

September 1998

Issue 324

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chair-Tony Morton, Secretary-Anne Woodford, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-Rog Peyton Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 28 Chair-Martin Tudor, Novacon 29 Chair-Carol Morton.

PAT CADIGAN

will address the BSFG on

Friday 11th September 1998, *

from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge, second floor,
Britannia Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union
Passageway).

**Drinks may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine level
and taken up to the Lichfield on the second floor.**

**Admittance: Members £3.00 (£2.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £4.00
(£3.00 Unwaged). (Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the
Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being
produced.) (*VB: the second Friday of the month.)**

Forthcoming Meetings:

***9 October PETER F HAMILTON; 13 November a SPECIAL
MEETING AT NOVACON 28 - Guest to be announced;
11 December BEER & SKITTLES at the Samson & Lion.***

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £15.00 per person, or £20.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Mids, B65 0RL, (e-mail enquiries via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

Pat Cadigan
By Chris Fowler

Pat Cadigan is looking forward to meeting the Birmingham SF Group, reading from her new novel, *Tea from an Empty Cup*, and talking about her work. *Tea from an Empty Cup* is Pat's first novel for six years and publication is already creating media interest. *Tea from an Empty Cup* will appeal both to lovers of near-future science fiction and crime, as one aspect of the novel is a police procedural, set in the future and in Artificial Reality.

Pat Cadigan is a leading science fiction writer, and a respected futurist and commentator on popular culture. Her fiction, both novels and short stories, has received many awards and nominations, and is published in French, German, Italian and Japanese, as well as her native English. Many leading academics have drawn on her work, and she receives frequent invitations to contribute to academic conferences.

Born in New York and raised in Massachusetts, Pat Cadigan studied at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, before moving to the University of Kansas in Lawrence to complete her degree. After some postgraduate work with James Gunn, she worked for ten years as a writer and editor for Hallmark Cards in Kansas City. She then took up writing fiction full-time, continuing to live in Overland Park, Kansas until August 1996, when she moved to London, where she lives with her husband, Chris Fowler and her cat Calgary.

Pat has had three novels published to date: *Mindplayers* (1987), *Synners* (1991) and *Fools* (1992). Both *Synners* and *Fools* won the Arthur C Clarke Award for best science fiction novel of the year in Great Britain. Her fourth novel, *Tea from an Empty Cup*, is published in the UK by HarperCollins/Voyager on 7 September 1998, and in the USA by Tor on 5 October 1998. Pat recently completed an original *Lost in Space* novel, and has commenced work for a non-fiction book on *The Making of The Mummy*. She is also doing preparatory work for a new novel, featuring the same detective, Dore Konstantin, who is in *Tea from an Empty Cup*. Pat's book on *The Making of Lost in Space* (published April 1998 by HarperCollins in the USA, and in July 1998 by Titan in the UK) was her first major contribution to the literature of cinema.

Whilst all Pat Cadigan's novels concern the near future, the mind/computer interface, artificial reality and the impact of developing technologies on people - she is described as a "cyberpunk", though many would think of her as being a "hard science fiction" writer - her short

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fiction covers a wider brief, including science fiction, fantasy, horror, the surreal, and stories which would fit easily into the literary mainstream. Her short story collections include *Patterns* (1989), *Home by the Sea* (1993) and *Dirty Work* (1993).

Pat's non-fiction has appeared in a number of publications, including *Omni*. She is interested in all aspects of popular culture, particularly the ways in which music, TV, film and other time-based media are merging with the new digital technologies.

Pat has contributed to many radio and TV programmes. She was a special guest on BBC Radio Four's *The Net*, where she commented on issues of censorship and privacy; she featured prominently in *Brainstorm*, a segment of BBC TV's science series *Future Fantastic*.

Pat Cadigan was described by the *London Guardian* as "the queen of cyberpunk", and, not to be outdone, BBC1 TV on *Future Fantastic* described her as "the queen of modern science fiction". In the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, John Clute said "...at the heart of Synners is the burning presence of the future. One of the most acutely intelligent of 1980s writers, Pat Cadigan currently seems to be learning from everything."

With her home now in London, a world centre for culture and its developments in relation to the emergent digital technologies, Pat Cadigan continues not only to learn but to teach. Formerly a Visiting Scholar attached to the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at the University of Warwick, she has most recently spoken at the German Association for American Studies, in October 1997 at UC Riverside, and in November 1997 at a major European academic conference in Austria. During her tour of the US in October she will speak at MIT and at UC Santa Cruz.

Pat's short fiction has recently appeared in *New Worlds* (edited by David Garnett, White Wolf, 1997 - her story, "The Emperor's New Reality", was short-listed for the BSFA Award in 1998), *Disco 2000* (edited by Sarah Champion, Sceptre, 1998), *The Ex-Files* (edited by Nick Royle, June, Serpent's Tail), and in the Christmas 1997 issue of *Interzone* ("What I Got For Christmas", together with an interview by Laurie Goffin). Her story "Little Latin Larry" has just been published in the new *Event Horizon* website, whose fiction editor is Ellen Datlow.

[Pat's web-site is at <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/~fowlerc/patcadigan.html>]

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Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

12 Sept: **David Gemmell** signing his new hardback *THE SWORD IN THE STORM* (Bantam, £15.99) and his paperback *ECHOES OF THE GREAT SONG*.

12 Sept: 2.30pm. Launch party for the Gollancz edition of *DARK TERRORS 4* edited by **Stephen Jones** and **David Sutton**. Both editors and the following contributing authors will be in the shop to sign books: **Ramsey Campbell, Michael Marshall Smith, Christopher Fowler, Stephen Baxter, Joel Lane, Lisa Tuttle, Jay Russell, Conrad Williams, Terry Lamsley.**

9 Oct: **Peter Hamilton** signing his hardback short story collection *A SECOND CHANCE AT EDEN* (£17.99) and the paperback edition of *THE NEUTRONIUM ALCHEMIST* (£7.99).

Forthcoming Events

11 SEPTEMBER 1998: **PAT CADIGAN** will address the BSGF on the publication of her latest work, *TEA FROM AN EMPTY CUP*. From 7.45 in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway.)

11-13 SEPTEMBER 1998: **FANTASYCON 22**, the convention of the British Fantasy Society. At the Albany Hotel, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Freda Warrington, Jane Yolen and Master of Ceremonies Ramsey Campbell. Attending £55.00. Contact: 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT, further details can be seen at: <http://www.geocities.com/soho/6859/>

9 OCTOBER 1998: **PETER F HAMILTON** will address the BSGF on the hardback publication of his short story collection, *A SECOND CHANCE AT EDEN* (£17.99), and the paperback of *THE NEUTRONIUM ALCHEMIST* (£7.99). From 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

7-8 November 1998: **Memorabilia**, "Europe's largest SF, film, cult TV, pop and comic collectors fair". Hall 17, NEC. For further information call Made in Heaven 01899 221622 or tickets from box office on 0121 767 4555.

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13-15 NOVEMBER 1998: NOVACON 28, at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Paul J McAuley. Attending membership costs £32.00 until 1st November, after which time memberships may be paid for on the door at the rate of £35.00. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS, (For further information check out <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n28/n28.html>).

11 DECEMBER 1998: BSFG BEER & SKITTLES Christmas Meeting at the Samson and Lion, Wordsley. See advert on back cover.

2-5 April 1999: RECONVENE, 50th National British Convention, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. GoHs: Peter S Beagle, John Clute, Jeff Noon. Attending £25.00 to Reconvene, 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

27 December 1999 - 2 January 2000: MILLENNIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (£10.00) per year, to be deducted from eventual membership fee. Contact: Malcolm Reid, 186 Casewick Road, West Norwood, London, SE27 0SZ.

Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise readers to contact organisers prior to travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses. Please mention the BRUM GROUP NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.

If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor (e-mail yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them about) please feel free to write a report or review and send it to the editorial address.

TAFF News from Martin Tudor

On the 17th August the following announcement was despatched by the current Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund Administrator, Ulrika O'Brien:

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"Balloting is now open in the 1999 North America to Europe TAFF race. The candidates are Velma "Vijay" Bowen, and Sarah S. Prince. The winning candidate will travel to travel to Reconvene, the 50th Annual British National Science Fiction Convention, in Liverpool, England, April 2-5, 1999.

Deadline for voting is midnight, Saturday December 5, 1998. Ballots must be accompanied by a donation to TAFF of not less than \$3 US or 2 UK, though larger donations are gratefully accepted. Voting is open to individuals who have been active in fandom since April, 1997 or earlier. A complete statement of TAFF rules, plus the candidacy statements and nominators for both candidates, are available in the text of the TAFF Ballot.

Official ballots will be available from the U.S. Administrator, Ulrika O'Brien: 123 Melody Ln. #C, Costa Mesa, CA 92627, USA; ulrika@aol.com, and eventually from the UK Administrator Maureen Kincaid Speller, on her return to the UK. Dave Langford has kindly volunteered to produce UK ballots in the meantime -- contact him at 94 London Rd., Reading, Berkshire RG1 5AU, England; ansible@cix.co.uk. A ballot copy will be made available at the TAFF website: <http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Taff/>, or, look for ballots in a fanzine near you.

Best of luck to both candidates,"

New Editor

This is my first newsletter as editor so I thought I'd introduce myself. My name is Yvonne Rowse. I'm married with two children and live in rural Worcestershire. I've been a (literary) SF fan for thirty-odd years, a (sleeper) member of the BSFA for eleven years and a BSFG member for about a year now. I went to Intervention, Novacon 27 and Intuition. I've recently published my first fanzine (ask me for a copy if you're interested) and I'm slowly joining the mailing lists of other people's fanzines. I subscribe to the Feminist and Utopian SF list and any minute now I'm going to join an SF newsgroup.

If I do something with the newsletter that you don't like please feel free to tell me. I would also be pleased to hear what exactly you would like from the newsletter. There may be some changes as I try to wrestle my software into submission, but the newsletter will only be as good as the contributions received. If you don't send in reviews, articles, news, letters

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etc it will degenerate into a collection of (nicely presented) lists. I would really appreciate it if those of you with outstanding reviews would send them to me (preferably by e-mail so I don't have to type them in).

Finally, I'd like to say thank you all for making me so welcome and a particular thank you to Martin, Anne and Alan for their generous help. When I heard the group was looking for new blood I was a bit concerned but no-one's gone for my jugular. Yet.

Letters

**Madeline Willis,
9 Alexandra Road, Donaghadee, BT21 0QS, Northern Ireland.
19th August 1998.**

Dear Fellow Fans

I am awaiting a visit from a consultant in geriatrics to hear what is happening to Walter. For the last few days he has done little other than sleep. He also does not know how to get to the bedroom or the bathroom.

It seems to me as if he has had a stroke which has so far affected his sense of direction and his ability to focus his eyes.

You will understand if you do not hear from him or me in reply to your letters and fanzines. I am getting this photocopied at the library and will add any further information after the consultant's visit. At the moment it looks like "Goodbye Fandom".

Sadly

Madeline Willis.

{The following hand-written postscript appears on the back of the above letter:}

20th August

Consultant came. Walter removed to Dundonald (Ulster Hospital). Brain scan - slight stroke diagnosed - loss of some peripheral vision on left side, plus slight cardiac arrhythmia, plus some loss of power in left arm and leg. And worst of all, some confusion.

Madeline Willis, 27th August

Roscoe Report

By Steve Green

Fans of Mulder and Scully will be keeping their fingers X'd on 13 September, as the results of this year's Emmy Awards are announced - *The X-Files* has been nominated in 16 categories, including drama series, lead actor / actress in a drama series and writing, the last for creator Chris Carter himself.

Also waiting in the wings will be the cast of *3rd Rock from the Sun*, who survived a ratings collapse last year following an ill-advised mid-week rescheduling; their eight nominations include comedy series and lead actor / actress in a comedy series.

Paul Verhoeven's next directorial stint may be the invisibility thriller *The Hollow Man*, from a script by Andrew (*Air Force One*) Marlowe, but he hasn't ruled out taking the reins on *Starship Troopers 2*.

Disappointed by the *Robocop* sequels and tv spin-offs, Verhoeven insisted his contract include first refusal on any future bughunt, although he told *Total Film* he'd pass on any project mounted purely to make money: "It would have to involve bigger, more dangerous, much more intelligent bugs... I want to take the troopers to the planets surrounding Klendathu and have them discover even wilder biological possibilities that we so far haven't even dreamt about." It's also possible there'd be room this time for the power suits central to Heinlein's novel.

[Fans of the movie would be well-advised to check out the recent release on DVD, which includes trailers, behind-the-scenes footage and unused scenes which fine-tune the characterisation.]

The first instalment in the new *Star Wars* trilogy will be released on 21 May next year, 22 years after the original series began, but Twentieth Century-Fox has stressed it will not follow Sony's example with *Godzilla* and boost box-office receipts by taking over as many venues for the relaunch as possible.

This year's World Fantasy Awards will be presented at the 1998 World Fantasy Convention, being held in Monterey, California, over the Halloween weekend. This year's nominees and categories are as follows.

Novel: *Trader* by Charles de Lint; *The Physiognomy* by Jeffrey Ford, *American Goliath* by Harvey Jacobs; *The Gift* by Patrick O'Leary; *The Club Dumas* by Arturo Pérez-Reverte.

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Novella: "Streetcar Dreams" by Richard Bowes; "The Dripping of Sundered Wineskins" by Brian Hodge; "The Fall of the Kings" by Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman; "Coppola's Dracula" by Kim Newman; "The Zombies of Madison County" by Douglas E Winter.

Short Fiction: "Dust Motes" by P D Cacek; "Fortune and Misfortune" by Lisa Goldstein; "Get a Grip" by Paul Park; "The Inner Inner City" by Robert Charles Wilson; "Audience" by Jack Womack;

Anthology: *Modern Classics of Fantasy*, edited by Gardner Dozois; *Bending The Landscape: Fantasy*, edited by Nicola Griffith and Stephen Pagel; *Northern Frights 4*, edited by Don Hutchison; *Dark Terrors 3*, edited by Stephen Jones and (Birmingham's own) David Sutton; *Millennium (aka Revelations)*, edited by Douglas E Winter.

Collection: *Giant Bones* by Peter S Beagle; *Driving Blind* by Ray Bradbury; *Fractal Paisleys* by Paul Di Filippo; *The Throne of Bones* by Brian McNaughton; *A Geography of Unknown Lands* by Michael Swanwick.

Artist: Rick Berry; Jim Burns; Alan Lee; Don Maitz; Dave McKean.

Professional achievement: Ellen Datlow; Gardner Dozois; *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, edited by John Clute and John Grant; Stephen Jones; Gordon Van Gelder.

Non-Professional: Richard Chizmar; Fedogan and Bremer; Chris Logan Edwards; Barry Hoffman; Jeff VanderMeer.

Veteran tvsf producer Gerry Anderson, horror author Ramsey Campbell and scream queen Eileen Daly (perhaps best known from her appearances on Redemption's video sleeves) are among the many guests at the ninth Festival of Fantastic Films, 4-6 September at Sacha's Hotel in Manchester. Membership costs £60.00 (day rate: £25.00) and credit card bookings can be taken on 0161-707-3747.

The curse of *The Crow* continues. In 1994, actor Brandon Lee was killed in a freak on-set shooting whilst taking the lead role in the first of two movies based upon James O'Barr's acclaimed comic book; computer graphics were used to complete filming. Now a 44 year-old stuntman has been killed whilst working on the spin-off tv series, *The Crow: Stairway to Heaven*, when an explosion fired a piece of debris into his head.

Book Reviews

THE PALADIN, Adam Nichols, Millennium, pb, 503pp, £6.99.

Star Rating: ***

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Although I enjoyed this book I must admit to some disappointment. THE PALADIN, or Book One of the Whiteblade Saga, is set in the same world (but some time later) as Nichols' first two fantasies - the darkly disturbing and powerful THE WAR OF THE LORDS VEIL and THE PATHLESS WAY - but it lacks the power and emotional impact of either of those.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that Nichols is writing a "brand new fantasy sequence" (fantasy these days has moved beyond mere trilogies, to "sequences", more books more money I guess). Perhaps it is because he is now writing about a female protagonist/heroine. Whatever the reason, it just doesn't have the impact I'd come to expect from Nichols' work. (Incidentally it is not helped by the cover - which features one of the clumsiest pieces of artwork I have ever seen on a professional publication, where the heroine looks like a demented simpleton and the villains have some very peculiar joints!)

But don't get me wrong here, this is perfectly workman-like fantasy here. It tells of the transformation of Elinor a young girl who "dies" rather than marry a man twice her age and then runs off to sea. Escaping a shipwreck only to find herself trapped in the "castle" of a madman she is tricked into assassinating him and escapes to become Elinor Whiteblade leader of a downtrodden people....

Well, it reads better than that summary, but not *much* better. Pure escapism with no surprises - ideal, as they say, for a long train/bus journey. According to the blurb on the back cover an INTERZONE reviewer reckoned that "Millennium is pushing Nichols as the next David Gemmell" - on the strength of his first two novels I would've said that they had a good chance, now I'm not so sure.

KIRINYA, Ian MacDonald, hb, 412pp, Victor Gollancz, £16.99, ****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

I hadn't read Chaga, the prequel to Kirinya and I was concerned that the book would be less enjoyable because of that. In fact I ordered Chaga from my local bookshop but I'm still waiting. It wasn't necessary to read Chaga first. Kirinya stands alone as a very good book indeed.

The Earth has been deliberately infected with the Chaga, which is transforming the biosphere into something suitable for some other alien race. This is the story of the political upheavals, the human story of what happens on a world being 'terra'-formed to someone else's specification. The Chaga has taken over the southern hemisphere changing the vegetation so that nothing is uniform, familiar, earthly. Human children who are infected are changed. A race of people adapted to free fall are being born but are trapped on Earth because the South doesn't have the technology to put them into space. Gaby MacAslan, hero of Chaga, has a daughter, Serena, who is an empath. Others can stretch their time senses. Chaga makes nanotech a reality. And no-one is growing old. Suddenly the South has all the resources and the North is scared. Scared of infection and scared of the strangeness and potential power of the South.

And while all the political machinations are playing themselves out on Earth, the Big Dumb Object is orbiting, full of other biospheres, containing mysteries, containing the ultimate mystery; why the end of the universe happened around ten o'clock on 22 December 2032 and why humanity didn't notice.

This is a hugely imaginative book, full of strangeness, violent and exciting. The characters are engaging, human. When I found myself wanting to shake Gaby and say, 'For God's sake, pull yourself together woman', I realised that she'd started to live in my imagination. The star of the book for me, though, was the Chaga. A book of ideas and characters. What more could a science fiction reader want?

MOONSEED, Stephen Baxter, hb, 535pp, Voyager, £16.99 ****
Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

To my shame I must admit that this is the first Stephen Baxter novel I have read but it certainly won't be my last.

It is a classic 'end of the world' type novel and is very well written. The main character is Henry Meacher, NASA geologist, whose unmanned mission to the moon designed to prove the presence of frozen water at the poles has just been cancelled as the book begins. He takes a chunk of Moon bedrock to Edinburgh University for study. It is here that sawdust from the rock is released and falls onto lava from Edinburgh's extinct volcanoes. The dust, 'moonseed', acts like a virus turning the solid rock to silver dust which infects as it spreads. It eats its way through rock and

builds space-ship parts; prehistoric nanotech, and it's infecting inwards towards the Earth's core. Henry is the first to realise the implications of the infection and returns to the US to attempt to convince the world to send a mission to the moon ostensibly to find out how to combat the spread of destruction.

As well as the main plot lines there are several sub-plots that make this a very human and moving book. We see the disaster of Edinburgh's volcanic destruction through the eyes of the Dundas family, the family of Henry's girlfriend. We also have glimpses from other eyes: a policewoman, a firefighter, a child-molester turned monk, an oil-rig worker.

The destruction of Edinburgh was riveting. I couldn't put the book down. The scenes in space en route to the moon were less gripping for me, but then I like character driven fiction. The description of the mission would probably be joyous for those hard SF fans that like all the science to be completely accurate and fully described.

I think what makes this book so good for me are the glimpses that seem casually dropped in. The portraits of ex-prime ministers: Thatcher, Major, Blair, Portillo. The chaos of an evacuation performed to procedure manuals written in 1940 and using the sleek streamlined health service without an inch of surplus capacity. The British invading Ireland to give somewhere to evacuate their displaced people to. Weather on the moon. Kids flapping around in the thick air and low gravity under the big glass domes at Clavius and Tycho 'like bony chickens learning the rudiments of three-dimensional navigation and aerodynamics as soon as they were born.'

Another thing I liked was the women. Without it being a big deal there were women in places of authority. There are always women in end-of-the-world books. Their job has always been to scream and clutch onto the rugged hero whilst wearing very little. Baxter's women are real people. One of the astronauts is Henry's ex-wife, a tough and competent woman, the sort that frightened men might hang onto for support.

In the afterword Stephen Baxter writes, 'It seems we really could get back to the Moon for under two billion dollars. The Moonseed may not be waiting for us – but a sister world is.' This is what I read SF for; the possibilities and the longing for them to be achieved.

[As Alien: Resurrection makes its debut on video and rumours grow of plans for a fifth instalment in the sequence, we travel back to 1979 for another peek from behind the sofa at the sf/horror hybrid which began it all.]

Bugs in Space by Steve Green

Interviewed during the 1986 launch of *Aliens*, director James Cameron differentiated between Ridley Scott's approach and his own by describing the original *Alien* as a ride upon a ghost train and its successor as the big dipper; in other words, Scott galvanized his audience by having the unexpected leap out at them, whereas Cameron let them know what was coming but kept everyone firmly strapped into their seats.

Intriguingly, it was the "ghost train" element in Scott's movie - the deliberate blurring of distinctions between horror and science fiction cinema - which initially prompted the raising of critics' eyebrows. Reviewing *Alien* in *Starburst* #14, John Brosnan dubbed it "very annoying" and "a botched job" after concluding that "as a science fiction film it's seriously flawed, but as a horror film it works perfectly". Considering that the plot is lifted almost entirely from A E van Vogt's 1939 short story "Black Destroyer" and the 1958 sf movie *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (which screenwriter Jerome Bixby later confessed was itself inspired by 1951's *The Thing from Another World*), there's no denying *Alien's* sf credentials, although Brosnan was certainly justified in criticising Scott for editing out the sequence (included in the recent boxed set) in which Ripley discovers her partially cocooned former lover, Dallas, and so reveals the creature's biological imperative. Still, co-producer Walter Hill did apparently tell original screenwriter Dan O'Bannon "My strength is that I don't know anything about science fiction", which might explain much about the *lacunae* in the storyline as screened.

Oddly, even O'Bannon has offered different versions of that screenplay's roots. Its core was produced in 1972, whilst O'Bannon was working on *Dark Star* with John Carpenter; entitled "Gremlims" and set aboard a World War Two bomber infested with malevolent demons, it would later be filmed in that form as a segment of the animated feature *Heavy Metal* (1981). By 1975, according to Alan Murdoch in *Starburst* #13, it had acquired the title "Star Beast" - whilst the project only took on an sf slant the following year if you accept O'Bannon's recollections in the September 1979 *Fantastix Films*, and even then as a result of a suggestion from his partner Ron Shuset. In either case, Shuset took the concept to Mark Haggard, a kind of Hollywood "matchmaker", who connected with Brandywine, the production company run by Hill, David

Giler and Gordon Carroll. O'Bannon had wanted to occupy the director's chair himself (an ambition he would finally fulfil with 1984's *Return of the Living Dead*), but this was thrown out of the question when Brandywine sold the project to Twentieth-Century Fox, and he was hired to design the movie.

By the time Ridley Scott entered the equation, much of the final production was already in place. O'Bannon had drafted in his old friend Ron Cobb (partially due to "a debt of honour" over Cobb's on-off involvement with Alejandro Jodorowsky's ill-fated adaptation of Frank Herbert's *Dune*) and Britain's Chris Foss (then famous for his sf paperback covers), and had decided to recruit the Swiss artist H R Giger, who he'd first met on the *Dune* set and whose work had inspired his screenplay. Scott, fresh from his failure in 1977 to mount the legend of Tristan and Iseult as "a fantasy, with elements of *Star Wars*, *Conan*, Moebius, modern technology and celtic legends", was swift to second O'Bannon's support for Giger and completed the group with the French comics artist Jean "Moebius" Giraud, who would prove a heavy influence upon both uniforms and spacesuits.

Meanwhile, relations between O'Bannon and the Brandywine triumverate had deteriorated sharply, a situation hardly eased when Scott was shown a copy of O'Bannon's initial draft and announced he preferred this to Giler's and Hill's subsequent rewrites (both were excluded from screenwriting credits, a situation they "corrected" thanks to their producer status seven years later). Money was also a problem: budgeted at US\$4.5 million, Scott's estimate was nearer \$12-13 million and he was forced to cut it to \$8 million by losing several major scenes, including the discovery of a giant pyramid (which would have explained much of the Alien's life cycle) and a sexual encounter between Ripley and Dallas (less crucial once Scott removed the balancing sequence wherein she is forced to kill him).

Given Giger's particular brand of necrophiliac surrealism, it was hardly surprizing that the film began to take on the atmosphere of a wet nightmare: enclosed spaces, exploding eggs, clouded slime. Scott had even visualised the pyramid as a giant vagina, its entrance covered with a membrane which Kane would have to cut through before discovering the egg nest within. Such imagery was hardly lost on Alex Eisenstein, contributing editor to *Fantastic Films*, whose overwrought Freudian analysis of "the first Heavy Metal movie" in its January 1980 edition dubbed the creature's final incarnation "a phallic nightmare" and extended the sexual theme to claims that Ash's attempt to choke Ripley constituted "a deadly fellatio" and that the fluids which seep out of the android's disengaged head may be viewed as "an awful flow of semen". (Actually,

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Eisenstein seems obsessed with fellatio, so it's little wonder that he's so struck by a film featuring a lifeform which sports the ultimate version of *vagina dentata*, but he wasn't the only critic to pick up on *Alien's* sexual undertow: as late as 1981, Brosnan was taking up space in *Starburst #40* to salivate over Sigourney Weaver's "slow, langourous strip down to a functional pair of briefs and army-issue tee-shirt". One wonders how he would have viewed that scene had the character of Ripley not changed gender during the rewrites.)

In retrospect, perhaps the greatest contribution *Alien* made to the sf/horror genre was in the characterisation of Ellen Ripley, who took the resourcefulness of Jamie Lee Curtis' Laurie Strode from *Halloween* and laid the groundwork for Linda Hamilton's survivalist Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* (indeed, Connor's bubbly victim in the first movie was by 1984 already looking slightly dated in cinematic terms, even if it did make her transformation all the more stunning). Hollywood might still demand that its scream queens spend an inordinate amount running around shadowy corridors in bikinis, but at least now they got to carry a very big gun.

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Colophon

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Once again we proudly present the event of the year!!

CHRISTMAS MEETING

Friday 11 December

BETTER & SKITTLES

at the

SAMSON and LION

Wordsley

Please let Carol Morton know as soon as possible how many tickets you want to attend the Christmas event. It is our usual second Friday and as in previous years includes a bar meal and transport.

Once the Committee have an idea of numbers - and who, we hope to book a coach to allow DROP OFF people (reasonably) near home on the way home. Pick up points in the past were City Centre, Bearwood and Lye. A pick up time for this year will be decided later. Total cost is undecided as the pub are currently rewriting their menus due to the arrival of a new cook (don't worry Rog, the Balti's are still on!)

To secure a place a £5 deposit is required. This can either be given to Carol at any meeting, or a cheque, made out to "Birmingham Science Fiction Group" posted to 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

If confirmation is required please let Carol know. Further details will be available once we finalise the event.