending them off to publishers and getting sometimes polite rejection slips and sometimes...slightly curt ones. But no particular interest.

Then I switched to writing Comics journalism. I did reviews then articles for a magazine called *Fantasy Advertiser* which was one of the big... 'big'...one of the few UK Comics Press Publications in the early to mid-eighties. So I was working for them and then the company that produced that magazine was a distributor, a comics distributor called Neptune and they started their own comics line; Trident, and I started pitching comics ideas to them.

At the time I felt like whenever I tried to get anything published, actually get anything creative published, it was one step forward and then six or seven steps back. But in fact, whenever I did it I would make contacts that moved me forward at least a little (and) it reached a point where I thought 'actually, there probably is a living to be made at this'.

Was the *Lucifer* mini-series your first experience of writing with other people's characters?
Yes, it was.

How did you find that?

It was scary but at the same time, it was what I wanted to do. I've said this many times before but at the time if anyone had asked me what would be your dream job, what would you like to do more than anything else in the world, I would have said 'write a sequel to the *Sandman*'. The *Sandman* was to me the height of mainstream comics storytelling at that time and in many ways still is (and) I really wanted to play in that sandbox. *Sandman*-Sandbox... That wasn't meant to be a pun! So although it was scary, I was really up for it. I was entirely up for it.

Like in the *Sandman*, *Lucifer* sometimes takes a back seat to the supporting characters. Were the supporting cast created to bring out certain aspects of *Lucifer* even though he's still the driving force of all the storylines?
He's the driving force...Exactly, he's the catalyst. One of the interesting

things about *Lucifer* is that he can't change. He is always absolutely and monolithically himself. When Gaiman wrote *The Sandman*, over the seventy-five issues, you actually do see Morpheus change very much from the sort of proud and insular character he is at the start to a rather more human figure at the end before he engineers his own death. *Lucifer* is incapable of change. The very idea of it would be anathema to him, the very idea that there was something about him that wasn't already perfect. He doesn't want to open up to other people's perspectives or experiences because it would feel like a kind of surrender of his own identity.

So we haven't gone down that road. There is no gradual character arc for him. *Lucifer* as you first meet him will be *Lucifer* as you last leave him. But he is and can be a catalyst for change in other people and we played very hard on the fact that *Lucifer* impacts on other people's lives.

Having said that, I think the story that we're telling is his story more than anyone else's. It's a universal family drama. *Lucifer* has an overbearing father who has always been there and who has always been excessively in control of his life.

Did you want people to be on his side?

We always wanted people to see his side. We want people to be seduced by *Lucifer* but to see exactly what *Lucifer* is. He is selfishness turned into a sort of force of nature. He is so selfish that he would set fire to the world to light his own cigarette.

So you were writing one of Vertigo's flagship titles and then you decided to take on another one as well. How did you end up writing for *Hellblazer*?

They offered it to me. Will Dennis phoned me to say that Brian Azzarello was leaving the book, that they'd been talking about possible successors and that my name had come up and he wanted to know if I was interested. And I actually said 'no'. Even though I loved the John Constantine character and had been reading him since the series first came out, in fact since the character was introduced in *Swamp Thing*, the idea of writing two titles in a month struck me as ludicrous at the time. I mean how could anybody possibly do that? Which is kind of ironic considering how things turned out later. But Will wouldn't take no for an answer. He said 'just think about it because we don't need an answer just yet. Brian is going to be working for another six months or so'.

You were bullied into it?

(laughs) Yeah, my arm was twisted!

First let's just go back to how you pronounced his surname.

Oh, Con-stan-tyne. The English pronunciation.

Excellent. When other writers had taken over the series they'd launched in with, for example, Garth Ennis had given him lung cancer and Brian Azzarello had thrown him in jail. How did you decide to take him back to his roots and back to Liverpool?

Although I enjoyed very much what Brian Azzarello did with the character I wanted to put the magic back in and back at the centre. I wanted not so much to re-define John but to take him back to what he'd been at the start under Jamie Delano and under Warren Ellis. Those were my favourite runs on the book. It's noticeable that most of the supporting characters that I didn't invent for myself I took from Warren's run, Warren's very short run. So I reintroduced the magic, took him back to the places that define John for me, which are both Liverpool and London. You see I'm a Scouser living in the South and John is a Scouser living in the South so to some extent I write John as me. I have him living in the places where I used to live and drinking in the places where I used to drink and so on.

So even though a lot of your stories are all about gods and monsters, you're still able to draw from your own real life?
Oh all of the gods and monsters stuff happened to me as well!

Oh right, sorry. Should have done my research better.

You know a lot of people said when I took over *Hellblazer* that *Lucifer* and *Constantine* were the same character. They're arrogant sons of bitches, totally ruthless and incredibly dirty, which is true up to a point. But I think the key to John's personality is that underneath that superficial ruthlessness and flippancy he's actually scarred by the things he's done. He'll sacrifice his friends if they happen to be the most useful tools, or the ones most readily to hand. But he can never forget what he's done, he can't walk away from it afterwards. He carries this awful burden and that paradox between his incredibly pragmatic approach to life and the ways it harms him in the long run is, I think, the key to writing him.

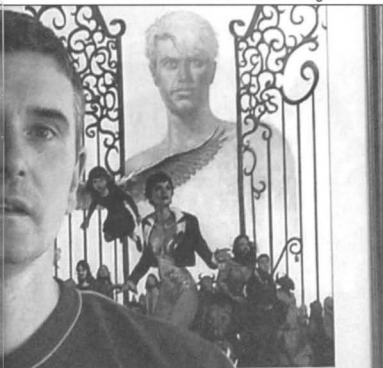
So...there's *Lucifer*, you're



currently adapting *Neverwhere* to a comic book and you've done the *Sandman* Presents *Petrefax* and *The Furies*... Neil Gaiman. Discuss.
(laughs) I've got nothing for Neil except praise and gratitude. He's been the most generous and thoughtful of collaborators – if I can call myself a collaborator. When I was working on the original *Lucifer* stories, the original mini, he took the time to have several long telephone

r Lucifer

John Hunter talks to Mike Carey about his career in comics and becoming a novelist



conversations with me about the Lucifer-Mazikeen relationship and things that I was proposing to do and how they might play out. We developed a sort of very cordial relationship there. He's always given a lot of freedom and on the Lucifer monthly, he's always backed me in everything that I've done. Increasingly he's taken a back seat as he trusts my instinct. The only time that he watches me closely now is when

I'm writing the Endless. So if I have Death, Delirium or Destiny making a cameo then he'll check the dialogue. Which is only to be expected. I pitched a whole load of *Sandman Presents* minis at various times and he's always been prepared to chat either by email or phone and to help me brainstorm ideas. When I finally got to meet him at a San Diego convention he was incredibly cool. It would be possible for him to be possessive

about the universe he's created and you could understand it perfectly, but he's not! He's always given me room to do what I wanted and at the same time, given me guidance whenever I needed it. Great, great guy!

Is there anything that you feel that you've absolutely nailed, that's your favourite that you've written or are very proud of? I have a couple of favourites. I'm very proud of *My Faith in Frankie* because I'd never done comedy before and I think it came out pretty well. It's probably one of the most offbeat ideas that I've ever pitched but it was also the easiest sell I've ever had. I only sent off a one-page summary and it was accepted right there and then. That's not my usual experience. And I think the artists on Frankie were a perfect team. Originally Sonny was going to do inks as well but then Shelly Bond had the brilliant idea of bringing Marc Hempel in on the inks and on the covers. I just think that the finished package was something that I was one hundred percent happy with.

So as your massive runs on *Hellblazer* and *Lucifer* build up to their final push, what do you see yourself doing afterwards? What's the next big thing?

I have got a monthly pitch in with Vertigo, which looks like it may very well happen. It's fantasy again but it's a different kind. And there is the possibility of doing a series for Marvel involving a classic Marvel character, who I'd quite like to take in a new and slightly odd direction. Apart from that all the pitches that I have in are mini-series and one-offs of various kinds. I'm doing another book with John Bolton, a *Sandman Presents* hardcover called *God Save the Queen* which uses most of the Faerie characters. I'm doing a *Vampiella* arc, which is a hell of a lot of fun to do, and I may be doing some work for a Canadian publisher, Speakeasy. But again it's all six-parter and eight parter. The *Vampiella* was a three parter. It is nice to work on smaller and self-contained things. But on the other hand it's going to be odd, very odd, not having *Lucifer* to write.

Are you now in a position to be a bit more experimental if you like?

I think so. And certainly if the *Castor* novels take off I will be doing less comic work and will only have time to do the things that I can get passionate about and not just take stuff on automatically. When you start off as a freelancer you say 'yes' to everything.

What new avenues is the world you've created for the *Castor* series allowing you to explore?

There's a lot in there about the big issues that continue to bug me - issues of life, death and faith. What I used to love about HP Lovecraft's stories was that they were often a kind of metaphysical horror in which the "monster" was an idea rather than anything you could actually see or touch. In *Castor*, likewise, the scariest

things ultimately are the explanations for what's happening and why it's happening.

You describe *Castor* as a classic 'gumshoe' character. What has influenced your novel writing?

That's quite hard to say, really. I suppose the biggest influence on my early prose stuff was Ursula LeGuin, and I still love her rigorous humanist sensibility. More recently I've been blown away by Garth Nix (the *Abhorsen* books - not *Krags of the Kingdom*) and China Miéville. Miéville in particular has made me re-assess, as great genre writers do, what's possible within a horror/fantasy context. Some of that is bound to seep through into *Castor*, because it's been on my mind so much, but I'd be surprised if it showed in any stylistic borrowing.

And finally, have you actually seen the *Constantine* movie?

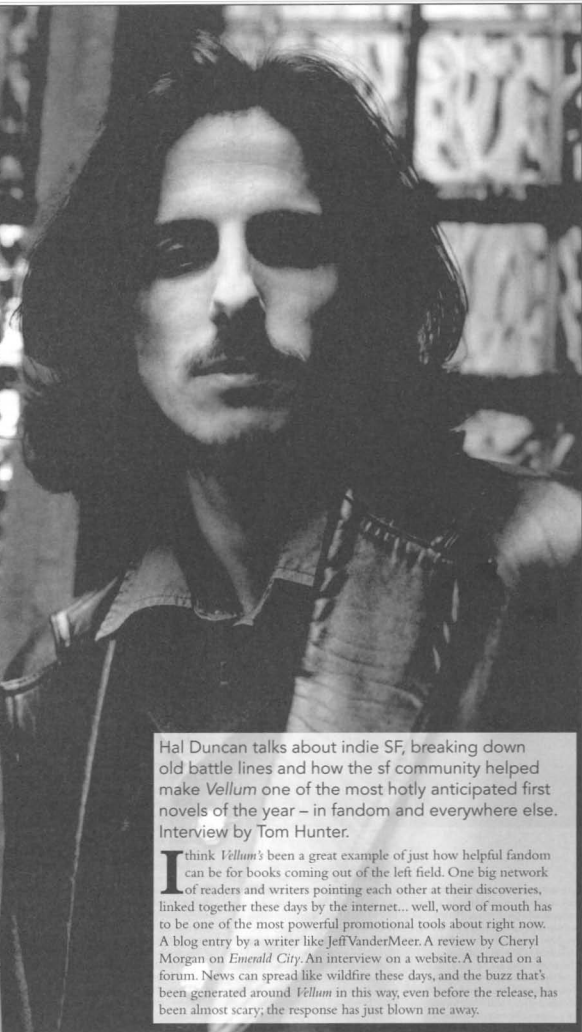
I have, yes.

And what were your thoughts?

I enjoyed it. It's a fun, mainstream, Hollywood movie. It's not *Hellblazer*, it's not the film of the book and Keanu is not John Constantine. Notice I call him Constan-teen there because I'm talking about the movie. The film, in itself, I enjoyed. I think it did a lot of things right. The way they envisioned Hell I thought was really good, a really good visual dynamic for Hell. And a lot of the 'business' works. The way John gets his audience with Lucifer at the end works nicely. But it annoyed me that they started from a position of disrespect in some ways towards the source material. So you get Lorenzo di-Bonaventura saying 'comic books work in a very black and white way. Who's good and who's bad. Who stands for what and why do they stand for it'. And the director, what's he called? Francis Lawrence? He said at one point in an interview that 'although this movie has its origins in a comic book, I didn't want it to have a comic book feel. I wanted it to be grounded in reality'. So you get all these judgements about how comics work. That comics have black and white morality, and that comics are stylised and unreal. And actually if you look at the movie and you look at the comic, the movie shows a John Constan-tyne or Constan-teen whose motivation could be summed up, and probably was summed up, in the initial pitch in a single sentence. "Because he succeeded in killing himself he is damned to Hell, so he's trying to redeem himself by fighting these battles against demons." Now look at the John that we know from the last eighteen years of *Hellblazer* continuity. You can't sum up why he does what he does. I think ultimately, he's an impossible character to pin down and that's what makes him satisfying! I didn't mind the movie at all. I really enjoyed the movie as an experience but I don't think they should diss the book.

Then I gave him a copy of *Constantine* for his very own...

Velluminations



Hal Duncan talks about indie SF, breaking down old battle lines and how the sf community helped make *Vellum* one of the most hotly anticipated first novels of the year – in fandom and everywhere else. Interview by Tom Hunter.

I think *Vellum*'s been a great example of just how helpful fandom can be for books coming out of the left field. One big network of readers and writers pointing each other at their discoveries, linked together these days by the internet... well, word of mouth has to be one of the most powerful promotional tools about right now. A blog entry by a writer like Jeff VanderMeer. A review by Cheryl Morgan on *Emerald City*. An interview on a website. A thread on a forum. News can spread like wildfire these days, and the buzz that's been generated around *Vellum* in this way, even before the release, has been almost scary; the response has just blown me away.

I mean, I think there's actually something different to old-fashioned hype going on here, and I find it really exciting, not just because of what it's done for *Vellum* but because of what it says about sf&f. The growth of the blogosphere and web-based forums means that there's now a sort of ongoing online convention; it's like we're all sitting at this virtual bar blathering about the stuff that's interesting us – the new Jeff Ford, the new Kelly Link collection, the new Jeff VanderMeer, the new whatever – with little or no barriers between fans and pros. Hang out on the Night Shade Books message board, for example, and you can find yourself in conversation with an anonymous fan or a big name editor like Ellen Datlow. It's just immensely encouraging to read another writer's blog, say, and discover a little sub-community of simpatico souls, people reading or writing similar work.

I guess what I really dig about that "online convention" most of all is the diversity. You see, I'd have to confess that I was quite disillusioned with fandom and the convention scene for many years. I had a whale of a time at my first con, at the Liverpool Adelphi back in the early 90's, but with each con I went to I grew more and more uncomfortable

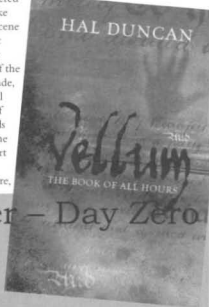
with the insularity, the cliques and coteries of people who seemed to be in it mainly for the kudos of being on committees or as devotees of dross, of media tie-ins and MacFantasy. Battle lines seemed to have been drawn – though never acknowledged – between "Sci-Fi" fans and "SF" writers, if that makes sense. You'd get the BSFA awards squeezed into a fifteen-minute slot before the Masquerade and the majority of convention-goers seemingly more interested in the latter. I'm not averse to a bit of frillery, but it came to seem like fandom in general just wasn't that interested in what attracted me to SF&F in the first place – the eclecticism of ideas and approaches in writers like Bester and Bradbury, Delany and Dick. A lot of sf&f fans are looking for "something different", but genre fiction also runs the risk of formulation, of becoming generic in the worst way; and a lot of fans are, truth be told, looking for that formula product, for "more of the same".

The way I think of it is by analogy to music scenes. I think of sf&f as being like rock music, hugely diverse and generally populist... but similarly split in terms of audience. For years at conventions I seemed to be looking around and finding only the latter – the stereotypical

fans with beards, beer bellies and black t-shirts with dragon skulls on them. It was as if sf&f fans, whether 14 or 40, were all stuck in some permanent adolescence, like mullets-and-spandex metalheads making the sign of the Horned One over the literary equivalent of an 80's power ballad. Imagine a bar where all they have on the jukebox is tenth-generation rip-offs of Whitesnake, full of regurgitated riffs and that power chord "sense of wonder". And where that's all that the clientele seem to want. The final straw came, for me, at a joint Easterncon/Highlander convention in Glasgow; it was about like any pretence that this was about books had just been abandoned for one big fancy dress celebration of shit. Exit Hal, stage-left.

Now though... hell, maybe I was just going through a blinkered and bolshie stage but it feels like SF&F is growing up, like the scene is becoming much more about exactly those "high quality but unusual books". The growth of the independent press – Night Shade, Golden Gryphon, Prime, Small Beer – reminds me so much of Rough Trade or Island Records that I can't help but think of the SF&F scene (or at least that part of it) now as basically "indie". Forget the tired old clichés. Sure,

we're still a bunch of uber-geeks at heart, but we're uber-geeks listening to New Wave electro-clash, mixing DIY acid jazz records on our PCs. The bar has changed owners. The jukebox has prog rock and punk now, glam and garage and grunge as well as, yes, all the unreconstructed metal you could want. Live gigs every other night. Fuck, it even has weird-as experimental post-rock that's just plain out there. I don't know if it's a new generation of readers, writers or what, but I think sf&f is now a lot hipper than it even realises. The shelves still hold a lot of formula pap, but with that network of readers, writers and editors out there... it's like having a hundred big brothers and sisters whispering in your ear "Never mind the bollocks. Here's the Sex Pistols". That side of fandom is just fucking brilliant.



The Journals Of Reynard Carter – Day Zero

A burning map. Every epic, my friend Jack used to say, should start with a burning map. Like in the movies. Fucking flames burning the world away; that's the best thing about all those old films, he said – when you see this old parchment map just... getting darker and darker in the centre, crisping, crinkling until suddenly it just... fwoom.

That was Jack for you; if you asked him what he wanted for his birthday, he'd tell you he wanted an explosion. Jack was crazy, but as I flicked forward through the Book, faster and faster as each page fed in me a growing sense of horror and awe, I thought of what he'd said. I thought of gods and tragedies, legends and histories, and movies that opened with scrolling tales of ancient times. The vellum pages beneath my hand flickered under a light that wasn't fire, however, but rather the pale blue of the underground vault's fluorescent lights; and if there was a burning it was in my head, a fire of realisation, of revelation. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that at any second the world around me would be torn away in flames and ashes, stripped back to reveal a scene of carnage choreographed as in some lurid Hollywood flick, and soundtracked with a crashing, clashing music over screams and sounds of war.

The Book. I slammed the thing closed, checking a suspicion. Its outward, leather, cracked and weathered carapace was thick and dark, embossed with strange sigils – an eye-like design, a circle within an ellipse, but with four smaller semicircles on its outer edge at three o'clock and nine o'clock, and at five and eleven; overlapping this but offset was a rectangle. The framework of embossing around it looked, for all the world, like the stolen architectural plans that lay abandoned on the floor, and with a glance around the vault my suspicion was confirmed

– it matched. The long, rectangular doorway in the bottom right-hand corner; the left-hand wall thicker, as it should be, a supporting wall for the building above; the two blocks of wall on either side jutting out a foot or so into the room two-thirds of the way up, as if the original end wall had been knocked through at some point, extended into a forgotten recess; the tiny alcove at the far end which I'd found hidden behind a tall glass-panelled bookcase and which was barely legible on the stolen plans, drawn in pencil where the rest was marked in ink.

I felt a bit guilty looking at the piles of Aristotle and Nostradamus and Moliere and who knows what else, lying on the floor where I'd put them so I could heave the solid bookcase out from its place. Fragile, priceless artefacts of the university's Special Collection, books a student would sign for, with his tutor's name and research subject, and have brought to him by the curator, in the Reading Room upstairs, lain gently on the desk before him on foam supports, their brittle pages to be turned so delicately, tentatively in case they crumbled to dust between unthinking fingers. And I'd treated them like paperbacks dumped on the floor by someone rearranging furniture. But they were worthless in comparison to the Book; they were already dust.

I wiped away some of the blood that ran down from my forehead and opened the book again, to its first page.

This extract from *Vellum* is published with the kind permission of the author, Hal Duncan, and Pan MacMillan.

the BSFA's greatest

BRITISH

science fiction ever

In August, Worldcon, the world's biggest science fiction convention is returning to Britain for the first time in a decade. To celebrate, the BSFA are launching 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 will launch 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 to be on this list?



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.

Last chance to vote!

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: great-britishsf@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 Worldcon and we'll have a full report in the next issue of *Matrix*.

Best novel

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

Best film

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

Name:

in full, please print

Address:

Postcode:

E-mail:

Best newcomer

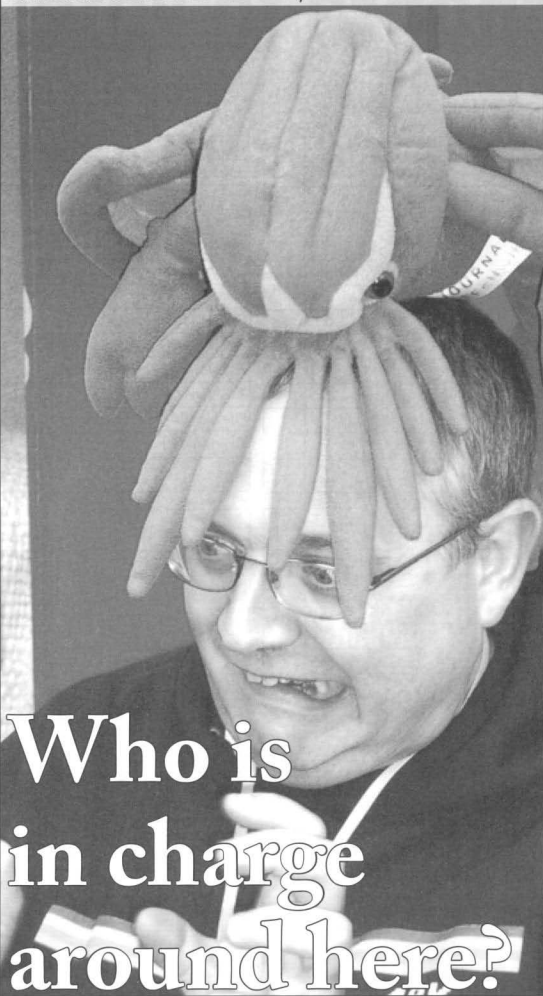
Neal Asher	
Tony Ballantyne	
Susanna Clarke	
Jon George	
Gary Gibson	
David Mitchell	
Richard Morgan	
Adam Roberts	
Alastair Reynolds	
Martin Sketchley	
Charles Stross	
Steph Swainston	
Karen Traviss	
Liz Williams	
Other:	

Best television

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

My nominee for a place on the BSFA Order of Merit is:

Tom Hunter talks to new BSFA Chair Pat McMurray about his vision for the future



Tom Hunter: For anyone unfamiliar with the BSFA (unlikely given our readership, but it's a place to start) maybe we should begin by finding out what you think it is and how you would describe it to someone interested in SF but not involved in fandom.

Pat McMurray: Your first question cuts straight to the heart of the matter – what is the BSFA? We can describe what it does, its history, what type of organisation it is, its stated purpose, quite easily. But what is it *for*, why does it still exist? When asked, and I've asked quite a few by now, most people mention the magazines and, if London-based, the meetings and maybe the AGM. The BSFA awards need prompting normally, and no-one seems to mention *Focus* and the Orbiter writing groups.

Almost everything we do seems to be overshadowed by other better known organisations or institutions – the awards by the Clarke Award, *Vector* by *Foundation*, *Focus* and *Orbiter* by *Clarion*, the meetings by the *Ton* or *Borders*. Almost the only unique thing we appear to do is *Matrix*, so when people ask themselves "what is the BSFA?" it seems inevitable to focus on *Matrix*.

The good news is that this perception is almost completely false – everything we do is unique and unusual – our award winners are chosen by the membership; *Vector* focuses on timely reviews and criticism to help our members choose what to read; *Focus* and *Orbiter* provide year-round support to aspiring authors. The BSFA starts to look like a classic marketing challenge – a small company with good products, limited resources and no obvious place in the marketplace, no clear niche.

Now marketing may not be rocket science, but neither is it voodoo magic. This type of challenge can be solved and I've done it several times. The first step is to talk to people who are committed to and involved with the organisation – committee members, former chairs – about the identity, purpose and value of the BSFA. This is not a tabula rasa, but it is an open-minded process. I know the BSFA *has* a purpose, and it continues to be of value to members but I think we need to work on much more clearly defining "the purpose of the BSFA".

So that's the BSFA now but how about where it should look to be in a year, five years, next Worldcon, final implosion of the Sun types times?

I think the BSFA has been incredibly lucky in its recent chairs – first Maureen, then Paul & Elizabeth had incredible success in keeping the BSFA in existence, getting people involved, building a consolidated base and reminding people the BSFA exists. I think we've now reached the stage where my sort of skills can come into play – I'm much more of a seller than a doer. I'm interested in establishing the BSFA's identity and purpose, marketing that internally to members and committee, externally to the wider SF community and prospective members. I want to see growth.

In a year's time I want to have a firm well-established committee, a clear purpose & identity and started on internal and external marketing – "this is what the BSFA is, and this is why you should participate/join/support."

Five years from now is where I'm currently setting my "term limit" – I would like to hand on to my successor a BSFA with many more members, a clear well-known purpose and identity, a serious presence with writers and other SF professionals. To my successor can go the challenges of the next stage of the BSFA, which will probably be about professionalisation and internationalisation...

We all know about the popular press images of the sci-fi fan. They're young, male, like bad rock and insist on wearing specs when anyone post-cyberpunk is wearing contacts these days. But for those in fandom the flip-side almost seems to be true – Fandom is allegedly old and 'greying' – so should the BSFA be looking to recruit younger members and if so, how?

Fandom is a cultural grouping, and like every such grouping needs occasional renewals, but I think the greying of fandom is at least partly an illusion. And god yes, we need to recruit younger members else they'll revolt and cast us from our ivory towers, or even worse, just ignore us.

And in a similar vein, SF has the street-cred (on some streets anyway) but fantasy has the reader numbers – discuss? Ever since I read *The Book of the New Sun* by Gene Wolfe, I've felt the distinction between SF and

"Imagine Jack Aubrey, sword in one hand, blaster in the other."

fantasy is somewhat artificial, a matter of tone, appearance, tropes and vocabulary, rather than any real difference. I think that modern SF is about relationships as well as ideas, and the books that sell well and win awards tend to reflect this. And are you really saying that, say, George R.R. Martin doesn't have any street cred?

Nah, we all love him at *Matrix*, we were just trying a bit of Paxman style head-messing on you for a laugh. Speaking of head-messing, a couple of issues back we ran a feature on a robotic version of Philip K Dick. Assuming advances in medical science allowed you to clone the best bits of your favourite authors who would you sample and what would the end creation look like?

I recently did a serious purge of my collection, from 11,000 pieces down to about 600. I now know what authors I really cannot live without – Gene Wolfe, Jack Vance, Dan Simmons, Patrick O'Brian, Henry Trezza, Ursula LeGuin, Diana Wynne Jones, John Wingate, George R.R. Martin, Connie Willis, Neil Gaiman, John Barnes, Vernor Vinge – these are the ones that automatically made the cut and survived. The newest authors in that category for me are Charlie Stross and Cory Doctorow – both overnight successes after decades of hard work... Because of lack of time – Worldcon involvement – I have not read as much recently as I wanted to, but I really like what Steph Swainston and Marianne de Parris are doing.

I note that most of my list are genre authors who write cross genre – sf, fantasy and horror – while a couple of them are a bit more

webfooted thus revealing my secret vice – I love naval fiction. I really must learn to sail one of these days! So imagine Jack Aubrey, sword in one hand, blaster in the other, boarding a stellar sailing ship with a dragon by his side – hang on, am I channelling E.E. Doc Smith there?

That sounds like Fandom's dream book to us but Fandom doesn't sell books. They're not the target market. Fandom is fandom and SF readers are something else. You don't sell books to fandom... That's not us speaking by the way, just an oft-heard comment (by *Matrix* anyway) from certain sectors of the publishing industry. Sometimes it makes sense to us, other times it sounds like, well, bollocks. What do you reckon? Affiliation groups, user groups, loyalty groups are some of the most common marketing strategies. The classic example is Harley Davidson where user groups kept the company in business, long after most of their competitors had succumbed to Japanese competition. "Fandom in the broad sense does form a sort of affiliation group, a book launched at an Eastercon or through the BSFA for example, has the opportunity of reaching 600 or so member plus their friends and associates. A couple of thousand people interested in a book can give someone like Mary Doria Russell, Susanna Clarke or Steph Swainston a sound start in life.

I think the answer to your question is that some marketing departments see the value of fandom as an affiliation group and make good use of it, and some marketing department's don't. I think the fandom strategy is very good for high quality but unusual books, maybe not so good for more standard works...

So the answer is yes and no.

Good answer, but enough of this puff-piece stuff... Have you read any Harry Potter?

Yes, and enjoyed it too. The contrast between HP5 and HP6 showed me the value of good editing though.

I prefer slightly meatier stuff like Diana Wynne Jones, Terry Pratchett or Philip Pullman, but I like Harry Potter too.

Ok, and how was your Worldcon anyway and what did you get up to?

My Worldcon was exhausting and a bit stressful, but also fun and very fulfilling. It's almost a decade since KIM Campbell and I launched the concept at a Novacon, so in one sense my Worldcon started a decade ago. In another sense my Worldcon started ten days before when I hired a truck to drive art show materials and BSFA stuff to Glasgow. On its way up the vehicle was known as *The Truck of Doom and Foreboding*, but on its way back it was *The Larry of Happiness and Puppies*.

I spent pretty much my entire convention in the artshow and business meetings, with occasional excursions to eat, have a beer and make sure the BSFA table was still there. I met and talked to a lot of artists, but saw very little programme, and kept bumping into people for a few minutes here and there. And then came the closing ceremony, and we of the BSFA had a tiny little ceremony at the table, where we did the handover from Paul and Elizabeth to me, and Elizabeth did a dance of glee, honestly.

And finally, can you give us a sneak preview of any of your plans for the BSFA.

Well, my personal objective is to remain Chair of the BSFA for five years and not to take on any other major voluntary or fanish project during that time. I want to do three things during that time:

I want to look very seriously at the role, purpose and image of the BSFA, with the specific aim of marketing it internally to committee and members and externally to SF pros, potential members and the general public.

I also want to look seriously at the people, structure and future evolution of the BSFA's organization. A couple of people have said they feel they're coming to the natural end of their tenures and I'd like to use that opportunity to evaluate roles, look at job descriptions, that sort of thing.

Most importantly, I'd like to look closely at what the BSFA could do to support and work with SF pros – authors, artists, editors, critics. Our Orbiter work groups and *Focus* are very good for aspiring writers, but that should not be the limits of our ambitions.

"Almost the only unique thing we appear to do is *Matrix*, hence when people ask themselves 'what is the BSFA?' it seems almost inevitable to focus on *Matrix*."

A Very Good Year

2005 is a great year for short fiction. At least that's what it looks like from the list of nominations for the BSFA awards. By mid-October more than 30 stories have been nominated, and from all sorts of sources: old and new magazines, websites, collections and anthologies.

It's also looking like an interesting year for SF and fantasy novels; although fewer titles have been nominated for the BSFA award at this stage, there's some intriguing diversity in the range that have been put forward so far. Given the number of other pretty good books around already, and some more due to be published before the end of the year, it's looking like being another strong shortlist.

Artwork nominations seem a bit quieter, but the range received is no less interesting. Until 2003 magazine covers tended to dominate; then we had an all-book cover shortlist, and last year included both book covers and photographic images. This year the nominations include magazine covers, fanzine covers, and

artwork featured online – but no book covers yet.

Finally the non-fiction award seems to be working well in its new format. So far all the nominations received officially are for long works, but we're assured that the judges are reading some worthwhile shorter pieces too.

So far, so good – but don't relax just yet. You've still got time to have your say and you should use it, even if your favourite choice is already nominated – extra votes can make all the difference in determining who reaches the final shortlist (especially in the closely fought Short Story category!). The deadline for nominations is 21 January 2006, and in this mailing you'll also find a form to make it even easier for you to nominate works in any category.

Just post this back before 21 January or email awards administrator Claire Brialey at awards@fishlifter.demon.co.uk

It's looking like a good year for the BSFA awards. Make sure you help to make it a great one.

Nominations to date

Nominations for BSFA award for Best Novel of 2005

Accelerando – Charles Stross (Orbit)
Air – Geoff Ryman (Gollancz SF)
Anansi Boys – Neil Gaiman (Review)
Band of Gypsies – Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz SF)
Double Vision – Tricia Sullivan (Orbit)
Learning the World – Ken MacLeod (Orbit)
Resolution – John Meany (Bantam Press)
The Rainbow Opera – Elizabeth Knox (Faber Children's Books)
Vellum – Hal Duncan (Pan Macmillan)
Woken Furies – Richard Morgan (Gollancz SF)

Nominations for BSFA award for Best Short Fiction of 2005

A World of His Own – Christopher East (*Interzone* #197)
Dee-Dee and the Dumpy Dancers – Ian Watson & Mike Allen (*Interzone* #197)
Deus Ex Homine – Hannu Rajaniemi (*Nova Scotia: An Anthology of Scottish Speculative Fiction*, ed. Andrew J Wilson & Neil Williamson)
Ducks in Winter – Neal Blakie (*Interzone* #196)
Going the Jerusalem Mile – Chaz Brenchley (TTA #41)
Head 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 McDaid (*F&SF*, January)
Kivani – 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)
Pupate – Brian Rideout (*Neometropolis* #5)
'Second Person, Present Tense' – Daryl Gregory (*Asimov's*, September)
'Smile Time: The Comic' – Astrid (LiveJournal community ats_endofdays)
'SS' – Nathan Ballingrud (TTA #41)
The Emperor of Gondwanaland – Paul Di Filippo (*Interzone* #196; also *The Emperor of Gondwanaland and other stories*)
The Face of America – David Ira Cleary (*Interzone* #196)
The Kansas Jayhawk vs. the Midwestern Monster Squad – Jeremiah Tolbert (*Interzone* #197)
The Leopard Girl – Tim Lees (*The Life to Come*)
The Little Goddess – Ian McDonald (*Asimov's*, June)
The Tetrahedron – Vandana Singh (*Intemova* 1, April)
The Western Front – Patrick Saphire (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)
Tolens – Wil McIntosh (*Interzone* #196)
Two Dreams on Trains – Elizabeth Bear (*Strange Horizons*, 3 January)
Vessels of Light, Chapels of Darkness – Paul Edwards (*Whispers of Wickedness*, 14 October)
'What the Dead are For' – Terry Gates-Grimwood (*The Future Fire* #2)
'Winning Mars' – Jason Stoddard (*Interzone* #196)
'Written in the Stars' – Ian McDonald (*Constellations*)

Nominations for BSFA award for Best Artwork of 2005

Cover of *Interzone* #197 – Kenn Brown
 Cover of *Meta* #2 – Heather Kelly
 Cover of *Zoo Nation* #6 – Pete Young
 'Cloud Dragon Skies' – Frank Wu (www.strangehorizons.com)
 'Megara' (cover of *F&SF*, January) – Max Bertolini
 'Olympia, ET Daniland City' (cover of *Leading Edge* #49) – Eugene V Marlin
 'Weapon Shop' (cover of *Interzone* #198) – Kenn Brown
 'Winning Mars' (cover of *Interzone* #196) – Josh Finney

BSFA Award Nominations 2005

You can give your nominations directly to Claire Brialey or send them to the address below. All nominations for the 2005 BSFA Awards must be received by 21 January 2006

Name	
BSFA Membership No.	
Contact phone number or email (in case of query)	
Please note, nominations cannot be accepted without the name of the person making the nominating.	
Award category	Author or artist
Title	Source (e.g. publisher or magazine)

Claire Brialey, BSFA Awards Administrator, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7ES or awards@fishlifter.demon.co.uk

Eligibility for the BSFA awards for 2005

Works published by the BSFA itself (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) not published by the BSFA are eligible, subject to the conditions below. The **novel** award is open to any novel-

length work of SF&F 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 published elsewhere, but it hasn't been published in the UK until 2005, it is eligible. The **short fiction** award is open to

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.

mediatations

My name is Martin McGrath and, having had a catholic upbringing, I must confess to having overwhelming urges to make confessions – which can be troublesome around Brummie policemen.

Anyway, today's confession is: I like space opera.

Embarrassing, huh?

There is a part of me for whom science fiction, real science fiction, must always have spaceships – proper, faster-than-light, sod-ye-physic-professor spaceships – that leap about the galaxy at the flick of a switch and lead raids on impregnable fortresses against terrible odds.

I tell myself that I can control it, that I have gone beyond those childish impulses, and that I can move on to better, more refined things. I appreciate grown-up books now. I read sf that aspires to be taken seriously as "literature" – stories without spaceships, or aliens, or anything giant (robots, squid, battalions...). I enjoy grown up films that explore the human condition and our relationships with each other – whole hours can go by without an explosion or a deathray and I won't doze off.

All that spaceship stuff was for children, I used to tell myself, and I have put aside childish things.

But is it true? Have I killed off the kid who just wanted to zap dark lords on distant planets? Or does he remain, like the lizard brain that still sisses the daily agenda from the amygdala to the rest of the supposedly advanced thinking machine atop my spinal column? If he's dead, where does that little shiver come from when a cinema screen fills with vast fleets of spaceships tearing towards each other? Why do I still look at the sky on a clear night and wonder about flitting amongst them? How is it that lately the books creeping to the top of my "to read" pile feature names like Reynolds, Baxter, Macleod, Banks and others – books that sometimes have pictures of spaceships on the front and aliens on the inside?

Am I really just the helpless victim of the seven-year-old who sits alongside my primeval lizard and pulls my strings?

Maybe, but guess what? I've stopped worrying about it.

You see, I like spaceships and strange, distant planets. I like struggles against vast, cool alien intelligences and vicious, implacable robot armies. I like mysterious objects floating in the night of space. And I even have a soft-spot for galactic empires.

I'm not criticising that other sf – the "grown-up" kind that might be "literature" – I'm still reading it and admiring lots of it and enjoying some of it. But I no longer care whether people think my choices are childish or old-fashioned or uncool. I'm not trying to prove anything to anyone else by what I read or watch. My choices aren't a badge and I'm not interested in being anyone's gang.

My name is Martin McGrath, and I like space opera.

I can live with that.

Flicker

Grim up north

Whether or not you like his films, Neil Marshall stands head and shoulders above every other modern writer/director of genre films working in Britain in one key respect: he gets films made and shown in cinemas.

The creator of *Dog Soldiers* and *The Descent* has signed a deal with American companies Rogue Pictures and Crystal Sky Pictures to back his new film, *Doomsday* with a \$20 million budget, according to *Variety*.

Doomsday is described as a futuristic thriller set in northern England. Rogue



president of production Andrew Rona said, "It's in the vein of *Mad Max*, set in the near future, when the world has become a very intense place to live. A

disaster threatens the future of mankind, and a team of people have to stop it."

The film is expected to go into production in spring 2006.



Ancient is Hollywood's new black (Private Eye, anyone?). Roland Emmerich (*Godzilla*) will direct *10,000 BC* for Sony, described as an epic depicting tribal life at the dawn of modern man. Also at Sony, but for their new animation division, Jon Favreau (*Elf*) is to write and produce a CG animated film, *Neanderthals*, based on his own original story. On a smaller scale, Adam Rifkin (*Detroit Rock City*) is making *Homo Erectus* – a comedy about Ishbo, the phallosophical caveman mocked for his ideas.



Favreau has also signed up to direct *John Carter of Mars*, after Kerry Conran (*Sky Captain...*) departed the project to concentrate on his own

hush-hush pulp sf-based project. Favreau has said his goal is to get closer to the original novels than the previous script, by Ehren Kruger (*Brothers Grimm*) while delivering what the studio want – a PG13-rated movie that can form the basis of an ongoing franchise. Favreau is the third director on the project following the earlier departure of Robert Rodriguez (*Sin City*).



Looking dodgy: Breck Eisner (*Sahana*) to remake *Creature From The Black Lagoon*, he wants it to be like *Aliens* or Carpenter's *The Thing*... **Highlander:** The Source to be directed by Brett Leonard (*The Lawnmower Man*) and star the squinty guy from the TV... **Crap game Postal** to be directed by crap director Uwe Boll (*House of the Dead*), crap...

Pi equals three



Life of *Pi* is the story of zookeeper's son Pi Patel, who is travelling aboard a huge freighter from India to Canada with his family when the ship sinks. Pi finds himself adrift in a lifeboat with a zebra, a hyena, an orang-utan and a Bengal tiger. An adaptation of Yann Martel's 2002 Man Booker Prize winner is currently in development at Fox 2000.

M Night Shyamalan (*The Village*) won't be directing it, however, having quit to concentrate on *The Lady in the Water* – his own story. It is a thriller about a building superintendent who discovers a

nymph in the swimming pool.

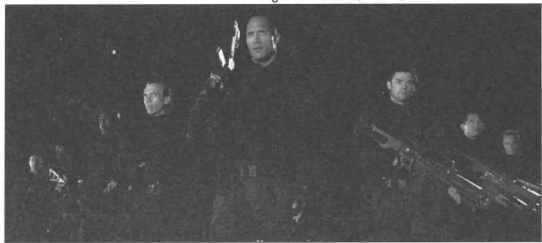
Alfonso Cuarón (*Harry Potter 3*) was in talks to take over production of *Life of Pi* after Shyamalan quit but he has also walked away, to adapt the PD James's story *The Children of Men*, about the discovery of the last pregnant woman on Earth in a violent and dystopian London.

Both non-*Pi* related movies are due for 2006 releases.

Life of Pi, meanwhile, will now be directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet (*Amélie*, *The City of Lost Children*) who has already started work with his long-term collaborator Guillaume Laurent. Filming is set for India and Baja, on the water tank used for *Titanic*.

Gloom

Come on baby, let's start today, come on baby let's play the game of Doom, Doom, da da da da Doom!



Doomed!! (top)

Many brave marines will die.

Doomed!! (right)

Rosamund Pike discovers the sequel clause in her contract...

Doomed!!! (below)

...and so does a Pinky monster.



You come across the strangest things on the Internet. The other day I read fans of the video game *Doom* swear that they would never watch the movie adaptation because the filmmakers had changed the plot. Instead of a group of scientists opening a door to hell on Mars and unleashing a horde of monsters, as in the video game, the film has the scientists messing around with genetics on Mars and unleashing a horde of monsters.

This is like discovering that an adaptation was planned of *Tetris* and complaining because you felt they'd made a fundamental mistake in the characterisation of the the L-shaped block. It completely misses the point.

Doom games do not have a plot. They have a premise. The purpose of that premise is to put the player character in a situation where he (and it is almost always a he) can shoot as many things as possible with a wide variety of weapons.

There are video games with plots that could form the basis of movies that had an actual concern with story – *Beyond Good and Evil*, the *Half Life* series, the *Monkey Island* adventures all spring immediately to mind. But *Doom* isn't one of those.

And at last the makers of this film understand that. The film opens with a nice take on the Universal logo, replacing Earth with Mars, but after that subtlety is thrown out the window. There is an effective sequence when a group of scientists flee from an unseen threat, then the marines – with names like Reaper, Destroyer and The Kid – arrive, work out what's going on thanks to a handy scientist and shoot lots of things while dying in more-or-less predictable order. There's a brief sequence where the film switches to a first person view, as in the game, and some nice in-jokes and references to the gameworld. Then there's a punch-up to decide the fate of humanity.

To be fair, there is a twist that

inverts expectations and makes you think that at least someone bothered to give five minutes thought to the movie. But it was only five minutes.

If the idea of a *Doom* movie appeals to you, then *Doom* delivers pretty much what you'd expect. If your expectations extend to something more than a heavy metal soundtrack and The Rock posing while delivering mediocre one-liners, then watch *Aliens* again. For me, *Doom* outstayed its welcome (by about an hour, truth be told) and the soundtrack grated like nails on a blackboard. (MMcG)

Doom

Director: Andrzej Bartkowiak
Writers: Dave Callahan & Wesley Strick
Cinematographer: Tony Pierce Roberts

Cast: Karl Urban, The Rock, Rosamund Pike, Doobia Oparei, Ben Daniels, Razaq Adoti, Richard Blake, Al Weaver
104 mins

Also showing

What else is on before Christmas

Released on DVD in America a year ago and reviewed by *Matrix* in issue 169, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* has finally received a limited UK cinema release. It received the first ever *Matrix* "Must See" award and twelve months hasn't done anything to reduce our desire to watch it on a big screen. Beautifully animated with a complex plot we called *Innocence* "quality science fiction by whichever measure you choose to judge it."

Also getting an overdue, but still limited release, is *Steamboy*. Perhaps a victim of impossible expectations (it is director Otomo's first film since 1988's astounding *Akira*), *Steamboy* has been quite harshly judged. It isn't as good as *Akira* but it is a visually powerful and entertaining adventure. Not profound, but fun.

Some of the year's biggest movies are being kept under wraps at the time of going to press but will be released before the next issue of *Matrix*. *The Chronicles of Narnia* from Andrew Adamson (both *Shrek*s) and *King Kong* by Peter Jackson (three *Lord of the Rings*) are trending on hallowed ground in our household, and have become the subject more of fear than expectation. Trailers suggest *Narnia* seems too "epic" – too much influenced by Jackson's hobbit adventures, perhaps – while *Kong* always seemed superfluous and the emphasis on CGI effects in the trailers and a reportedly bloated running time (three hours!) haven't assuaged my fears.

Also unavailable at the time of writing is *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* – Mike Newell gives Hogwarts another makeover as the Triwizard Tournament comes to their doorstep. Most of the pre-release gossip has centred on the future of sprouting Daniel Radcliffe, but Newell (*Donnie Brasco*) has never attempted anything remotely like this – how will he cope?

We hope to have reviews of all three big winter releases next issue plus *Zathura*, *The Fog* and a look ahead to the big sf releases in 2006.

Serenity soars

You can't always get what you want, but sometimes you get what you need. *Firefly* is dead, all hail *Serenity*.

At the end of *Serenity*, ship's captain Mal (Fillion) has a little speech about the first rule of flying a spaceship – "it ain't all buttons and charts" he says, but "love that keeps her in the air when she ought to fall down." Writer/director Whedon is surely addressing the legions of "browncoats" – the diehard *Firefly* fans whose dedication brought the story of the crew of *Serenity* back from the dead when Fox mishandled and then prematurely cancelled the original show.

Love (and phenomenal DVD sales) kept the story of *Firefly* alive when it should have died, the only question now is: was *Serenity* worth the effort?

The answer is yes, unequivocally. *Serenity* is by no means perfect but it is hugely entertaining.

Whedon strikes a sensible balance between filling in backstory for those unfamiliar with the original series and moving things along fast enough for fans. Inevitably, perhaps, the first half of the film is a little exposition-heavy as the large cast is introduced and complex history explained. That *Serenity* doesn't become bogged down is due to Whedon's trademark fizzy dialogue and tight plotting.

In the second half *Serenity* really comes to life. Big action sequences, dramatic tension and well developed character relationships all pay off handsomely to deliver a taut, traumatic and triumphant final hour. The result is a film that outdoes the great majority of blockbusters in terms of action and excitement and that easily outpaces them in intelligence and wit.

The story focuses on River (Giau), the precocious but damaged fugitive smuggled aboard *Serenity* by her brother Simon (Maher). The Alliance, concerned at the secrets the telepath might know send an operative (Ejiofor) – a cold-blooded killer – to capture or kill her. As River is revealed as more than she seems and the operative hunts down the crew's few friends, River's memories begin to surface. These lead the crew of the *Serenity* into a close brush with the rampant, flesh-eating madness of the Reavers via a dead planet to a final showdown with the Alliance.



More than she seems (above)
River knows a secret that could get the whole crew killed

Giant space battles (right)
Are really no place for a (mostly) unarmed trader like *Serenity*

Rogue's rogue (far right)
Mal (Fillion) is tough, but charming



"Mal Reynolds is the kind of swashbuckling rogue Han Solo dreams of becoming. He has absolutely no problem with shooting first."

Whedon is playing to his strengths here with a large ensemble cast sharing quick, often very funny banter that hints at deeper emotion. Love is, as always, difficult, with no one quite able to say what they really mean until it appears too late. Whedon has never been afraid to explore darker elements in his story and those familiar with his writing on *Buffy* and *Angel* will not be surprised that not all the characters in *Serenity* get out in one piece. For fans, this can be painful – especially when a favourite character becomes the focus of Whedon's baleful gaze. But it means the viewer can never relax, even established and loved characters can be sacrificed. Whedon's worlds are never cosy.

The cast, all returning to reprise their television roles are uniformly excellent but Fillion is a stand out. Mal Reynolds is the kind of swashbuckling rogue Han

Solo dreams of becoming. He has absolutely no problem with shooting first. Tough to the point of cruelty, Fillion imbues the character with humour and vulnerability.

There are annoying flies in *Serenity*'s ointment – the opening exposition clearly states that the action takes place in a single solar system with dozens of planets and hundreds of moons. But one planet has, apparently, been kept "secret" from the whole population. Are there no astronomers in this system? Don't all those pilots in their spaceships notice a big ball of rock influencing their orbits? And why does everyone seem to refer to this solar system interchangeably as both the galaxy and the universe? It's a tiny, but irritating, point.

More crucial to the plot is the question about what sort of government and/or drug company carries out its first test of a new

drug on a whole planet?

And The Alliance and, especially, Ejiofor's operative, are simply too implacably wicked to be truly convincing villains. Tyrants and fanatics construct complex webs of self-justification for their actions, they do not simply concede their intrinsically evil nature to the enemy.

Niggles apart, *Serenity* is solidly realised science fiction, as entertaining a piece of space opera as you are likely to see and has enough depth to reward repeated viewings. (MMcG)

Serenity

Director/writer: Joss Whedon
Cinematographer: Jack N Green
Starring: Nathan Fillion, Gina Torres, Alan Tudyk, Adam Baldwin, Jewel Staite, Sean Maher, Summer Glau, Ron Glass, Chiwetel Ejiofor

119 mins

24 Carrot Gold

They've got more rabbits than Sainsbury's - thank heavens
Aardman Animation haven't given it a rest

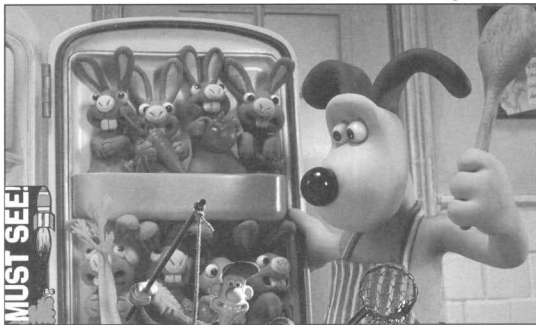
What is the best thing about Nick Park and Steve Box's magnificent *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*?

There will be those who claim it is the distinctively British humour - near puns, Heath-Robinson contraptions and buck-toothed vicars - that marks it out as a work of superior artistic endeavour. Whether American audiences will have a clue what PC McIntosh is on about when he announces that the town has been the victim of "arson... Yeah. Someone arsin' around" I don't know. And, honestly, I don't care. I do know, however, that I snorted popcorn down my nose and I did again when the same character gets to shout "Watch out for the giant rabbit dropping" near the end of the film - and it hurt both times.

There will be others who will point to the beautiful, pain-staking animation. It is famously filmed at just three seconds of footage per day and yet each frame is so crammed with incidental detail that you have to wonder whether it isn't actually the result of some unforgiving obsessive-compulsive disorder. I love the bookshelf full of tomes with titles that pun on cheese ("East of Edam") and Lady Tottington's family crest (motto: Manure Sets Us Free) and I especially love the demented rabbits that fill so many background shots. I have watched *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* three times now and each viewing reveals more and more detail and invention.

Fewer, perhaps unfairly, will credit the cast for the film's success. But Wallace would not be Wallace without the enthusiasm and talent of Peter Sallis as his voice, while the supporting cast of Fiennes, Bonham Carter, Kay and the rest are, without fail, pitch-perfect in their delivery of a finely crafted script. Fiennes, in particular, deserves mention as he gives the cruel-hearted Victor Quartermaine an extra-thick layer of unctuous unpleasantness.

And, make no mistake, all these factors contribute to making this a wonderfully entertaining film. It works on every level - it is superb entertainment for small children, for whom Gromit is an irresistible attraction, beautifully animated and



"I snorted popcorn down my nose... and it hurt both times."

delivering all of the film's best visual jokes. But it also entertains adults. It offers sumptuously rich visuals that reward numerous viewings - handy if you've got small children - and it contains a beautifully paced plot that twists and turns to its inevitable feel-good ending.

But, for me, the best thing about Wallace and Gromit has always been the obvious love of cinema - and particularly genre cinema - with which Nick Park suffuses every moment of this adventure.

From the very beginning, on their rocket to the moon in *A Grand Day Out*, Wallace and Gromit have drawn upon genre film history. *A Grand Day Out* references everyone from George Méliès (*A Trip to the Moon*) to Nathan Juran (*First Men in the Moon*) by way of Spielberg and fifties sci-fi.

In *Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, they plunder elements from sources as diverse as *The Thing*, *King Kong*, *Watership Down* and even the American remake of *Godzilla*.

And, perhaps most remarkably, the Aardman team succeed in incorporating this material in a final product that is cohesive and undeniably original.

The Curse of the Were-Rabbit owes its greatest debt to British horror films of the late fifties and early sixties, such as those that emerged from Hammer Films. One sequence in particular stands out, as the town's vicar is hunted in his own church by a monster intent on raiding the harvest festival offerings. The plot, design and script are all full of references to Hammer horrors and films of that era. Indeed, in places, the homage that the filmmakers clearly intend rather backfires on the object of their affection. *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* is a so much more accomplished piece of cinema than the Hammer films - despite their many fine qualities - are left looking rather pallid.

The Curse of the Were-Rabbit was as enjoyable an experience as I've had in a cinema for a long time.

Rabbit stew (above)
A plague of bunnies threatens the annual vegetable competition

Anti-pesto at work (left)
Wallace and Gromit are always on the job

Innocent, uplifting, fun, that was entertaining, intelligent, hilarious... I could exhaust a thesaurus searching for the sufficient words.

I loved every minute. Aardman Animation have delivered a film that can stand tall amongst any company. This is a special film that will appeal to adults and children and entertain both handsomely. Now, excuse me while I get the last of that popcorn out. (MMcG)

Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit

Directors: Nick Park & Steve Box
Writers: Nick Park, Bob Baker, Steve Box & Mark Burton
Cinematographer: Tristan Oliver & Dave Alex Riddett
Starring: Peter Sallis, Ralph Fiennes, Helena Bonham Carter, Peter Kay, Nicholas Smith, Liz Smith, John Thomson, Mark Gatiss
85 mins

Dead and loving it

Ever fallen in love with someone you shouldn't have fallen in love with? At least they had a pulse... didn't they?

I'm not sure how long it has been since two examples of stop-motion animation have sat beside each other in the world's multiplexes and the box-office charts but, as a fan of the artform – for the record, Ray Harryhausen is a genius – it was a rare treat to watch both *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (reviewed opposite) and *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* within a few days of each other.

It was an even greater pleasure to discover that these films are united by more than just the form of animation used – they are both tremendously high-quality productions, beautifully designed and meticulously put together. And both films feature a predominantly British cast doing a spectacularly good job of providing the voices that bring their animated characters to life.

Yet, in look, feel and content the two films could hardly be more different. Where Wallace and Gromit offer belly-laughs and adventure in a brightly coloured, 1950s-style Britain, Burton's *Corpse Bride* draws its inspiration from the Victorian era's death fixation, séances, spiritualism, necropolises and all. Burton's career-long fascination with the gothic is once more given free rein. The look of the *Corpse Bride* is similar to Burton's earlier stop motion project, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, though perhaps even darker. Certainly, at least visually, this second foray into the world of animation is every bit as successful as his earlier film.

Victor Van Dort (Depp) is the heir to a fishmonger fortune and his parents have arranged a social-status enhancing marriage with Victoria, scion of the noble but broke Everglot family. Victor and Victoria meet at the wedding rehearsal and fall in love, so much so that Victor cannot remember his wedding vows and is berated by everyone. Distressed, he wanders into the woods trying to learn his lines and accidentally marries Emma, the eponymous corpse bride.

Victor must find a way to extricate himself from his "marriage", escape from the land of the dead and save Victoria



Aisle he back (above)
The *Corpse Bride*, beautiful, available but, sadly, also dead

Rib-tickling (left)
The otherlife, people are dying to get in!

"That this is only the second best stop-motion film on screens this year is no disgrace."

from a wedding with patently wicked Barks Bittern (Grant in magnificently unpleasant form).

The truly inspired decision in the making of this film was to make Emma, the eponymous corpse bride, a sympathetic character. The world of the dead is a bright, colourful place full of happy, carefree people and pets. The land of the living is almost monochrome and full of greedy parents and nasty, scheming strangers. Emma, whose innocent hopes of happiness were taken away, quickly becomes the subject of Victor's (and the audience's) sympathy and affection.

However, *Corpse Bride* isn't quite perfect. The songs left me

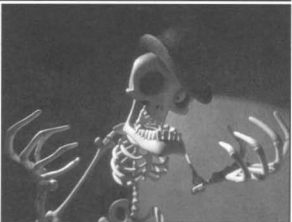
rather cold – though none are offensively bad and they provide the opportunity for some of the film's best visual gags, none seemed quite memorable or catchy enough. And, if I was to be (perhaps overly) critical, I think the character of Victoria is under-developed. It is not at all clear why Victor is so strongly attracted to her, especially given her tendency to simmer.

Nevertheless *Corpse Bride* is a beautifully-made film and Burton is unmistakably one of modern cinema's most talented directors with a unique visual aesthetic. That this is only the second best stop-motion film on screens this year is no disgrace, both this and

Aardman's more instantly accessible film are superior pieces of art. By any standards, *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* is a wonderful film and one to cherish. (MMcG)

Tim Burton's Corpse Bride

Director: Tim Burton & Mike Johnson
Writers: John August, Pamela Pettler & Caroline Thompson
Cinematographer: Pete Kozachik
Starring: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Emily Watson, Tracey Ullman, Pual Whitehouse, Joanna Lumley, Albert Finney, Richard E Grant, Christopher Lee, Jane Horrocks
76 mins



Grimm viewing

Terry Gilliam's career has been a long road with many a winding turn, but his new movie ain't heavy, it's my *Brothers Grimm*

Of all the films due to be released in 2005, the one I was looking forward to most was Terry Gilliam's *The Brothers Grimm*. *Brazil* and *Twelve Monkeys* are two of my favourite sf films. He is also responsible for the creation of three of the most interesting documentaries on film-making – or, to be more precise, in not film-making: *Last in La Mancha* (his "lost" *Don Quixote*), *The Hamster Factory* (*Twelve Monkeys*) and *The Battle of Brazil*.

Gilliam has established a reputation as an uncompromising filmmaker. Which is why the fact that *The Brothers Grimm* is a rather average film is all the more disappointing.

The project seemed to be the perfect coming together of director and material. Gilliam's work is full of references to fairytales and the fantastic. This story, of the eponymous brothers scamming their way across Napoleonic Europe, convincing gullible villagers that they can banish witches appeared to play to Gilliam's strengths.

There are good things here. The visuals are, as one might expect, stunning and inventive. The brothers' collection of bizarre gadgets is splendidly realised and the set design is often extraordinary. I also liked Ledger and Damon in the lead roles, a well-matched pair with good comic timing, and Monica Bellucci is convincingly icy and entrancing as the Mirror Queen.



However, the story is confused beyond rescuing, the dialogue is flat and too often expository and the film fails to engage the viewer emotionally. Writer Kruger – whose record of second-rate sequels (*Scream 3*, *Ring 2*) – never inspired confidence. The subplot featuring wicked French soldiers (Stormare and Pryce – both going far, far over the top) throws the film out of kilter, distracting attention from the core plot at crucial moments. The love interest – a needless conceit, as the relationship between the brothers should have been the



Mirror Queen (left)
Bellucci is icy and magnificent

Well-matched pair (left)
Ledger and Damon – scamming across Europe

undiluted focus – falls thunderously flat. Angelika (Headey) is too distant and her relationship with the brothers too poorly defined.

Nor is Gilliam blameless. He has been over this territory before. *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* has visual élan and a solid cast but is also a dramatic mess. *The Brothers Grimm* is not as bad as *Munchausen*, but the problems are the same – too much thrown on screen with too little thought to structure, plot or dramatic effect.

The Brothers Grimm is no disaster, but it is an average film from a

vastly talented director and that means that it must be judged an enormous disappointment. (MMcG)

The Brothers Grimm

Director: Terry Gilliam
Writers: Ehren Kruger
Cinematographer: Nicola Pecorini & Newton Thomas Sigel
Starring: Matt Damon, Heath Ledger, Monica Bellucci, MacKenzie Crook, Richard Ridings, Peter Stormare, Jonathan Pryce, Lena Headey
118 mins

Is it a turkey?



I had already sharpened the pencil I use to write my really nasty reviews – the one dipped in shrew's blood – before seeing *Sky High*. But then I had to put it away.

Not only is *Sky High* not the awful cack I was expecting, it's actually quite likeable. It's a Disney family film, so there are moments of nauseating sickliness, but aware of the cheesy burden they carry, the cast and crew go just far enough over the top to waft away the scent of gorgonzola without turning the film into a farce.

In a world where superpowers are commonplace there is a special flying school (*Sky High* – geddit?) to train heroes and sidekicks (or "hero support"). Will Stronghold (Angrano) is the son of the world's greatest

heroes The Commander (Russell) and Jetstream (Preston) but his own powers haven't manifested yet, so he ends up in the sidekick stream. But, when the school comes under threat, the sidekicks have to save the day.

The story is predictable and the sentiments hackneyed but *Sky High* gets away with it as it undercuts pomposity with good jokes. John Hughes's superior 1980s teen comedies (*Ferris Bueller's Day Off* etc) are obviously an influence – not least in the throwback 80's soundtrack.

Russell is good as the slightly too keen superhero father and he is supported by entertaining cameos from Campbell, Carter (riffing her *Wonder Woman* role) and especially McDonald. The kids, usually the most

What ever happened to all the heroes?

They should have gone to *Sky High*

grating thing about a film like this, are inoffensive.

Sky High is enjoyable, light entertainment you can watch with the whole family. Disney should be ashamed, an innocent shrew died in vain. (MMcG)

Sky High

Director: Mike Mitchell
Writers: Paul Hernandez, Bob Schooley, & Mark McCorkle
Cinematographer: Michael Giacchino
Starring: Michael Angarano, Kurt Russell, Kelly Preston, Danielle Panabaker, Kevin Heffernan, Dee-Jay Daniels, Kelly Vitz, Nicholas Braun, Lynda Carter, Bruce Campbell, Steven Strait, Kevin McDonald
100 mins

BBC puts a Torch to UK SF



Just as I was getting ready to pitch my brilliant idea of a UNIT-based, *X-Files*-style *Doctor Who* spin-off, news breaks of an *X-Files* style *Doctor Who* spin-off. Damn the BBC's evil mind-reading machines!

Torchwood will feature John Barrowman whose swashbuckling character, Captain Jack Harkness, was one of the highlights of the first season of the Doctor's new run.

Who producer Russell T Davies will also produce *Torchwood*, which will be set up by events in the *Doctor Who* Christmas special. Described as "adults only" Stuart Murphy (the recently departed Controller of BBC Three) said that the post-watershed *Torchwood* was the channel's biggest ever drama commitment. Murphy said the series would be "sinister and psychological."

Davies, meanwhile, has described the show as "dark, wild and sexy, it's the *X-Files* meets *This Life*" and says it will stand alone from *Doctor Who*. *Torchwood* features a "renegade group of investigators" dealing with human and alien crime and

The BBC aren't stopping with *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*, a whole slate of new UK-made genre shows are heading our way in 2006. Already in production is *sf* sitcom *Hyperdrive*, featuring Nick Frost (*Spaced*, *Shaun of the Dead*) and Kevin Eldon (*Fist of Fun*, *Jam*). Set aboard the HMS Camden Lock in the twenty-second century. The crew's job is to persuade aliens to relocate to the UK, but they're having trouble just coping with each other. Writers Kevin Cecil and Andy Riley co-wrote the third series of *Black Books*, *Hyperdrive* should be on BBC Two in January 2006.



The BBC has also commissioned a fantasy show to fill the Saturday teatime drama slot recreated by the return of *Doctor Who*. The adventures of a youthful Merlin are currently being scripted by Chris Chibnall. Chibnall previously created

Captain Jack Flash (left)

Handsome, time-travelling, multi-sexual and now starring in his own series.



alien technology in South Wales. *Torchwood* (an anagram of Doctor Who, though this seems not to be relevant to the plots) will be set specifically in Cardiff, said Davies. "With *Doctor Who* we often had to pretend bits of Cardiff were London, or Utah, or the planet Zog. Whereas this series is going to be honest-to-god Cardiff."

Perhaps the Millennium

Stadium's roof is acting as some sort of alien-attracting magnet, or perhaps it's the charms of Charlotte Church, rumoured to have been offered the part of a Satan-worshipping villain in one episode.

PJ Hammond, creator of so-scarey-my-wife-still-won't-watch "kids" show *Sapphire and Steel* will script at least one of *Torchwood*'s thirteen 45 minute episodes.

1950s-set comedy-drama *Born and Bred* and is also pencilled in to write some of *Torchwood*. Expect this later in 2006.



Kudos Productions, the people behind the glossy, high-profile BBC dramas *Spooks* and *Hustle*, have recently finished filming *Life on Mars*, which is actually the story of a time-travelling modern policeman stuck in 1973. Creator Matthew Graham (*This Life*, *Hustle*) cites *Get Carter* and *The Sweeney* as influences on *Life on Mars*'s gritty style, but promises a fantastical tinge with *The Prisoner* and the work of Nigel Kneale (*Quatermass*) also cited. *Life on Mars* will star John Simm and should also be on screens tuned to BBC One early in 2006.



And that's still not all! The BBC have also commissioned a three-part adaptation of Terry Pratchett's *Johnny and*

the Bomb to be broadcast on Sunday afternoons on BBC One "early next year". Starring George MacKay (Peter Pan) as Johnny and with support from a starry cast including Zoe Wannamaker and Frank Finlay, Johnny has been adapted by Peter Tabern (*Stig of the Dump* - 2001) and is being produced by Childsplay Television.



The Pratchett set (above) Terry Pratchett (the one with the beard and hat) on the set of *Johnny and the Bomb*.

SF too from ITV

Even ITV are getting in on the SF act, or are they? *Eleventh Hour* stars

Patrick Stewart (*X-Men*, *Star Trek: TNG*) as Professor Ian Hood, a campaigning scientist and special government adviser battling the "abuse of science". All those involved seem keen to distance the series from *sf* - writer Stephen Gallagher (*Doctor Who*, *Oktober, Chimera*) prefers to call it a thriller set in the world of science while Stewart helpfully points out that there are "no aliens anywhere in sight". Still it sounds like *Doomwatch* to us.

The four ninety minute episodes focus on cloning, climate change, a disease outbreak and alternative medicine. Filming on the £4.5 million series wrapped in August but there is no firm news on a broadcast date. Gallagher recently won a British Fantasy Award for his short story collection *Out of His Mind*.



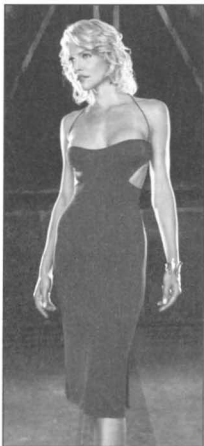
Afterlife, the supernatural drama by Stephen Volk (*Ghostwatch*, *Gothic*)

recently completed its first series and may return after solid ratings of between 5.5 and 6.5 million viewers kept it amongst ITV's top shows throughout its run. The DVD collecting the first series, six episodes, is available now.



Gerry Anderson will follow the success of the new CGI *Captain Scarlet* (reviewed on page 29) with *Lightspeed*, a new series set aboard a faster than light spaceship exploring the galaxy, visiting new worlds, meeting aliens and generally adventuring. *Lightspeed*, by my count, is the seventeenth series (plus at least ten movies) the seventy-six year old Anderson has produced.

The first season (13 episodes) of the new *Captain Scarlet* and the 1999 series *The Lavender Castle* have just been released on DVD. The second season of *Captain Scarlet* is currently on ITV on Saturday mornings.



Conflict revolution

Ronald D Moore's new *Battlestar Galactica* is an exciting adventure story, but it goes much deeper than that.

If it is true that, in fiction, conflict creates drama then even without *Battlestar Galactica*'s supposed main bad guys, the metal and flesh machine intelligences of the Cylons, there would be more than enough conflict to sustain several seasons worth of adventures.

Indeed many of the most interesting episodes of the revamped series barely feature the Cylons at all. Following Adama's (Olmos) shooting at the end of season one, season two opens with Executive Officer Colonel Tigh (Hogan) in charge of the fleet. He is maintaining martial law and making some seriously bad decisions that lead to mutiny and the brink of civil war. The Cylons are there, infiltrating *Galactica*'s computers and even invading the ship, but their presence is almost a background nuisance to the human (and specifically political) dramas that are going on at the same time.

The most obvious human conflict in *BSG* is the struggle between military and democratic institutions for power. Adama is a

military commander and he sees the situation of *Galactica* in military terms. Roslin (McDonnell), the junior minister tossed into the position of supreme authority, is a politician seeking to preserve the democratic traditions of the colonies. The positions that the crew of *Galactica* and the surviving citizens take in relation to these two points of view are by no means straightforward. Adama commands respect, but following his shooting, Tigh is an alcoholic whose blunders cause death and outrage. Even normally loyal members of the *Galactica* crew find themselves facing hard choices.

What has worked so well about the conflict between the demands of political and military leadership in *BSG* is that the series hasn't taken the simple route of presenting one side as having the monopoly on being right. Adama is presented as unfailingly honourable, but his decision to impose martial law at the end of season one rebounds badly on Tigh. And the arrival of Admiral Cain (Forbes) and the *Battlestar Pegasus* at the halfway

point of season two places new stresses on the uneasy alliance between military and state.

By the same token, Roslin has also been shown to be quite capable of being ruthless. She tortures a man she believes is a Cylon, promises him freedom for information then throws him out an airlock. She tries to use Adama's son Lee (Bamber Griffith) against his father and uses her religious visions to manipulate public opinion and split the fleet. Even Billy, her apparently unshakably loyal assistant, demurs.

It is this complexity in the relationships between characters and ideals in *BSG* that makes the programme such a pleasure to watch. But it is the willingness to tackle contemporary political issues that gives the show its teeth.

In a time of conflict, what is a democratic political system worth? How much should we risk our security to preserve our freedom? What makes a society built on the basis of the rule of law rather than rank worth fighting for? *BSG* not only asks those questions but, as a mark of its quality as drama, it is

willing to present characters who hold both views as admirable and leave viewers to assess their own position. Unlike, say, *The West Wing*, *BSG* does not have a preferred position which invariably turns out to offer the "right" path to solve any given problem. Producer Ronald D Moore and his team of writers are producing drama that demands that viewers think. That is a very rare thing in any genre.

What raises Moore's new *BSG* to a higher level – and must earn it a place amongst the best ever television sf – is the way that it combines an adventure story with layers and layers of conflict. It addresses not just politics but questions about the nature of religious faith, love and what it means to be human.

Season one of *BSG* is available in a boxset with the original mini-series, deleted scenes and excellent commentaries. The first half of season two will be available to import on DVD from America from December 20th – and should get its UK television premiere from January on Sky One. (MMcG)

Destined to succeed

Captain Scarlet is indestructible. You are not!
Remember this. Do not try to imitate him.

My first attempt to watch Gerry Anderson's *New Captain Scarlet* ended in a disaster. First broadcast during *Ministry of Mayhem* (the televisual equivalent of attention deficit disorder), ITV's Saturday morning children's show it was cut in two screened up to an hour apart – despite having a running time of just twenty-two minutes (including credits). Even then distracting messages scrolled across the screen throughout the episode.

I staggered away, disorientated, confused and feeling terribly old to watched *Soccer AM* instead...

However, the show's popularity – and its evident quality – persuaded ITV to reshoot *Scarlet*'s new adventures in an afternoon slot, relatively unmolested. Now the first season (13 episodes) is released on DVD and I'm happy to recommend it to *Matrix* readers interested in children's entertainment.

Some fans of the older show will be outraged by the changes – they made Lieutenant Green and Captain Ochre women, Cloudbase is now referred to as Skybase and no doubt there are a hundred and one other sacrileges or imagined sleights certain to infuriate that sort of fan. But, really, who except the obsessives out there remembers who Lieutenant Green was? And Captain Ochre? I think his/her importance is summed up in the colour they chose to give him/her.

Let it go, I say. *New Captain Scarlet* is a whole new ballgame. But then again, it isn't.

There is much that is reassuringly familiar about *New Captain Scarlet*. Under the shiny-polish of "Hypermarionation" (motion-captured, computer-generated animation) Gerry Anderson is continuing to make the kind of fast-paced, high-concept stories that he always aimed at. And, after a so-so start – the two-part opener ("Instrument of Destruction") has too much Wachowski-inspired slo-mo – *New Captain Scarlet* hits its stride with episodes four and five "Rat Trap", "The Homecoming". "Rat Trap" in particular is a tense little story set on a Martian base and is full of neat horror-movie inspired moments while "The Homecoming" clearly

"Destiny is smart, cool, sexy and she has her own jetfighter. Is there anything more a boy could want?"

owes a debt to *Quatermass*.

Welcome traits that survive from *Scarlet*'s puppet adventures include the obsession with cool stuff – every gadget, car, truck, airplane and spaceship is designed to within an inch of its life.

Then there is the breakneck pace. While *Thunderbirds* – inexplicably the more popular programme – ambled along for forty-five minutes, *Scarlet* always had to get on with things in his shorter show. Cut even shorter, the new adventures can't hang around – occasionally this acts against the story ("Rain of Terror" and "Heist") would be better for more time to establish characters) but usually it just pumps up the adrenaline.

And Captain Black and the Mysterons remain Anderson's finest evil creation – giving immediate plot drive to every episode. *Captain Scarlet* was always the toughest of Anderson's shows and the new one continues that tradition with Black

capable of the most cold-blooded murder, and some quite brutal scenes are shown unflinchingly.

Finally there is Spectrum. *Scarlet*, sensibly shorn of his Cary Grant accent (which would have meant nothing to modern children) is tough and adventurous. Colonel White seems magisterial. Captain Blue is the dependable sidekick.

But *Destiny Angel* is the biggest revelation in the new show. More than *Scarlet*'s love interest, she's the fighter-flying, decision-making, gun-toting woman at the heart of the series. Yes, she blubs – especially early in the season – but by "Skin Deep" she's running around in form-fitting black lycra doing a ninja burglary, while in season finale "The Achilles Messenger" she's leaping through windows to blow away Mysteron agents.

Destiny is smart, cool, sexy and she has her own jetfighter. Is there really anything more a boy could want? I love my wife beyond words,

I truly do, but if I was ever forced to pick a collection of computer-animated pixels to run away with – it would have to be *Destiny Angel*.

Technically excellent – the animation is not Pixar quality but it is a considerable step forward in CG animation produced for television (compare it to *Roughnecks: Starship Trooper Chronicles*) – and full of thrills, spills and heroics, Anderson and his production team have done an excellent job with *New Captain Scarlet*. It succeeds in updating a classic character as effectively as the new *Doctor Who* while cutting through any lingering fustiness to deliver quality entertainment. The only shame is that it isn't being shown at a time when the whole family can watch. I see no reason why this and future Anderson projects shouldn't continue to be the recruiting ground for new generations of sf fans.

Season one is available now on DVD, season two is currently being



To badly go...

See the future in a Finnish fan film.

Does the idea of a comedy by Finnish fans about a war between versions of the *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5* universes sound fun to you?

No, me either and, mostly, *Star Wreck*: In *The Pirkinning* confirmed my prejudices. There's a ludicrous plot, poor acting and a script that (even allowing for losses in translation) is extremely ropey.

So why reviewing it?

Because *Star Wreck* may well be the future of sf cinema.

Hollywood studios have held the monopoly on high concept sf films for decades because only they could fund the necessarily vast budgets. But films like *Star Wreck* signpost the way to a revolution in film production.

Shot mostly against green screen, with sets, space battles and space stations created with painstaking slowness on computer by insanely dedicated amateurs, *Star*



Skies filled with spaceships (above)
Of an oddly familiar type.

Wreck features visuals that match the best possible in Hollywood just a decade ago. Technically this a remarkable achievement given the resources available to the producers.

The shame is that this effort has gone to make something both derivative and silly, but the bigger lesson should not be lost.

Watch *Star Wreck* for what it signifies. The means to create convincing sf universes on screen

are now in the hands of any filmmaker, however amateur. And the technology is getting better and simpler every week. The question now is whether it will be used to create original, exciting stories or simply to fulfill fanboy's dreams.

Of course there's no reason why it couldn't do both.

See the future, download *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning* free from www.starwreck.com. (MMCG)

Of course. Now, let's see, you were asked what your ambitions were for your time as a cosmonaut? And you answered...

...to destroy Los Angeles and start a war between the complacent Americans and the Russian oppressors of my people. You have a problem with that? I'll kill you!

And during an emergency re-entry of the space station you said...

...I would stand on the bridge as the flames lapped around me laughing maniacally at the success of my evil plans. Like this: *mwabababab!*

We're sensing some hostility here.

Are you angry about something? I'm not angry. If you say I'm angry...

...you'll kill us all. We got that. Thanks.

What causes these feelings, Conrad, tell us about your mother?

My mother was very religious, we argued often. She never loved me and she was quite insane, luckily I'm not. Now excuse me while I play obsessively with my lovely knife.

Are there other women in your life?

I have had many good friends who are women. And I killed them all. *Mwabababab!* With my lovely knife.

But you'd have no problem working with female cosmonauts?

No. Unless their pheromones taunt me. Then I will kill...

...them all. As I said, we got that.

...indeed, with your lovely knife.

Can we talk about religion?

I hate God! It is all a filthy lie.

How about modern culture?

I hate it! I hate the corruption, the

music, the whores, the black people and the chaos. I will kill it all! With my lovely knife. No wait, I'll need something bigger. I will use the space station. *Mwabababab!*

You certainly have this all planned. Finally Cosmonaut Conrad, is there anything you don't hate?

Murder. Laughing. My lovely knife. My mommy. No wait I hate her. No I love her. Hate. Love. Oh, I don't know... I like pickled onion Monster Munch. They make me burp funny.

Well, that all seems fine – Eh?

I see no reason why we can't clear you for this mission.

But he's a nutjob! A loony! A fruitloop! He's a cuckoo short of the full clock! He's clearly suffering from a non-specific psychosis chucked in by writers who couldn't be bothered to do any research on real mental illnesses and based it all on stuff they've seen in crappy movies.

But I've checked and, according to *Space Fury*, neither America nor Russia have rules against nutters flying space shuttles.

Oh, fine, okay then, have a nice flight, Cosmonaut Conrad! Goodbye. If I come back, I'll kill you. You wacky guy!

Is there anything else we learn from *Space Fury*?

You can't leave the parking to a woman... Space shuttles use seatbelts from a Renault... Attractive female cosmonauts on space stations sleep nude, on beds... After recovering from a head trauma, head-butting someone is probably fine... Don't watch *Space Fury*.

Brain drain

Man with the screaming brain? Soon the audience knew how he felt.



Bruce Campbell seems like a nice guy. He has a long association with Sam Raimi through the *Evil Dead* franchise and a host of scene-stealing cameos in big movies (e.g. *Sky High*, reviewed page 26). And he's written a funny autobiography, *If Chins Could Kill: Confessions of a B Movie Actor*.

So, I approached Man With The Screaming Brain, Campbell's feature debut as writer and director with good will. I wanted the film to be good. I wasn't expecting art, but I hoped it would make me laugh.

Sadly, it's awful. Pretty much every joke misses the mark in a script that might have been scribbled out five minutes before filming started.

The quality of the material dooms the actors – so even those who have shown ability elsewhere are helpless. But some of the cast would, I think, be appalling in anything. The female leads – Byron and Gorski – are dreadful, looking surprised to be in front of a camera (with good reason on this evidence).

Screaming Brain is reminiscent of the similar themed Steve Martin vehicle *The Man With Two Brains*. Watch that funny movie instead.

Man With The Screaming Brain is available on DVD in America now. There is no news of a UK release.

Man With The Screaming Brain

Writer/Director: Bruce Campbell
Cinematographer: David Worth
Cast: Bruce Campbell, Ted Raimi, Antoinette Byron, Tamara Gorski, Remington Franklin, Stacy Keach
90 mins



Space Fury (2000) – AKA *In the Dead of Space*, don't let Hollywood trick you! – proof that all you need to make bad movies are an inept cast, terrible script and a pocketful of hope. You go guys!

Martin McGrath refuses to suffer in silence.

We'd like to welcome a special guest to this issue's column, star of *Space Fury*, Cosmonaut Conrad. Hi there Cosmonaut Conrad!

Why do you bother me? I'll kill you!

We've been asked to talk to you about your application to fly the shuttle mission to Space Station Tesla.

You can't stop me, I'll kill you all!



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RALE AGAINST... ...SF ON Television

Ninety-nine plus channels to choose from and there is still nothing worth watching on television. Well not if you like to watch the occasional bit of science fiction. And obviously I'm assuming you've seen every episode of *Star Trek* from the original Jeff Hunter pilot through to the newly terminated adventures of Scott Bakula in *Enterprise*, to the point you know the scripts by heart and, like me, reached a point sometime during *Trojaner* that you frankly didn't care if Captain Janeway ever did find her way back home.

So what else is there to watch?

No shortage of *Buffey* repeats and *Buffey*-style series involving nubile teens who realise they have occult powers and must spend their days wrestling with demons – and still get their homework in on time. But if you take the view this is supernatural fantasy rather than pure SF what have we got at the moment? The answer appears to be *Stargate* and, er, *Stargate Atlantis*.

Now I know I've so far ignored *Doctor Who* and I'll happily admit I was glued to the screen when the series made its return earlier this year but this

brings me to the crux of this particular *Rage*, namely whatever happened to home-grown science fiction programmes on UK TV?

The latest *Doctor Who* series was a triumph but it was off the air for 16 years despite there being a ready-made audience waiting for its return. But *Doctor Who* was not the only flash in the Brit SFTV pan. Over half-a-century ago British television was at the forefront of small-screen (in those days they really were small screens) science fiction with series such as *Quatermass* and later *A for Andromeda*. Yes it really was in July 1953 that the first *Quatermass* programme aired – the author Nigel Kneale reportedly earned £250 for the script, which may not sound much but back then it would have bought a new car and left change for a fish and chip supper.

This trend for ambitious adult SFTV (relax, no bare, naked ladies – 'adult' was used to signify grown-up content to distinguish it from a kids' TV) reached its peak in the mid-1960s with the *Out of the Unknown* and *Out of this World* series on BBC and ITV. Each episode was a separate self-contained story by a different author. And what authors! They

included Isaac Asimov, John Wyndham, Ray Bradbury, John Brunner, Frederick Pohl, Clifford Simak and Philip K Dick. (Emma Peel-era, *The Avengers* airing at the same time, also contained a solid SF content.)

Yet, despite the short story format frequently being as its most creative in the science fiction genre – and that short stories generally lend themselves to translation to the smaller screen – no sooner had these SF anthologies flourished on British TV programme schedules, than by the early 1970s they had all vanished, never to return.

As it has taken 16 years just to get *Doctor Who* back, I'll probably gaga and in my dotage before we see a return of adult SF anthology on TV but maybe someone could dig out the tapes of these 'golden age' programmes and re-show them, even if only on UK TV Gold or BBC 4? There again, as we now know, BBC had wiped clean and re-used a tape of a TV play that starred such an iconic figure as Bob Dylan, perhaps I'll just have to be satisfied with *Stargate* and repeats of *Star Trek*!

Charles Christian

Free SEX

Sir David Langford has won Hugos as a fanwriter, as editor of *Anisble*, and he's even won a Hugo for best short story. A critic, humourist and author he is also the world's greatest exponent of *Fang-Wang**, a murderous martial art known only to a handful of initiates. If he wasn't deadly with either little finger, he'd be an easy guy to hate. Now he's kindly giving you the chance to win a copy of *The SEX Column and Other Misprints*, the new collection of his regular column (it's been in every issue for ten years, so he even meets deadlines) from SFX.

Complete the crossword. The shaded answers are books or short stories written by Mister Langford clued only by their year of publication. Send these answers, plus your name and address to: matrix_competition@ntlworld.com by 6 February 2006 – the random number generator will pick the winner.

Across

- 1, 5 & 9 2004 (9,5,2,8)
- 5 see 1
- 8 1988 (4)
- 9 see 1 (10)
- 11 1982 (3,5,5)
- 17 1990 (8)
- 19 Lyric (6)
- 21 Plead, attract, contest decision (6)
- 22 and 23 1984 (3,5,13)
- 23 see 22
- 28 see 11 down
- 31 2001 (4)
- 33 1991 (5)
- 34 1987 (9)

Down

- 1 Name, knight, re-record (3)
- 2 Goddesses of destiny (5)
- 3 English footballer, from Brazil? (3)
- 4 Shove, suggest (5)

- 6 Tavern (3)
- 7 Plate (4)
- 10 Biochemical molecule (1,1,1,1)
- 11 and 28 across 2002 (3,4,5,5)
- 12 Surpass, pass in front of (7)
- 13 Man or gang – often at sea (4)
- 14 Monster, causing rows on the Internet (5)
- 15 Exhausting routine, have rodent for competition (3,4)
- 16 Work out the meaning of 27 (7)
- 18 Place, informer, factory (5)
- 20 Native of Bangkok (4)
- 24 Beast of burden, idiot, American bottom (3)
- 25 Dead plant used to clean (5)
- 26 "Oh _____, they killed Kenny" (2,3)
- 27 Rules, program, cypher (4)
- 29 Tree, Quercus (3)
- 30 Up to now (3)
- 32 Quantity, total, problem (3)



Congratulations to Nick Dale of Lancaster who won our H&G Wells competition in *Matrix* 174.

* Not true (probably)