

# matrix

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

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**Christopher Campbell on  
painting armageddon**

**Lon S Cohen on the  
scourge of fan films**

**Martin McGrath defends  
science fiction cinema**

**Stephen Baxter toys with  
sf merchandising**

**Plus news, reviews  
and much more**



## Strange Lady

M Night Shyamalan's new film will divide audiences

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## Words of wisdom

I once got into trouble for saying that books are disposable. Very few of the books that we read or write will outlive our lives. There's a bit of me that's purist. If you buy books, you keep books – you look after books. And there's a bit that thinks I get rid of my DVDs and my videos, why are my paperbacks different? I've got to a point where I don't automatically keep all the books that I buy. I mean, I take rejects down to a charity shop rather than bin them but I have a set number... So instead of adding to that number, I improve the quality! I have about three rooms full of books, but I still end up taking twenty or thirty a month down to Oxfam...

**Jon Courtenay Grimwood**

More of Jon's words of wisdom can be found online in an exclusive double interview shared between [www.matrix-magazine.co.uk](http://www.matrix-magazine.co.uk) and [www.infinityplus.co.uk](http://www.infinityplus.co.uk)

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# Moving pictures

Martin McGrath wonders why some fans look down their noses at science fiction cinema

It will not (I hope) have escaped the notice of attentive readers of *Matrix* over the last four years that I like science fiction films and that I make an effort to watch as many – perhaps too many – as possible. I take them seriously and have strong opinions about the good and the bad.

What has surprised me in my time as *Matrix* editor is the number of BSFA members and sf “fans” who consider an interest in sf films to be somehow below them. It is a snobbery that runs deep amongst a certain type of fan. They shuffle in embarrassment when their “speculative fiction” is lumped in with “sci-fi”, roll their eyes at the mention of such media horrors as *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* and sniff dismissively at the populist sf cinema.

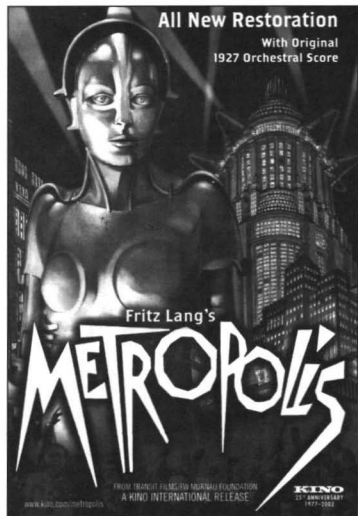
By contrast I have always believed that sf films frequently surpass the vast majority of written science fiction in terms of quality, originality and intelligence.

In defence of this claim, let me start by targeting a canard that should have been shot down years ago – that sf film lags behind the written form and only regurgitates material first explored, often decades earlier, in the written form.

This idea can seem obvious – after all, aren't many sf films adaptations of sf books (actually, relatively few are) and isn't there always a long gap between the great books and their adaptation? There was a fourteen year gap between the publication of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and *Blade Runner*, and a seventeen year gap between the publication of “The Sentinel” and the release of 2001. Though, if we allow for the fact films take longer to produce than most novels or short stories (both these films took four years from conception to release) then the gap between publication and adoption by film-makers is less than it first appears.

But even then, these comparisons are fatuous.

*Blade Runner* and 2001 might draw inspiration and a core of ideas from written sf, but both bear little relation to their source material, which they surpass for intelligence and impact. These films did not lag behind written sf, they charted a



Great films set the agenda for the whole genre

course for the whole genre.

Of course it can be argued that both 2001 and *Blade Runner* are exceptions. It is true, they are part of the tiny minority of genuinely extraordinary sf films. And they are part of an even smaller minority of genuinely interesting adapted works. But the difficulty of adapting the written word to the screen is hardly unique to sf. Great novels rarely make great cinema, the two media require fundamentally different elements to succeed.

I groan when I hear fans chatter excitedly about Hollywood plans to film their favourite novel and I want to punch someone when I hear them moan about the liberties the film-makers have taken with their beloved text. I'd be happier if no one ever made a film that adapted an sf novel ever again. I don't want

sf films to be more like sf novels. I want writers and film-makers to explore their different media and exploit their unique strengths. I want originality, not conformity to the dead hand of fans' demands for “faithful” adaptations.

Just because sf cinema often stumbles when it translates the written word to the screen does not mean that it can't deliver material capable of standing toe-to-toe with the best of sf literature.

In the last ten years *Gattaca*, *Dark City*, *12 Monkeys*, *The Matrix*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Spirited Away*, *28 Days Later*, *The Incredibles*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Serenity* have all been nominated for the Hugo for best film. That's a respectable list of original, intelligent science fiction. Then there are films that didn't make

the shortlist, but should have, such as *Pi*, *Donnie Darko*, *Abre los Ojos*, *Amelie*, *Unbreakable*, *eXistenZ*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Jin-Ro*, *Primer* and *Big Fish*. To this list of good quality sf films I would add a group of flawed but interesting works like *The Big Empty*, *The American Astronaut*, *Cube*, *Cypher* and *The City of Lost Children*.

Where are genre novels that are decades ahead of these films? Where are the novels so clearly of superior quality that they can look down their nose at this list?

There may be a few, but they are rare.

Are there bad sf films and television programmes being made? Of course – an endless stream – and I suffer through more of them than most. But there is also a steady stream of vapid genre novels. To assume that all sf film is inferior to literature because the latest blockbuster is nonsense is like assuming that all modern novels are trash because the silver-embossed airport novel you've just picked up is as repetitive and weakly plotted as a Welsh telephone directory.

It's a matter of taste, of course, but in this issue I review two films (*A Scanner Darkly* – and yes, thank you, it is ironic that I'm praising a film adaptation of a novel published thirty years ago – and *Lady in the Water*) that are as interesting as any novel I've read so far this year. Both got me thinking and challenged my prejudices, and that, more than anything, is what I want from sf.

The next six months will see the release of *The Children of Men*, *The Fountain*, *Sunshine*, *The Prestige*, *Southland Tales*, *Pain's Labyrinth* and *Standstoo* – a promising mix of original sf and adaptations. I have no idea, at the time of writing, whether any of these are any good – but I hope one or two will be exceptional. If, in that period I also read one or two exceptional novels, I'll be a happy fan.

After almost four years this is Martin McGrath's last issue as an editor of *Matrix*. He's leaving to spend more time with the blank screen that is currently pretending to be an unfinished novel. He will continue to review films.

# NEWSBITS



SF author and *Matrix* favourite Liz Williams is to join the *Interzone*

editorial team. The exact details of Liz's role are as yet unclear – one thought is that she will be taking more of a second-tier editorial role working on those stories that have made it through the first submissions hurdles. *Interzone* recently made it to two hundred issues, an event that even managed to garner coverage in the *The Guardian*, although much of this was a mild surprise at the magazine having made it that far. Something which doesn't surprise *Matrix* at all.



Cheryl Morgan has announced that online fanzine *Emerald City* is to finish by the end of the year. In an announcement on the site's weblog Cheryl said: "The reasons for this decision are many and varied. One of the least obvious is that I have a major logistical problem. It simply isn't possible to run an operation like this when you don't have a permanent home. In addition, over the past year or so I have become very disillusioned about both the quality of my own work and the general usefulness of online book reviews. The bottom line is that if you don't think what you are doing is worthwhile then it is very difficult to maintain the level of commitment necessary to produce something like *Emerald City*."



Because there's no end to his shameless plugging of his own work, Martin McGrath would like to draw *Matrix* readers attention to issue 8 of *Aeon SF*, which features his story "Palaces of Force" – an odd tale featuring Gandhi, Roger Casement, the Paris Exposition of 1889, a hot air balloon and a journey through time and space (sort of). Go to [www.aeonmagazine.com](http://www.aeonmagazine.com).

# Where the hell are my magazines?

The magazines produced by the BSFA are printed by one company, and then forwarded to another for mailing. Just before Easter, we had a phone call from our printers. His delivery van had got to the mailing house, to find that the mailing company had gone bankrupt. Fortunately the driver turned round and brought the magazines back to the printers, instead of continuing to deliver them. If they had been delivered to the bankrupt mailing company, it would have taken a very long time to get them back. There aren't many pieces of good news in this little story, but not losing a mailing is one of them.

So, it's just before Easter, when most of the BSFA's volunteer committee either goes to Eastercon or on holiday. We had to find an alternative mailing company. None of us know a great deal about the intricacies of printing and mailing magazines (if you do, we need a volunteer to take on a supervisory role...). We started by speaking to the printers. After the profuse thanks for rescuing our magazine, we set about finding a new mailing company. A couple were suggested, we talked to them, they seemed reasonable. And then came the next hitch, the cost.

We had been getting an insanely good deal out of our old mailing company. New quotes started at ten times the price. This probably explains why our old company had gone bust. We had to negotiate new prices, from a position of great weakness, and with our very limited budgets. Did I mention we'd paid the old mailing company for the next three mailings just before they went bankrupt without warning? That's a big chunk of money we'll never see again.

I negotiate for a living, but it's a very busy and time-consuming living. We did manage to negotiate an affordable deal, just about. Just about negotiate, and just about affordable. It was definitely a case of "Rock, let me introduce you to hard place". And some of you might want to Google BATNA and contemplate. That's BATNA as in Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement, not Batna, the fourth



largest city in Algeria.

So all that was left were the challenges of sending the membership data to the mailing company in a useful format, creating an account and forwarding references, and sorting out the actual mailing itself.

To be frank, this had been a fairly unmitigated disaster for the BSFA. We didn't lose the mailing, true, but it was unacceptably late. We lost a lot of money when the old mailing company went bankrupt. The mailing now costs us more, so that's an ongoing loss. We had finally begun to deliver our magazines on time and regularly, and then this happened to us, which

I suspect has impacted on our membership.

And the big loss is the opportunity cost. We're all volunteers, who give what time we can to the BSFA because we care about it and want to see it succeed. But if that time is being spent sorting out this sort of crisis, then it's not spent doing the other things we want to do.

We hope members will accept our sincere apologies for the interruptions to your recent mailings. We will do our best to ensure that this does not happen again.

Pat McMurphy  
BSFA Co-Chair



## The edge of space

**D**an Holdsworth's large-scale photographs explore the limits of perception and the possibilities of photography. His new exhibition at the National Maritime Museum in London – 'At the Edge of Space, Parts 1–3' – features work from three series of the artist's photographs.

*At the Edge of Space* (1999) is a series of photographs taken at the European Space Agency's spaceport at Kourou in Guiana, South America, where the Ariane rockets are launched.

*The Gregorian* (2005) was developed at the

Arecibo Space Telescope at the American National Astronomy and Ionosphere Centre, Puerto Rico. Nestled in a jungle landscape of collapsed cave systems, this man-made structure is the world's largest single-dish radio telescope.

*Hyperborea* (2006, above) is a series of landscapes, commissioned by the National Maritime Museum, showing the aurora from Reykjavik in Iceland and from the Andoya Rocket Range above the Arctic Circle in Norway.

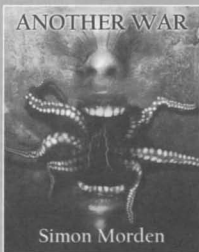
At the Edge of Space is on show until January 2007. See [www.nmm.ac.uk](http://www.nmm.ac.uk) for more details.

## Morden's focus on prize

**C**ongratulations to author and *Focus* editor Simon Morden whose novella *Another War* (Telos Publishing) has been shortlisted for a World Fantasy Award.

Two men are found inside an old manor house surrounded by an impenetrable bubble where everything that lives within it seems to wither and die: men who vanished some 100 years ago but who have now reappeared, and as young as the day they disappeared. There are rumours of a machine which could puncture the dimensions, allowing man to travel beyond the bounds of the Earth ...and for other things to travel here.

Other nominees from the UK include Graham Joyce, Hal Duncan, Neil Williamson, Andrew J. Wilson, Dave McKean and Edward Miller (Les Edwards).



## Northampton correction

**I**n last issue's Newsbits we announced that Ian Watson and the Northampton Science Fiction Writers Group were seeking to recruit new members. This is still all true, the only problem is that we ran a slightly altered version of the correct contact email address. Anyone wanting to join the NSFSG should send a sample short story or chapter to

(your choice of sf, fantasy or horror.) for consideration to [susans@albion.co.uk](mailto:susans@albion.co.uk).

The NSFSG is a great starting point for anyone looking to become more active in both writing and fanish participation, having organised conventions and author events as well as members going on to see their stories published in magazines and anthologies.

## Bumps! Clowns! Cake! Jelly! Whee!

**H**appy birthday to us! *Matrix* is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary as a publication of the BSFA this year. Originally published as the *BSFA Newsletter* the name was changed in 1976 (with the August issue – No.7) to *Matrix* and the magazine has been produced continuously (notwithstanding mailing house failures and various other acts of God) ever since.

The first issue of *Matrix* included an article entitled "Whither Fandom?" (nice to see things have moved on then, Ed.), a preview of *Space* 1999 and was edited by Tom A Jones.

We'd like to send out thanks to all those others who've worked on the magazine over the years, and hope that *Matrix* is still running articles called "Whither Fandom?" in the space year 2036 – though we hope we're not still editing it!

## Borders crossed...

**A**fter recently celebrating five years of the monthly Borders Author Nights, Pat Cadigan has announced that the Oxford Street bookstore has declined to host any further meetings and the search is currently on for a new location. The monthly event has been a regular fixture in the sf calendar, and as popular for its post-meeting pub gatherings as it was for the high quality of its guests.

## ... but Blackwell in the pink

**B**lackwell Bookshop continues to host perhaps the most interesting programme of larger scale author events, with a new Autumn season building on this reputation. Authors on tour include Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, J.G. Ballard and a special ICA event featuring Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie talking about *Lost Girls*, which on evidence of the last Alan Moore event is likely to be sold out within minutes.

The success of this season is due to programmer Andy Quinn, who previously worked across the Charing Cross Road at Foyles, and has brought his extensive contacts list and good taste with him. Meanwhile Foyles events have taken a notable downturn of late, all of which makes *Matrix* think there should be a campaign for them to host Pat Cadigan's monthly night right away, if not sooner.

More information online at [www.blackwell.co.uk](http://www.blackwell.co.uk)

# Ozone hole not growing...

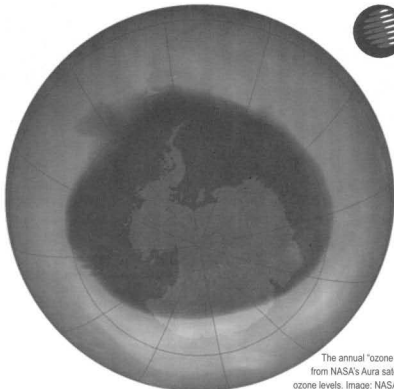
**R**emember the hole in the ozone layer? Well, it's still there reducing the planet's protection against ultraviolet rays. Worst at the poles, it is diminished by 10% at Northern European and North American latitudes.

The good news is that the ban of halogen compounds, such as the infamous Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that were used in fridges and freezers, appears to be taking effect.

Results from a host of studies, plus space and ground-based measurements show that the decrease in ozone has stabilised or in some cases ozone levels have increased.

It is unlikely that the ozone levels will return to pre-diminished level because of other climate altering factors which are still present, so be careful out there.

Source: Manchester Evening News



The annual "ozone hole" over Antarctica as seen from NASA's Aura satellite. Dark areas represent low ozone levels. Image: NASA.



## ...but pollution is!



**W**hile ozone damage is stabilising pollution isn't. The World Bank has just issued its comprehensive annual report, the "Little Green Data Book", looking at world pollution and energy demands.

The economic boom in China and India has significantly contributed to the 15% increase in global greenhouse gas emissions between 1992 and 2002. Between 1992 and 2002 (the last full year of data available) China increased its emission by 33% making it the second largest polluter behind the US. India's emissions grew 57 percent in the same period. Despite these increases it is still the older industrialised nations that remain the major contributors to carbon dioxide emission. The United States

contributed 24 percent of total emissions and the nations of the Eurozone emitted 10 percent.

The UN predicts energy use to grow by 50% in the next 25 years, with two-thirds of that growth accounted for by the developing world. Today 1.6 billion people do not have access to electricity and 2.4 billion people continue to cook and heat with wood, dung and the like, when that changes pollution can only get worse.

Whether or not you believe humanity is affecting the climate we are soiling our own nest. The only positive aspect of the picture is that we're running out of hydrocarbons – placing an upper limit on the amount of damage we can do.

Source: AFP

## Scatter-brains

**T**he world's most powerful Spallation Neutron Source (SNS) fired its first beam in April. Located at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the SNS is an accelerator that generates intense pulsed neutron beams with ten times more neutrons than any other facility and does this every 17 milliseconds.

How the neutrally charged particles bounce off and scatter from what they hit can reveal the composition of a target down to molecular level. The SNS can make 'movies' of molecules in motion and more neutrons in the beam means a more detail picture.

Neutron-scattering has helped in the development of polymers, high-temperature superconductors and stronger magnets. Further developments in chemistry, complex fluids, crystalline materials, disordered materials and structural biology can be expected.

Source: [www.sns.gov](http://www.sns.gov)

## See the light

**A**rtificial retinas are being developed around the world. Most feed electricity

generated from light into retinal cells; however this heats the nerve cells risking damage. At the University of Illinois engineer Laxman Saggere proposes an alternative. He suggests implanting pumps that respond to light by firing jets of neurotransmitters on to the cells, stimulating them in a more natural, low energy way.

His prototype actuator – constructed from a flexible silicon disc 1.5 millimetres in diameter and 15 micrometres thick – acts like a diaphragm compressing a reservoir to squirt the neurotransmitters onto the retinal cells. The prototype uses a solar cell to generate electricity when struck by light, which in turn feeds a piezoelectric material. This expands according to voltage and flexes the disc. It is still early in its development

Source: *New Scientist*

## Spammed!

**S**pammer Jeanson Ancheta was sent to jail for 57 months for infecting 400,000 computers with spam and adware. The court confiscated \$60,000, his BMW and his PC.

# Sunshine & Stardust lead Brit sf&f revival



Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* to lead Brit of revival?

Perhaps it's changes to the way public funds are being made available for films, or perhaps it's the success of films like Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* and Neil Marshall's *The Descent*, but there seems to be a definite increase in UK genre movie production. It might even be a modest boom. Next year (2007) should see the release of at least six big-budget UK-based genre movies.

Boyle is currently in post-production on the horror/sf hybrid *Sunshine*, due for release in March 2007. His fourth consecutive genre film following *Alien Love Triangle*, *Millions* and *28 Days Later*, *Sunshine* is a space-based horror movie set aboard a mission to the sun. Boyle will also produce *28 Weeks Later* (Summer 2007). The premise – the arrival of the American army to “reboot” a Britain emptied by the rage plague in *28 Days Later* – doesn't sound promising but director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo made the beautiful but odd *Intacto* and writer Rowan Joffe co-wrote *Last Resort* (a gritty drama about illegal immigrants) so it might not end up as stupid as it sounds.

Marshall, meanwhile, will follow up *The Descent* with *Doomsday* (Autumn 2007), which he describes as a “dark, brutal action adventure” set in a post-apocalyptic future where a disease threatens humanity and featuring futuristic knights and car chases. Marshall may follow that up in 2008 with *The Ninth Legion*, a historical action film, or with *Outpost* his long-gestating monster story set on an oil rig. A sequel to *The Descent* is also on the cards following success in America.

Perhaps the biggest profile UK production currently under way is the adaptation of Neil Gaiman's fantasy novel *Stardust*, directed by Matthew Vaughn (*Layer Cake*). The story, of a young man who travels into magical lands to retrieve a fallen star for the woman he loves, it has attracted a long list of high profile names, including Robert DeNiro, but the lead will be relative unknown Charlie Cox. *Stardust* will be released in the UK in March.

If tales of fairy land aren't your thing then *The Mutant Chronicles* might grab your attention. It's the story of Major Mitch Hunter fighting an army of underworld

“necromutants” and is, apparently, based on a role-playing board game. The cast, which includes Thomas Jane, Ron Perlman, John Malkovich and Devon Aoki (Miho in *Sin City*) suggests this is an altogether bigger project than director Simon Hunter's previous effort – direct to DVD schlocker *Lighthouse*.

Finally, American director Jay Russell (*Ladder 49*) will direct *The Water Horse*, an adaptation of Dick King-Smith's fantasy novel. Produced by Walden Media, *The Water Horse* is due for release around Christmas 2007 with a cast that features Brit actors such as Emily Watson, Ben Chaplin and David Morrissey. The book tells the story of a young boy (Alex Etel from *Millions*) who discovers the egg of a Water Horse, a sea creature of Scottish legend, which the boy must fight to protect.

Taken together, that's an unusually impressive development slate of sf and fantasy movies springing from the UK this year. With luck 2007 will turn out to be a highly successful year for UK genre cinema and, perhaps, success will breed success.

## Roeg trading

*Puffball* is the first full-length feature from cult British director Nicolas Roeg for over a decade and his first genre film since 1990's Roald Dahl adaptation *The Witches*. *Puffball* adapts Fay Weldon's novel of the same name, and tells the story of young wife Liffey (Kelly Reilly) who finds that her dream move to the country turns into a nightmare. Roeg, now 78, will follow *Puffball* with *Adina*, an sf/horror film about a race of immortals who use sex to maintain their youth and which, apparently, explores the idea that there is no such thing as linear time.

## Warped minds

*Warp X* is a new production company designed to promote low-budget film-making in the UK. Supported by, amongst others, the UK Film Council, FilmFour and Optimum Releasing, *Warp X* has funding to produce and distribute seven films over the next three years.

Amongst the films on *Warp X*'s slate are *s/f* horror movie *Blind Eye* – set in a futuristic prison, it is a spin-off from Channel 4's *The Trial*, in which four prisoners agree to take part in a drug trial in exchange for their freedom. *Warp X* has also commissioned a “sci-fi melodrama” from Chris Waitt and Henry Trotter – the creators of the rude puppet show, *FUR TV*.

## Flicker



Terry Gilliam may direct *The Owl in Daylight* – a biopic based on the life of Hollywood's favourite sf writer Phillip K Dick. Paul Giamatti (*Lady in the Water*) is lined up to star. Meanwhile another biopic of Dick's life is also in the works. *Panasonic*, directed by Matthew Wilder and starring Bill Pullman, is an indie comedy taking in paranoid conspiracies, drug-fuelled hallucinations and pop culture from the 1970s.



Christopher Nolan looks set to direct a film version of *The Prisoner* – probably after he directs the sequel to *Batman Begins*, now officially titled *The Dark Knight* which will feature Heath Ledger as The Joker.



*Halo*, the adaptation of the hugely successful Bungie/Microsoft game, has a director. Neil Blomkamp will be behind the camera – and the film (rumoured to have a budget over \$150million) will be his first feature. Blomkamp has gained a reputation through award-winning shorts such as the excellent sf film *Alive in Joburg* and adverts including the dancing car/robot for Citroën and Yellow for Adidas. All are worth checking out on the web.



*Bourne* director Doug Liman will direct Hayden Christiansen (*Star Wars* prequels) in an adaptation of Steven Gould's juvenile sf adventure *Jumper*. It's the story of a boy from an abusive home who discovers that he has the power to teleport. *Billy Elliot* star Jamie Bell is also signed up. Producers hope *Jumper* will be the first in a trilogy.



Looking dodgy... Matt Damon to play Kirk in new *Star Trek* movie? Ugh!

Marginally funny comedian Demetri Martin will star in *The Moon People* about Moon colonists returning to Earth, written by *Da Ali G Show* writer James Robin. Yuck!... Empire Pictures plan to make a film based on the rights to 60's toy “sensation” Sea-Monkeys – basically dried shrimps sold as pets. Wha...Huh?

MUST SEE!



# A Scanner smartly

Of all the stupid ideas I've ever heard (and there have been plenty) I thought the decision to adapt Philip K Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* ranked up there with the dumbest. I was convinced that Dick's paranoid, tortuously twisted novel could never be turned into a film and even more certain that Linklater, with his record of slightly pompous romances and wafer-thin comedies was incapable of writing or directing a successful take on this story. And when I heard it was going to be semi-animated, I snorted derisively.

What do I know?

Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* is a bit of a triumph. It's dark and weird and it won't appeal to a mainstream audience out for an evening's light entertainment, but as an exercise in capturing the essence of a novel it is about as successful an experiment as any viewer could hope.

The "rotoscoping" animation technique – which involves drawing over live-action film – is immensely irritating. It can't allow the flowering of imagination seen in the best "real" animation and it also obscures the subtleties of performance and setting found in "real" films. However, here the technique works perfectly. The audience is immediately alienated from these characters and their world, as familiar actors and their environment becomes alien.

Perhaps the most successful visual element of the film is the realisation of the scramble suits. These disguises, worn by undercover agents to protect their identity from everyone, even their colleagues, are captivating. The constant melange of changing faces is fascinating, especially since you keep seeing glimpses of faces you think are familiar (including, I thought, Dick himself, John Wayne

and Clint Eastwood). The way the film uses the suit as a barrier between Bob Arctor (Reeves) and the rest of the world, especially in the opening sequence where he addresses a Rotary Club-like "Bear Lodge" also works well.

But the scramble suit is far from *A Scanner Darkly*'s only memorable achievement. There are some fantastic performances – Reeves, Ryder, Cochrane, Downey Jr and Harrelson are all excellent, with the latter two especially stealing the film. Their drug-hazed banter provides the humour to counterpoint the darker elements of the story. Downey Jr reminds us why he was once regarded as the most promising acting talent of his generation (before his own run in with drugs) and the role of Arctor perfectly suits Reeves's semi-detached acting style. He becomes increasingly convincing as his character gradually slips away from

his anchorage in reality.

I enjoyed *A Scanner Darkly* immensely – much more than I expected to. Despite the hyper-stylised visuals and doped-up characters Linklater plays it smart by keeping a firm grip on the plot and pushing it on at a good pace. There's nothing indulgent about this film – though it could have easily descended into druggy mess – and while Linklater cleverly highlights a post 9-11, "war on terrorism" relevance to the story, he never overplays it.

*A Scanner Darkly* is the most surprising and rewarding sf movie of the summer so far. (MMcG)

## A Scanner Darkly

Writer/director: Richard Linklater  
Cinematographer: Shane F Kelly  
Cast: Keanu Reeves, Robert Downey Jr, Woody Harrelson, Rory Cochrane, Wynona Rider  
100 mins

# Miike turns out Yokai

Call me old-fashioned if you like, but taking my child to a film by the director of *Audition* and *Ichii the Killer* strikes me as risky. Think of the psychiatrist's fees!

But Takashi Miike has made a film for the little ones – *Goblin Wars*. It's the story of Tadashi (Kamiki) – a boy from a broken home struggling to cope in a new village. Tadashi gets picked as the "Kirin Rider" at the village

festival – a traditional post that once held great responsibility, the holder enforcing peace between the Yokai (creatures from Japanese folklore) and humanity with a magical sword.

Now, of course there's an evil lord determined to take over the world and Tadashi must take up arms with an unlikely bunch of side-kicks that include a River Princess (Takahashi) and the Azuki-Bean Washer (Okamura).

*Goblin Wars* is a strange mix of the low-tech and the modern, with Miike mixing extremely silly puppets with CGI imagery and stealing from just about every fantasy film you've ever seen.

The result is uneven and sometimes bewildering but oddly endearing. The final battle is an impressive set piece and the end hints strongly that sequels are a distinct possibility. (MMcG)





MUST SEE!



# Wet but wonderful

It's easy to see why most "professional" critics have given M Night Shyamalan's *Lady in the Water* short shrift. Not only does the director include a character that is a film critic (Balaban) who arrogantly misunderstands the plot and pays for it, but he's also made a film that deliberately challenges the cynicism and crude deconstructivism that are the core tools of most critics' art.

And it's also easy to see why Disney – the studio that gave Shyamalan his big break – decided to dissolve of their association with the director rather than put their money into this film.

*Lady in the Water* is a wilfully self-indulgent movie. It is constructed around a ludicrously complex fairytale world that Shyamalan built while telling bedtime stories to his kids. It features the writer/director in a major supporting role as a Christ-like author doomed to die for bringing his wisdom to the world. And the sometimes stodgy script completely lacks the sort of twists that most people demand from the maker of *The Sixth Sense*.

Disney's executives will point to the modest box-office takings that are bound to accrue from this strange film and argue that they were right to keep their money in their pockets. And the professional critics will point to the large proportion of the audience who leave the cinema disgruntled as

evidence that they too were right. They'll nod their collective heads and agree: *Lady in the Water* stinks.

But they're all wrong.

True, Shyamalan needs someone to beat an ounce of humility into him. And *Lady in the Water* is not without serious flaws. Yet, despite all this, I loved it.

I loved it beyond all reason.

I sat down knowing the film's history and knowing that other reviewers had panned it. I sharpened my pencil and prepared to write a scathing attack on a prodigious talent wasting his ability on self-aggrandizing rubbish.

But, instead, I found a film I couldn't resist.

Cleveland Heep (Giamatti) is the janitor of an apartment complex called The Cove. One night he discovers a girl in the pool – the girl is a water spirit, a "Narf", called Story (Howard). Cleveland helps Story find the person she's supposed to inspire, doomed but brilliant writer Vick (Shyamalan), and then tries to send her home, but something goes wrong. Story is badly hurt, a monster is roaming loose and Cleveland must bring together the community of The Cove to save the Narf.

In one sense this tale about a man who has lost everything but who finds redemption through the intrusion of the fantastical into his world is simply a retread of themes Shyamalan has used before – particularly in *Signs*. *Lady in the*

*Water*'s huge advantage over its predecessor, however, is Giamatti's fantastic performance. He is superb, managing to both dominate your attention and yet retain the sense of fragile vulnerability that is essential to his character. Cleveland, not the mystical Narf, does the real magic in *Lady in the Water*. Through his diligence and kindness he creates community where none should exist and manufactures in people the rarest of commodities in our modern world: trust.

But *Lady in the Water* isn't just a story, or even a story about Story, it's a story about stories – so much so that on a number of occasions Shyamalan stops the film to deconstruct our expectations of where the plot will go next. Some will find this a monstrous act of hubris, but the film repeatedly confounds those expectations, often via wild leaps of logic-defying imagination. Shyamalan gets away with it – just – because *Lady in the Water* is about the power of stories to heal and transform and redeem and unite and just raise up the spirits of those who hear them. Of course this approach requires that the viewer be willing to make a leap of faith alongside the creator's leap of imagination, and that will be a major stumbling block for many (perhaps the majority) of the film's potential viewers.

I expect *Lady in the Water* to polarise audiences: some will love it, most will hate it. I suspect this is

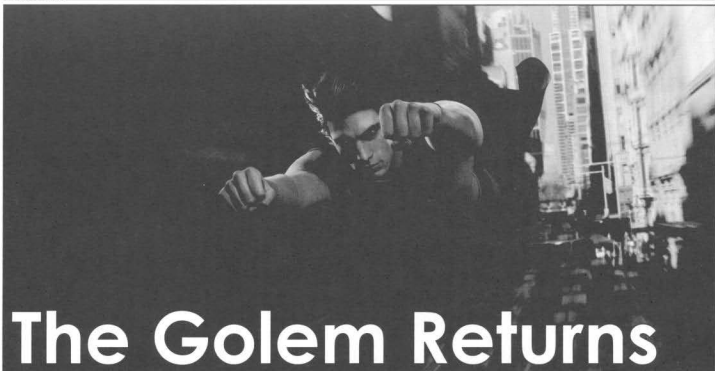
a reflection of the writer/director/producer/actor Shyamalan's own character. He is perhaps the most singularly gifted storyteller working in Hollywood, a man who consistently produces films that look beautiful, challenge the audience and that live in the mind. But he is also, obviously, a hard man to like, being stubborn with a thick streak of arrogance.

Those looking for popcorn thrills will find *Lady in the Water* too slow. Others will see only the flaws, the director's egotistical self-regard, the gaping chasms in the logic and the total absence of a second act, and hate it. But, while conceding these flaws, I remain in love with *Lady in the Water*. The cinematography by Christopher Doyle is nuanced, delicate and beautiful. Paul Giamatti is affecting and engaging. And the world of magic and hope the film creates, just for a moment, transported me from these too-troubled times.

*Lady in the Water* won't win Shyamalan many new fans, nor will it persuade the professionally cynical, but I suggest you see it before you dismiss it. (MMcG)

## Lady in the Water

Writer/director: M Night Shyamalan  
Cinematographer: Christopher Doyle  
Cast: Paul Giamatti, Bryce Dallas Howard, Jeffry Wright, Bob Balaban, Sarita Choudhury, Cindy Cheung, M Night Shyamalan, Freddy Rodriguez, Bill Irwin  
100 mins



# The Golem Returns

**T**he infuriating thing about Superman is that the mythology of his origin – two Jewish boys (Siegel and Shuster) reacting to Nazism by creating a golem – is far more interesting than the hero they created.

Superman is a hero so hollow and untouchable that writers must constantly fall back on improbable gimmicks (fifty-seven flavours of Kryptonite) to inject any element of physical drama. Superman could bring rain to the desert and end world hunger, he could destroy every tyranny on the planet. He doesn't because there are, apparently some problems mankind has to work out for itself. Why those problems don't include crime against property in Metropolis or engineering failures on planes remains unexplained.

Then there's Superman's boundless self-sacrifice. He could have anything, and yet he never uses his powers for his own advancement. Superman isn't a real character, he's a cipher: incorruptible and unknowable.

None of this is addressed in *Superman Returns*. Brian Singer is a film-maker I've admired for a long time. *Usual Suspects*, *Apt Pupil* and the *X-Men* films are well-made entertainments from a director with considerable skill and vision.

But all that is missing here. Singer has approached *Superman Returns* with a stodgy, fanboy reverence that abandons critical thinking in favour of obeisance before an over-familiar mythos.

There is no perspective on the character, no sense of what he might be for or what he might

signify in a world where the exercise of power and the ideals of "truth and justice" have long since fallen out of synch. Instead Singer crow-bars his film into the continuity of Richard Donner's first *Superman* (1978) – as if nothing has changed in thirty years. Then he beats the viewer over the head with facile references to Christ and resurrection, imbuing the whole thing with a po-faced drabness that even Spacey's flashes of lunacy as Luthor can't dispel.

The acting doesn't help. Spacey is entertaining, but the rest look as though they've been prescribed a dose of downers.

The majority of screen time is devoted to the pretty but vacant Routh as Clark Kent/Superman. Yes, he does look a bit like Christopher Reeve, but that's not enough. Bosworth, meanwhile, is the least convincing Lois Lane I've ever seen and (and perhaps this is an indication of a general backwards slide in Hollywood) she is notably less able, less spunky and less independent than Margo Kidder was thirty years ago in Donner's film.

But most annoying is the fact the entire plot of this film relies on the fact that everyone is stupid.

If Superman uses his powers to their full extent, or even if he takes some basic precautions, Lex Luthor's plans can't work. It is only because Superman behaves like a buffoon that there is any drama in this story at all. Superman leaves Earth and his "Fortress of Solitude" – with all the information of an advanced alien civilisation – and not only does he not lock the front door (if there is one), but he doesn't

even have a password protecting all that dangerous information. When he learns Luthor (his great nemesis) is free, he doesn't check what he's up to but ignores him, too busy mooning over Lois Lane. Then, when he finally meets Luthor, Superman doesn't bother to check whether he has anything that might be dangerous with his x-ray vision, he just walks up to him – arrogantly certain of his own invulnerability – and lets a middle-aged man stab him.

This mix of arrogance, laziness and stupidity may be essential to move a weak script forward, but it hardly makes the hero appealing.

Meanwhile a room full of crack reporters can't tie together the mysterious return of Superman with the reappearance of Clark Kent and Luthor, the supposed genius, sets out to create a new continent no one could possibly live on and with Superman at his mercy, fails to finish him off.

Some of these problems are inherent in the almost omnipotent character created by Siegel and Shuster. Superman is capable of almost anything, so devising real threats to challenge him is almost impossible. However, perhaps because of the uncritically fannish nature of this production, no one seems to have been interested in even acknowledging that such problems might exist.

In the end, desperate for some sort of emotional punch to this sterile toss, Singer resorts to that tried and tested Hollywood standby – he turns everything into a parable about the relationship between a son and his father – even going so far as to give Superman

his very own illegitimate son. Both Superman's fathers (Jor-El and Pa Kent) are dead, so obviously Clark/Kal-El feels abandoned – which no doubt leaves Ma Kent feeling suitably devalued – but luckily he learns he's not really alone and so has a little bit of wisdom to pass on to his sleeping child in a final, vomit-inducing monologue.

This moment is a crass attempt at emotional exploitation wedged into a film that, otherwise, has nothing original or interesting to say. Its cloying sentimentality is the final nail in the coffin of an underpowered, unrewarding movie.

There are one or two nice touches in *Superman Returns* (I liked the extended destruction of the railway model recalling the earthquake sequence in the Donner film) but it isn't a patch on Christopher Nolan's recent *Batman* movie, Sam Raimi's *Spider-man* films or Singer's own *X-Men* outings. It is too long, too slow and too pathetically reverent.

The closest thing *Superman Returns* has to a moment of genuine emotion is the opening credits, when John Williams' fantastic, familiar theme thumps out triumphantly. It's all downhill from there. (MMCG)

## Superman

Director: Bryan Singer  
 Writers: Michael Dougherty & Dan Harris  
 Cinematographer: Newton T Siegel  
 Cast: Brandon Routh, Kate Bosworth, Kevin Spacey, James Marsden, Parker Posey, Frank Langella, Sam Huntington, Eva Marie Saint, Marlon Brando  
 154 mins

# Running man

**D**istrict B13 is relatively low-budget French action movie set a few years in the future when parts of Paris have become ungovernable and have been divided from the rest of the city by vast walls and corrupt security guards. Outside life goes on more or less as normal, inside gangs hold sway and lawlessness reigns.

Against this background Letto (Belle) refuses to submit to Taha (Naceri), a grasping drugs lord. Letto is captured and sent to prison by corrupt

giving the frequent fight and chase scenes in the film a tremendous jolt of realism. The fight sequences owe obvious debts to recent films such as Thai martial arts hit *Ong Bak* and Euro-actioner *The Transporter* – the violence is swift, brutal and (more-or-less) convincing.

For fans of action movies who have grown tired of wire-worked fantasy kung-fu, Matrix-inspired slo-mo and the frenetic editing of most modern movies, *District B13* is a bit of a blast of fresh air. The fact that both



cops, his sister becoming a slave to Taha. In prison Letto is teamed up with Damien (Raffaelli) an undercover cop and sent back to retrieve a nuclear missile (and his sister) from Taha. Once inside, however, they discover that Taha is the least of their problems.

The hopelessly thin plot is ripped off from elsewhere and most of the acting is below par but *District B13* remains a surprisingly entertaining action-adventure movie.

A big part of the enjoyment comes from the fantastic physicality of the performances. Leading man Belle is best known as the creator of parkour, the "sport" of street running that treats the urban environment as one big jungle-gym. Remember those BBC adverts with the men leaping off rooftops? One of those men was David Belle. There are very few computer generated effects and many of the stunts are performed "as seen" by the actual actors,

leads are able to do their own moves on screen (Raffaelli is an accomplished stunt man) means first-time director Morel can let the fight choreography speak for itself. The opening half an hour is particularly strong, featuring a long chase sequence as Letto tries to escape from Taha and then a high-octane shoot-out/light sequence as Damien brings down a crime syndicate.

Luc Besson produced and co-wrote *District B13* and its hard not to compare it unfavourably with his early action movies (*Subway*, *Nikita*, *Leon*). However, judged on its own merits, *District B13* is a silly but entertaining movie – perfect Friday night fun.

(MMCG)

## District B13

Director: Pierre Morel  
Writer: Luc Besson & Bib Naceri  
Cinematographer: Manuel Teran  
Cast: Cyril Raffaelli, David Bell, Tony D'Amari, Larbi Nacen, Dany Verissimo, Francois Chatto  
85 mins

# Click clunks



**S**ome men have secret stashes of porn that they leer over when the house is empty or their loved-ones are in bed. I am not one of those men. But I do have an illicit stash of material I only get out when I think no one else is looking. It's my collection of really stupid comedies.

Jim Carey and Steve Martin are both there, from when funny (before 1994 and 1983 respectively). There's *Caddyshack*, *The Blues Brothers*, *Animal House*, *Anchorman*, *Zooged* and *Dodgeball*. These films are unsophisticated bordering on the downright stupid, but when I need a guaranteed laugh, they are where I go. And near the top of the pile is a film featuring Adam Sandler which might be the most ludicrous film of the lot – *Happy Gilmore*. It's got a raging hockey player ruining golf, its got a giant, one-eyed, alligator, its got Jaws from *Moonaker*, its got a desperate struggle to save Grandma's house and three tonnes of ridiculous slapstick. I ask you, what's not to love?

I'm telling you this because I don't want you to think that my opinion of Adam Sandler's new film, *Click*, is not because I share the hatred of this actor that seems surprisingly widespread. I love *Happy Gilmore*, I like *The Wedding Singer* and I was impressed with his work on PT Anderson's *Punch-Drunk Love*. I quite like Adam Sandler, but I didn't like *Click*.

Indeed the problem of the film isn't Sandler or any of the other cast some of whom (Walken, Hasselhoff, Winkler, Astin) are enjoyable in their minor roles.

The problem with *Click* is that it's depressing.

Sandler plays Michael, an ambitious architect who finds himself passed over for promotion.

In his moment of crisis Michael meets Morty (Walken) who provides him with a "universal remote control" that does far more than change television channels. Michael can fast forward time, skip dull meetings, see into the past and watch his days go by with a DVD-like commentary (with a voice over by James Earl Jones – who else?).

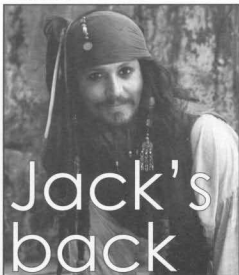
Quickly, though, things start to go wrong – as we know they must, for it is obvious from the start that like Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* – Michael is going to be taught a lesson. The remote "learns" Michael's preferences and begins to skip larger and larger chunks of his life – no more arguments, no more illnesses, no more boring work – soon Michael is an old and dying man alienated from his wife and children.

This central idea – of a man throwing his life away while dreaming of something better – isn't funny, it's miserable. Remove the gimmick of the remote control and all you have is a sad and lonely man ruining his life – and while Sandler throws in plenty of physical humour and fart jokes – by the end even the obligatory second chance can't quite dispel the miasma of despair that descends during the opening ninety minutes.

I left *Click* feeling like I needed cheering up, which really wasn't what I was expecting and not what I think the film makers intended. Luckily, I still have my *Happy Gilmore* DVD. (MMCG)

## Click

Director: Frank Coraci  
Writer: Steve Koren & Mark O'Keefe  
Cinematographer: Dean Semler  
Cast: Adam Sandler, Kate Beckinsale, Christopher Walken, David Hasselhoff, Henry Winkler, Julie Kavner, Sean Astin  
107 mins



# Jack's back

For sheer entertainment I don't believe I've seen a film in recent years that's been more successful than *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*. Confounding the inevitably low expectations attached to a Disney film based on adapting a jumped-up fairground ride it delivered hilarious performances by Depp and a fine cast of supporting actors, swashbuckling action and thrills that can only, fairly, be described as like a rollercoaster ride.

There was obviously a fear that when director Verbinski and his crew reunited to tell the further tales of Jack Sparrow that the sequel *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* would disappoint. And there are flaws in this second outing, less screen time is devoted to Depp's manic pirate captain, there's an awful lot of plot being crammed in to the lengthy two and a half hour running time, some of the story's threads seem to tail off pointlessly (though perhaps they'll be resolved in the sequel), and the slightly darker tone to this film isn't going to see the audience leave the cinema with the same kind of high as the previous outing.

But there's also a lot to love here. The insane dedication the filmmakers have put into creating their world, from the vilest drinking dens to the most outrageous monsters is endlessly admirable. The cast's inspired overacting, gurning and "arrring" as they deliver the consistently sharp banter is magnificent. The action is epic – a lengthy swordfight that takes place in a mill wheel as it rolls across an island that had me bouncing on my seat with glee. And the story has a real breadth, with vast monsters, complex intertwined stories and two jaw-droppingly shocking surprise endings that had the audience I saw it with gasping out loud and gagging for the sequel.

There are films that are more intellectually challenging, but if this summer holds a film that is more straightforwardly fun, then I've yet to see it. This is cinema. (MMCG)

## Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

Director: Gore Verbinski

Writer: Ted Elliott & Terry Rossio

Cinematographers: Dariusz Wolski

Cast: Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley, Jack Davenport, Bill Nighy, Jonathan Pryce, Lee Arenberg, Mackenzie Crook, Kevin McNally, David Baile, Stellan Skarsgård

150 mins

# Ex-rated



It is difficult to know how to take a film that claims to be a comedy but which features no likeable characters, precious few jokes and that, at times, comes perilously close to outright misogyny. What I can say without fear of contradiction is that *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* is an unpleasant mess of a film.

The central character, Matt Saunders (Luke Wilson), is an entirely self-obsessed jerk. He's the kind of jerk who sees a woman he thinks might be vulnerable on a train and sizes up whether she looks desperate enough to have sex with him before approaching her. Then, when rejected, he refuses to take a straightforward "get lost" as an answer. It says something for the sensibilities of the filmmakers behind this film that this is the character we're supposed to sympathise with. Of course Matt is not the most repulsive male character ever to appear in a romantic comedy, but that's only because the producers of *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* have seen fit to give him a sidekick, Vaughn (Rainn Wilson), who really is just vile.

In the end Matt ends up dating the girl on the train, Jenny (Thurman) who turns out to be a superhero – G-Girl (Superman in nicer outfits) – but of course having learnt her secret and had his fill of amazing (if painful) sex, he immediately dumps her and sleeps with his co-worker Hannah (Faris). G-Girl is (not unfairly, I thought) miffed at this turn of events and determines to extract her revenge, which includes putting his car into orbit and throwing a great white shark at him – it's all probably the least he deserves.

There are all sorts of unsavoury elements to *My Super Ex-Girlfriend*. I didn't like the way all the women, no matter how powerful, are desperately reliant on men. I didn't like that the plot amounts to nothing more than crude

male wish-fulfilment. I hated that it tried to illicit my sympathy for a male character who appeared to have no redeeming features. And I particularly objected to the fact that we're supposed to sympathise with Matt when he makes the supremely selfish decision to help Dr Bedlam (Izzard), G-Girl's nemesis, rob this heroine (who we've been shown saving countless numbers of lives) of her powers to make his life easier.

Of course *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* might still have saved itself if it had managed to be even remotely funny. But it isn't, and there really aren't any excuses for it being such a miserable bore of a movie.

Director Reitman may be well past his best, but he did make *Ghost Busters* and this idea has tonnes of potential. The cast is good. I could happily watch Uma Thurman watch paint dry. She's proven that she's an actor with a flair for comedy and she's the most convincing "action hero" working in Hollywood. I like Luke Wilson too, in films like *Bottle Rocket*, *Anchorman* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*, his deadpan delivery and charm can be devastatingly effective. And *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* also has Eddie Izzard, perhaps the funniest living Englishman.

But all their talents are wasted. I really can't emphasise enough how appalling I thought this film was. Even if the relentless sexism isn't enough to put you off, the utter absence of anything like a decent joke should. (MMCG)

## My Super Ex-Girlfriend

Director: Ivan Reitman

Writer: Don Payne

Cinematographer: Don Burgess

Cast: Uma Thurman, Luke Wilson, Anna Faris,

Rainn Wilson, Eddie Izzard, Stelio Savante,

Mike Iorio

95 mins

# Contrasting futures

Christian Volckman first started work on this film in 1999 so he must have been slightly narked when *Sin City* (2005) was released. That film received acclaim for its transliteration of Frank Miller's comics to the screen. *Renaissance* goes one step further in this respect by not just using a blue screen and post production but being totally animated, including overlaying motion captured actors. The result is a startling black and white film. Still, the debt to Miller is so clear you can't help but feel Volckman's thunder has been stolen.

*Sin City* was a gratuitously offensive exercise in simple-mindedness. *Renaissance* is much better but holds its own frustrations. This neo noir technothriller is set in 2050s Paris, chiefly as an excuse to showcase flashy bits of invented technology since it is executed very much in the traditional way. The backbone of the plot is the usual: Ilona Tasuiev (Garai) has gone missing and important people want her found. Ideally a world weary gumshoe would be tasked with this mission but we get the second best archetype: Captain Karas (Craig), a maverick cop. It is possibly the world's smallest spoiler to reveal that he is suspended part way through the film for getting results his way. The plot unfolds much as you would imagine, with evil corporations, mysterious pasts, femme fatales, chases, inversions



and the like, but all falls apart in the final reel when yawning rents appear in the fabric of the story.

This makes the attempt at an ambiguous conclusion seem merely unfinished.

So the story is little to get excited about but the visual impact of the film is another matter. As well as Miller the film is strongly influenced by *Blade Runner* (1982, 1992) but establishes its own identity in its implausible but impressive evocation of a future Paris. This makes great use of the grandiose architectural gesture, so beloved of comics. Couple this with the fact there is only a virtual camera making the cinematography and direction much more

adventurous than you might expect and you have a riveting spectacle.

There is some tension between the different techniques used – the CGI smoke of a character's cigarette seems out of place against the blank planes of their face, or the fluid movement of someone walking against a static background – but it is overall effect is certainly arresting.

This is a truly monochromatic film. There is no grey, only the nuclear glow of white and its absence. (The exception is a single splash of colour, which unfortunately seems to be de rigueur in modern black and white films.) It is a style that demands concentration, as images coalesce

out of the shadows. Inevitably, since the film relies so heavily on such visual cues, this French film has been dubbed. It is probably the right decision but most of the voice actors give hammy performances and Craig, in the central role, sounds like he literally phoned his in. Let us hope this wasn't his preparation for playing James Bond. Martin Lewis

## Renaissance

Director: Christian Volckman  
Writer: Alexandre de La Patelliere & Mathieu Delaporte  
Cast: Daniel Craig, Catherine McCormack, Romola Garai, Jonathon Pryce, Ian Holm  
83 mins

# Angel-A, Movie-F

For about seventy-five minutes *Angel-A*, Luc Besson's latest (and, he claims, last) outing as director, is a likeable if unlikely story of an oddball couple making their way through the Parisian underworld. André (Debbouze) is a failed business man, small time thief and compulsive liar. The other, Angela (Rasmussen), is an angel.

The contrast between the leads (Debbouze is short and scruffy while Rasmussen is extremely tall – thanks to some CGI – and glamorous) gives *Angel-A* a startling central visual motif and Paris looks stunning in the finely detailed black and white photography. There's even some nice dialogue to speed things along.

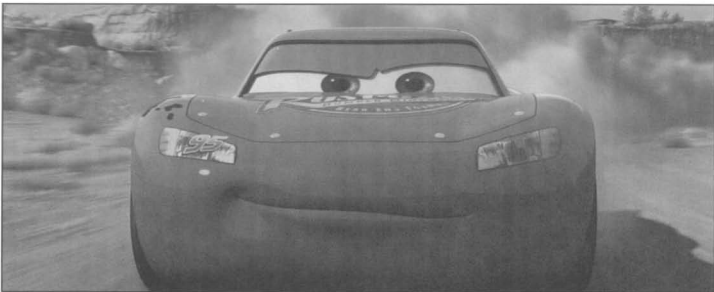
But it all falls apart in the final act. The

"message" of the film – believe in yourself and everything will be fine – is clumsily delivered and the relationship between the characters descends into histrionics. Any impact the final scenes might have possessed is wasted by the fact that both leading actors are painfully incapable of delivering convincing performances that match the too highly-strung writing. Instead of restraining them, director Besson seems to have urged them into a frenzy that is embarrassing to watch rather than affecting.

*Angel-A* clearly owes important debts to films like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Wings of Desire* but, like André at the opening of the film, Besson seems to have over extended himself and cannot live up to his commitments. (MMCG)



# Race relations



**C**ars is a very, very good children's film – the only problem is that it is made by Pixar and Pixar don't normally make very, very good films, normally they make works of transcendent brilliance.

The mini-studio that, practically single-handedly, redefined and revitalised Western animation has produced a string of films that stand head and shoulders above most of their rivals. In many ways *Cars* continues that trend. It is by some distance the most enjoyable and successful children's movie of the summer but, for me, it doesn't quite have the emotional impact of their earlier work.

There is no denying Pixar's continued technical dominance of their art-form. Every time their competitors raise their game Pixar comes along and blows them out of the water again. This time, while their rivals produce instantly forgettable cuddly creature features like *The Wild* and *Over the Hedge*, Pixar have produced a film that glistens and sheens and wows the audience with pure speed. The opening and closing sequences, which feature NASCAR-like races, are eye-popping affairs that are far more exciting than the sport they imitate. The quality and detail of the animation is nothing short of breath-taking.

But the reason Pixar makes great films is only tangentially related to their technical mastery. Their innovation and attention to detail in the process of creating a visually stunning film represents only

one facet of their perfectionism, which also manifests itself in a desire to create timeless, universally engaging stories. In this *Cars* is, I think, less successful than some of their earlier work because its core theme – the temptations of fame – and its occasionally heavy-handed nostalgia for an imagined 1950s American small-town idyll aren't as immediately affecting as those in Pixar's other films. *Cars* has none of the heart-tugging power of the *Toy Story* films or *Finding Nemo* nor the intelligence of *The Incredibles*.

*Cars* is the story of Lightning McQueen (Wilson), a brash young racing car who is on the verge of winning a championship trophy at his first attempt. On his way to a final showdown with his competitors the arrogant Lightning gets sidetracked to the town of Radiator Springs, a once bustling small town on the mythic Route 66 that has been sidelined and forgotten by the development of a new interstate. Through his

interactions with the locals – Sally Carrera (Hunt), Mater (Larry the Cable Guy) and particularly Doc Hudson (the mellifluous Newman) – Lightning learns the importance of friendship, that there's more to life than speed and that winning isn't everything.

For me the nostalgia in *Cars* was sometimes hard to stomach. The 1950s are frequently used as a kind of shorthand for innocence by Hollywood films but this was a decade of the Korean War, McCarthyism and the use of the Truman Doctrine to support dictatorships and promote American business interests from Guatemala and Cuba to Thailand and the Philippines. Americans might like to believe they were a more innocent country in the 1950s, but that's only because they could still stick their heads in the sand and pretend they didn't know what was going on in their name.

But that's all more historical baggage than a kids' film deserves to

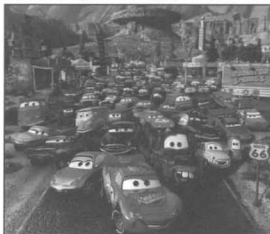
be lumbered with.

*Cars* is immensely entertaining and it hardly matters what I think when it so completely won over the children who saw it with me. My three-year-old daughter has seen all this summer's big kids' films. She failed to make it to the end of *Over the Hedge* and, though she watched *The Wild* happily enough she never mentioned it again. *Cars*, however, she watched and then demanded to watch again (and again). She referred to it constantly for weeks. And, when it came time to choose a new lunchbox to take to her playgroup, she demanded one with Lightning McQueen on it. When a three-year-old girl (my three-year-old girl at any rate) chooses something that isn't pink and doesn't feature a picture of a princess on it, it's an omen of Old Testament proportions. Against that kind of recommendation the reservations of a mere critic really cannot stand.

It is tempting to concentrate on the slight negatives in *Cars* but I've been forced to watch the film several times now and there's no doubt that, even if it isn't Pixar's very best work, this film remains a cut above most other entertainment aimed at children. (MMcG)

## Cars

Director: John Lasseter & Joe Ranft  
 Writers: Dan Fogelman, John Lasseter, Joe Ranft, Kiel Murray, Phil Loren & Jorgen Klubien  
 Cast: Owen Wilson, Paul Newman, Bonnie Hunt, Larry the Cable Guy, Cheech Marin, Tony Shalhoub, Guido Quaroni, Jennifer Lewis, 121 mins



# Goonie squad



**M**onster House is a computer animated comedy-horror film aimed at (slightly older) kids.

The story has two boys, DJ (Musso) and Chowder (Lerner) discovering that the house across the street is possessed after its owner, Mr Nebbercracker (Buscemi), collapses on the night before Halloween. It falls to DJ, Chowder and Jenny (Locke) to save the local kids from being swallowed by the house while most of the adults mock them or get eaten.

The quality of the animation is high – Kenan clearly has a talent for visualising sequences and the framing of shots and the movement of the

characters is noticeably more fluid than some other animated movies, having been painstakingly recorded using motion capture techniques.

Monster House does just about enough to hold the viewer's attention, but the kids are too nauseatingly confident and too stereotypically drawn to be really engaging. Nor does it help that the film constantly reminds the viewer of other, better films – not the least of which is *The Goonies*. That's not necessarily a bad thing. I've always felt *The Goonies* was an overlooked classic but *Monster House* sometimes feels like the film version of a tribute act. *The Bootleg Goonies?*

*Monster House* is also guilty of ramping up the action too early in its running time and then attempting to maintain a one-note frenzy through to the end – it is a tone that quickly becomes too much for the audience to comfortably endure. (MMcG)

## Monster House

Director: Gil Kenan  
Writers: Dan Harmon, Rob Schrab & Pamela Pettler  
Cinematographer: Paul C Babin & Xavier Perez Grobet  
Cast: Mitchel Musso, Sam Lerner, Spencer Locke, Steve Buscemi  
Maggie Gyllenhaal, Jason Lee  
91 mins

# Whistling Dixie



**I**n CSA a British documentary on the history of America from the Civil War to the present is broadcast on an American network. The film includes the continuity announcements and advertisements and everything is familiar, except that the film is being shown in the Confederate States of America, 140 years after the South's victory.

Of course, it's not what's different that shocks but what is the same. It is when the final credits roll to reveal how much of the material presented here belongs not to an alternate reality but to our own recent past that this thought-provoking film really packs its punch. (MMcG)

## CSA: Confederate States of America

Writer/director: Kevin Willmott  
Cinematographers: Tim De Paeppe & Matt Jacobson  
89 mins

# And the rest...

**T**he *Da Vinci Code* is too long, too slow and too stupid to engage the unconverted. The source material plays directly Ron Howard's greatest weakness as a director – his tendency towards over-literal plodding – and a fine cast that includes Ian McKellen, Jean Reno and Paul Bettany are wasted while the humourless lead pairing of Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou drag everyone around them down. *The Da Vinci Code* is a film where very little happens very slowly.

Despite woeful pre-publicity, a ludicrously tight schedule imposed by the studio and the last-minute change from revered auteur Brian Singer to reviled hack Brett Ratner, *X-Men: The Last Stand* turns out to be a rather entertaining film.

Switching the characters from the worthy but dull pairing of Phoenix (Janssen) and

Cyclops (Marsden) to the sparkier Wolverine (Jackman) and Storm (Berry) works well and the plot has more twists and greater darkness than one might have expected. The arrival of *The Beast* (Grammer) and Angel (Foster) increases the visual impact of the film but the surprise is that Ratner and his inexperienced writing team succeed in delivering impressive action set pieces while retaining some of the intelligence of the earlier films.

*The Lake House* is an adaptation of a superior Korean film (*Il Mare*) about a woman who moves into a new house and starts receiving messages in the mail from the previous owner – eventually realising that the messages are travelling through time. *The Lake House* just avoids total mawkishness but neither Keanu Reeves nor Sandra Bullock sparkle and



She's just happy she didn't have to stay to the end of *The Omen*!

there's a coolness about the film that doesn't mesh with the passion we're supposed to believe they feel.

The original *The Omen* really only had one thing going for it – the fantastically creepy Oscar-winning score by Jerry

Goldsmith. Otherwise it was a preposterous hodge-podge of pseudo-biblical nonsense and hysterical over-acting. This remake imports a new cast to ham it up but the plot now makes even less sense than the original. Terrible. (MMcG)

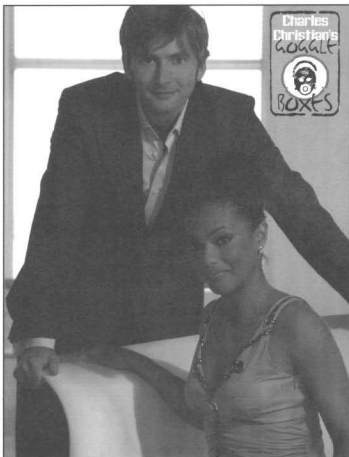
# A Rose by any other name

I'm conscious we're living in strange times when editorial and distribution deadlines mean that at the time of writing, I don't know the answer to a question that will have been answered by the time you read this, so stick with me. The question is what happens to the character of Rose Tyler (aka Billie Piper) at the end of the current series of *Doctor Who*? The goss is she is leaving – going out with a bang in the series finale during a battle with the Cybermen – so she can pursue a career in Hollywood.

This raises two important questions, namely who will take her place (see opposite for the answer to that one), and, how will the show fare without her? Or, to put it another way – who were we really rooting for: the Doctor or Rose? It will also be interesting to see whether the programme can retain its current viewing figures – *Doctor Who* having recently become the most popular TV programme for children, outstripping both *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*.

Elsewhere on BBC, the build-up (aka hype) for *Torchwood* continues. The first series cast have been named – no, I haven't heard of them either – and the 13 part series is being pitched as "a cross between *The X-Files* and *This Life*... more *Serenity*, less *Star Wars*". *Torchwood* starts on BBC3 (and presumably will be repeated on an analogue channel) in either October or November this year.

Beeb Three is a digital-only channel that can be accessed via Freeview and, as one of our readers recently pointed out, there is some good SF&F stuff starting to crop up on Freeview. Pride of place must go to Sky Three's decision to start running *Battlestar Galactica* on this channel (Thursday nights at 9:00pm). Can't find Sky Three on Freeview? Of course you can except, confusingly, it is called Sky Travel. Remaining in the *Galactica* universe, the word is the production team are working on a spin-off prequel called *Caprica*. Set about 50 years before the



David Tennant poses with Freema Agyeman, who will play the Doctor's new assistant Martha Jones in the third series of the revived *Doctor Who*

main series it will explain the background to the Cylons. And, in the US, series three of *Battlestar Galactica* will premiere on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October.

The only SF special over the past couple of months has been the BBC1 mini-series *The Triangle* (no relation to the 1981 Kate O'Mara soap on a boat of the same name) which was aired over the May bank holiday weekend. Produced by Brian Singer (*Superman Returns*) this was a Bermuda Triangle mystery in which a team of unconventional experts (oh that again) are hired by shipping billionaire Sam Neill to find out why his ships keep going missing. In the process we encountered devious government agencies, half way decent special effects and dialogue even the Radio Times described as 'rusty'. The premises

was the triangle was actually a tear in the space time fabric of the universe caused by a WWII US Navy project (the Philadelphia Project) that had gone wrong and was getting worse.

This was a nice conceit as the Philadelphia Experiment (if it ever happened – look it up on Wikipedia – there was also a 1984 movie of the same name) lies at the heart of a lot of 'black technology' conspiracy theories about government experiments with inter-dimensional portals. There are also suggestions that the current series (two) of *Lost* is exploring similar themes. With a better script this could have been a really great piece of TV. As it was, hard to sympathise with characters and some decidedly dodgy jumps in the logic of the plot rendered *The Triangle* a bit of an also-ran.



Sky One has confirmed that *Hex* will definitely not return for a third series

however there are rumours of a third *Stargate* spin-off under development with talk of the franchise also returning to the big screen.



Sky One is now in the final stages of producing a four hour mini-series based on Terry Pratchett's Discworld novel *The Hogfather* – it is due to be aired over the Xmas period.



The children's satellite channel Jetix is working on a 26-part comedy series based on Doctor Who's erstwhile canine sidekick K-9. Called *K-9 Adventures*, it will be a mixture of live action and CG animation.



The UK Sci-Fi Channel has begun running a *Babylon 5* sequel/spin off on Friday nights called *Crusade*. I found it hard to get excited about this series, not least because the CG animation has a decidedly dated feel to it – think *GameBoy* rather than TV production values. There again the only alternative is watching the *Big Brother* eviction night.



The better news for *Babylon 5* fans is that show creator JM Straczynski has announced that he is to start work on a series of hour long spin-offs featuring the B5 characters and universe. JMS will write and direct the anthology series that will be released direct to DVD by Warner Brothers. Production starts in September 2006 with a release date mid 2007.



Sky One is showing *A Town Called Eureka!* (Wednesdays at 9:00 from 2 August) a US Sci Fi Channel import featuring the strange goings on in the town of Eureka, a kind of Area 51 for the phenomenally intelligent.



Matt Groening's *Futurama* was cruelly cancelled by Fox in 2003 but the wise folks at Comedy Central have commissioned 13 new episodes. Expect to see Fry, Leela and Bender back on screens in 2008. Bite my shiny metal butt Fox!





# Attack of the clones

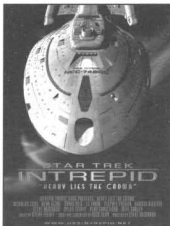
For the most part I find fan-produced films to be horrible wastes of both their time and mine.

I'm not against hobbies. I have a few myself, like blogging, but there is a line and fan films cross that line by a few parsecs. I remember my first introduction to fan films. When the *Star Wars* prequels were coming out there were too many fan films to count posting at all the various fan sites. I was a frequent peruser of those *Star Wars* sites because I wanted every spoiler I could get my geeky little hands on and almost every spoiler site had a section for *Star Wars* fan films.

For the most part they were terrible but the one thing that most of the better-made efforts got right were the special effects. They are often not bad. As long as they can be on par with or better than a 1950s B-movie, then I'm sold. I still think the original *Star Trek* series shot of the Enterprise orbiting the planet d'jour looks good, minimal yet effective, especially for 1960s technology. I am also not bothered by the camera shaking technique they employed to symbolize a direct hit by a Klingon torpedo. It works for me. Having never been sojournd on a starship built by the Federation who am I to criticize? How do we know that direct hits to the saucer section don't feel and look like that? Then again, I'm actually impressed with the special effects on the *Power Rangers* series so maybe I'm not a good critic.

Actually, I do have a discriminating eye and I can tell cheesy or sub par effects from the top of the line effects produced by ILM but story can pretty much overcome most bad effects. I still enjoy many old movies that haven't had the Lucas-style revisionist touch just fine, bad effects and all. So I can cope with the odd dodgy effects shot in a fan film - though many fan films are often technically very good, that's for sure.

As well as decent special effects, costuming is another area that fan films often do pretty well. As with the effects, geeks spend a lot of time fashioning the perfect Federation uniform or stormtrooper armour baked to perfection in his mother's oven. I mean if you and I haven't watched these movies a

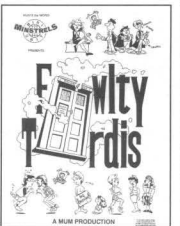


thousand times and collected all the miniatures and action figures and know every detail of every second-rate commander in the galaxy then what the hell are we even doing here, right?

And the backgrounds and sets, though not nearly as good as the costuming, can be satisfactory.

But if special effects, costuming and sets were all that made a movie work then we'd have a damn hard time coming up with Oscar winners every year. Add a dash of sex, a pinch of violence and sprinkle with bad language and you've got 75% of every year's genre movie releases.

However, there is something that separates the schlock of Hollywood from even the best of the fan films. That something is actually threefold: acting, dialogue and story. Maybe it's because that these fan films are usually made by geeks - unpaid geeks at that - that they don't have the time or the talent to think about the three most important elements in filmmaking. Every time I find myself falling into a deep depression



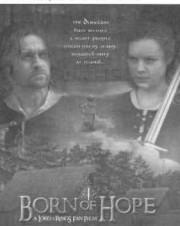
about the overall quality of the *Star Wars* prequels or the remake of one of my favourite genre books and or video games, all I have to do is watch one of these fan films to set my mind straight.

The acting is the most dismal part of fan films. You cannot get me to watch the most beautifully made film with the best cinematography and seamless effects unless your actors can speak their lines without tripping over themselves. Most of the acting in fan films is atrocious. I can watch the worst B-movie, "made for television", "Lifetime Original" or worse yet, "SciFi Channel Original" production and still walk away with a glimmer of respect for the attempt at professionalism the actors brought to the set. This is why even for bit roles the better movies hire real life, card-carrying actors.

I have to digress here to point out a glaring flaw in the *Star Wars* prequels over the originals. In the original, for the most part, George Lucas used real actors for even bit-



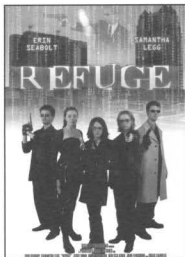
Whatever your fannish persuasion, it's probable that someone, somewhere, is making a film set in your favourite universe.



part roles. In the final battle scenes even guys who appear just long enough to give their signature and then get blown to bits were real actors. In the prequels we had battle scenes that seemed stiff because the guy who invented Photoshop gets onscreen, or George's daughter needed to be on screen telling Baby Anakin that his podrace won't run. Even in Hollywood the producers like to stick their friends on screen. It's a treat for them, but not the audience.

Anyway, the reason directors hire real professional actors is that they have training. They've been on a few sets. They can deliver a line without heaving it out there like a big fart. Some of the acting in these fan films gives a new definition for the word cardboard. They are just bad. It's not their fault, they aren't actors: they're programmers and networkers and graphic designers with a dream, a hobby and a little time on their hands. They are not actors. This is why when you go to get your car tuned up you don't ask

## Lon S Cohen has had enough of fan made films



the green grocer to do it. He's not a professional mechanic. You go to someone with some training. You might have to pay a little money but it's worth it. Ever got a haircut from someone's Mom who sat you in her kitchen chair and wrapped a towel around you?

Bowl haircuts and bad acting are two signs that a person is trying to be someone they are not. Go spend a few Yen at the Lemon Tree on a haircut. Sure the Lemon Tree is not known for its high fashion stylings but at least you've got a professional taking scissors to your head. Same thing with fan films. If it's free you might want to avoid it, or you'll be pining for those hours of time back at the end of your life.

When you hear bad dialogue you know it. You can't avoid the stiff sound, the lack of emotion, the fakiness. Spoken conversations are a key element to success in writing. If you can write believable dialogue then you've won half the battle. If you are a really good actor you can make almost anything sound good.

That's the actor's job. One of the best characters in both the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the *Star Wars* prequels was Christopher Lee. After all those years in horror B-movies he's used to spouting bad dialogue. He's a genius at it. But bad dialogue said by bad actors is doubly worse because they don't have the time or inclination to practice.

Story is the essential element in every movie. It is the story that gets a movie made in the first place. Without it you have a bunch of good-looking people standing around with cool gadgets but no idea what to do [that sounds like *Deep Space Nine*, ed.]. I have found that most of the fan films tend to deviate from the canon of the movie they are trying to emulate into geek fantasyland. It's the story they would make if they finally had the chance to write and direct an episode of *Star Trek*. For the most part they have the concepts right but they tend to throw too much into the mix. It's useful to have a good editor around not just to match up scenes but also to cut scenes when they don't work or add to the progression of the storyline. Fan films seem to try to include everything they shoot (understandable since they have little free time to re-shoot scenes or film anything that may not be used). It's just that we don't need that side trip to revisit a long lost bit character in one of the episodes just to show how geeky we really are that not only do we remember the character but we can fit him into a logical place in the plot of this universe. It's those complexities that confuse the casual fan and bore those who don't want to dig so deep into the layers of the story.

I have a friend who foists disk after disk of fan films on me. I try to watch them, I really do. Every time I hear someone rave about another fan produced film I get excited, like this will be the one that blows me away and makes me claim that the days of big budget movies are over. So far, I am not impressed.

Lon S. Cohen is a writer and podcaster living and working on Long Island, NY. His newest novel, *Erosion*, is available from [Lulu.com/lonscohen](http://Lulu.com/lonscohen) and for download at [Podiobooks.com](http://Podiobooks.com). Visit him at <http://loncside.blogspot.com>

# Fan-tastic?

Lon doesn't like them, but are all fan films really that bad? Matrix finds some of the better efforts.

### Dastoli Digital

A regular mini studio churning out good quality short films including *Southwestern Orange County Versus The Flying Saucers* (right), *Automated Assets* and *Amalgamated Metal Screw Co. of Bismark, North Dakota*. Well made, decent acting and with good jokes.

### Almost There and Back Again

This *Lord of the Rings* spoof has a group of role-playing fans setting out to walk across New Zealand. Inspired madness and pitta breads – miles better than anything by Peter Jackson.

### The Call of Cthulhu

The most faithful adaptation of a HP Lovecraft story ever made. The brilliant idea was to do the whole thing as a 1920s black and white silent movie. It fits the mood and style of the source material and avoids the most common problems with fan films – bad acting and cheap scenery. A must for any fan of this author.

### They're Made of Meat

This short film, an adaptation of a Terry Bisson story, is wonderfully atmospheric, well-acted and funny.

### Star Wars meets...

*Anakin Dynamite* is a perfect short (just two and a half minutes long), mixing the *Star Wars* prequels with cult teen comedy *Napoleon Dynamite*. The skills are strong in this one!

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the *Superlaser* – from Dastoli Digital (see above) – this short is an amusing mix of Kubrick and Lucas.

Pitching Lucas has television executives pitching ideas for a new *Star Wars* series. Each meets a familiar ending as Lucas rejects their ideas – but *George's Angels* really deserves a pilot.

*Beagle* – Snoopy and Woodstock's role in the destruction of the Death Star is given the recognition it deserves. Good grief!



### Star Trek

*Starship Exeter*: Kirk-era *Star Trek* stories with high production values and decent stories but dodgy acting. Two episodes: 'The Savage Empire' and 'The Tressaurian Intersection' have been completed.

*Star Trek: New Voyages*: The original Enterprise crew are recast in this fan production. One full episode, 'In Harms Way' (a ludicrously complex time travel story) and a short, 'Centre Seat' are available online. 'To Serve All My Days' (with Walter Koenig as Chekhov) is due soon.

● These films (except *The Call of Cthulhu*) are all online – try [www.atomfilms.com](http://www.atomfilms.com), <http://the-force.net>, [www.films.com](http://www.films.com), [www.fanfiction.com](http://www.fanfiction.com) or just hit Google.

# Objects of de

As I write the second series of the new *Doctor Who* is unrolling across our screens, and we are predictably inundated by merchandising. I'm amazed by how much product David Tennant managed to shift even before his full debut as the Doctor.

Of course *Who* has tremendous cross-generational reach. The highlight of the fiftieth birthday party of sf writer Paul McAuley in 2005 was a gift, by Kim Newman, of a quite magnificent Dalek-shaped cookie jar. None of us wrinklies, steeped in nostalgia, is immune.

Which is why I have been rooting in the debris of the first wave of *Who* merchandise, which broke during my 1960s childhood (see *Doctor Who – The Sixties*, by Howe, Stammers and Walker, 1992).

Of course, back in 1963, *Doctor Who* wasn't created to sell cookie-jars but to be an 'educational' time-travel show. All that went out the window when the Daleks made their debut appearance in the second serial, broadcast from December 1963 through January 1964. The Daleks were an immediate hit. For a six-year-old like me they were scary, but there was something comical about their child-like destructive rage. Also, they were easy to draw – and to make, as *Blue Peter* figured out very quickly.

There was an urgent demand for merchandise. This may have been an innocent age but there were precedents; 1950s hero Dan Dare had sold a mountain of secondary product, and the BBC through its 'Exploitation' department had previously developed tie-ins for programmes as diverse as *Dixon of Dock Green* and *The Flowerpot Men*. But Dalek-mania was overwhelming.

One of the first legitimate licenses was for an annual called *The Dalek Book*, now

fondly known among fans as 'The Blue Book'. Published by Souvenir Press and Panther Books and written by Dalek creator Terry Nation himself with *Who* script editor David Whitaker, the book appeared in June 1964, just five months after the first Dalek serial was aired. Unusually for a book of its kind the contents, strip stories and text, are chapters in a ten-year narrative of a Dalek invasion of the solar system beginning in the year 2400. The quality of the art and prose is variable, but there is continuity with the one TV serial shown so far, and a terrific double-page 'Anatomy of a Dalek' cutaway.

But there was a fault-line at the heart of the *Who* world. The BBC were unusually generous in that Nation had retained fifty per cent of the rights to his creation. Thus *The Dalek Book* mentions the Doctor only on the cover and in a photo-strip, which used stills from the first TV serial to tell a rather odd story of Susan

Foreman and the Daleks.

Merchandising operations were slower to get underway in those days. Even by the first *Who* Christmas, 1964, there wasn't much to ask Santa for: the annual, a few badges, a dressing-up costume, and the first novelisation, *Doctor Who in an Exciting Adventure with the Daleks*, by Whitaker.

But as 1965 opened, *Who* showed up in the comics. Again the Nation-BBC rights split was clear, for while the Doctor's adventures were chronicled in *TV Comic*, with nary a Dalek in sight, the Daleks featured in a back-page strip in *TV Century 21* (series

1 issues 1-104, January 1965–January 1967; see my article in *Vector* 224), scripted throughout its run by Whitaker. The first few serials gave us the first Dalek origin story, consistent with both the TV serials and *The Dalek Book*, but contradicted much later by the invention of Davros. I always loved the gaudy adventures of the TV21 Daleks. In the fourth

serial the beautiful organic planet Alvega is destroyed by a suicide-bomber Dalek in its core. 'What we cannot conquer, we destroy!' says the Golden Emperor. There was something guiltily magnificent in such pointless evil. The strip became known retrospectively as 'The Dalek Chronicles'. Thanks to reprints, including a 1994 single-volume edition by Marvel Comics UK, the 'Chronicles' remain familiar to the fans.

During 1965 the merchandising operation got into full swing, and by that Christmas no less than eighty-five *Who* and Dalek products had been released, including boxed games, bagatelles, 'give-a-show' projector sets, Dalek slippers and masks, and a TARDIS tie. The first sweets showed up in 1965, including a Dalek Easter egg.

And there was a series of (very non-PC) 'sweet cigarette' collectable cards. You would suck on your candy sticks, thus ruining your teeth and learning to be a smoker for a mere sixpence a box. But you would also collect and trade the cards, each with a colourful frame and a fragment of narrative.

In a series by Cavenham Confectionery of Slough in



Cookie jars for every occasion: The new *Doctor Who* has seen a merchandising bonanza



# sire

Stephen Baxter looks back on the history of merchandising in sf

their 'Cadet Sweets' range, a 50-card set contained two 25-part stories. In the first tale a rather unfamiliar-looking Doctor gets caught up in (another) invasion of a future Earth by the Daleks and their alien allies the Voords, who featured in the fifth *Who* serial 'The Keys of Marinus', also scripted by Nation and broadcast in April 1965. In the second story the Doctor is summoned to Skaro to help the Daleks defeat an out-of-control 'super machine brain'. We are clearly in the continuity established in *The Dalek Book*. On one card (no. 33) you are, rather fussily, cross-referenced to the *Book* itself. Cadet sold more than 14,000 units of these cards through to 1969.

The Voords had been among a number of aliens hopefully promoted by the BBC, but none had the impact of the Daleks. The third Dalek serial 'The Chase' (May-June 1965) introduces the Mechanoids, unwieldy, near-spherical robots intended by Nation to be a recurring

Dalek enemy. They didn't work out on TV for production reasons; at a time when studio space was restricted, the Mechanoids simply took up too much room. Script editor Dennis Spooner said of them, rather unkindly, 'Terry put them into the script because he hoped he'd make a few quick quid out of them, like he did with the Daleks ... They were just designed wrong. Terry was very unhappy about it.' Kim Newman owned a plastic Mechanoid, but now describes them as 'croaking, bloated loser Dalek rip-offs'.

The Mechanoids never reappeared on television. But they were at the heart of the two-year *TV21* Dalek comic strip, and the next Dalek annual, called *The Dalek World*, published in October 1965 and written by Nation and Whitaker, shows the Daleks rearmed to help humanity fight off a Mechanoid 'mechanical planet'. The book contains a nifty cutaway of a Dalek flying saucer.

The next Dalek annual,

*The Dalek Outer Space Book*, published in September 1966 and written by Nation with Brad Ashton, shows the origin of Special Space Security (SSS), a crack military team, which had been introduced in two more TV serials, 'Mission to the Unknown' (October 1965) and 'The Daleks' Masterplan' (November 1965-January 1966).

In 1967 T Wall & Sons, the ice cream manufacturers, produced another set of 36 story cards to go with their 'Sky Ray' lollies, in which the second Doctor battles the Daleks as they invade the planet Zaos. A neat 24-page album called *Dr Who's Space Adventure Book* went with this series, containing a cutaway of a 'Sky Ray' spaceship. For a giveaway with an ice lolly this was heavily promoted, with ads on TV and in the cinema.

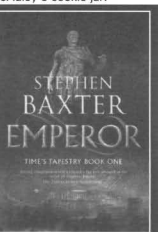
By 1967 the bubble had burst. The 'Sky Ray' set was one of only nine items of merchandise released in the Troughton era. The first Dalek craze was over,

nobody seemed interested in marketing, say, the Cybermen, and we all started buying Spectrum Pursuit Vehicles instead.

Board games, ice cream cards, gadgets powered by friction motors and springs: all this junk, dating from days before microprocessors had even been invented, must seem antediluvian to a more modern generation. But it was much loved at the time. It's easy to dismiss merchandising as cold-eyed profit-making exploitation by the Men in Suits. But at the most basic level merchandising helps pay for the production costs of shows like *Who* in the first place. The various merchandising outlets gave Nation and others the opportunity to develop ideas that defined the outlines of the *Who* franchise as it has survived to this day.

And, most importantly, merchandising supports the meta-text of supplementary stories and play that accretes around a long-lived franchise like *Who*. I'm quite sure my own young imagination was nourished by the annuals, plastic Daleks and comic strips, and my voracious collection of all those sweet cigarette cards.

And, yes, all right, I covet McAuley's cookie-jar.



Stephen Baxter's latest novel, *Emperor*, is on sale now.

"And, most importantly, merchandising supports the meta-text of supplementary stories that accretes around a long-lived franchise like *Who*." Playing with action figures is okay, official!



# The Aesthetic of the



**Tom Hunter:** Hi Chris, after hearing about your work and then seeing it on show we were really keen to talk to you so thanks for agreeing to the interview. This is a bit of a first for *Matrix* as we've talked to genre illustrators before but never a fine artist so we thought it would be good to find out how you got started and what lead you towards the form and themes you're working with now.

**Christopher Campbell:** I have painted urban scenes since I graduated from university. They are always apparently deserted. Whether they are of tube stations, airports, suburban streets, they are always painted with a sombre desolate feel to them. The style of the work is at first glance quite 'photorealistic' however when viewed in relative close proximity they retain the qualities of paint. They are not super slick, they have distinct marks that clearly identify its roots in painting.

The paintings are oil on linen and I work from my own photos, the photographs are usually pretty terrible but it doesn't matter as they are only a guide for the canvases. I only base the paintings on the photos and change things like the

colour and omit certain items from the photo. This editing process is what makes the painting interesting and not just a scaled version of the photograph, it is these careful choices that give a painting its soul.

The way I paint is based on progressive decisions. When I started out as a painter I wanted to be as photorealistic as possible, in as much as it would look like a photo, even relatively close up. I did strive for this quality, with a degree of success, but it became labored and soulless and may as well have been a photograph. I now try to create paintings that show the marks and the bumps and where the paint runs and bleeds. This for me gives the painting its unique quality. If the painting is successful it will be quite vague up close, but once stepped back from, all the painterly marks fuse to give an almost photographic appearance.

**TH:** Roughly how long will you work on a particular painting, and do you work on one at a time or multiple synchronous images?

**CC:** It really depends, the painting of Big Ben (Evacuation) took two months and it was really hard as it was so detailed, where as Journey in

Hope (a rural scene) doesn't have the same detail, but that sometimes doesn't make it any easier as you still have to try to capture a mood.

I do tend to work on one painting at a time as I get distracted with multiple paintings. I need to focus on one thing, and while I am painting it I am engrossed in it, I am memorising every aspect of the composition from the picture I am working from. My brain just can't cope with more than one!

**TH:** So what drew you to attempt a whole sequence based on Wyndham and the *Day of the Triffids* source material?

**CC:** I think that the subject matter was lying dormant in me for many years. I vaguely remember the BBC series when I was small, and being terrified, not so much by the wobbly fibre glass triffids but the notion that the world was doomed. That is pretty scary concept to a child under ten.

I have always painted misanthropic imagery and when I read the book about two years ago I was enthralled by Wyndham who describes with such great prose about the emptiness and futility of London's plight. This struck a chord with the ideas that I have painted



all these years. It was interesting that he could write such a believable disastrous London in 1951 and that it is still as frightening for today's capital.

**TH:** Were you already a fan of SF writing or was it more a case of finding a point of shared reference with this particular set of images i.e. urban disaster scenarios?

**CC:** I am not sure that I could be called a fan of sf writing. I read a lot of books about all subjects. I do like bleak subject matter, I liked reading 1984, JG Ballard's *The Drought*, and *War of the Worlds* by Wells, which are rooted in science fiction. I am currently reading Phillip K Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* and I think it is important to remember that science fiction isn't always space orientated and American imported films have probably tainted the name.

**TH:** Have you had any negative response within artistic or other circles for naming your exhibition after a 'Sci-Fi' classic?

**CC:** I have had no negative response about the choice of theme, maybe a few raised eyebrows, however I have been surprised how

# Mundane

An interview with Christopher Campbell by Tom Hunter



Christopher Campbell's work  
(from left to right)  
"The End Begins"  
Oil on linen 120x150cm  
"Frustration"  
Oil on linen 70x90cm  
"Evacuation"  
Oil on linen 150x120cm

many people haven't read the book. I have been even more shocked the amount of people who haven't heard of it!

**TH:** Have you ever been tempted to approach the work of other SF genre related authors as potential sources of inspiration? For instance you mentioned JG Ballard earlier.

**CC:** This venture of making paintings for the 'triffid' exhibition has been the first time I have linked paintings to a frame of reference, literature or otherwise. I would definitely consider other classic novels. Although I am massively inspired by Orwell's *1984* and HG Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, I think that the difference between these and Wyndham's vision is he (Wyndham) creates such a quiet disaster. This is appealing to us as it seems almost tranquil despite the peril society is in. In contrast Wells and Orwell create fearful and terrifying environments for us to endure. In reference to the Ballard question, I think that the novel *The Drought* would make interesting work to paint, as it shares the same dystopian aftermath as the wreckage of London in Wyndham's idea.

**TH:** Do you think that many modern urbanites secretly desire the chance to live in an apocalyptically depopulated city and are just waiting for the chance to recreate their own version of *The Day of the Triffids* or *28 Days Later* while they passively ride the tube to work everyday?

**CC:** I agree that people wish for a desolate barren wasteland. Perhaps they are sick of being crushed in tube trains, stuck in rush hour, made to sit on hold for hours, threatened by roaming youths. The idea comes across as serene, peaceful. In fact it would be hellish and soon result in death, but it doesn't stop the metaphor of having a city to your self being appealing somehow. In fact the desire of an abandoned London as a fantasy is no more absurd than wishing we (the average public) could go to Mars. It won't happen to us, not this century anyway.

May I just add as *28 Days Later* was mentioned, that film was okay as it was, but could have been sensational if only it had made up its mind what it wanted to be. The film once it left London to find fellow survivors turned into

a farcical horror film. That said, I have seen it at least six times.

**TH:** Speaking of leaving London, I was interested in the way that the countryside scenes in your *Triffids* sequence are equally depopulated as it seemed to mark a separation from Wyndham, who would have located his mixed band of protagonists to the country in order to begin the process of rebuilding, and I was wondering if this was a deliberate choice on your part?

**CC:** I was aware of the retreating to the country aspect of the novel and the places they set up at, but I wanted to show England as a whole pretty much wiped out. They would have been in the country in small numbers but not able to find each other. You can imagine they are in the paintings, but out of sight of the viewer (of the painting) hopefully the sprawling landscapes show the vast emptiness left by the disaster.

**TH:** And finally then, what projects are you working on now and will there be further exhibitions of *Triffids* paintings?

**CC:** I am working on dark

paintings. They are of suburbia, deserted and strange. They are having the most absurd apocalyptic skies with woodland animals having free run of the streets. For example I have just finished a painting of three horses grazing on the North circular. I suppose that this sounds odd, you'll just have to wait and see.



"A light in the night"  
Oil on linen - 45x35cm  
by Christopher Campbell  
Thank you to Christopher for allowing us to reproduce his painting on the back cover of this issue of *Matrix*.

# Holding the

The name of Charles Hoy Fort (1874-1932) should be familiar to most science fiction aficionados. Today the good name of Fort and his works has become associated with Forteanism, the study of anomalous phenomena perhaps best defined as 'humorous agnostic scepticism'. Forteanism is currently represented by a host of magazines and organisations, most notably *Fortean Times*, yet were it not for science fiction the work of Charles Fort might have disappeared without trace. For many years after his death Fort's work only survived in the pages of science fiction magazines. Fort had produced four books filled with ideas and images that provided a rich source of plots and possibilities that science fiction authors had eagerly exploited. Were it not for science fiction Fort might have disappeared from history. The question motivating this article is not so much 'what debt does sf owe Charles Fort?' as 'what debt does Charles Fort owe sf?'

## Damned data and wild talents (1920s-1930s)

Fort was born in 1874 in Albany, New York. As a boy he was a keen learner and was fascinated by natural history and taxidermy. 'I read voraciously, shot birds and stuffed them, collected stamps, classified minerals, stuck insects on pins'. He wrote to Jules Verne for his autograph. Unfortunately his wilful temperament clashed with his autocratic father and aged seventeen Fort left home on a two-year hitchhike around the world, to 'accumulate an experience and knowledge of life that would fit me to become a writer'. He returned to New York and worked as a journalist until in 1906 he abandoned his job abruptly and began the



Bust of Charles Fort by Scott Sutherland.  
Photograph © Scott Sutherland

research that would consume the rest of his life. For the next 26 years he sat in the libraries of London and New York researching all the arts and sciences, 'taking notes, reading books and going over indexes'.

Around 1915 he wrote two enigmatic manuscripts, now lost, titled *X* and *Y*. The descriptions of their theses are fascinating. 'Somewhere in space about us were forces as intelligent and as practical as ourselves [...] *X*, the hero of the book was pouring rays on the surface of this world...which controlled this human scene'. On a similar theme *Y* proposed a sinister power closer to home. 'Beyond the Arctic there is a great civilization;...for many years, guards, say in flying machines, from that civilization have been

watching our Arctic explorers, keeping out of sight, but spying, and discouraging if not openly attacking'.

However Fort was disappointed with the lack of publishing interest and destroyed the books. He returned in 1919 with his classic *The Book of the Damned*, followed by *New Lands* (1923) *Lo!* (1931) and the posthumous *Wild Talents* (1932). These books are filled with science fiction concepts: sinister civilizations, aerial continents, controlling alien powers, vampires and werewolves, teleportation, psychic warfare, alien spacecraft and a secretive 'occult police force' that prefigured the 'men in black' phenomena of the late twentieth century.

Fort also argued for extraterrestrial visitation.

'There are recorded indications that this earth has, from time to time, been visited by explorers from other worlds' he wrote in 1925. These ideas were enthusiastically taken up by the literary figures of the day, including science fiction writer Edmond Hamilton and novelist Theodore Dreiser, even if few knew whether Fort was serious or not about his fantastical theories.

A Fortean Society was founded in 1931 to promote and continue Forteanism but unfortunately under the control of its secretary, Tiffany Thayer, it descended into cranky attacks on everything from water fluoridation to air raid wardens. As one critic wrote of it, '[t]he society which was founded to carry on after Fort is snarling at air raid wardens and pursuing cheap political ends. So the prophet is without honour in his own society... and Fort's name declines in the West'.

## Far-out theories (1950s-1970s)

Fort's name continued to decline. Throughout the 1950s to the 1970s Fort disappeared from the literary and public eye and his reputation dwindled until he was an established 'crank'.

However, his work and name persisted in the world of science fiction. Fort's work was an active and inspiring force as sf writers enthusiastically picked up his startling theses and dark speculations. Unfortunately there is no consensus on just how influential Fort was. Sam Moskowitz said that 'Fort projected a multitude of far-out theories and notions, a few of which had not been previously used in science fiction'. Damon Knight, on the other hand, was much less reserved. Fort's influence on science fiction, he said, was 'incalculable; his ideas have

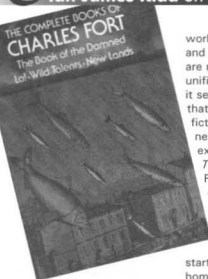


# Fort

Ian James Kidd on how sf preserved the name of Charles Fort

diffused so widely that compiling a list of examples would be a hopeless task'. Another commentator had similarly remarked as early as 1952 that 'it was recently proposed to form a club that would be called, "Writers Who Have Stolen Plots From Charles Fort" but said the idea was abandoned "when it was realised that such a group would include virtually every modern writer in the imaginative field". This might be exaggeration but certainly some science fiction writers were inspired by Fort. Most notably, Eric Frank Russell's *Sinister Barrier* was inspired by Fort's famous line, 'I think we're property' and Russell once commented that *Barrier* was 'a posthumous collaboration'. I leave the bibliographic mission of defining Fort's influence amongst of writers to others, but it is clearly significant.

Fort's ideas continued to inspire, alarm, fascinate and entertain – which is probably just what he intended. This is important since Fort's writings could simply have been trawled for plots and ideas while the man himself was forgotten. Fortunately, however, his idiosyncratic style of writing and thought made the reader take note. 'Throw a paragraph of it into any company and stand well back' exclaimed one admirer, who considered that 'it is manifestly impossible to read [Fort] without being excited to something very like original thinking'. Arthur C Clarke honoured Fort with an entire chapter of his *Astounding Days*, remarking that he found 'his eccentric – even explosive – style stimulating and indeed mind-expanding'. This captures the point exactly. Fort's ultimate purpose was not to prove that telepathation exists or that the 'priestcraft of science' is suppressing data of anomalous phenomena –



that's all by the by: what Fort really wanted was to stimulate independent thought. His mantra was: 'I offer the data. Suit yourself'.

Some thought his style let him down on this count. John W Campbell, editor of *Astounding Stories*, thought Fort was offering some powerful truths but that he failed to present them coherently. 'If you have something to say, it's up to you to say it right.... Fort couldn't'. However there were some who saw beneath the damned data and startling ideas something deeper and more important. Forteanism's time had come.

## Forteanism – skyward hol (1970s onwards)

These days Fort is only really known for his studies of anomalous phenomena and it seems strange to think it was ever otherwise. A whole swath of phenomena – falls of frogs, spontaneous human combustion, bodily elongation and levitation, unusual lights and sounds in the earth and sky – are termed 'Fortean' phenomena. These are the subject matter of the excellent magazine *Fortean Times* which is doing a fine job of keeping Fort and his

work alive. However Fort and anomalous phenomena are now so inextricably unified in Forteanism that it seems strange to think that were it not for science fiction, Forteanism might never have arose. The existence of *Fortean Times* (and by implication Forteanism) might well owe its existence to the persistence of Fort's name in science fiction works. There are two stories to tell here and I start with the one closest to home.

Bob Rickard, who founded *Fortean Times* in 1973, wrote that he had heard of Fort for years before he ever read his books. 'Years of reading science fiction had thrown-up the occasional mention of Fort and his weird ideas'. It was only at a science fiction convention in the late seventies Rickard came across copies of Fort's four books. 'I read them at one sitting and all my interests fell into place'. So impressed was Rickard with Fort and his intelligent and humorous interplay of science, anomalies and surreal speculation that he decided to do something about it.

Now Rickard was not starting from scratch. There was already the International Fortean Organisation (INFO) in the United States,

founded in 1965 and directly inspired by an article by Sam Moskowitz in *Amazing Stories* the year before. Rickard contacted INFO and in 1973 founded *The News* – a small newsletter typed and stapled together in a small flat in Birmingham. Within a few years this erstwhile bulletin had expanded and was renamed *Fortean Times*. The magazine has gone from strength to strength and recently celebrated its two hundredth edition whilst INFO is still alive and kicking and holds its regular 'Fortfest' conference. Yet it seems strange to think that for almost thirty years the work of Charles Fort survived only in offhand mentions in the pages of science fiction stories and novels. Ironically, many of Fort's contemporaries – and others like Campbell – thought that his wild style and unconventional subject-matter – memorably described as 'half-journalistic, half-apocalyptic' – meant no-one would read him and that his work would disappear into literary oblivion. The truth is quite the opposite. If Fort had written of irregularities in the sciences in a conventionally sober academic style, his works may have made no particular impact. Forteanism would never have existed, and science fiction would doubtless have been far less rich than it is.

Fort was not always a paranormal icon. In his lifetime he was an eccentric literary phenomena and iconoclast who inspired and enthused. After his death he disappeared into the pages of *Amazing Stories* and *Unknown* and there he languished until he was rediscovered by a man from Birmingham and resurrected in Forteanism. Were it not for science fiction, Fort's name – and the idea of Forteanism – might today be nothing at all.



# A most peculiar Voyage

**A** *Voyage to Arcturus*, first published in 1920, is usually classified as science fiction because, well, there's nowhere else to put it and it *does* have a spaceship and another world in it. It is certainly one of English fiction's most indescribable works, somewhere between Cyrano de Bergerac and CS Lewis in the way it uses a science-fictional "voyage to another planet" to express satirical or philosophical questions. But Lindsay's visionary descriptions are very different from Cyrano's humorous exaggerations, while his neo-Platonism is very different from Lewis's Christianity, much as Lewis (whose *Out of the Silent Planet* was influenced by *Voyage*) admired Lindsay.

A society séance is interrupted by the arrival of two strangers, Maskull and Nightspore, followed soon afterwards by the enigmatic and truculent Krag. Krag offers Maskull a chance to understand the nature of the apparition which has appeared, by means of travelling to Tormance, a world orbiting the star Arcturus. Once on the planet, Maskull, abandoned by his companions, has to make his own personal quest through a series of alternatives which leave him bewildered and sometimes approaching despair.

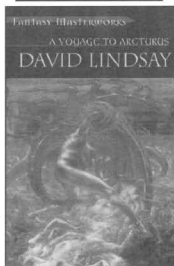
Like ER Eddison's "Zimiamvia" sequence, *A Voyage to Arcturus* is an exploration of philosophies of existence. Maskull's adventures are among a series of individuals and locations which suggest that existence is more than the "real" world as we know it. But what is the "real" reality? Love? Sex? Will? Duty? Who is "Surtur", aka Shaping or Crystalman? God or the Devil? Some of the symbolism is obvious; some – the pounding drumbats Maskull hears on several occasions – is even explained. But other aspects

are stranger. What is the relationship between Maskull and Nightspore, who are clearly linked as Everyman and (perhaps) his dark side? What are all these apparently symbolic names? Perhaps it's best to let such questions remain romantically enigmatic and to revel in Lindsay's wonderful capacity for invention. As Maskull progresses towards his own tragedy, leaving a trail of blood and betrayal behind him, he has quite literally seen the world in different ways. Lindsay plays no half-measures here in creating philosophical fictions: Maskull develops new senses, sees new colours. Much of the action and dialogue has that vivid but unsettling character of dream.

In *A Voyage to Arcturus* there are echoes of that not altogether ignoble dissatisfaction with the mundane in the 20s and 30s of the last century which became perverted into fascism's obsession with the superhuman and the *Will* but Lindsay is working neither within the political nor the mythic currents of romantic fascism. Salvation is not secular. There's also that desperation about identity and the search for meaning in an apparently meaningless world which more modern sf readers are familiar with through the novels of Philip K Dick. John Clute, introducing The University of Nebraska Press reprint (2002) locates the novel as one of those works of art which are haunted by collective deadfulness: in this case, as with Tolkien, Lewis and other British writers of the fantastic, the First World War. These fantasy writers "refused the world. In these writers there can be heard a 'No!' in thunder against the course of history."

Lindsay, in this reading, is, despite his extraterrestrial world and his space-travel, one of the great fantasy writers rather than a

**FOUNDATION**  
*fantasies*  
by Andy Sawyer  
NUMBER TWENTY ONE: *A Voyage to Arcturus* by David Lindsay



scientific-romancer groping towards hard science fiction. There is little of Wells in him, for instance. Wells describes the Moon as Bedford and Cavor see it in *concrete* terms. Not a place which *could* exist, it is a place which *could have existed* if the cosmology available to Wells had been true. It fits the facts as Wells knew them. Tormance is vivid, but unreal. Yet Lindsay's space-travel and his setting on another world calls us to read his novel as science fiction even when it so clearly *isn't* your average gosh-wow skiffy and it's this slippery instability which makes it so interesting. It's a novel which is impossible to pigeon-hole, which creates its own form even as we read it, and which makes us realize how predictable most attempts to describe the alien are...

Oddly, in 2002, two editions of *Voyage* appeared. Savoy Books' edition is part of a series of "maverick" books whose

genre classification is probably "Unclassifiable". In contrast with the relatively monochrome Bison Books edition, it is a gold-leafed hardback adorned with a jacket showing fiery figures which turn out to be paintings by the Belgian Symbolist Jean Delville. It's a fittingly beautiful book. Including Lindsay's shamanistic, apocalyptic qualities, while the volume also contains a reprint of Colin Wilson's study "The Haunted Man: the Strange Genius of David Lindsay" (previously published by Borgo Press) in which he discusses not only *Arcturus* but Lindsay's subsequent novels in which the flaws of his first novel are less overshadowed by his mighty imagination.

Lindsay, says Wilson, "misunderstood his talents when he decided to become a novelist". In other words, no-one, probably not Lindsay himself, can be said to have the "correct" handle on David Lindsay and *A Voyage to Arcturus*, a book which sold poorly in the author's lifetime, yet which some people still insist is one of the great works of the twentieth century. Wilson's introduction is worth reading for the description of his own "What the hell is this?" experience which many of us experience when coming to Lindsay for the first time. Wilson also provides an afterword to the book in which he gives more information about Lindsay's life: a sad decline into literary sterility and ill-health. His publisher made him cut 15,000 words from *Arcturus*. What we would give for those lost words to be found!

*A longer and substantially different version of this piece was published in The Alien Online website in October 2002.*

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 (sawyer@liverpool.ac.uk). Science Fiction Foundation Collection: [www.sffoundation.org](http://www.sffoundation.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.



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# matrix

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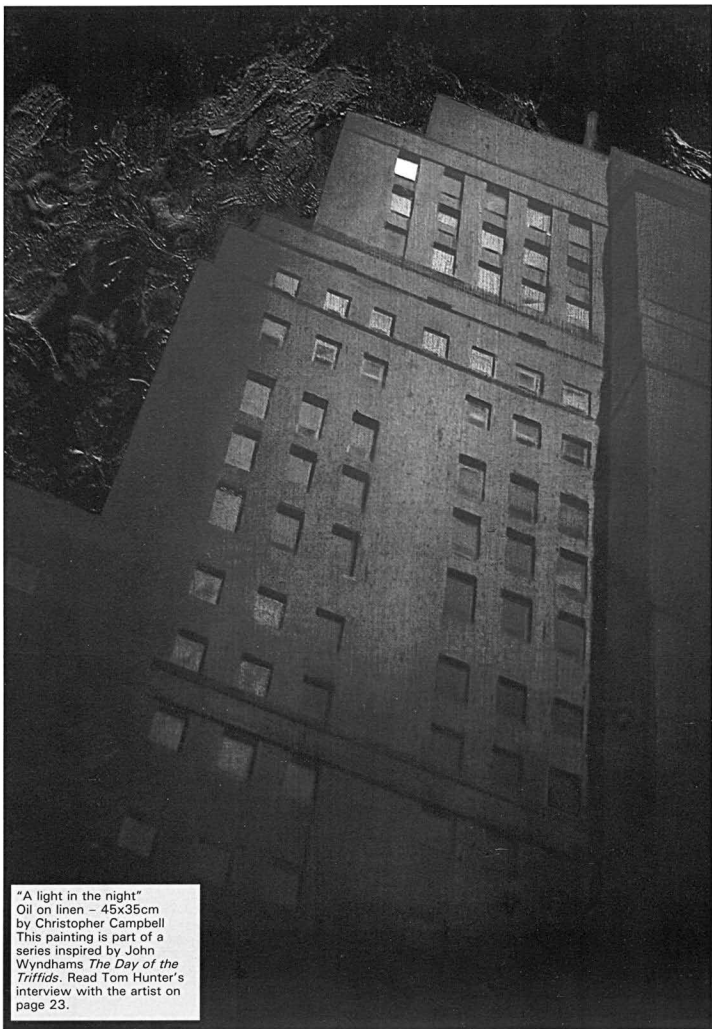
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notification of contest results.



"A light in the night"

Oil on linen - 45x35cm

by Christopher Campbell

This painting is part of a series inspired by John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*. Read Tom Hunter's interview with the artist on page 23.