

# matrix

the media magazine of the british science fiction association

£2.25

186

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## STARDUST SHINES?

ALSO IN THIS EDITION:

**GEORGE MANN OF SOLARIS**

**LOU ANDERS**

**MICHAEL MOORCOCK**

**ALAN MOORE**

**IAIN SINCLAIR**

**RESIDENT EVIL**

**"WHEN ZOMBIE MOVIES ATTACK!"**

**THE INVASION**

**'BE AFRAID. BE VERY AFRAID.'**

**THE CROW**

**'CRIES OF A CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK'**

# In this issue

George Mann & Lou Anders

Two interviews with two friends, one British, one American, both in the industry and both passionate about science fiction

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# matrix

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ISSN 0143-7900

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## British Science Fiction Association Ltd

Registered in England and Wales. Company No. 921500  
Registered address: 61 Ivycroft Road, Warton, Tamworth, Staffordshire, B79 0JJ

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# Come On Over to the Dark Side

Is it just us or is this latest edition of Matrix infused with a new level of darkness? Pure coincidence we can assure you, and in spite of our more nocturnal leanings. For your malevolent viewing pleasure then, issue 186 features grit-tastic movie reviews for *Grindhouse*, *The Invasion*, *Black Sheep*, *The Seeker: The Dark is Rising*, *30 Days of Night* and *Resident Evil: Extinction*, a fresh digging over of the soundtrack to *The Crow*, and, scariest of all, a close up photo of Matrix's new despot...we mean editor...Ian Whates (see opposite).

It's just as well we have a blinding review of *Stardust* to light the way...

Kim & Del Lakin-Smith, Matrix Co-Editors



# 50 YEARS AND COUNTING

With the BSFA approaching its 50th birthday, *Matrix's* new editor, Ian Whates, is in the mood for celebration and looking to the future.

**O**kay, let's get one thing straight: I'm a writer.

I wanted to put that down on paper to remind myself as much as anything else. You see, over the past year or so I seem to have stumbled into so many things associated with writing that are not actually writing that it's easy to forget at times.

First there was the editing of short stories, then the publishing of anthologies, and now the editing of a magazine. That last is easy enough to explain; I mean, we're not talking just any magazine here, we're talking a British Science Fiction Association magazine, *Matrix*, and these are such exciting times for the BSFA that how could anyone resist the temptation to be involved?

Why are these exciting times? Well, apart from anything else, next year sees the BSFA reach the distinguished age of 50, which is pretty impressive when you think about it.

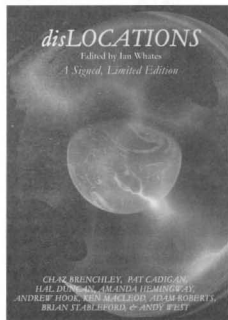
So 2008 is going to be a big year for the BSFA. We're going to be looking back at the past 50 years but just as importantly, looking forward to the next 50.

This 'looking forward' will involve some significant changes. You may have noticed that these have already begun. For example, the website has been overhauled and revamped. The site continues to develop and is intended to become a far more dynamic centre, an online home for the BSFA and its activities.

Another change that has already occurred involves this very magazine.

Having done such a magnificent job with *Matrix* in recent years, the editorial team of Tom Hunter and Claire Weaver have stepped down to concentrate on new ventures (sound of galloping hooves as a trail of dust disappears towards the horizon). This has left the responsibility for building on Tom and Claire's achievements to a brand new team: us. So we might as well take this opportunity to introduce ourselves.

I am Ian Whates, writer, editor and publisher of the speculative fiction anthologies *Time Pieces* and *disLOCATIONS* via NewCon Press, which I founded in 2006 ([www.newconpress.com](http://www.newconpress.com)). Assisting me will be the dynamic duo of Del and Kim Lakin-Smith, whose work will already have been seen by anyone visiting the BSFA website. Del is a technical whiz, whilst Kim is a designer and author, whose debut novel, the richly Gothic *Tourniquet*, was published earlier this year ([www.kimlakin-smith.com](http://www.kimlakin-smith.com)).



What other plans are afoot? For many of them, I'm afraid it's too early to say much, but I can reveal that there is going to be an anthology of original short stories to commemorate 50 years of the BSFA. Provisionally entitled *Celebration*, the book will feature a line-up of authors to die for, and is set for a launch at next year's Eastercon. There will also be a short story competition for new writers, with a cash prize and professional publication for the winning entry.

**'From now on, *Matrix* is going to be far more reactive and interactive than it has ever been before.'**

But perhaps the most significant development in many ways will again be here, with this magazine. Hang on to the copy you are now holding – it could become a collectors' item! This, #186, will be the very final *Matrix* to be published as hard copy. Whilst our sister publications, *Vector* and *Focus*, will continue as print magazines, *Matrix* will be moving to an online format as of 2008.

There are many reasons for this, but principal amongst them is the increased flexibility the new format will give us, particularly with regard to news items and developing situations and events within the SF community. Due to the speed with which the world moves these days, it has not been unknown for the odd news item to be overtaken by events, to in effect be 'old news' by the time it appears in print. From now on, *Matrix* is going to be far more reactive and interactive than it has ever been before.

As your new editorial team, Kim, Del and I are all excited by the possibilities of the new format and can't wait for the launch of *Matrix Online*. We trust that you, the readers, will feel the same way, and look forward to your company on what promises to be one heck of an adventure.

Here's to the next 50 years!

Ian Whates  
Editor of *Matrix Magazine*



**'Why are these exciting times? Well, apart from anything else, next year sees the BSFA reach the distinguished age of 50, which is pretty impressive when you think about it.'**

Joss Whedon is making his return to network television with an original drama series, *Dollhouse*. The series, which will reunite Whedon with former *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* co-star Eliza Dushku (who will star in and produce *Dollhouse*), has received a seven episode commitment from FOX.

Jennifer Connelly and Kathy Bates are in negotiations to join Keanu Reeves in the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Scott Derrickson, who spooked audiences with *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, will direct the remake.

Just in time for Christmas, Johnny Depp and Tim Burton join forces again in a big-screen adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's award-winning musical thriller *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Depp stars in the title role as a man unjustly sent to prison who vows revenge, not only for that cruel punishment, but for the devastating consequences of what happened to his wife and daughter. When he returns to reopen his barber shop, Sweeney Todd becomes the Demon Barber of Fleet Street who "shaved the faces of gentlemen who never thereafter were heard of again."

Singer Alanis Morissette has joined the cast of *Radio Free Albemuth*, based on a book by sci-fi writer Philip K Dick. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, the Canadian star will play Sylvia, a woman with cancer who appears in the visions of a record label executive. Based on Dick's semi-autobiographical 1976 novel, published posthumously in 1985, the low-budget film is written and directed by John Alan Simon.

## Move Over Dr. – There's a New(ish) Girl in Town!



The BBC seem determined to come to the aid of those Dr. Who fans who are suffering for lack of their weekly fix. Not only have they just released, via BBC Audiobooks, three classic *Dr. Who* adventures – *The Curse of Peladon*, *The Dinosaur Invasion* and *The Giant Robot* (the last read by Bob Baker, no less) – but they have also brought *The Adventures of Sarah Jane* to our screens. Although clearly aimed at a younger audience, this series features many of the same elements as *Dr. Who* itself (not to mention a few of the same villains) and has proved eminently watchable for all ages, primarily due to the performance of its ever-green star, Elisabeth Sladen.

Ms. Sladen first played Sarah Jane to the late Jon Pertwee's Dr. way back in 1973, a fact that seems incredible when watching her today, as the 200-odd people who attended a recent signing event at Borders in London would undoubtedly testify. The signing was to promote the release of two exclusive 'Sarah Jane' audio books, read by Elisabeth herself. The books, *The Glittering Storm* and *The Thirteenth Stone*, are available for a modest £3.60 each from the usual outlets and also from the BBC themselves at [www.bbcaudiozone.com](http://www.bbcaudiozone.com).

## Science Fiction at Fantasycon?

The ever-convivial Pete Crowther did a consummate job as MC of this year's Fantasycon in Nottingham, even going so far as to welcome the fact that the dreaded 'Science Fiction' had reared its ugly head in the British Fantasy Awards shortlists. Ian McDonald's Hugo-winning *The Djinn's Wife* and Sarah Singleton's *The Disappeared* (from the NewCon Press anthology *Time Pieces*), both featured on the six-strong list for best short fiction.

Pete also used the event to launch several new titles via his (not so) small press publishing house, PS Publishing. These seem to mark a conscious return to the novella format which PS was originally founded on, as witness Eric Brown's *Starship Summer* – a handsome volume which features a wonderfully retro cover by the intriguingly named Tomislav Tikulin.

Nick Gevers, Pete's collaborator at PS, describes *Starship Summer* as: "A grand old-fashioned space opera, the story of ill-assorted and often melancholy exiles on a colony planet discovering a lost alien spaceship, the secrets of which will revolutionise the lives of humankind." He then adds, "All Eric Brown's trademarks are here: the far-future interstellar expansion, with its sad abandonment of obsolete space-faring technologies, stark romanticism, and quests that may shatter lives and worlds."

Sounds good enough to read!



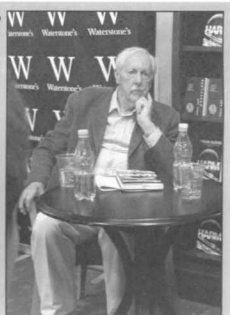
## Looking Forward in Anger

It used to be that anger was most frequently associated with the young – 'Angry Young Men', rebelling against the system and the strictures of their parents – but these days things seem to have changed. Often as not, it is those at the opposite end of the age spectrum who feel disgruntled, as witness the recent glut of 'Grumpy Old Something-or-other' TV programs.

Further evidence of this role reversal was provided recently at Waterstones in Gower Street, London, where celebrated author Brian Aldiss (OBE) was interviewed by John Clute. Brian, who has perhaps strayed beyond the first flush of youth, was there to read from his latest novel, *Harm*. The book's release marks more than fifty years in the industry for one of Britain's most enduringly successful genre authors. During

conversation with John, Brian spoke of the motivation behind *Harm*, which proved to be primarily anger. Anger at what our society, our world is turning into. From the extracts chosen, *Harm* promises to be a rewarding, if at times disturbing, read. Brian further treated those packed into the intimate room to various anecdotes, revealing why he will never be Robert Heinlein's greatest fan and sharing with us the secret of how Agatha Christie produced those surprise endings with such remarkable consistency, as explained to him by the lady herself.

*Harm*, by Brian Aldiss, is published in the UK by 'Duckworth' and is available to buy now.



# And The Third Alternative Is...

2007 has proved to be a big year for Andy Cox and TTA Press. April saw them celebrating the 25th anniversary of *Interzone*, 'Britain's premier science fiction magazine', marking the occasion with the release of #209. Said issue featured a bumper crop of stories from many of the authors who have helped to establish the magazine's reputation over the years, alongside a couple from some newer arrivals.

TTA Press took over the helm of *Interzone* from David Pringle in 2005. That same year saw the final issue of *The Third Alternative*, formerly TTA's flagship publication and, indeed, the source of the business' very name. But in September, the long wait was over, and after more than two years of painstaking development, *The Third Alternative's* successor, *Black Static*, emerged like a butterfly from its chrysalis... although, looking at the striking cover image, that is perhaps the wrong insect to refer to here.

Andy Cox explains that the change of name is designed to emphasise a deliberate shift towards the dark side – an element always present in TTA – leaving potential readers in no doubt as to what to expect. He adds, 'The magazine has much more of 'concept' running through it than TTA did, conveyed mostly by David Gentry's artwork. In #1 the whole 'black static' thing is reflected, but each issue will be different. In fact, the art throughout each issue kind of tells a story of its own. It also means we can have a bit of fun, break the rules, hence the total lack of a masthead on the first issue.'

As if two significant events aren't enough for one year, or perhaps to reflect their name, TTA Press managed a third in 2007 with the unveiling of their review title, *The Fix*, in its new online format. Under the expert stewardship of fast-emerging writer, Eugie Foster, *The Fix* provides in-depth reviews of short fiction from the full spectrum of magazines, webzines, anthologies, and single-author collections. It also offers feature articles, exclusive interviews, and regular columns on writing, audiobooks, podcasts, and short film. Phew! When does Eugie find the time to actually write anything?

The Fix is here: [www.thefix-online.com/](http://www.thefix-online.com/)  
and TTA Press are at: [www.ttopress.com/](http://www.ttopress.com/)



## Space: The Weirdest Frontier

In an age when everyone seems determined to leap through convoluted semantic hoops in an effort to convince us that their work has nothing whatsoever to do with science fiction, it's refreshing to find someone bucking the trend.

Nobody could accuse Spanish rock band Space Weirdo of hiding their SF credentials under a bushel. Their latest album is *Automata* – described as 'the life and times of James Mk II, the world's first and only Class J programmable-by-experience domestic robot'. Tracks include Ad Astra, First Contact, Planck's Constant, and Tik Tok, which even pinches (with permission) some lyrics from the famous John Sladek novel of the same name.

With the support of such SF heavyweights as Dave Langford of Ansible fame, how can they fail? Well, presumably if nobody listens to their music they might.

Further information and sound samples can be found at their website: [www.spaceweirdo.com](http://www.spaceweirdo.com).



## Sci-Fi London.TV



Conscious that not everyone can get to their annual sci-fi and

fantasy film festival (though all who can should – it's well worth the trip), the canny organisers of Sci-Fi London have come up with Sci-Fi London.TV.

As well as featuring an extensive collection of shorts, features and documentaries, many of which have previously appeared at the festival, the webTV station also boasts a growing amount of original content, including filmed conversations with the likes of William Gibson, Douglas Coupland, Neil Gaiman and Suzanna Clarke.

Intended to compliment the existing news and reviews site, Sci-Fi London.com, Sci-Fi London.TV also has one other major plus point: access to all of its content is completely free.

## Novacon: A 'Stress Western'...

Sorry, we mean Novacon: Stress and Weston.

The organisers of this year's Novacon were clearly determined to get their money's worth from Guest of Honour Charles Stross, subjecting him to both an interview and a speech in addition to several panel items. Thankfully, in Charles they had a GofH who is rarely at a loss for words. Authors Geoff Ryman, Ian Watson, Eric Brown and Andy Remic, not to mention such Matrix regulars as James Bacon and Andy Sawyer, also contributed to what proved a varied and entertaining program. Even so, it struggled to compete with the annual contest of 'Can We Drink the Bar Dry of Black Sheep?' On this occasion, attendees undeniably won, with the flow of ale dribbling to a halt shortly after midnight on Saturday.

The event's more formal competition, the Nova Awards, proved a memorable occasion for Peter Weston. His winning

'best fanzine' with the excellent retrospective *Prolapse* was perhaps predictable, even to the man himself, but his being awarded a second, special Nova for outstanding contribution to fandom clearly was not. This announcement produced the loudest cheer of the weekend. Other Nova winners included Alison Scott for best fan artist and Mark Plummer for best fan writer. The latter means that Mark and Claire are going to have to find even more space on their award-laden mantelpiece!



The 'New Optimism in British SF' panel - Eric Brown, Ian Watson, Catherine Pickersgill (moderator) and Charlie Stross

# RESONANCES

Stephen Baxter explores a rich tapestry of historical and religious allegiance in Moorish Spain

In *Navigator*, the third book of my *Time's Tapestry* series (Gollancz, July 2007) I've taken the chance to explore Moorish Spain, a place and time that has fascinated me since a visit to Spain in my early twenties. It seems remarkable now, but from the seventh century a Muslim culture flowered in western Europe; at its height al-Andalus was the most advanced civilisation anywhere west of Constantinople.

But in January 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella, still remembered in Spain as 'the Catholic monarchs', completed their defeat of the kingdom of Granada, the last vestige of the Islamic empire. And as the keys to the city were handed over to the Christian conquerors, Christopher Columbus was on hand to witness it. Columbus had followed the royal court to seek patronage for his spectacular voyage to come later in the year. It was an extraordinary moment: both the nascent birth of a new era of exploration, and a pivotal event in the relationship between Islam and Christianity, a relationship that remains fraught to this day.

And it is a relationship full of what-ifs.

The great expansion of Islam began within a generation of the death of Muhammad. Arab armies took Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, swept through the old Roman provinces of North Africa, and stormed across the Pillars of Hercules and through the Christian Gothic kingdom of Spain. United by faith, tribal cohesion, good leadership and tactical flexibility, they achieved a conquest matched in extent only by Alexander's, and whose achievements were more long-lasting; today all these domains remain Muslim, save only

Spain and Portugal.

But, in the greatest what-if of the whole Islamic era, they might have gone even further.

In 732 AD the Muslim armies crossed the Pyrenees to attack Septimania, a Gothic domain within Gaul. Soon, under an able general called abd al-Rahman, all the cities of the Mediterranean coast of Gaul were in Muslim hands. Fifteen thousand men drove forward, thrusting deep into the belly of Gaul. The Muslims saw this as a first footstep in the 'Great Land', as they called it, western Europe. Perhaps they could go further – perhaps they could advance all the way to Constantinople.

Al-Rahman got to within two hundred miles of Paris, to a place called Poitiers. And there, on the Roman road north of the town, al-Rahman faced the army of the Frankish king, Charles, who became known as 'the Hammer', Charles Martel, to posterity. The two forces were well matched that October day, but it was Charles's men who held their ground, and abd al-Rahman was killed.

It was a crucial day in all our histories. The Moors had come a thousand miles north from the strait to Africa. Now at last they had been turned back. Less than a century later Charles' grandson Charlemagne was mounting expeditions the other way across the Pyrenees.

Bede in far-off Jarrow knew the significance of the event. After all it need not have been so; the battle of Poitiers, obviously a close-run thing, could have gone either way. What if it had been Charles who had fallen? The Franks, demoralised by defeat and convulsed by a succession dispute, could have offered the Moors little further resistance. The Moorish expansion across Gaul and then Germany might have been like the story of their conquest of Spain – if anything more dramatic. As for England, the Baghdad caliphate had long been a great naval power in the Mediterranean; the Channel would have offered the Moors no resistance. In his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788), Edward Gibbon opined that following an Arab victory at Poitiers, 'Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might

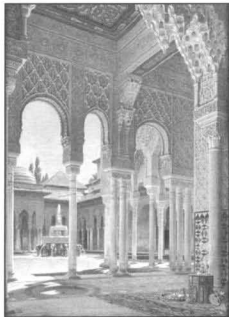
demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet.'

Poitiers was a hinge point in L Sprague de Camp's early and very influential alt-hist classic 'The Wheels of If' (Unknown, 1940). The Moors win at Poitiers, and a century earlier the Northumbrian King Oswiu adheres to Celtic Christianity rather than accept the authority of the Pope in Rome, as in our history. As a result the Latin south is weakened, and by the twentieth century Europe is dominated by an English-Scandinavian empire in the north, a surviving Byzantium in the east, and a Moorish empire that includes southern France. 'If', an alternate history spun out by the Synod of Whitley, is an example of the sheer intellectual quality of the American pulp magazines at their best. (A recent essay covering Poitiers is by Barry S Strauss in *What If?* (Putnam's, 1999).)

Poitiers was lost and a Moorish Europe was not to be. But in their heyday the Moors in Spain built a civilisation without compare in the western world. The Arabs had inherited all the intellectual riches of Persia, of Greece and Rome, Europe's own antiquity, most of it lost in the west. But Christians and Muslims managed to get along in those remote centuries no better than they do today.

There seems no reason why two religions which share such deep common roots should have come into conflict at all. In Islam Jesus is regarded, if not as the Son of God, as a great prophet. His life a revelation of peace and compassion. It is said that in the seventh century, when Mecca fell to Islam, Muhammad ordered the destruction of all idols and icons – but he spared one, a fresco painted on the Kabah, the old shrine at the centre of the city. It was a portrait of Mary and the infant Jesus which the Prophet saved by covering it with his cloak. So there was a basis, perhaps, on which Islam and its two great monotheistic predecessors, Christianity and Judaism, could have coexisted peacefully. But it wasn't to be.

Christians were always officially tolerated in al-Andalus, as they were 'People of the Book', like the Jews. But as early as the ninth century the so-called Martyrs of Cordoba, fifty or so, deliberately challenged the authorities and



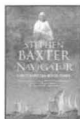
'Anybody who thinks that history doesn't matter, or indeed that alternate histories are futile speculations, need only glance at the history of relations between Christianity and Islam.'

insulted Islam. In the end they won what they had wanted: martyrdom. Such self-sacrificing idealists were trained by rogue clerics and the extreme preaching of hate, and the isolated Christians' only weapon was their own lives. Asymmetric warfare waged through suicide – sounds familiar?

After 1492 intolerance towards the remnant Muslim population in Christian Spain gradually grew, until they were banished altogether from Spain by 1614. But if the people had gone, the heritage of their vanished nation had shaped the future. It was through al-Andalus that Aristotle's thinking and Arabic mathematics reached the west and catalysed the intellectual revolution that would one day lead to Newton; it was through al-Andalus that devices such as the astrolabe made possible western voyages of discovery. It was an Islamic state that provided western Europe with a bridge to its own past, and reshaped it for good.

Anybody who thinks that history doesn't matter, or indeed that alternate histories are futile speculations, need only glance at the history of relations between Christianity and Islam. President Bush, in a speech about the modern west's invasions of Islamic countries, managed to use the word 'crusade'. And though Granada fell to the Catholic monarchs over five hundred years ago, Ayman al-Zawahiri, number two in al-Qaida, recently pledged that every piece of Waqf – that is, territory claimed under the first Islamic expansion – will be retaken from Spain to Iraq. Those of us who would prefer peace may have a few more centuries to wait yet.

When I visited Spain in 2006 to research my book, I found controversy and tension over the past today, for instance over proposals to build a mosque in Granada – the first for five hundred years. But under all the ideological division a deeper integration lingers; after a cohabitation of eight centuries it must be so, and the Moorish legacy is embedded in the very language. The only Spanish word that most people know – Ole! – is derived from 'Allah'.



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

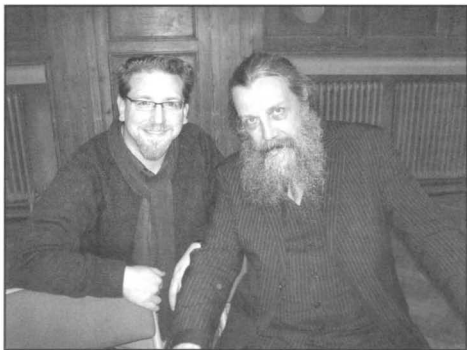
'...at its height al-Andalus was the most advanced civilisation anywhere west of Constantinople.'



The Alhambra is a Moorish citadel and palace in Granada. It is one of the most famous items of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian historical legacy.

# Gentlemen of Manners

James Bacon enjoys an insightful evening in the company of three of Science Fiction's most charming men.



**'Mr Moore revealed that he is currently working on a novel set in Northampton, a city which he feels shares many of London's characteristics, although perhaps not it's more famed links to insanity.'**

wonderful venue. The wine flowed freely, ensuring that everyone was relaxed and complementing the anticipation in the air. After welcoming everyone, Iain Sinclair talked about the cultural memory loss, not to mention physical losses, that have occurred in the City of London. To set the tone for the evening, the audience were then treated to a captivating performance by Kirsten Norrie. Her haunting, angelic vocals were supplemented by a small amount of tech to create a wonderful looping effect that reverberated to the rafters. This was followed by a memorable reading from poet Brian Catling, capturing very poignantly the futile nature of certain types of urban life. The much-anticipated discussion then followed, with Iain Sinclair going in turn from Michael Moorcock to Alan Moore, initially asking each to explain their interpretation of the many ways in which they perceived London to have altered. As a relative newcomer to this wonderful city, I found it interesting to discover that both yearned to a degree for London's past and were disappointed with certain changes that had occurred. It was fascinating to hear Mr. Moore

London Lip was an evening to celebrate the paperback release of the proven and well-received *London: City of Disappearances*. This anthology with over fifty contributors brings together an eclectic and enigmatic selection of literary genius' all edited quite beautifully by novelist and psycho-geographer Iain Sinclair. Mr. Sinclair had Michael Moorcock and Alan Moore along, both contributors to the anthology, for a full evening of discussion and entertainment.

The event was attended by over 250 people and was held in the austere surroundings of The Bishopsgate Institute's Great Hall – a





**'I came away from this pleasurable evening feeling greatly enriched, grateful that the format was so diverse and so very different from the talking-head panels normally encountered at literary and science fictional events.'**

express his views on the current class system, particularly with regard to a fine area that he has stayed in repeatedly over a number of decades. During that period, he has observed an interesting development, in that the new working class is now lower middle, although they don't perhaps wish to admit or recognise the fact.

The discussion then moved on to the role that writers have to play in recording and influencing change and it was agreed that this was where the magic of being a writer truly lies: in the ability to make an impact upon an individual. This culminated in an interesting aside from Michael Moorcock regarding the *Movie V for Vendetta*, which Alan Moore has neither seen nor indeed wishes to have any association with. Moorcock explained that when he saw the film, the effect it had on the 'red neck Texans' in the cinema was obvious. Even in this diluted form, the rhythm of voice was apparent and effective, leaving its mark, which he felt was entirely fitting at that moment in time and in that part of the world. Mr Moore revealed that he is currently working on a novel set in Northampton, a city which he feels shares many of London's characteristics, although perhaps not it's more famed links to insanity. He has been working on the book, *Jerusalem*, over the past eighteen months.

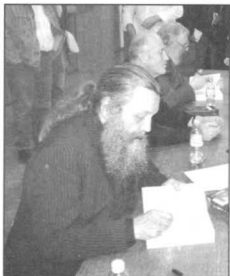
One of the intriguing things about *London: City of Disappearances* relates to the identity of the authors. The reader does not discover who actually wrote a given piece until the end of the book. In some ways, the evening mirrored the structure of the anthology, in that Iain Sinclair's questions allowed both authors to wind around and drift in a variety

of directions, taking their enrapt audience with them on these short, mesmerising journeys. There was much laughter and all concerned were in very good spirits. All three of the main participants then gave readings, with Messrs Moore and Moorcock choosing something from the book – so nice to hear the intonation of voice and the natural narrative emphasis that only a live reading can provide.

Following a final enchanting performance from Kirsten Norris, the authors then made themselves available to sign books, which were also on hand to purchase. The three all seemed in good spirits, welcoming the reasonable queue and treating everyone pleasantly and politely. Alan Moore in particular proved happy to sign any comic, to engage in conversation and to accept a fanzine. Whilst he refused to be drawn on *V for Vendetta*, he did admit to being pleased with how his new book is progressing, and I look forward to its release with great anticipation.

Michael Moorcock was also extremely warm and pleasant, even chatting happily about his recent contributions to Peter Weston's fanzine *Prolapse*, which came up in conversation as he happily signed works of various genres. I came away from this pleasurable evening feeling greatly enriched, grateful that the format was so diverse and so very different from the talking-head panels normally encountered at literary and science fictional events. I felt I had received much more of an insight into both Alan Moore and Michael Moorcock than a more conventional discussion could ever have elicited.

Needless to say, I bought the book.



## **'LONDON: CITY OF DISAPPEARANCES'**



Brian Catling

# SOLARIS

Something New in Publishing? Or is that just Pie in the Sky?

Launched in February 2007, Solaris Books are the new science fiction, fantasy and dark fantasy imprint from Black Library, the publishing wing of Games Workshop. Ian Whates met Consultant Editor George Mann, one of the 'Big Four' behind Solaris, at a coffee house in Grantham, close to where he lives. Ian was keen to discover what makes Solaris different.

**IW:** Games Workshop are obviously highly successful in their own sphere. What inspired them to look beyond the Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 universe and launch Solaris, so moving into the wider environs of science fiction and fantasy in general?

**GM:** Well, that comes down to a number of conversations between myself and Marc Gascoigne of BL Publishing. We're both huge science fiction and fantasy fans – that was our starting point. Marc has been with Black Library since the beginning, publishing tie-in fiction with Games Workshop for the past ten years. I came on-board about three and a half years ago to help develop the sales of that range and to help the business become more book trade-focused. Through the Black Flame imprint, we took our expertise at tie-in fiction to other brands and even movie tie-ins – Judge Dredd, Strontium Dog, Freddie Kruger, Blade, Snakes on a Plane, that kind of thing. After that, we started looking for other avenues.

As readers of SF and fantasy who were involved in the market, both Marc and I felt that the industry, particularly in the UK but

also in the US, was polarising. On the one hand were very big imprints, themselves part of even bigger publishing corporations; doing a great job but with limited room on their lists. So only authors with huge sales survived and everyone else was looking for a new home. On the other hand there were the specialist press, people like Pete Crowther, also doing a fantastic job but lacking the wider distribution networks. Everything in between had been squeezed out.

We therefore felt there was a gap in the market that we were equipped to make the most of – we've got excellent distribution and sales channels – so we decided to go for it. Games Workshop were happy to back us.

**IW:** It's interesting to hear you talk of a gap in the market, because you seem to have launched at a time when there's a great deal of dependency surrounding the whole publishing industry, with falling book sales etc. In many ways, the arrival of Solaris seems to be going against that trend.

**GM:** Yes, I suppose that's true. It's not easy to sell books, we know that, but what we've learned working with Games Workshop is that there are niche markets out there. Games Workshop is built on a niche market, after all.

We saw that there are science fiction and fantasy fans who want genre books, and there are also great authors who aren't finding an outlet. So it was a case of 'let's put these fans and these authors together'.

We make no apologies; we are our own target demographic, publishing books that we want to read. We're also publishing books that we know will sell, of course, because this is a commercial enterprise, but we're the guys who want to read Eric Brown etc. Thankfully, there are plenty of other people out there who want to read Eric as well. Helix has done very well for us and it's the sort of back-to-basics book we love, with a space ship on the front. That's not to say every book Solaris publishes will have a rocket on the cover, we're very aware that there's great variety in science fiction and a great variety of ways to market it, but we feel at the moment that it's a good strategy



to provide for those traditional readers who like their SF with space ships on the front.

**IW:** Yes, that's noticeable when looking at a couple of your recent releases. The cover to Helix, for example, might be modern in its execution but is very traditional in its theme – the sort of thing you could imagine Chris Foss producing a cover for in days gone by.

**GM:** Absolutely.

**IW:** Then there's Adam Roberts' Splinter, which is traditional in a very different way.

**GM:** Yes, it's based on a first edition Jules Verne cover, because the book itself is based on a Jules Verne novel. That's a great example of a book where we've taken a different approach to the promotion. It's all a matter of how we can best serve a given book and the readers of that book.

**IW:** To date you've published a mix of established authors and also new and unknown ones. Is that a deliberate policy?

**GM:** Yes it is. Of course we want our big names – Juliet McKenna has just signed to our list for a new fantasy trilogy – but also people like Gail Martin, James Maxey, and Jeffrey Thomas, who's done quite a bit in the small press but whom a lot of genre readers won't have heard of. We're keen to promote talent wherever we can find it and to put new blood into the market. Though it's true



# 'We make no apologies; we are our own target demographic, publishing books that we want to read.'

that a book from a new author requires a two stage battle. First you have to sell it to the book stores, who, especially in America, tend to be guided by sales figures for the writer's previous book, then you have to sell it to the readers.

**IW:** *Solaris* only launched in February 2007. You seem to have a presence at virtually every convention going and to have been very successful in raising your profile in such a comparatively short time.

**GM:** Yes, it has taken us a little by surprise, how well things have gone. We were always of the belief that there was room for us in the market, and that's been borne out by how quickly things have taken off.

As for the conventions, we feel that the best way to succeed at anything is to be a part of it. We don't want to be on the fringes looking in, we want to be in there talking to the readers, talking to the authors, to other editors and artists. There are a number of reasons for this. With our authors, for example, we want to develop a relationship. We're not in this to publish one book and then never see that author again; we're here to help a given author build their career. It's our firm belief that by doing that, we can grow together, which might sound a little old-fashioned, but that's genuinely how we work. If we're a part of the community, that can only benefit the business, our editors and our authors.

**IW:** *By the end of this year, Solaris will have released a total of fifteen books during 2007. Is that the sort of output you're intending to*

*maintain?*

**GM:** About that, yes; certainly in terms of new titles. That's really to enable us to concentrate on a given book and on the author. We believe that by investing that time, we can help make both a success. Our aim is to release one or at the very most two new titles per month.

**IW:** *One of your first titles was the Solaris Book of New SF. I get the impression that the anthologies are very much your department, almost a separate cell within the company.*

**GM:** Absolutely. I handle the anthologies; we're working on a fourth at the moment, the third *New SF*, with the second due out next year. The way we work in general is that we sit down as a team of four – myself, Marc Gascoigne, Christian Dunn and Mark Newton – we talk through a new proposal that's come in. We all look at it, we all read it and once we're in agreement, we acquire it. While we all know each and every one of our authors, one of us will then become the main contact point for a given writer. I'll consult with the sales and marketing guys about the best way to promote the new book, while Christian or Mark will edit it. So they deal with the editing of the novels, and I handle the anthologies.

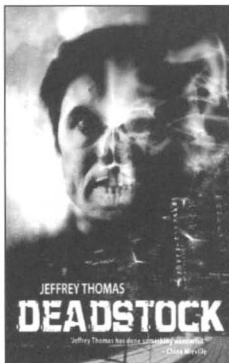
**IW:** *What do Solaris have lined up for us next year?*

**GM:** Quite a lot, actually. The fantasy trilogy from Juliet McKenna, a novel from Paul Kearney, a new Keith Brooke novel, there's a new trilogy to launch from Eric Brown, Chris Roberson's *Celestial Empire* series is launching properly – he's done a lot of short stories in that world that have been picked up for 'Year's Best' anthologies etc, but this will be the first novel in the sequence... a Lou Anders anthology, *Best New Fantasy*, *Best New SF II*... loads of really good stuff!

**IW:** *And how is the established publishing industry reacting to your arrival?*

**GM:** That's a good question. I don't really know... It's still early days and I think they're watching with interest. Because we've identified our own niche in the market, we haven't come storming in trying to take anyone else's place – that's not our approach. We think there's room for all of us, and so far we have very good relations with the other publishers. I hope that continues.

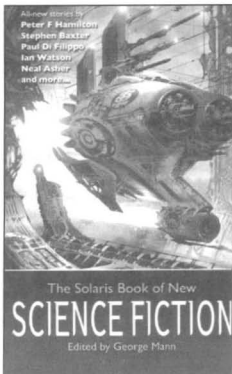
**IW:** *You're in an unusual situation for a new venture, in as much as you have a big corporation behind you, making it difficult for one of the majors to step in and buy you up if*



*you do prove to be a great success.*

**GM:** Yes, for us, that's really nice. It's almost as if we're an independent with some clout. We're not struggling trying to make our way, but at the same time we do have to provide a good return for our shareholders, so we act responsibly. When we sit down to consider a new book, Marc will often say to us, 'If we turn this one down are you going to take out a loan and publish it with your own money?' If the answer's 'yes', we don't turn it down. It's a system that appears to be working pretty well for us so far.

Solaris Books have kindly agreed to make their recent anthology, *Infinity Plus*, available at a specially reduced price for BSFA members. See page 27 for full details of this exclusive offer.



# IN APPRECIATION OF SCIENCE FICTION GOLD

Lou S. Cohen interviews Lou Anders

Lou Anders is a pirate in the sense that not only does he look like one, but he displays his buccaneering ways by looting the English speaking world's best science fiction and fantasy authors for his booty at Pyr, the imprint that he currently helms as editorial director. Fortunately, pirate Lou Anders is a formidable and likeable hero, champion of expert writing, great cover art and highly crafted anthologies.

In our interview, Lou Anders was accommodating and loquacious. When Lou talks, people should listen, because he has a lot of good stuff to say about the industry from books to movies to television to art, he's got it all covered.

**LC:** What is your earliest memory of this genre be it a movie, book, game, etc. and can you tell me when you realized that you were a life?

**LA:** I'd say that my involvement with SF involves a three-stage connection/initiation.

First, one of my earliest memories period is standing in front of the big, black & white television at my grandfather's house and my mother saying, "Yes, that's a man walking on the moon." That's pretty close to the first thing I remember.

Then, when I was an adolescent, I was captivated by Sid & Marty Krofft's original *Land of the Lost*. I was raised fundamentalist Christian in the Deep South, so the presence of missing link Philip Paley as Cha-Ka the ape boy did NOT go over well with my parents. As a result, *Land of the Lost* was something I had to sneak glimpses of, and you know what they say about forbidden fruit. It wasn't until years later that I discovered how many SF writers had been associated with it.

Finally, when I was 12 or 13 my father pushed a copy of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars* into my hands and said, "Here, you need to read this."

And I did, followed by the rest of the *Mars* series, the *Venusian* series, the *Pellucidar* series, the *Tarzan* series, and everything else by Burroughs that was in print. That led to Michael Moorcock and Fritz Leiber, and from there to the Science Fiction Writers of America Hall of Fame series, and from there—well, you know the rest.

**LC:** What was the book that sucked you into the potential and possibilities of this genre in terms of literature?

**LA:** That's a difficult question. I largely stopped reading SF&F in high school, and in college, I read things like John Irving or Tim Robbins when I read for pleasure at all. In the 90s, I was very involved professionally with SF television (*Star Trek*, *Babylon 5*)—I was the liaison between Los Angeles and London for several Titan Publishing magazines—and so my return to SF was to its media aspect. This in turn led to involvement with a dot com online publishing start up, which reintroduced literary SF to my life.

So around the time *Star Trek* was beginning its slow degeneration and *Babylon 5* was ending, these shows being replaced by *Hercules* & *Xena* and the various god-awful offerings of the SciFi Channel, I was reading Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* and Michael Swanwick's *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* and Michael Moorcock's *Dancers at the End of Time* and Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden* and William Gibson's *Idoru* and Mike Resnick's *Kirinyaga* and Philip K Dick's *Valis* and becoming increasingly disgusted and infuriated with the dichotomy between filmic and literary SF&F. So there was no one book.

**LC:** So who are your editorial influences?

**LA:** Michael Moorcock. We can almost start and end there. I think that what he did as editor of *New Worlds* had the greatest, most significant impact on our field since the golden age. I didn't realize the extent of his influence as a child, but reading *A Boy and His Dog* and *Aye, and Gomorrah* and all those other New Wave writings in the SFWA anthologies permanently shaped my perception of speculative fiction. It wasn't until around 2000, when I read Colin Greenland's brilliant history of the New Wave, *The Entropy Exhibition*, along with his (highly recommended) book-length interview with Moorcock, *Death is No Obstacle*, that I learned and understood how much of an impact my favorite childhood writer had wielded as an editor, and I remain in awe.

**'...SF doesn't need to attempt 100% world domination. We're not a religion, simply an extremely relevant branch of literature with a lot to say about 21st Century life.'**

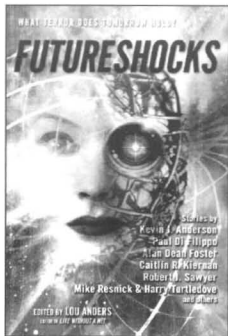
**LC:** In the interview with China Miéville for *The Believer* magazine he mentioned an "embattlement mentality" in genre literature. With the success of the SF&F genre in movies (see multi-BILLION dollar success of the *LOTR* trilogy) and genre bending authors like both Vonnegut, Clarke and others, (that Miéville mentioned) don't you think this conversation is moot?

**LA:** Yes, it is moot, but it wasn't at the time of that interview. We are right now living through a very rapid swing of the pendulum of mainstream perception. I would date its inception from the moment Stephen King was chosen as recipient of the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters—which seems far less absurd now than it did in many in the mainstream at the time (remember the outcry?)—but that was the crack in the damn that is just bursting now.

You mention *Lord of the Rings*, but equally important to its box office (because when do critics care for box office?) is the moment when *Return of the King* took all eleven Oscar awards for which it was nominated. When Michael Chabon wrote *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* he was still clothing his generic elements via a narrative-within-a-narrative, but in the wake of his *Pulitzer*, he has moved further and further into unabashedly genre territory, first with a YA fantasy, then with a Sherlock Holmes narrative, then with an alternate history and now, with *Gentlemen of the Road*, an outright sword & sorcery adventure, dedicated to Michael Moorcock no less, and following its New York Times serialization with a novel from an outright genre publisher (Del Rey). Throw in Susanna Clarke's novel being chosen as the #1 book of the year by *Time* magazine, *Entertainment Weekly* and *TV Guide* both proclaiming *Battlestar Galactica* as the number one drama series on TV, and the profusion of quality science fiction series and films being celebrated in the mainstream, and yes, it begins to look like we have overcome. Not to mention Bradbury's recent *Pulitzer*.

**LC:** How much of this "embattlement mentality" is self-perception and self-consciousness in our field and how much is true?





**LA:** There are still stigmas attached. I tried to hand a guy at my (martial arts) dojo one of our Pyr catalogs and he recoiled like I was handing him a *Four Spiritual Laws* tract. But again - SF doesn't need to attempt 100% world domination. We're not a religion, simply an extremely relevant branch of literature with a lot to say about 21st Century life.

**LC:** Also, in your Q&A with *Miëville* you spoke about golems. What do you think the golem/cyborg character says about human nature/society/etc. in the works you have come across?

**LA:** Science fiction is the literature of estrangement. It is a literature of subversion. It is a literature of the open mind. That's what the alien is - it's literalizing the ability to see from other eyes than the ones you were born with. And the cyborg - well, that's the stage at which you're halfway there, one part your old self, and one part something other. That can be a terrifying position to occupy - ask anyone who ever kicked off the religion of their parents. But it's also the place where enlightenment occurs.

**LC:** Your love of the genre motivates you but what is it that Pyr does differently than other imprints to make it stand out as a premier Speculative Fiction Imprint?

**LA:** I'm not sure how I should answer this. There's plenty of fine work being done elsewhere, and I am very big on the notion that our competition is not with each other, but with all the various aspects of modern life that lure readers away to other pursuits, responsibilities and activities - work, games, movies, internet, etc. Every good science fiction or fantasy book published enhances the field. It has the potential to create a new reader - someone who will go on to being a dedicated reader for life - but it also sustains those of us who already are. We publish a wide broad category of SF&F, and while I've met readers who are enthusiastically reading everything we publish, it's possible there are readers out there who are only reading a percentage and selecting by author, subgenre, or style.

So, for instance, if you read and enjoyed Adam Roberts' *Gradisil* and/or Ian McDonald's *Brasyl* and are looking for more of same - Richard Morgan's *Black Man* (*Thirteen* in the US) can feed your need for smart, literate

SF while Ian's off in Turkey researching his next book. Unless we're talking about the readership for Baen's military SF or Daw's fantasy, very few houses have dedicated audiences who buy everything they output. Readers tend to follow authors and subgenres. I know I never looked at a logo on a spine until I was in the business myself.

**LC:** I will try not to pin you down too much but what are the most important things you look for in acquiring a new author to Pyr? (Whether established or never been published before.)

**LA:** I want a book that is so good I have to put it down to come up for air. I want a manuscript that I can't wait to get back to when my administrative duties call me away. I want something that is so compelling, or mind-blowing, or clever, or funny, or poignant that I have to call my buddies and tell them, or dash off an email, or just take a break, stand up and walk around the room and breathe.

With someone like Joe Abercrombie, or David Louis Edelman, or Justina Robson, or Kay Kenyon, or Ian McDonald, you really know from the first sentence that they've got what it takes. If there is a through line, it's not a subgenre or a world view or writing style, but, I hope, a consistent level of quality across the breadth of all that science fiction and fantasy can be.

Ian McDonald, Adam Roberts, Justina Robson and Martin Sketchley are all UK writers that Pyr has published. Besides their superior storytelling skills, is there something 'different' about the UK writer?

Besides their superior storytelling skills? Okay... When I was a child, my father used to drill into me that the British had a superior command of language. He'd take out Kipling's poem 'The Gods of the Copybook Headings' and read it to me over and over - his favorite poem because of the prose. He didn't have a clue what a copybook was and "suspected" that the poem was uncomfortably close to endorsing Hindu concepts of reincarnation, but he loved it for its language.

To this day, he'll still pull something out of the *London Times* or the *London Financial Times* to show me how much better the average UK journalist is. The result of all this is that I have an inherent bias to UK authors. I have a similar one for UK musicians and another for UK comedy.

I'm a big admirer of the music of Robyn

Hitchcock, which manages that very British way of being both hysterical and heartbreakingly painful in the same breath. It's very similar to the way that Doctor Who can be absurd one minute and leave you in tears the next - which is something that *Star Trek* could never pull off - not in the same episode anyway.

I'm generalizing horrendously in everything I say above, you know?

**LC:** What can you divulge as common threads among your choices for stories in your anthologies (if there are any)?

**LA:** The relevance, importance, and urgency of science fiction. Science fiction is first and foremost entertainment and must be entertainment if it is to function effectively. But it will never be just entertainment. It has been, since its inception, a fundamental contributing factor both in how we view our increasingly technological world and in actually dictating the shaping of that technological world, and as the branch of literature devoted to examining humankind's relationship with technology, it is coming into its own as the most important literature of the 21st century. I will never willingly denigrate the field of science fiction and nothing gets my back up more than when people within our field undersell, devalue or deny this literature's importance.

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<http://www.prometheusbooks.com>

# COUNTY C



I would be surprised to discover that there was anyone reading this article that hadn't heard of Neil Gaiman by now. For those of us who maintain that a great work of art isn't complete without a series of bubbles protruding from somebody's head, Gaiman is the much-adored creator of *The Sandman*, a comic that helped to redefine a generation's approach to sequential art. Others may know him as the writer of *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys*.

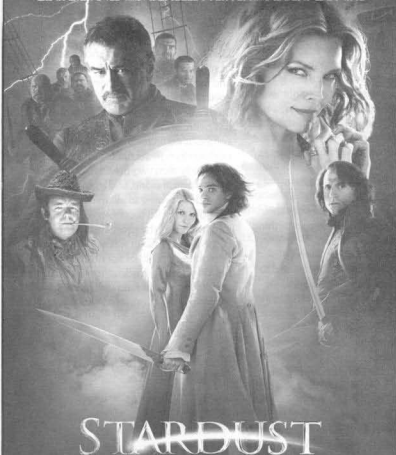
Until now, his unique imagination has been given relatively few opportunities to display itself via the medium of film and television. Each time it has, the results have been mixed, with moments of hand-trembling wonder let down by obvious difficulties in translating Gaiman's style to the screen. These problems have often been blamed on funding and other such practical issues. *Stardust* is the first big-budget Gaiman film, so if there is anything wrong with it, a lack of sufficient cash can not be held to blame.

*Stardust* is the story of Tristan, a young man who lives in a country village named Wall. The setting is apparently the early nineteenth century and Wall is a fairly average sort of place for the time. It has a pub, a local shop and, oh yes, a hole in a wall that leads to a hidden fairy kingdom.

Tristan is infatuated with a local girl named Victoria. Unfortunately, Victoria is already planning to accept an offer of marriage from Humphrey. In desperation, Tristan makes a deal with his beloved; he will retrieve a fallen star from beyond the wall for her if she will agree to marry him upon his return. She accepts his foolhardy proposition and Tristan begins his journey into the strange and dangerous country that borders his unremarkable homeland. It isn't long before he discovers the object of his quest. The only complication is that the star is not a lifeless lump of rock but is in fact a tall, angry blonde, who is in no mood to be taken anywhere, having recently fallen roughly from the heavens.

Any film with such a magical premise would need some enchanting and spectacular visuals if it hoped to live up to audience expectations. Luckily, *Stardust* has a whole fairy treasure-chest full of them. From the quintessential Englishness of Wall to the wild and rolling lands of the world it adjoins, the film is full of vivid scenes pulled straight from the pages of a storybook. Flying ships sail through raging thunderstorms and buildings spring up from pools of writhing emerald energy as pallid ghosts watch on, with the marks of their deaths still visible upon their deformed countenances. Even so, the

CLAIRE DANES • MICHELLE PFEIFFER • ROBERT DE NIRO



THIS SUMMER A STAR FALLS. THE CHASE BEGINS.

# OUR lucky STARS

director, Matthew Vaughn, never allows the viewer to become overwhelmed by the majesty of the fantastic. *Stardust* provides a stark lesson to those filmmakers who believe that computer generated impossibilities are a substitute for story.

To be fair, *Stardust* does benefit from a truly stellar cast of actors who seem to be genuinely enjoying themselves. Michelle Pfeiffer obviously relishes her role as Lamia, the malevolent witch who seeks to carve out the star's heart in exchange for youth and extended life. We'll forgive her the slightly troubling English accent she adopts for a short period halfway through the film in the hope that she never does it again. Charlie Cox, who plays our hero Tristan, brings the right blend of naivety and likeability to the part. However, it is Claire Danes as the star Yvaine who provides the light in *Stardust's* crowded firmament, with enough charm and natural beauty to truly convince one that she may indeed be not of this world. If you don't fall in love with Yvaine by the closing credits, I'd have to doubt your humanity.

Despite these great advantages, the film is not perfect. *Stardust* was adapted from a graphic novel written by Gaiman and illustrated by Charles Vess. Along its journey to the big screen it has lost a little of the beguiling strangeness that gave the original its edge. Certain narrative elements have been toned down to make them more palatable for a family film, such as the notably tamer sex scene between Tristan's parents. The ending is far less sorrowful and therefore less poignant as well.

Inevitably, some elements have also been added, but for once not all of these are detrimental. The screenwriters have introduced the conceit that Yvaine shines when happy, a filmic device that is used to great effect on several occasions.

So, is *Stardust* the definitive Gaiman movie? On balance, I'd have to say no. It is, however, a highly enjoyable adventure, and one that has managed to avoid having its heart sliced out by Hollywood's own cruel blades.

Review by Paul Skevington



'Any film with such a magical premise would need some enchanting and spectacular visuals if it hoped to live up to audience expectations. Luckily, *Stardust* has a whole fairy treasure-chest full of them.'

# GAME'S OVER

Donna Scott finds herself all creeped out by  
*Resident Evil: Mark 3*

It's easy to see why budget filmmakers love making zombie films: the genre is readily understood, the precedent having been set with George Romero's shopping zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*, with its neatly thrown-in social commentary. Plus, bad lighting and poor acting can actually be a bonus... But what happens when you make a zombie film with money?

*Resident Evil: Extinction*, being the third film in the Sony Pictures franchise, certainly has a moneyed ancestry, and extrapolates the story of the popular Capcom 'shoot-'em-up' game. At the start of *Extinction*, we are given a swift recap on the story so far, which hasn't really moved on much from the first films: The Umbrella Corporation have been unable to contain an outbreak of the zombifying T-Virus from Raccoon City. Only a handful of humans survive, and the world is turning more and more into desert. Alice (Milla Jovovich) is determined to drift alone, having encountered a few insane and unfriendly types on the way. But her mysterious 'powers' are increasing, and a telekinetic accident leaves her without transport and compels her to join up with a convoy led by tough-girl, Claire Redfield (Ali Larter). Alice persuades the group to travel to Alaska, where there may be no virus, but this is problematic: they don't have much fuel, Alice is being pursued by Umbrella who need her blood for a cure, of sorts... Oh, and then there are the zombies.

It would be fair to say that *Resident Evil: Extinction* draws less from the traditional zombie film than it does from the world of gaming. The monsters, be they zombie men (all dressed in uniform grey boiler suits), crows or dogs, all arrange themselves neatly into 'levels', and the 'level 7 baddie' is just that, a super monster on level 7 of the Raccoon City building.

Perhaps the most striking game-like effect is at the beginning, when a newly conscious 'Alice' tries to escape the hospital.



She remembers when she tried that way before, and dodges the traps she knows are there, only to be killed and thrown onto a dump filled with other dead Alice clones. She has failed some kind of test, but why the scientists don't value the increased memory and power of each clone is not made clear. What is shown is that Alice is the game player, losing lives, starting the level again, getting a little further each time. But this self-referential intertextuality reveals nothing clever, except perhaps the shallowness of the franchise.

The lack of realism would trouble a small child: why does Claire's convoy, lacking fuel, decide to fill the flame-throwers? But never mind that when you have Jovovich's eerie beauty... except the aesthetic is somewhat hampered by switching from shots of Alice looking windblown and haggard to smooth and perfectly made-up within the same scenes.

It's a shame, because Jovovich can act, though she makes more of fearful and vulnerable than she does tough and vengeful. In the blown-out landscape of the Nevada desert, Larter's Claire seems synonymous with her character, Jessica in *Heroes*. Ashanti is more or less lost in her minor role as [Nurse] Betty, and the zombies... well, they were quite un-zombie-like, as it goes; limbs intact,

'...they don't have much fuel, Alice is being pursued by Umbrella who need her blood for a cure, of sorts... Oh, and then there are the zombies.'



RESIDENT EVIL:  
EXTINCTION

not especially bloody or sad and mournful, just computer generated baddies without the computer generation.

Despite its limitations, I find the *Resident Evil* series suits my palate a little better than *Ultraviolet*, but it's all much of a muchness, and I sincerely hope Jovovich finds the forthcoming *Azazel* a much better vehicle for her acting talent.

*Resident Evil: Extinction*  
*Resident Evil: Nemesis* (US)  
Director: Russell Mulcahy  
Written by: Paul W. S. Anderson





# GRINDHOUSE

## Martin McGrath on a new form of gory resurrection

I don't know if Dugan cinema ever showed anything that might genuinely count as "Grindhouse" – but I am just about old enough to remember late-night bills of dubious, cheap horror movies and suspect action movies. For most of my generation, I'm guessing, the desire to find the kind of cheap thrills and schlocky mix of sex and action was provided by pirated videos. Instead of coping with terrible projectionists we sat for hours twiddling the tracking button, trying to peer through snow-fields of static while muttering "I think I can see something..." What wasn't different was the essential content of the movies – preposterous acting, terrible scripts, gore, titillation and more gore.

So not quite the same, but not so different either. Certainly not so different that sitting down before a DVD double bill of *Planet Terror* and *Death Proof* didn't stir some guilty memories.

These films were created to be shown together as a movie double-bill but rent asunder by frightened movie executives when opening weekend takings were poor. The versions eventually released in UK cinemas (and now available to buy as Region 1 DVDs) are somewhat longer but, I think, still work better as a pair.

Of the two, Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* is the wilder and most purely entertaining. It's a zombie flick, and Rodriguez gives plenty of nods to the greats of that genre but it goes far beyond the average, cheap horror flick and, with a fantastic sense of its own absurdity, manages to become more than just a pastiche of past movies. Rodriguez keeps revving the engine way up into the red zone to create a high-powered movie that rips along at an impressive pace, but one that never takes itself too seriously. The zombies – actually victims of a biological weapon – swell and ooze and burst in fantastically gross detail as victims are ripped asunder in increasingly imaginative ways but it is those points when Rodriguez reveals that his tongue remains firmly in his cheek that provide the film's most memorable images. There's the already iconic rifle/grenade launcher fitted to Cherry Darling's (Rose McGowan) leg or the moment that ultracoool hero El Wray (Freddie Rodriguez) is shoved on a mini-motorcycle and still kicks all kinds of zombie arse, or there's the fantastic moment where Dr. Dakota Block (Mary Shelton) gets the use of her anaesthetised hands back.

And what *Planet Terror* has that none of those cheap exploitation flicks could dream of is a cast of truly excellent supporting characters willing to chew scenery just for laughs. Jeff Fahey, Michael Biehn, Bruce Willis and Josh Brolin are all excellent support,

adding another layer to what is, in essence, a very, very silly but very enjoyable film.

By contrast, *Death Proof* takes itself a lot more seriously. Where Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* is kinetic and keeps up a frantic pace, Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* is an altogether slower and more titillating movie. Where Rodriguez seems concerned to deliver the best possible Grindhouse movie – the kind of thing that the producers would have turned out if they'd been blessed with huge budgets and limitless goodwill – Tarantino seems most concerned with maintaining a sense that his film could be an authentic Grindhouse production.

There's a very long opening sequence following a group of attractive girls on an apparently ordinary day that only very, very slowly builds a sense of foreboding. For most of the opening forty-five minutes, Tarantino seems content to focus his camera on the legs, backsides or breasts of his leading ladies while having them deliver a series of his improbably cool stoner monologues.

For those already fans of Tarantino's work this is not necessarily a bad thing. He is exceptionally good at writing stoner monologues and some of what he writes here ranks with the best of his work anywhere – fans will find an endless supply of nuggets they can repeat to friends, acquaintances and random passers-by. Then, suddenly, though not altogether unexpectedly, the film erupts with an incredibly gruesome moment of violence. And then it stops. And we move on to another group of unfeasibly attractive, cool young women with a familiar sounding talent for cool dialogue. It is only now that Tarantino begins to slowly ratchet things up until the film enters its extraordinary final act with quite the most monstrous car chase ever put on screen, some stunning stunt work and a twist ending designed to get the audience cheering and allow Tarantino to defend himself from charges of extraordinary sexism.

As an evocation of the true "Grindhouse" spirit, I'd guess that Tarantino's *Death Proof* is by far the most accurate – with its low key spirit and low budget feel (though the final chase belies that image). However my guess is that most people won't ever have experienced a genuine "Grindhouse" movie and many of the clever references and sly nods will be lost on them. What they're left with, then, is a slow moving beast that will appeal primarily to those people who don't believe there's such a thing as too much Tarantino in a movie. *Planet Terror*, on the other hand, has a

wider appeal. It moves faster, it aims its jokes at more familiar movie targets and it's a lot of fun from start to finish. Rodriguez is an excellent director of action and he's on top form here.

I enjoyed both *Planet Terror* and *Death Proof* for their different qualities and would recommend both. They're not profound in any sense, but they are examples of films made by directors utterly steeped in the visual language of cinema. They are undeniably self-indulgent movies, but they are also compelling. Tarantino and Rodriguez should be applauded for demonstrating their willingness to take chances with their movie making. My only disappointment was that I was denied the chance to sit down and watch the double-bill in the cinema, the way the directors intended.

Grindhouse double bill

*Planet Terror*  
Written and directed by Robert Rodriguez

*Death Proof*  
Written and directed by Quentin Tarantino



Martin McGrath gets spooked by  
*30 Days of Night, The Seeker: The  
Dark is Rising, and Black Sheep*

## LEAVE A LIGHT ON

As night falls the small town of Barrow finds itself increasingly cut off from the outside world. Communications are shut down. Roads are closed off. Means of escape are destroyed. And then things start to get killed. First dogs are slaughtered, then people, and the town finds itself under siege. Under attack, the people of Barrow, led by their sheriff Eben (Hartnett), must band together to survive until dawn.

The only problem is that Barrow is in Alaska, north of the Arctic Circle, and the next dawn is thirty days away. Most of the population have fled south until the sun rises again and the remainder are a hardy bunch of isolationists and survivalists, as one might expect in this unforgiving environment. But the people of Barrow are not facing any

ordinary threat. There are monsters amongst them. A band of bloodthirsty vampires have descended upon their town, led by an aristocratic master, Marlow (Huston), who scowls and issues orders in a guttural, faintly Eastern European language. But this is no stately Dracula nibbling daintily at some maiden's neck. These vampires are swift and ferocious, tearing their victims to shreds and bathing in the red-mists of blood.

Soon the town of Barrow is reduced to a corpse strewn wreck, with only a handful of survivors huddling in hiding places and desperately fighting for survival. They are led by the sheriff, who brings them together, develops a plan and keeps them going when everything seems doomed.

*30 Days of Night* is a better than average modern horror movie that has a number of things going for it – not the least of which are solid performances from its two male leads Josh Hartnett and Danny Huston. Hartnett reveals a surprisingly steely core to his performance which might surprise those who (like me) know him best for his lighter romantic and comedic roles. Huston is genuinely scary as the monstrous vampire leader, oozing rage and menace.

Director David Slade, whose previous movie was the excellent *Hard Candy*, does an excellent job of making the town of Barrow a harrowing place – the pale washed-out streets are lit in an eerie sweep, the snow whips across screen. The action is effectively staged and, unlike many modern movies, it isn't over-edited, making it possible to actually follow what is happening on screen.

It is very easy to do vampire/action movies badly – anyone unfortunate enough to have sat through *Ultraviolet* or *Underworld* will know the truth of that – but while *30 Days of Night* is certainly no classic, it is well enough put together and sufficiently exciting to make the movie a worthwhile and diverting two hours.



## IN SEARCH OF HIDDEN DEPTHS

A high-quality cast of British actors – including Christopher Eccleston and Ian McShane – can't hide the fact that *The Seeker: The Dark is Rising* is pretty wishy-washy stuff.

The world is in danger – The Rider (Eccleston) is gathering the powers of darkness and will unleash them in six days. Fortunately there is an American boy, Will Stanton (Alexander Ludwig), who has the power to save us all, aided by the Old Ones – led by Merriman (McShane) and assisted by the excellent James Cosmo and Jim Piddock, who are guardians of the light.

As *The Seeker*, Will must find the six elements of a powerful, lost icon that has been scattered through time and which only he has the ability to identify. The Rider will do anything to stop him, mustering flocks of ravens and unnatural storms, and bringing destruction.

Those familiar with the Susan Cooper novel on which this story is based will no doubt be horrified by the wilful disregard shown for the original – such as making Will an American, making him older and giving him a love interest. Of these changes, the Americanisation of the lead character seems strangest. It isn't as though the Anglicised *Harry Potter* or *Narnia* films (produced, like *The Dark is Rising*, by Walden Media) have been harmed by featuring British children in the leads.

But something more important than just quaint accents has been lost in shifting this production into the mid-Atlantic – it has robbed the story of a crucial element of what made it distinctive in the first place. Cooper's books are firmly grounded in a very specifically English folklore drawn out of a very specifically English setting. In diluting that Englishness the producers demonstrate how little they understand the material they're working with – and go on to confirm that by throwing away the menace that his neatly constructed in the opening act on a series of rushed and more or less incomprehensible action sequences, culminating in a nonsensical and utterly formulaic finale, which even some beautiful water effects and smart direction can't rescue.

*The Dark is Rising* suffers in comparison to both the *Potter* and *Narnia* franchises. The American "kids" are altogether too wholesome, the story is stripped of any real power or authenticity and any complexity and ambiguity in the original has been cast overboard in what becomes a straightforward, and therefore predictable, struggle of good against evil.

THE D

# KNESS CREEPS



'Soon the town of Barrow is reduced to a corpse strewn wreck, with only a handful of survivors huddling in hiding places and desperately fighting for survival.'



**SHEEP  
COME  
BAAAA!**

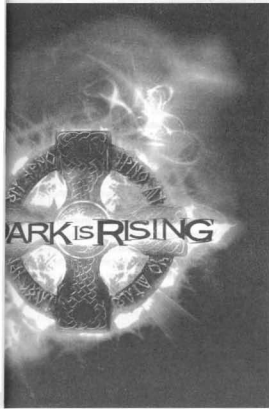
**B**lack Sheep, the first film from New Zealander Jonathan King is a surprisingly likeable horror-comedy. King might only have himself to blame for a script that varies wildly in tone (he wrote as well as directed the film) but he copes admirably with a relatively low budget and frequently wooden acting performances to deliver a film that's going to find a warm place in the hearts of more than a few horror fans.

There's nothing in *Black Sheep* that one might call original but it's all approached with an admirable energy. *Black Sheep* has more than one nod to the likes of *Evil Dead* and Peter Jackson's early work, but this is plainer fare, despite some beautiful scenery and some clever Weta Workshop effects. One brother's reckless genetic engineering creates a monstrous race of flesh-eating sheep who can turn humans into were-sheep with a single nip. The other brother, who happens to have a pathological fear of sheep, must stop the sheep going on a rampage with the

assistance of a female eco-warrior (with a tendency to spout new age nonsense at the drop of a crystal) and a Maori shepherd.

King's film plays it all much more for laughs than scares, but there's something both inherently threatening and funny about a screen full of implacable ovine faces played straight and presented as a threat.

**'...a monstrous race of flesh-eating sheep who can turn humans into were-sheep with a single nip.'**





# THE SOUND OF VIOLENCE

Few movie soundtracks are enmeshed with the visual schema and emotional pitch-shifts of its source material like 1994's cinematic goth-fest, *The Crow*. A nocturne in the truest sense of the word, the soundtrack is less ear-filler than a social commentary on love, loss and revenge ever after. Black as a congealed river slit from the wrist of Poe, Wilde, or Curtis, the fourteen-track-strong album is filth-gilded in early grunge and industrial rock stylings, with the odd wistful ballad smeared in-between. Of any album spawned by a graphic novel, *The Crow* is by far the most visceral, and not because of the violence of its lyrics, but because it is a terrifyingly frank tribute to the inherent pain of the human condition.

Why this should be so is rooted in the real story that lies behind the movie. An overwhelming sense of tragedy permeates both movie and album, and this can be traced back to the original graphic novel, and writer and artist, James O'Barr.

In 1981, O'Barr started work on *The Crow* while he was stationed in Berlin. He explains,

"I joined the marines after someone very close to me was killed by a drunk driver. I just wanted to stop thinking about it and have some structure in my life. But I was still filled with such rage and frustration that I had to get

it out before it destroyed me. One day I just began drawing *The Crow*; it came pouring out."

That 'someone' was the one. Racked with grief, O'Barr achieved an early discharge and returned to the states with the full intention of killing the drunk behind the wheel. His personal quest for revenge was thwarted, the driver having already passed away. Instead, O'Barr channelled his homicidal rage into his art. It is no accident that the comic's inferred setting is O'Barr's hometown of Detroit, or that the murders of anti-hero, Eric Draven, and his true love occur when they are out for a romantic drive. *The Crow* was a product of anguish then, even ahead of its infamously beleaguered movie set.

The series of misfortunes which occurred during the filming of *The Crow* have led many to believe O'Barr's story a victim of its own macabrim. A car accident, a screwdriver embedded in a hand, a stuntman falling through a window and breaking several ribs, a hurricane, and a fire were among the darker acts of god to befall those on set. But the paramount tragedy was the death of the movie's star, Brandon Lee, shot by a fellow actor on set under still-debated circumstances. With Lee due to be married three weeks later, the story of Eric and his lost love was all too acute for O'Barr; he spiralled into depression and drug addiction, only

to emerge years later, relieved for the most part of the guilt - and the majority of the financial assets - that came from his creation.

Given these bleak circumstances, the choice of soundtrack was always going to be intrinsic to the movie's authenticity. O'Barr even admitted, "I was much more inspired by the music of the time than the comics of the time." The first graphic novel in the series was dedicated to the lead singer of Joy Division, Ian Curtis, who hanged himself at age 23 and on the night before the band's first US tour, seemingly because of his worsening epilepsy. This fusion of art and music was evident in the use of Joy Division songs as chapter titles, and quotes from rock poet Jim Carroll and lyrics by Robert Smith of The Cure. Even Eric's appearance was based on Peter Murphy from the group Bauhaus, his body movements on punkster Iggy Pop.

The resultant album was seminal; it revelled in O'Barr's musical inspirations, layering these with artists not only relevant at the time but whose work reflected the film's core themes of alienation, heartache and decay. From the haunting cries of The Cure's opening track, 'Burn', through to the metal bombast of Pantera, Trent Reznor's rusted, tyrannical meshwork of 'Dead Souls', hit track, 'Big Empty' from Stone Temple Pilots, and the closing fragility of Jane Silberr's

BRANDON LEE

## THE CROW



### SOUND BITES

- ▶ "...The sonic personification of anxiety. Blues cubists. Spoken word for misfits" - how the Violent Femmes describe themselves on their website. Perfect then for a movie about a heart-torn vigilante expelled from the grave.
- ▶ Pantera's 'The Badge' is a Metallica's anthem which questions the morality of police, asking 'What's behind the badge?' This theme is prevalent in the third film in the Crow franchise: *The Crow: Salvation*, which sees a new dark angel, a character called Alex Corvis, framed for the murder of his girlfriend by corrupt police.
- ▶ James O'Barr began work on his graphic novel in 1981. This was also the year The Cure recorded the maudlin album *Faith*, solidifying an obsession with all things decayed and dissipating with their 1982 release, *Pornography*. O'Barr's adoption of The Cure as muse was well-timed; a year later, Robert Smith and crew reinvented themselves as more of a pop outfit.
- ▶ The soundtrack concludes with Jane Silberr's ethereal 'It Can't Rain All The Time'. In 2006, Silberr changed her name to Issa (pronounced eeee-sah), a feminine variant of Isaiah. Another case of reincarnation?
- ▶ *Fear And Bullets* was an album created through a collaboration between James O'Barr and longtime friend John Bergin as a soundtrack to O'Barr's graphic novel. It was originally released in 1994 along with a limited edition hardcover copy of the graphic novel, the release coinciding with the publicity received from the film.

'It Can't Rain All The Time', *The Crow*: the soundtrack encapsulated a moment of cinematic history, when Goth became gut-wrenchingly glorious and the whole world wept.

by Matrix Co-editor, Kim Lakin-Smith  
www.kimlakin-smith.com

# The Invasion

DO NOT TRUST HOLLYWOOD  
TO SHOW EMOTION  
DO FALL ASLEEP

Martin McGrath on 'The Invasion'

There are aliens amongst us. They hide, but if you know what to look for, you can spot them. They dress like us, but in nicer, better tailored suits. They move like us, but more slowly and they have a tendency to cluster together and persecute those who act differently. They look like us, but they don't sweat, and if you look closely, something seems to be missing behind their eyes. They even talk like us, but if you listen carefully you'll detect the subtle clues that prove that they are emotionless, soulless drones. Yes, Hollywood executives move amongst us and they are murdering perfectly good stories near you.

There's no good reason why a new version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* shouldn't be made today. After all, the first movie (1956) is, famously, the product of McCarthyism and post-war America's first descent into paranoid self-loathing. The second (1978) has its roots in that post-Watergate-post-Vietnam era where a decade of drug-fuelled excess woke up and found Reagan's new conservatives and the moral majority waiting at the gates, tooled up and ready to ruck.

Two films born in what seemed like paranoid times, no doubt, but from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, they seem like the last carefree days of summer.

McCarthy might have wanted to pry into the secret thoughts and allegiances of every American but he was, in the end, just one junior senator trying to make a big name for himself (albeit with some powerful allies). And the hippies might have looked into the eyes of the moral majority and screamed in terror at the idea of such rightwing conformity, but they never foresaw the rise and rise of the Christian right to the extent that its dollars now buy it control of a major American political party.

The Patriot Act, Homeland Security, the War on Terror, Intelligent Design, religious fundamentalism, the surveillance state, the death of trust: if ever there was an era ready for a hard-hitting, intelligent version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, this is it.

Which makes it all the more bewildering that this remake (*Invasion*), by Oliver Hirschbiegel (director of the stunning *Downfall*) from a script by first-time writer Dave Kajganich is so utterly toothless.

How this happened we, the audience, will never know. Hirschbiegel and Kajganich might remain on the credits, but the studio so hated their version of the film (finished in 2006) that they hired the Wachowski brothers (*Matrix*) to rewrite the script and James McTeigue (*V for Vendetta*) to reshoot extensively.

There are clearly elements of this film that hint that someone involved recognised the potential for intelligent political commentary. The alien virus (the original pods are gone) that is turning people into suit-wearing, sweat-free zombies begins its spread through the infrastructure of "Homeland Security" and the film has some smart images throughout of the "police state" being mobilised as the aliens exercise control. But, whether because studio executives interfered or because the film-makers lacked any kind of conviction, these potentially interesting aspects are allowed to fade into the background in favour of a mother's (Kidman) search for her son (Bond) who, it just so happens, might possess the key to stopping the virus. *Invasion* then becomes a long and increasingly strained series of chase sequences with nothing to say and little to recommend it.

What would be hilarious if it wasn't so stupid is that, fifty years after Allied Artists executives faced with Don Siegel's classic original, embarrassed themselves by tacking on a "happy ending," Warner Brothers have done exactly the same to this version. Yankee ingenuity and the steadfastness of the American military are not to be outdone here by some sneaky invaders working in cells – whether they're terrorists or an alien virus. Kidman, it must be said, is utterly awful. She is surrounded by a cast of decent actors (Craig, Northam, Wright) who are given precious little to do except stand around and watch while Kidman gets to "emote" – the "star" simply rides roughshod over the rest of the film – and it's made worse by the fact that Ms. Kidman seems totally unaware of her painful limitations as an actress. *Invasion* stinks. It's an insult to the movie-going public and to the memory of two much better movies.

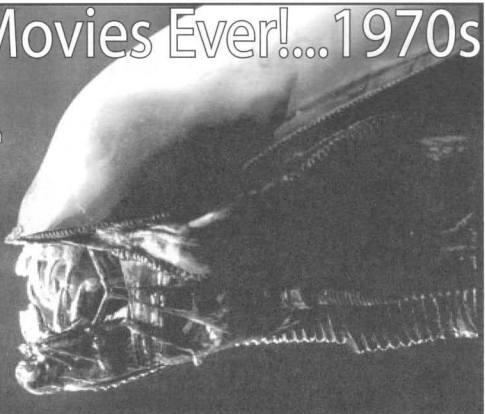


'If ever there was an era ready for a hard-hitting, intelligent version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, this is it.'



# Best SF Movies Ever!...1970s

In honour of the imminent countdown to 2008 and the celebration of the BSFA's 50th anniversary, *Matrix* has decided to do a countdown of its own - of the best sf movies of each decade, starting now and working our way back to the good old days of 1958 (ish)...



**1979** and it's the year of *Alien*, (Sir) Ridley Scott's first science fiction masterpiece and proof positive that not only is space entirely tedious, it's also full of nasty, bitey horrors just waiting to smear you all over the spaceship the minute you shove your curious monkey-face into its darkest corners and start poking around. Clearly the moral here is stay on Earth, or if you absolutely have to know what's on the other side of the Universe, at least send a machine so no lurking terror will try and French-kiss you to death.

Then again, perhaps that's not such a good idea either, as the crew of the *Starship Enterprise* discovered on their first big screen adventure. While later franchise outings messed around with time-travel, killing Spock, bring Spock back and then finally realising it was Kirk they should have offed all along, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* plays its SF cards remarkable straight and delivers on the high-concept front with a story of the *Voyager* probe returning to Earth imbued with almost God-like powers and some serious parental issues. So really the moral here is just sit back and enjoy planet we happen to live on and make the most of it, right?

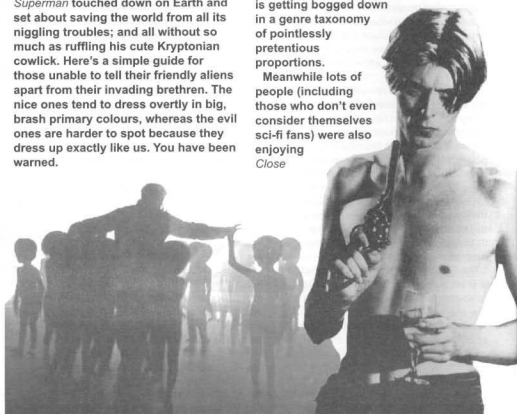
Well no, not if you live in the world of *Mad Max* anyway. The oil's running out (pay attention Bush administration, this is 1979 and we already figured this out) and there's killer road gangs on the loose burning up what little we have left. This is a world with no morality at all, and a frighteningly plausible road-map to our own potential future. Roll on the eighties.

**1978** and anyone concerned about visitors from outer space would be receiving very mixed messages from the year's two main sci-fi offerings. *Paranoia* is very much in fashion for the remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Updating the B-Movie concept to a superior science fiction thriller with one of those classically downbeat endings you just can't sneak past marketing committees these days. Meanwhile Mr All Cape - No Trousers *Superman* touched down on Earth and set about saving the world from all its niggling troubles; and all without so much as ruffling his cute Kryptonian cowlick. Here's a simple guide for those unable to tell their friendly aliens apart from their invading brethren. The nice ones tend to dress overtly in big, brash primary colours, whereas the evil ones are harder to spot because they dress up exactly like us. You have been warned.

**1977** is considered by many supposedly well-informed commentators to be the year that science fiction broke, and the finger of blame is pointed squarely at one George Lucas. Is *Star Wars* actually science fiction at all, they cry, or just some fantasy in space? Ok, so it may have nicked some of our toys, but it's not really proper SF is it? Can't be, it's too popular for a start.

Well, actually, of course it's science fiction, and anyone who says otherwise is getting bogged down in a genre taxonomy of pointlessly pretentious proportions.

Meanwhile lots of people (including those who don't even consider themselves sci-fi fans) were also enjoying *Close*



Encounters of the Third Kind a whole lot and for those who like to crossbreed their genres we'd also recommend *Dawn of the Dead* as a satirical slice of sci-fi as much as it is obviously a fantastic zombie horror.

**1976** was the year that finally bowed to the inevitable and cast starman David Bowie as an estranged alien seduced by life on Earth rather than Mars. Meanwhile *Logan's Run* was perhaps the last of the big dumb but fun sf concept movies that still thought we'd all be wearing jumpsuits in the future. If this is what the hip and trendy youngsters of the future were choosing to wear it's no wonder they were being killed off at the age of thirty - the year we all enter a permanent decline in fashion sense.



Elsewhere David Cronenberg was carving out his own special cinematic niche with the delightfully disturbing *Shivers* while *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* would prove to be an equally, though differently, disturbing hit thanks to its continued influence on a certain kind of student.

**1974** is perhaps most notable for the cult hit *Dark Star*. A low-budget offering from genre master John Carpenter and a comedy forerunner of *Alien* thanks to the involvement of scriptwriter Dan O'Bannon, who retrofitted many of the comedy set-pieces from this film into the claustrophobic horror of the latter.

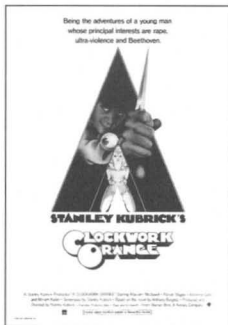
Phase IV was an interesting take on the 'When Ants Attack' genre, and speculated an intriguingly naturalistic approach to the development of superior hive minds that threaten to replace mankind as the planet's biggest thinkers. As yet another precursor to *Alien*, the film is also notable for starring Helen Horton,

who would later provide the voice of spaceship computer Mother.

**1973** and science fiction writer Harry Harrison joins Richard Matheson in the ranks of authors who've been Hestoned. This time main man Chuck stars in an adaptation of *Make Room! Make Room!* A still timely science fictional tale that is either cautioning us about the perils of overpopulation or quite

possibly predicting the latest marketing ploy of the modern fast food industry. Either way 2022 looks like being a pretty bleak year for mankind, so we'd recommend stocking up on canned goods now before suddenly James Oliver starts telling us just how pucker Sainsbury's finest soylent really is.

**1972** saw it's own space race for the top movie slot, with slowburn *Solaris* squaring off against ecological fable *Silent Running* for prime position, but it was perhaps the time-hoppingly happy adaptation of *Slaughterhouse Five* that proved the biggest hit with science fiction fans who were so delighted this adaptation didn't screw up a good book that they awarded the film a Hugo award. Even this level of fannish devotion couldn't



be topped by Kurt Vonnegut's own delight, who claimed to "drool and cackle every time I watch that film."

**1971** was the year of *THX 1138*, the other significant sci-fi offering from a certain George Lucas, as well the release of yet another of Kubrick's finest hours in the form of *A Clockwork Orange*. Other notable offerings included space virus technothriller *The Andromeda Strain* as well as Steven Spielberg's made for TV monster truck (emphasis on the monster) marathon, *Duel*.

**1970**, and finally what best of collection would be complete without the mention of at least one Dinosaur Vs. Caveman classic. We've picked this one partially because it actually had some decent special effects (it's nominated for an Oscar don't you know) but mostly because a certain J.G. Ballard claims a story credit, and thus the science fictional circle is complete.



## BAD MONKEY

Worst science fiction film of the decade? Well, this time we simply couldn't settle on one and so have opted instead to include anything with the words 'planet of the apes' included somewhere in the title.

So you could be beneath, above, battling for, or just generally bored of 'the planet of the apes', but that doesn't matter because apparently if you're unlucky enough to be a cinema-going science fiction fan living in the Seventies there's an *Apes* movie for every occasion. Ok, so individually there are some fine moments throughout the franchise, but the increasing desperation of ideas, and ever decreasing budgets, do nothing to enhance the reputation of the original classic, and if there's one movie that deserves to rest on its laurels after its final shot surely it's the original *Planet of the Apes*.

**1975**, and while not technically science fiction, no round up of best movies ever would be complete without a mention of *JAWS*. To summarise the case for the defence, not to mention this film important as the jumping off point for sf cinema champion Steven Spielberg, not only is this film vital in shaping the face of modern blockbuster (a vital force for bringing new fans into the wider sf world) but this film also features a giant animal terrorising a town, which is surely still an appropriately snafu theme even if the barrels of radioactive waste or strange cosmic rays that usually mutate our wildlife to gigantic proportions are hidden entirely off screen. For further proof that sometimes giant monsters are best off without a genre rationale check out *The Land That Time Forgot* (or don't) also 1975.



# SEDUCTION of the Innocent

COMIC REVIEWS BY JAMES BACON ESQ.



## Alice in Sunderland, an Entertainment by Bryan Talbot.

Occasionally comics turn up which feel just that little bit special, read quite differently from the enjoyable popcorn cultural ephemeral entertainment usually on offer and capture something unique.

Great works are not always immediately apparent, but Bryan Talbot, author and artist of the comic classic *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright*, is well known for his depth of storytelling and intricate and detailed artwork. Talbot reinterprets the history surrounding the life and times of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, known more commonly to us as the writer of *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll. Basing this aspect of the work of Michael Bute's book *A Town Like Alice*, which investigates and offers evidence and opinion on the activities of Dodgson and his connections with the city of Sunderland.

Talbot takes the reader on a historical journey, playing the part of narrator in a number of guises, starting at the Empire Theatre and then meandering gently from there, taking an in-depth look at what Sunderland has offered, the current state of the city and a detailed look

of the history of the area throughout time. As Talbot encounters crossroads with Dodgson, he brings them to light, subtly drawing quite a convincing case and offering the reader the opportunity to contemplate one's own insight into what he lays out as circumstantial and factual evidence.

The artwork is uniformly stunning, containing an incredible amount of accuracy. This is no hackneyed photoshop job, Talbot has applied every bit of sequential skill possible to the story, and utilises photography, comic artwork, reproduction of imagery and what can only be considered photo manipulation to produce a real collage of artistic presentation. This vivid and refreshing visualisation does the tale we are told true justice.

I would not be surprised if the founding fathers and leading lights of other cities, with not dissimilar low reputations in the eyes of the masses, are not queuing up to offer Mr. Talbot residency, financial support and some sort of cultural Christie-an puzzle to put together a similar work that shows the true heart, history and nature of their cities in an honest and thoughtful way.

I must admit, I only truly know Sunderland because of the Irish connection with their Football team, but this comic induces a strange yearning to personally see and appreciate the cultural and historical beauty that the town and surrounding areas have to offer. This and the urge to reread *Alice* is proof indeed that the comic had a certain effect on this reader.

Lacking the stodginess that one might associate with a work produced for 'culture's sake', Talbot seems to have emulated some of the ideas and attitudes that culturally Sunderland seems to embody, offering a damn good read. There is no slack in the pace of the story, which is frequently peppered with moments of dry humour and continually investigates the connection between *Alice* and *Sunderland*.

The story tells the tales of Sunderland, most of which are well known in the area, and of course have survived the ravages of boredom and time, as any mythical or historical tale that still exists

'Talbot, with his own storytelling skills, recounts great tales and draws them reflecting the period and styles of the time in a very pleasurable way.'

today will have had to do. No one will listen to a story in the pub, nor remember it if it is boring. Talbot, with his own storytelling skills, recounts great tales and draws them reflecting the period and styles of the time in a very pleasurable way.

Shockingly this book, which took years to bring to fruition, delightfully involving the likes of author Chaz Brencley and comic artist Leo Baxendale amongst others as side bar story tellers, failed to gain the support of the Arts Council, and this in its own right is an indictment on where art is today. Art for the sake of it, foisted upon communities, lacking any context or connection. Then, when some truly significant piece of art turns up, a modern day Book of Kells, the authorities completely fail to recognise its import or to treat it appropriately.

If you never read a comic before, then the three hundred and twenty pages of this book will not only get your synapses firing, but also will be a visual delicacy for the eyes and a wonderful place to start enjoying the beauty of sequential story telling.

Bryan Talbot was one of many guests at the Lancaster Comics Convention, held at Ashton Memorial, Williamson Park, Lancaster on November 17 to 18, 2007. [www.lancastercomics.com](http://www.lancastercomics.com).

*Tintin* the play has been doing a tour of excellent reviews, a play with music for all the family starring the classic two dimensional character. Check out <http://www.tintintheshow.co.uk> for more details, but it will be touring around the UK, from Plymouth to Bradford to Working, winding up in the Playhouse Theatre, London from December 6, 2007 to February 23, 2008





## Spray-On

From Stanislaw Lem's *Return from the Stars* to *Futurama*, spray-on clothing has been a SF favourite. Today there is *Fabrican*, fabric in a can. Created by Dr Manel Torres, formally of Royal College of Art, and Professor Paul Luckham of Imperial College, London, they believe it will meet the needs of several markets including medical coverings, fashion and the automotive industry.

When sprayed, a cloud of fibres strike the skin and bind together to make the covering. Torres says the characteristics of the fabric can be adjusted to be as soft as silk or as tough as hemp. It doesn't have to be applied to the skin, hard surfaces can be the target and it can be adjusted to be as durable as required.

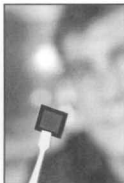
He sees the future of adding different materials to develop different textures and styles.

Source: [fabricantltd.com](http://fabricantltd.com)

## Turn Up The Heat

The Georgia Tech Research Institute has announced a new technology that will dramatically raise the efficiency of solar electricity generation. It is the 3D solar cell. Made up of microscopic 'towers' created from millions of carbon nano-tubes, where the current cells reflect much of the light striking them the 3D photovoltaic cells tower structure traps more light.

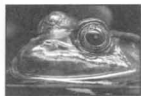
The prime aim is to use them on satellite solar panels to reduce their size and mass – critical for space applications. It will also remove the need for pointing mechanisms



used to keep flat panels pointing at the sun.

The next step is industrialising them, if they can be shown to withstand the space environment.

Source: Professional Engineering



## MRSA Leap

A chemical produced by bullfrogs may help in the fight against MRSA. The hard to kill bacterium is responsible for the deaths of 2,000 people a year in the UK.

The substance, Ranalexin, is produced by the Rana frog and when combined with another antimicrobial, lysostaphin, has a 'potent and significant' inhibitory effect.

Dr Coote, of St Andrews University's Centre for Biomolecular Science (CBMS), said, "Our finding represents a potentially novel way to combat MRSA via surface treatment or impregnation of wound dressings."

Combining antibiotics is a common way of targeting a wide spectrum of organisms and prevents the emergence of resistant strains. It also decreases toxicity to the patient because lower doses of each ingredient are used.

Ranalexin is an antimicrobial peptide. These type of chemicals are produced by all creatures as a defence against disease-causing pathogens.

Dr Coote said, "The development of new routes to target MRSA that do not result in the acquisition of resistance would greatly improve the ability of clinicians to tackle these infections more effectively and cheaply."

Source: [St Andrews University](http://St Andrews University)

## Light: Particle, Wave...Solid?

It took years for physicists to stop arguing over whether light was a particle or a wave. Now they're suggesting it can behave like a solid.

A new theory of light has been proposed by Dr Andrew Greentree, Jared Cole and Professor Lloyd Hollenberg of the University of Melbourne with Dr Charles Tahan of the University of Cambridge.

"Solid light photons repel each other as electrons do. This means we can control photons, opening the door to new kinds of faster computers," says Dr Greentree.

Photons of light do not normally interact

with each other; however, the team has shown theoretically how to engineer a 'phase transition' in photons so that they do interact with each other and thus can be controlled like electrons.

"Usually, photons flow freely, but in the right circumstances, they repel each other, and form a crystal."

They describe it as a phase transition because it is analogous to water solidifying into ice, and see this effect linking two very different areas of physics: optics and condensed matter.

Source: [University of Melbourne](http://University of Melbourne)



After announcing the completion, and imminent operation, of CERN's Large Hadron Collider in Matrix 1B3, it now faces a set back.

All the hardware has been installed but during high pressure testing the supports for the 'inner triplet' of superconducting magnets have failed. This is critical since it is the magnets that focus the particle beams as they are accelerated around the 27km ring. The supports haven't broken completely, but beam alignment is impossible.

The magnet assemblies are highly stressed as well as being cooled with super-fluid helium to -271°C (2°C colder than deep space) and under 20 atmospheres of pressure.

It appears there was an oversight in the design calculations omitting that the magnets suffer from asymmetrical loading.

The manufacturers, Fermilab, are working closely to redesign and repair the supports without removing them whilst intending to meet the original start up schedule.

Source: Professional Engineering, [www.cern.ch](http://www.cern.ch)

Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science have developed the HeartLander. This is a slug-like miniature robot that crawls over the surface of a beating heart to perform procedures within the pericardium (the sac that encloses the heart).

The key benefit is that it can travel to any part of the heart via a small incision. This minimises the physical trauma to the patient; for example: there no need to deflate a lung as is currently required for some conventional operations.

Source: [Carnegie Mellon University](http://Carnegie Mellon University)

Mercury may have a molten core. It has long been suspected that the planet has an iron-rich core caused by a massive collision early in its life which removed most of the original surface. That core is also thought to be solid because the planet is too small to remain molten after billions of years of cooling.

Researchers from the Cornell University, the University of California, JPL and Space Research Institute, Russia now think they have evidence that it may not have solidified completely.

Using a trio of powerful radio telescopes, they have been bouncing radar signals off Mercury to measure its wobble. The motion is twice what would be expected for a solid core, suggesting that the interior is decoupled from its exterior.

Their theory is that trace amounts of other elements mixed in the iron have lowered the core's freezing point, hence it not solidifying completely.

It is unclear how important this is, however, with NASA's Messenger spacecraft due to arrive in two and half year's time and ESA's BepiColumbo probe due for launch in 2013, more surprises are likely.

Source: NSF's National Radio Astronomy Observatory

# ACCESS ALL AREAS

A new column where *Matrix* co-editor,  
Del Lakin-Smith, lays media technology bare

## DIGITAL RIGHTS AND WRONGS



In the land of the free, DRM is dead. But in the land of consumerism, DRM still limps along, providing the big media producers with a method of squeezing a few more pence of profit from their products.

For those unfamiliar with the term, DRM stands for Digital Rights Management, or 'Digital Restriction Management' by the Free Software Foundation. It provides a method of locking a piece of media, be that a song, movie, e-book or document, to a device like an iPod, e-book reader or PC. The motivation behind DRM is to prevent the copying and distribution of any piece of electronic media, therefore protecting the copyright of the owner – or, more to the point, ensuring that profits are protected for the distributor. DRM is actually an umbrella term which can apply to any piece of digital media. It can be open or restrictive – the latter because it is used to control access to and distribution of either sensitive or copyrighted material.

DRM, right or wrong? It's one of the great debates of 21st century media consumerism. There are arguments for both sides of the digimedia coin. To my mind, a better question is whether DRM prevents fair usage (US term) or fair dealing (UK term) of the media I buy and own.

To get an idea of how DRM affects us, the home user, we need to understand the technology's legacy. From its infancy, DRM's journey into the mainstream was rocky, thanks in the main to Sony BMG who were the first to try to trash a home PC by installing a stealth DRM program that snuck onto

your PC, leaving a backdoor open to hackers in the process. Strangely enough, Sony's stealth program was soon withdrawn but the damage had already been done.

This was in 2005. Around the same time, several attempts were made to incorporate DRM onto CDs; this was badly executed and



ended up preventing many buyers from playing CDs on their PCs and sometimes even crashing them. In January of 2007, EMI became the last major record label to stop selling CDs with DRM, declaring that the cost of DRM outweighed the benefits.

The MP3 music market has faced a similar dilemma. 2001 saw the emergence of a young upstart company called Apple and their too-cool-for-school gizmo, the iPod. At last we, the consumers, had the freedom we so craved, freedom to carry around our entire music collection on one small device, to download whatever our ears desired courtesy of a galactic integrated shopping mall known as

iTunes store, and to purchase single tracks for less than \$1. It was a stroke of brilliance on Apple's behalf; with iTunes, they had in effect brought what was primarily a nerds' game of ripping CDs and downloading media to the masses.

But Apple's new technology has turned out to be a case of 'be careful what you wish for'. The major record labels agreed to sell their tracks through iTunes as a new – read, small – revenue stream. Little did they imagine that this would sound the death knell of the CD.

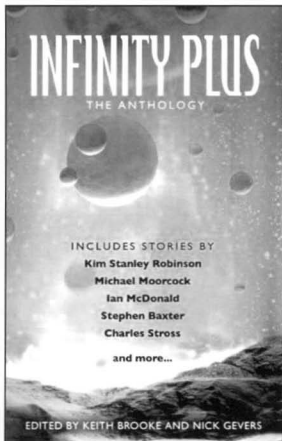
So, digital music is here to stay. But at what price? Surely what consumers really want is the freedom to choose and the freedom to use, not DRM or being tied in to one provider, just music when we want it and played on what device we want to play it on.

This same issue is raising its head in the digital movie and book industries, and while the use of DRM technology in these environments is much more in its infancy, they would be wise to sit up and take stock of the lessons learnt in the electronic trading of music.

So where are we heading? A *Star Trek* utopia or *Demolition Man* corporate slavery? Only time will tell. But one thing is for sure – the corporates will stick to DRM like a terrier with a rag, and the movement of people refusing to accept the restrictive DRM will increase. Place your bets, people, and let battle commence.



'DRM, right or wrong? It's one of the great debates of 21st century media consumerism.'



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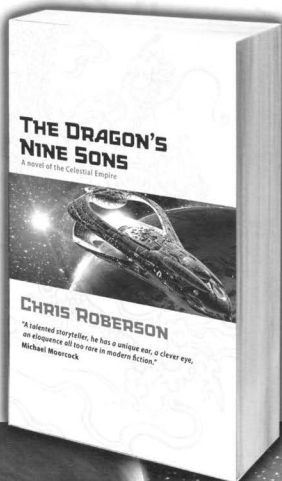
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