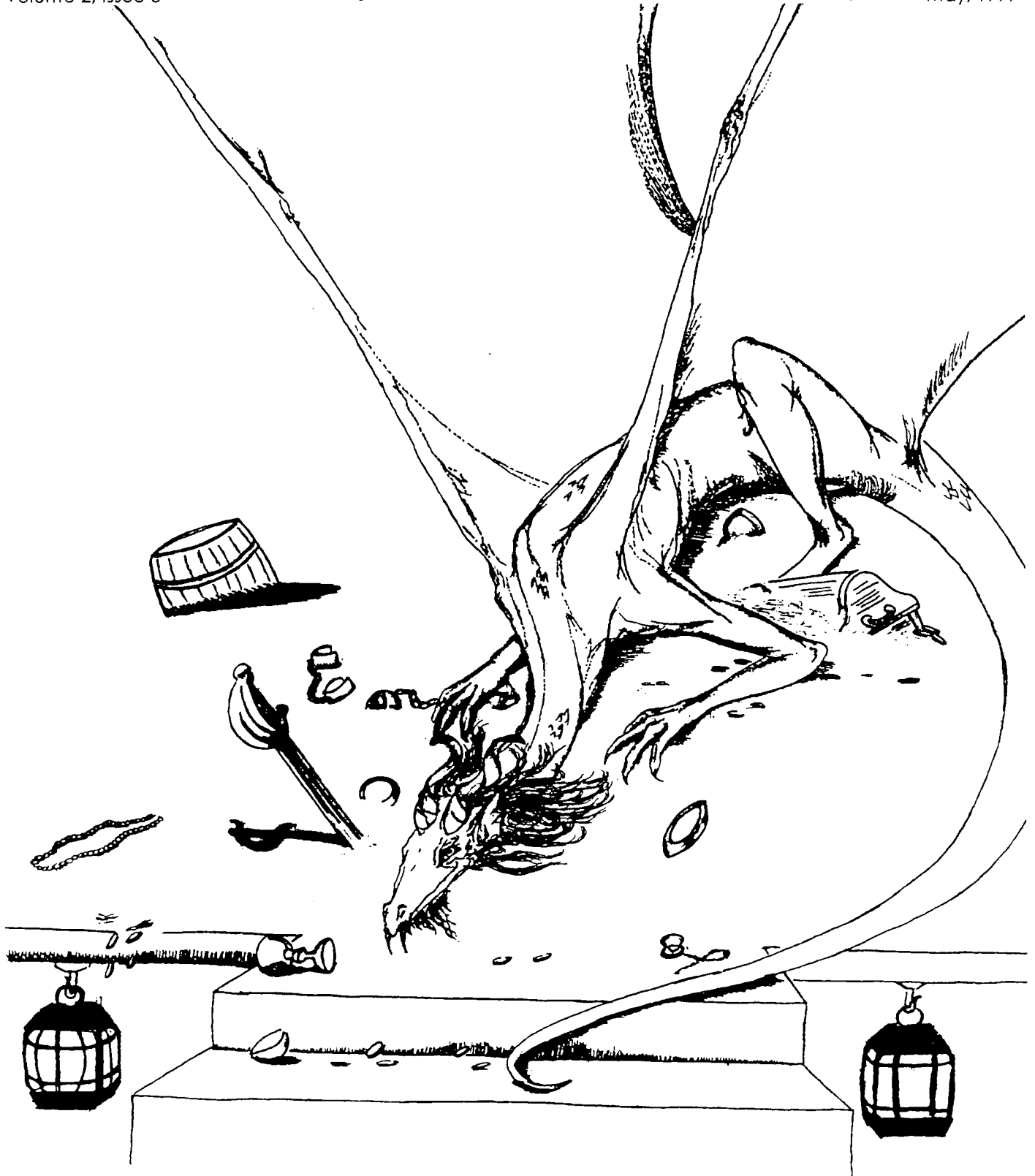


Future Times

Volume 2, Issue 5

The Monthly Newsletter Of The Atlanta Science Fiction Society

May, 1999



Art © Mary Noe

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THE FUTURE TIMES

The ASFS Future Times is a publication of The Atlanta Science Fiction Society, a gathering of aficionados of Science Fiction, Fantasy and associated genres. Future Times is published monthly.

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The ASFS Future Times is free to members and available to non-members for an annual subscription of \$12.00 U.S., a per issue price of \$1.00 or trade.

The ASFS Future Times was assembled using the internet, MS Word and MS Publisher

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From the Desk of the Editor

WOW! What a great issue, and what a turnaround! Putting this issue together was an Editor’s dream. with lots of terrific. well written material to publish. I believe this issue truly reflects the quality and qualities of our membership.

Many thanks to our contributors, both members and especially those who are not.

The interior illos this issue are by Mike Groves and our cover artist is Mary Noe, both currently living in Charleston, SC.

And as always, special thanks to my wife Jan for all of her support and help.

“ I believe this issue truly reflects the quality and qualities of our membership. ”

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My Corner of the Universe

By Ian Letendre

I thought hard about what to write this month. I debated with myself if I would give into the existing media hype surrounding the Columbine High School shootings. I caved, because this topic in some way affects each of us in fandom. Whether we like to admit it or not, most of us were the outcasts in our schools being picked on. Most of us at one point or another had violent thoughts against those who would oppress us. But all of us have chosen not to give into those thoughts.

Being an avid fan of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror automatically puts us into an odd category. Our minds see beyond the norm. And now, because some of our hobbies are viewed as "different", the media has pointed the blame in our direction. I have heard this tragedy pushed on everything from Gothic music/culture to cyber-punk films like The Matrix. Sadly, I have not heard anyone jump on the bullying the gunmen faced or the lack of parental involvement that they received at home. Truthfully, there is nothing I can say in this column that can bring any of those kids back or ease the pain that Littleton, CO is facing or change the way our society works.

I do offer this to each member and every fan out there reading this column. As I started at the beginning, we all can remember what we went through in our younger years. Some of were fortunate enough to have strong parents or older friends to help us through it. I can say myself that without my college aged SF friends; I would have suffered miserably in high school. And so, when we come across the "future" of our hobby, I ask each of you to give a supporting hand. Encourage and re-confirm to these kids that they are okay, that what they read and are interested in is a healthy outlet.

These are frightening times. More and more people are coming forward pressing lawsuits against film studios and game designers. How long will it be before they attack Heinlein or Herbert? As a community of fans, we must stand up for ourselves and for the future generations. I know it sounds hokey, but I ask only this: now, more than ever, we need to work as a united front to show that we support our hobby not just amongst ourselves, but in our schools and junior social settings. The next time you are at a convention, think twice before making that smart crack about Magic: The Gathering or Vampire: The Masquerade players. These kids are the ones who need your support more than ever right now.

I am not going to go on ranting. I am going to sum this up here. The choices that we, as SF fans make here and now towards our children and the children that attend our conventions is what will in some ways shape our country's future and the future of our hobbies. Get involved, be supportive and look positively at our young. Until next month...

April Meeting Minutes

by Jayne Rogers

The April meeting of the Atlanta Science Fiction Society started at 2:08pm on Saturday the 3rd. A report was made on the success of the VulKon party that was co-hosted with the Klingon "Shadow Fleet" from Florida. (We won best party!)

It was announced that ASFS membership packets were being prepared. A new meeting place and day were discussed, due to the fact that several people are not able to make Saturday meetings.

It was announced that ASFS would take part in DragonCon programming, and that Anne Brunsgaard would reprise her Jeopardy game at our "panel". No date has been set as yet.

ASFS members were invited to the Georgia Renaissance Faire on April the 25th.

Local cons were reviewed. Book donations were solicited for the library. An idea for a club calendar is in the works. Volunteering for GPTV and the Peachtree Film Festival was discussed. The meeting ended at 3:10 and several members attended a screening of "The Matrix" for the afternoon's program.

Grand Moff Tarkin

Darth Vader's Rock & Roll Fantasy

By Aaron Dunne

Atlanta's Echo Lounge was temporarily transformed into Echo Base for the debut of Star Wars theme group Grand Moff Tarkin; naturally ASFS members were there to record the event for posterity. A group consisting of myself, Jayne Rogers, Ian Letendre and Anita Benecke rendezvoused at Jayne's house then carpooled to the Echo Lounge, located a stones throw away from Little Five Points.

We arrived just before 10pm and Grand Moff Tarkin weren't due to play until after midnight but a crowd had already gathered and were admiring the display of Star Wars artifacts the band had brought along for decoration. Jan Sides was waiting for us and we settled in for a spot of people watching while awaiting the main event. Our anticipation increased as we noticed several people in Star Wars costumes circulating among the crowd; combined with the large amount of black leather, piercing and tattoos sported by some members of the audience it was easy to feel that we had been transported to a 'wretched hive of scum and villainy' in a far away galaxy.

After having our eardrums pummeled into submission by two warm up bands, Tweezer and The El Caminos, stage hands in Imperial technician uniforms stripped away black sheeting to reveal a suitably futuristic backdrop, complete with model Death Star. The Empires feelings about stage diving were made abundantly clear as they proceeded to mount several batteries of blaster cannon aimed at the audience.

Grand Moff Tarkin took the stage about 12:30, first up was the lead guitarist in a Stormtrooper outfit, followed by two more guitar wielding members of Palpatine's imperial guard, a Death Star trooper on drums and Boba Fett on keyboards. The band kicked off with an instrumental that climaxed with the arrival of the Dark Lord of the Sith himself; Lord Vader accepted the adulation of the crowd for a moment then, flanked by two Vader Go-Go dancers, launched into the first song "Death Star".

The band had a good instrumental base, nice guitar licks and a strong beat without the driving monotony found in many hard rock groups; unfortunately the sound engineer did a very poor job and the instruments drowned out the vocals throughout much of the performance. This was a pity as what we could hear of such songs as "Mos Eiseley" and "You're Not the Droid I'm Lookin' For" was very entertaining. But what the performance lacked in acoustics it made up for in stage show; the aforementioned Vader Go-Go dancers were supplemented by a Twi'lek dancing girl and an enslaved Princess Leia who had some moves George Lucas never thought of; Lord Vader accepted the 'apology' of one of his lackeys onstage, flame erupted from the set at intervals and the band interrupted their final set to encourage the audience to join in a spot of Ewok abuse.

All in all a fun evening; those of you who weren't present should make a point of catching Grand Moff Tarkin's appearance at this years Dragon*Con before the real Imperial forces, the lawyers, find out and close em down; until then enjoy.

1999 Hugo Award Nominees

The Hugos will be awarded at Aussiecon 3, the 1999 World Science Fiction Convention, in Melbourne, Australia, from Sept. 2-6.

Novel

Children of God by Mary Doria Russell (Villard) *Darwinia* by Robert Charles Wilson (Tor)

Distraction by Bruce Sterling (Bantam Spectra)

Factoring Humanity by Robert J. Sawyer (Tor)

To Say Nothing of the Dog by Connie Willis (Bantam Spectra)

Novella

"Aurora in Four Voices" by Catherine Asaro (*Analog* Dec. 1998)

"Get Me to the Church On Time" by Terry Bisson (*Asimov's* May 1998)

"Oceanic" by Greg Egan (*Asimov's* Aug. 1998) "Story of Your Life" by Ted Chiang (*Starlight* 2) "The Summer Isles" by Ian R. MacLeod (*Asimov's* Oct./Nov. 1998)

Novelette

"Divided by Infinity" by Robert Charles Wilson (*Starlight* 2)

"Echea" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch (*Asimov's* July 1998)

"The Planck Dive" by Greg Egan (*Asimov's* Feb. 1998)

"Steamship Soldier on the Information Front" by Nancy Kress (*Future*

Histories; *Asimov's* April 1998)

"Taklamakan" by Bruce Sterling (*Asimov's* Oct./Nov. 1998)

"Time Gypsy" by Ellen Klages (*Bending the Landscape*)

"Zwarte Piet's Tale" by Allen Steele (*Analog* Dec. 1998)

Short Story

"Cosmic Corkscrew" by Michael A. Burstein (*Analog* June 1998)

"Maneki Neko" by Bruce Sterling (*F&SF* May 1998)

"Radiant Doors" by Michael Swanwick (*Asimov's* Sept. 1998)

"The Very Pulse of the Machine" by Michael Swanwick (*Asimov's* Feb. 1998)

"Whiptail" by Robert Reed (*Asimov's* Oct./Nov. 1998)

"Wild Minds" by Michael Swanwick (*Asimov's* May 1998)

Related Book

The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World by Thomas M. Disch (The Free Press)

Hugo, Nebula & World Fantasy Awards by Howard DeVore (Advent: Publishers)

Science-Fiction: The Gemsback Years by Everett F. Bleiler (Kent State University Press)

(Continued on page 7)

The Matrix: High Impact SF

A Review by Anne Brunsgaard

"KISS: Psycho Circus"

A Review by Ian Letendre

If you love a good SF action flick, then this movie is for you! It has the twin virtues of a well-thought out plot and back story and about the best action sequences and effects I've ever seen.

Now I will tell you that at first I didn't expect much - I know that these days, the commercial for a movie can turn out to be better than the movie itself, with all the best parts crammed together into one fast-paced piece of movie eye-candy with no plot to get in the way of the "wow factor". I was also wary of Keanu Reeves in the leading role for obvious reasons - with Keanu, one learns not to hope for in-depth character expression. I was afraid that his presence alone would make the movie a sort of "Johnny Mnemonic II" - which I'm sure would have been just as cheesily awful as Lawnmower Man II. But - we're saved! Keanu is actually surprisingly good as Neo, a hacker looking for the answer to the question "What is the Matrix?" The answer soon finds him and, after some lengthy exposition on the subject by Lawrence Fishburne's character Morpheus, we're off on a roller coaster ride of constant action and danger. The movie's pacing is excellent and the strangeness of Neo's changing world is truly convincing and disorienting. We feel what he feels as he tries to deal with a totally new and frightening perspective on life. There's enough humor in the right places to keep the tone from getting too heavy and the movie is full of surprises. Trust me, if you like the SF action genre at all, you do not want to miss **The Matrix**!

Two things that just don't seem right for a Science Fiction club newsletter include comic books and the super pop-metal band KISS. But somehow Todd McFarlane, the creator of the mega-popular comic *Spawn*, has brought his medium into a new light. At least I think so. And I feel strongly enough to recommend to you this on-going series from Image Comics.

"KISS: Psycho Circus" brings the reader to the realm of a freakish circus that travels from city to city in different time periods. The book plays out as a Twilight Zone episode waiting to happen. The band members have been transformed into The Four Who Are One, mythological entities brandishing their own morality on those lost souls who may need it. Band members take on the guise of their stage personalities. Gene Simons is the Demon Lord, Ace Frehley the Celestial Guardian, Peter Criss the Beast King and Paul Stanley is the Star Child.

A typical issue will draw the reader into the Psycho Circus world by presenting a troubled person who somehow finds him/herself brought to this travelling circus. They are then introduced to different circus performers who are the human embodiment of the Elders (KISS). A bizarre morality play unfolds, and the reader is left with a bit of rock n' roll cosmic wisdom and 15 minutes worth of entertainment.

This is a departure from the band's 1970's Marvel Superheroes comic. The writing is for mature readers and is fantastical without being over the top corny. The art is fresh, which is typical of Image Comics. Granted, Gene Simons and crew are buffed up for the inked pages, but overall, the renditions are smart and stylized. At this writing, each issue retails at \$2.25. Do yourself a favor, go to support your local comic retailer and visit the Psycho Circus today. Worth the read at least once.

The Faculty: The Good, The Bad & The Alien

A Review by Aaron Dunne

In this latest twist on the Alien Invasion theme Kevin Williamson attempts to do for the Science Fiction film what he did for the slasher genre, he doesn't succeed, but it's a good effort.

For those who may not have caught it in theatres over the holiday season, *The Faculty* is the tale of a disparate group of students at Herrington High who realize that an alien force has taken over the teachers at their school as the first step in conquering the Earth. The aliens are a parasitic species that take control of their host; the only way to defeat them is to identify the original parasite, the parent of the other aliens, and destroy it, thus releasing the enslaved hosts.

The Good: Williamson again demonstrates his ability to write believable teenagers in unreal situations; the sense of raging paranoia as our heroes realize that they can't even trust each other is well captured. Williamson's talent for misdirection is highlighted in the desperate search for the identity of the original parasite's host, as in *Scream* when it's revealed it seems obvious, the clues are out there, but it's doubtful you'll figure it out. Director Robert Rodriguez coaxes excellent performances from the largely unknown cast playing the students. There are a number of interesting science fiction references worked into the dialogue; obviously there was input from someone who is a fan of the genre.

The Bad: Somebody knows SF as I said before, but it's not Williamson. The plot works well up to a point but there are too many convenient elements. Zeke, the high school pusher who is supposedly so slow he's been held back a year, turns out to be a genius with a bio chemical lab in his basement that would make the FBI green with envy. Naturally the drugs he's been selling turn out to be completely harmless to humans but are the only thing capable of killing the aliens. Somebody should have done some research here, caffeine is a diuretic, it causes the body to excrete more water, it doesn't freeze dry it. SF fan Stokely at first refuses to believe that the invasion is occurring (sensibly enough) but five minutes after being convinced of their existence she extrapolates the aliens life-cycle and how to destroy them without harming the hosts, based on theories from old *Star Trek* episodes! I don't know what's scarier, that she'd think this or that her companions readily agree to her plan. The fact that her theory is correct strains credibility to the breaking point, as do the abilities of the parasites, which seem to change from moment to moment as required by the script.

The Ugly: The final scene is overly trite and predictable, not at all what we've come to expect from Williamson. I found the fact that nobody who'd been taken over by the aliens had been harmed in any way particularly grating, it had been established that the parasites sent tendrils burrowing through the host's nervous system, replacing it. Several characters suffered what would have been fatal wounds; if they had not been possessed, but they seemed fine after their parasites had been killed; sorry but I just couldn't buy that.

Despite some serious faults *The Faculty* is entertaining and I'd definitely recommend it if you're looking for a video rental; it's just a pity that the plot slips so badly in the last third of the film. If Kevin Williamson can team up with someone who really understands the SF genre the results will be spectacular.

Using Broad Strokes And A Dark Palette: A Few Thoughts On **The Matrix** And Its Antecedents

By Lewis Murphy

For roughly 15 years the dystopian future of artificial intelligence, black-market hackers, vast computer networks, and human/computer interface has been the domain of cyberpunk science fiction writers. This spring a new feature film has entered that milieu, **The Matrix**.

The Matrix takes place in a not-so-distant future, on Earth. There is a global computer network, controlled by an artificial intelligence program that has enslaved the human population. Reality and virtual reality are indistinguishable. A small band of renegade humans, led by a messianic hacker, seek to free themselves and the rest of humanity from the computer's control. Religious metaphors and references to Alice in Wonderland abound. Some of these are heavy-handed, but most are fine and their presence lends depth to what could have been a shallow *sci-fi* action flick.

More importantly, for this essay, are the elements **The Matrix** has *borrowed* from its literary antecedents. The film is filled with direct and indirect references to books that have gone before it.

In **The Matrix** there is a character named Mouse. He is a diminutive person, and younger than other members of the heroic group. Both in name and stature, he strongly resembles the character from Samuel R. Delany's Nova. Also from Nova is the use of "spinal sockets" to link into the computer network.

The concept of being trapped in a computer, and physically brutalized by it, can be found in the Harlan Ellison story "I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream".

A character in **The Matrix** that represents the artificial intelligence remarks that the computer network was originally used for recreation, like an amusement park ride. John Varley used this concept in several stories collected in the book The Persistence of Vision. Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" deals with a similar idea, though in a different context.

A large-scale artificial intelligence takes over the world in Colossus by D. F. Jones. That book was itself made into the film **Colossus: The Forbin Project** in the 1960's.

Humans being "cultivated" or "farmed" for biological resources can be found in Coma by Robin Cook (later filmed by Michael Crichton).

Many of the themes and trappings of **The Matrix** can be found in the cyberpunk books from the 1980's onward, in particular the writings of William Gibson. The *hacker-with-a-heart-of-gold* criminality of Neo, the female kick-boxing partner of Trinity (similar to Gibson's Molly character), the black pseudo-gothic attire, and dark or mirrored sunglasses which hide the eyes (and intentions) of the characters; these are only a few of the trademark elements of cyberpunk found in **The Matrix**.

So for all its lack of originality, is **The Matrix** any good? The answer is a resounding "Yes". The originality comes in how the parts are combined. Because the writers took the best elements of what had gone before, and weaved them into a coherent whole, **The**

Matrix is a two and a half hour primer in the subgenre of cyberpunk. Good to excellent acting, outstanding effects, great cinematography, and a tight script make this the best film of its kind since **Blade Runner**. It is not a perfect film, there are flaws. The religious underpinnings become tedious, and echo the Muslim stories of Mohammad. Some science fiction fans will be reminded of Dune. There are occasional minor plot holes. And the ending is a little abrupt. But these are minor quibbles with a film that is well worth seeing.

If you've seen the **The Matrix**, and liked it, here are other works you might also enjoy:

Readings (fiction)

Neuromancer and Burning Chrome by William Gibson

Globalhead and Crystal Express by Bruce Sterling

Mirrorshades: the Cyberpunk Anthology by B. Sterling (ed.)

Mindplayers by Pat Cadigan

Halo by Tom Maddox

Vurt by Jeff Noon

Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson

Software by Rudy Rucker

Glass Houses by Laura J. Mixon

The works cited in body of the above article.

Readings (non-fiction)

Storming the Reality Studio by Larry McCaffery (ed.)

Across the Wounded Galaxies by Larry McCaffery (ed.)

Terminal Identity by Scott Bukatman

Films

A Clockwork Orange, Tron, Blade Runner, Lawnmower Man, Johnny Mnemonic, Dark City

Television

Max Headroom, The Prisoner, Tek War, VR5



Welcome to Sci-Fi Prime

by Regina and Bill Kirby galaxy, in the company of a strange and unusual assortment of aliens.

Well they have promised it for years and now they have finally delivered on their promise. The Sci-Fi Channel, long the last refuge for re-runs of classic and not-so-classic science fiction TV shows, has produced an all-"original" prime time line-up of science fiction series on Friday nights, dubbed "Sci-fi Prime". Please note I use "original" in this context to denote first run shows as opposed to re-runs, it remains to be seen how "original", as in innovative, and different, these shows are, as continued reading will demonstrate.

The Sci-Fi Channel's Friday prime time line-up consists of four new series; Poltergeist: The Legacy, recently acquired from Showtime, Farscape, a new series from Jim Henson Productions, Sliders, acquired a year or so ago from standard network television, and The First Wave, a new series produced by famed movie director Francois Ford Coppola. Since it has been on many years now, and many will be familiar with Sliders from its network run, I will not elaborate on it here. Similarly, since Poltergeist: The Legacy has been shown in syndicated re-runs of its Showtime episodes I will leave it to the reader to form their own opinion in regards to it. Instead, the focus of this review will cover the two new series exclusive to the Sci-Fi Channel, Farscape and The First Wave.

Farscape is produced by Rockne S. O'Bannon, of Sequest notoriety and Brian Henson, of Jim Henson Productions and Muppets fame. It is the story of astronaut John Crichton, who while in Earth orbit, attempting to prove his theory of atmospheric acceleration, passes through a wormhole and ends up in an unknown part of the

Astronaut John Crichton is having a really bad day.
Almost as soon as Crichton appears in this new part of

space his ship collides with an alien fighter which results in the death of the other pilot. This gets Crichton off on the wrong foot as the pilot turns out to be the brother of the local bad guy in that sector who



immediately decides Crichton must die for killing his brother. This local goon, Cris, is a high officer in the local oppressive military force, known as the Peacekeepers, whose Stormtrooper tactics have not exactly endeared them to most of the races in that part of the galaxy. The Peacekeepers are in the middle of chasing a band of fugitive aliens who are running in a "borrowed" living spaceship called Moya.

Naturally Crichton ends up on board Moya with the fugitive aliens and joins them, along with Peacekeeper Eryn Sun, who is accused of being "contaminated" by contact with the fugitives when she was briefly captured by them, and is forced to run with them for her

(Continued on page 8)

1999 Hugo Award Nominees (continued)

Spectrum 5: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art by Cathy Fenner & Arnie Fenner, eds. (Underwood Books)

The Works of Jack Williamson: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide by Richard A. Hauptmann (The NESFA Press)

Dramatic Presentation

"Sleeping in Light" (*Babylon 5*)

Dark City

Pleasantville

Star Trek: Insurrection

The Truman Show

Professional Editor

Gardner Dozois

Scott Edelman

David G. Hartwell

Patrick Nielsen Hayden

Stanley Schmidt

Gordon Van Gelder

Professional Artist

Jim Burns

Bob Eggleton

Donato Giancola

Don Maitz

Nick Stathopoulos

Michael Whelan

Semiprozine

Interzone

Locus

The New York Review of Science Fiction

Science Fiction Chronicle

Speculations

Fanzine

Ansible

File 770

Mimosa

Plokta

Tangent

Thyme

Fan Writer

Bob Devney

Mike Glyer

Dave Langford

Evelyn C. Leeper

Maureen Kincaid Speller

Fan Artist

Freddie Baer

Brad Foster

Ian Gunn

Teddy Harvia

Joe Mayhew

D. West

John W. Campbell Award

(Not a Hugo)

Kage Baker*

Julie E. Czemedá*

Nalo Hopkinson*

Susan R. Matthews*

James Van Pelt*

(* second year of eligibility)

Note: Several categories have six or more nominees due to ties for fifth place.

Welcome to Sci-Fi Prime (continued)

(Continued from page 7)
life.

Peacekeeper Eryn Sun must run for her life with the fugitives.



The other fugitive aliens on board Moya consist of Ka D'Argo, a Luxan warrior who prefers to fight first and ask questions later, Pa'u Zhaan, a Delvian priestess whose people are seekers of spiritual enlightenment, Rygel XVI, deposed ruler of an alien kingdom, and Pilot, the navigator of Moya. Together this group escapes Cris and the Peacekeepers by using Crichton's

atmospheric acceleration theory, naturally, and hides in an unexplored sector of space, always just one step ahead of their pursuers.

D'Argo and Pa'u Zhaan, two alien fugitives.



While the premise of fugitives on the run sounds hackneyed, it is really not so bad here since it is played down and not a main part of the plot unless necessary to the central story being told that episode. Most of the episodes so far have dealt with the crew's encounters in this uncharted section of space, such as a space insectoid species that needs the warmth of a spaceship to reproduce and chooses Moya, or a race of war-like scavengers who survive by kidnapping wealthy and important beings to ransom

and who kidnap Rygel when he leads them to believe he is still a wealthy king.

All in all the storytelling has been very solid, characters are being explored, their thoughts, fears, and motivations gradually revealed. D'Argo is the most one-dimensional with his desire to fight first and ask questions later. Rygel is the most humorous of the characters without becoming clownish, as he attempts to assert his royal heritage among the others with them not buying a bit of it.

Rygel XVI, a deposed King, now a fugitive among fugitives.

Yet

even his character has revealed hidden depths with the ability to confront his fears and pitch in when it counts. Pa'u Zhaan has demonstrated great calmness and gentleness without appearing weak or helpless, while Eryn Sun has been a strong character of action who has also shown a good, compassionate side.

The characters have blended well and we continue to learn new things about them as they learn about each other.

Plotlines have shown interesting situations with compassionate, innovative solutions being presented, the biggest drawback to my mind has been that too many times Crichton comes up with the solution making it appear that the human has to help these poor ol' aliens in spite of themselves. All in all though a good solid series with a lot of potential.

In 1564 Nostradamus predicted the destruction of Earth in three terrifying waves... such is the premise of *The First Wave*, a new series produced by Francois Ford Coppola. In this series, Cade Foster is a former burglar turned security expert, who unknowingly, is the subject of an experiment by aliens who have infiltrated the Earth with the ultimate goal of conquering it, like, what alien race *doesn't* want to do that?



(Continued on page 9)

Welcome to Sci-Fi Prime (continued)

(Continued from page 8)

Cade Foster, Subject 117 in an alien experiment.



The aliens have decided there are 117 different human personality types and they wish to study each type to see how they stand up under extreme stress and circumstances. Cade is Subject 117 in this experiment. They bankrupt him, cleaning his bank account and canceling his credit cards, cause him to lose his job and create hallucinogenic visions to plague him. During his attempts to track down those responsible for his situation,

Cade uncovers the alien conspiracy only to have the aliens kill his wife, frame him for her murder, naturally, and send him on the run while he attempts to expose their nefarious doings.

In the second episode, Cade saves and ultimately befriends a hacker named "Crazy" Eddie Nambulous, publisher of an underground newspaper called 'The Paranoid Times'. Eddie is a super-genius who ultimately becomes a *Deus Ex Machina* to the plotline, doing little more than providing Cade with any plot information or scientific mumbo-jumbo he needs to advance the story.

This is a series that has a lot of potential, which, unfortunately, it fails to live up to. It has a strong hero, who doesn't just

react, but acts to overcome his enemies and conquer his obstacles. The shows are slick, and well-done with some good, dramatic scenes that really catch your attention and draw you in. Unfortunately, the stories rely heavily on the 'Fugitive-on-the-Run' formula, resulting in cliched, predictable stories which are ultimately unsatisfying. The writer's follow all the cliches of the formula without recognizing the pitfalls they produce. The audience knows the hero will never be cleared of the frame-up, they know he will never get a single piece of evidence to support his claims of alien involvement and so a lot of the suspense is lost. Wouldn't it be nice to see these cliches shattered just once? What if the hero was cleared of the murder rap, would he give up searching for the aliens? The people who killed his wife? I don't think so. What if the hero found some evidence which hinted at alien visitors, would the world immediately believe, and the alien conspiracy be broken? I don't think so! Real interesting stories would come from the hero dealing with the repercussions of these events, how the storyline changed and grew as a result of them, that, unfortunately is not what we get with this series.

Strangely enough, my opinions of Farscape and The First Wave have flip-flopped over the course of time. When I saw the pilots I was disappointed with Farscape and thought The First Wave was interesting, but as the series have progressed, Farscape has grown with interesting character development and diverse stories while The First Wave is proving to be just formulaic hack work. All in all it is an encouraging start though, and one can only hope that these two series will only be the herald of future series to come which will ultimately give us good, interesting quality shows which rise above the same ol' dreck, and fulfill the promise the Sci-Fi Channel has represented since its inception.



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A New Neighborhood

by Bill Downs

While we still don't know if we are alone, the Solar System has a new neighbor. The likelihood that anyone is home is slim, but the more possible places we find, the more likely we are to find someone home.

Since 1995, about 20 extrasolar planets have been found. So far, they have all been solitary, raising the question of whether our system is unique. Astronomers studying the motion of Upsilon Andromedae, 44 light years from Earth, a roughly sun-sized star in the constellation Andromeda found evidence of a planet close to the star, orbiting it every 4.6 days. Overlaid on that was a second pattern of motion, a second planet.

It wasn't until the scientists removed the effects of those two

planets that the remaining data resolved itself into evidence of a third planet. This is our first look at a multi-planet system around a sun similar to our own. The second planet is twice the size of Jupiter and has an elliptical orbit that would stretch between Venus and Jupiter in our solar system. The third planet is four times the size of Jupiter and orbits further out than Mars would

Scientists are fast approaching the limits of available instruments. Someone looking at our Solar System from Upsilon Andromedae with our present level of technology probably would not find Earth or Jupiter. Help is due in 2005, when NASA launches Space Interferometry Mission and the Terrestrial Planet Finder.

Reference

"Dawn of a New Solar System", Patricia King and Thomas Hayden, Newsweek, April 26, 1999

How'd They Do?

A Look at the Gross Incomes of the Genre Films of 1998

by Bill Kirby

How did your favorite film of 1998 do against the others in the genre? Here's a quick look at the reported gross earnings of the films that Science Fiction and Fantasy fans either love or love to hate.

Ranking	Title	Domestic	Foreign	Video	Total
#1	Armageddon	\$201.6	\$306.4	\$116.3	\$624.3
#5	A Bug's Life	\$151.7	\$41.0	N/A	\$192.7
#7	Deep Impact	\$140.5	\$208.3	N/A	\$348.8
#9	Godzilla	\$136.0	\$239.7	\$96.1	\$471.8
#11	The Truman Show	\$125.6	\$122.8	N/A	\$248.4
#12	Mulan	\$120.6	\$176.5	N/A	\$297.1
#16	The Mask of Zorro	\$93.8	\$135.9	\$91.9	\$321.6
#18	Antz	\$90.3	\$76.3	N/A	\$166.6
#19	The Prince of Egypt	\$87.3	\$93.9	N/A	\$181.2
#20	The X-Files	\$83.9	\$103.1	N/A	\$187.0
#22	City of Angels	\$78.6	\$105.1	\$29.4	\$213.1
#26	Blade	\$70.0	\$52.7	N/A	\$122.7
#27	Lost in Space	\$69.1	\$63.6	\$50.6	\$183.3
#29	Star Trek: Insurrection	\$66.4	\$30.0	N/A	\$96.4
#37	What Dreams May Come	\$55.4	\$27.4	N/A	\$82.8
#38	Small Soldiers	\$55.1	\$31.9	\$69.5	\$156.5
#39	Halloween H20	\$55.0	N/A	N/A	\$55.0
#40	Practical Magic	\$46.8	\$13.1	N/A	\$59.9
#42	Meet Joe Black	\$44.4	\$41.1	N/A	\$85.5
#43	Mighty Joe Young	\$43.3	\$0.4	N/A	\$43.8
#47	I Still Know What You Did Last..	\$39.7	\$11.0	N/A	\$50.7
#50	Urban Legend	\$38.1	\$5.3	N/A	\$43.4

Ranking	Title	Domestic	Foreign	Video	Total
#53	Sphere	\$37.0	\$33.0	\$22.0	\$92.0
#54	The Faculty	\$36.7	N/A	N/A	\$36.7
#57	Bride of Chucky	\$32.4	\$3.0	N/A	\$35.4
#70	Fallen	\$25.2	N/A	\$22.0	\$47.2
#72	The Avengers	\$23.3	\$29.3	N/A	\$52.6
#76	Quest for Camelot	\$22.4	N/A	\$34.1	\$56.5
#80	Psycho	\$21.4	\$5.5	N/A	\$26.9
#81	John Carpenter's Vampires	\$20.1	\$2.5	N/A	\$22.6
#85	Species II	\$19.2	N/A	N/A	\$19.2
#100	Soldier	\$14.6	\$2.4	N/A	\$17.0
#101	Dark City	\$14.3	\$12.7	\$11.4	\$38.4
#114	Deep Rising	\$11.2	\$2.5	\$11.4	\$25.1

Figures As Reported by *Entertainment Weekly* Feb. 6, 1999



Upcoming Area Conventions

May 1999

May 14-16: Oasis 12- Radison Plaza, Orlando, FL. GoH: Jerry Pournelle, Vincent diFate, Ben Bova, Mike Resnick, ARTC and more. Memberships: \$26 ATD. Info.: PO Box 940992, Maitland, FL 32794-0992; 407/263-5822; uncalloyd@sff.net; Web-oasfis.org/oasis12.htm

May 28-30: LibertyCon- Ramada Inn South, Chattanooga, TN. GoH: Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, David Mattingly, Cheryl Mandus, Wilson "Bob" Tucker, David M. Weber and more. Memberships: \$25 until 5/10, then \$35. Info.: PO Box 695, Hixson, TN 37343-0695; libcon@cdc.net; Web- www.cdc.net/~libcon

May 28-30: NashCon '99- Howard Johnson's, Nashville, TN. Miniature Gaming Con. Info.: 2929 Kraft Dr., Nashville, TN 37204; gaiserc@aol.com; Web- www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/5051/hmgs.html

May 28-30: TachyCon 10- Renaissance Airport Hotel, Orlando, FL. GoH: Walter Koenig, Jerry Doyle, Tom Savini, Julie Newmar, Margaret Weis, Don Perrin, Arne Starr, Peter Telep. Memberships: \$65 ATD. Info.: 1271 Semoran Blvd., Suite 157, Casselberry, FL 32707; 407/678-7778; tachycon@scifispace.com; Web- www.scifispace.com/tachycon

June 1999

June 5-6: Wonderfest '99- Executive West Hotel, Louisville, KY. GoH: Robert & Dennis Skotak, Joe Vikocil, Bernie Wrightson, D.C. Fontana and more. Toys & Models Con. Info.: PO Box 5757, Louisville, KY 40255-0757; 502/254-8037; info@wonderfest.com; Web- www.wonderfest.com

June 11-13: Phenomicon '99- Holiday Inn, High Point, NC. GoH: Larry & Janet Nemecek, Sandra Buckner, Phil Smoot, John Morrow, Terry Collins, Jennifer McCollum, Cheralyn Lambeth and more. Memberships: \$25 ATD. Info.: PO Box 250, Thomasville, NC 27361; Web- www.stargame.org/phenomicon-99

June 18-20: Heroes Convention '99- Charlotte, NC. GoH: John Byrne, John Romita Jr. and more. Comics Con. Info.: Web- www.heroesonline.com

THE VULCORMITE CONNECTION

A Tale of the Celestial Seven

by W. C. Kirby
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(Part 1 of 4)

It was a scene straight from hell. Dead bodies lay sprawled in unnatural positions across the deck, their limbs twisted and convulsed into hideous shapes, their mouths gaping wide as if still screaming at some nameless, unspeakable terror. As he stood among the carnage, Mark Daniels shook his head and his mouth twisted in a grimace of pain. Horror and revulsion raced through his mind like a hurricane wind and yet somewhere in the eye of that storm a quiet, concerned curiosity struggled to understand the kind of force that could produce such utter devastation.

In the dim emergency lights of the bridge, the multicolored consoles flashed brightly. They blinked dispassionately on the contorted corpses, bathing them in an eerie light. They reflected in wide, unseeing eyes which Mark imagined were still staring at the unknown doom that had so ruthlessly claimed them. Every moment of pain and suffering was etched into their flesh as if chiseled there by some mad sculptor. It was as if some giant, invisible hand had suddenly clamped itself around the ship, killing all inside in one quick, agonizing instant.

Mark stood absently running a hand through his wavy brown hair as he tried to puzzle it out. He stood about six feet tall with a rugged, somewhat handsome face and brown eyes that, despite his outward anxiety, seemed to hold a mischievous sparkle. As he stood there pondering, something clattered behind him and he whirled, drawing his pistol in one fluid motion. Only to find his shipmate, Za-Carr-12, standing in the hatchway smiling sheepishly. Mark relaxed and chuckled as he holstered his weapon.

"You must be getting rusty Za-Carr, you're usually stealthier than that. That's a good way to get yourself blasted you know."

"You're usually less trepidatous than this Mark." Replied the being from Gamma Thebiades in a high-pitched, squeaky voice, "What's the matter? This place getting to you?"

Za-Carr stood a little over three feet tall and carried his small body on three spindly legs. His skin was a pale green and his large, elongated head had three oblong yellow orbs for eyes. While most of his race also had three arms, Za-Carr had lost one of his in a freak childhood accident so he had what, for a human, would be the standard set of two.

"It just doesn't add up." Mark shrugged his shoulders, "Everywhere you look there are dead bodies lying around yet none have a mark on them, and they all look scared out of their wits. Some hold weapons, but there's little sign of fighting. It's as if... they were simply slaughtered where they stood... but what could've killed

them?"

"I'm certain that after a thorough investigation the evidence will reveal an unequivocally ration explanation."

"R'jekk walks this ship," Came the booming reply of Mark's co-pilot and best friend, Andrus of Epsilon-Mercedes V, as he eased his massive body through the hatchway. "I feel his icy fingers on my heart."

Born of a race of mountain dwelling barbarians Andrus stood almost seven feet tall with broad, hunched shoulders and skin tanned dark bronze stretched over strong, rippling muscles. His dark, sunken eyes smoldered in the shadow of a protruding brow ridge. A mane of course black hair ran, like a mohawk, from his forehead to the middle of his shoulder blades and more tufts of it covered his forearms above his large, claw-like hands which he flexed nervously. He ran a pointed tongue over the lips of his beak shaped mouth and continued:

"There is something strange here, something evil. The Spirit of Death walks the decks of this ship, I can feel it in my bones."

"I'm well aware of how accurate your hunches can be old friend," Answered Mark, "but I want to know exactly what it was that did this and I need something stronger than feelings."

Andrus rolled his eyes and sighed deeply. He knew how stubborn Mark could be once he got something into his head. Andrus glanced around nervously and muttered a silent prayer to the Great Spirit to watch over them.

"Okay Za-Carr," continued Mark, "what have we got to go on so far?"

"I have confirmed my initial survey scan performed as we approached in the Celestial Eagle. All engine power was shut down, main power down, reserve battery power minimal. I instigated an inspection of engineering which revealed the major power couplers were destroyed, cause unknown, although definitely by a source which was onboard the ship. Whether the crew did it as a result of some psychosis or some other force produced it is undetermined."

"What about life-support," Asked Mark, "what's our status there?"

"Life support systems operation minimal. The atmosphere has grown slightly attenuable, but is sufficient for respiration, yet not for a sustained length of time."

"Translation?" Mumbled a puzzled Andrus.

"We can breathe it long enough to find out what we need to know." Answered the deep bass voice of Marcox Magnus as he wheeled on the bridge.

From Betacyon, Marcox Magnus' reddish-pink skin seemed to glow in the dim light. The fathomless black orbs that were his eyes appeared to glisten with emotion. The network of red and blue veins beneath the thin skin that covered his elongated forehead throbbed with

tension. There was no nose on his face and his thin, lipless mouth was surrounded by small beads of perspiration. He rolled into the room on the caterpillar tracks of the mechanical pedestal that formed the lower half of his body. His left hand was replaced by a bionic cone of similar design.

"Marcox!" Exclaimed Mark, "Did you discover anything?"

"Well, I've only had time to do a preliminary examination, but what I've found is pretty obvious. Something... I can't imagine what, has.. fried their entire nervous system. It's quite bizarre actually, but every nerve in their body has been burned away. That's the reason for the extreme trauma at the time of death."

"And there was no chance of disease?"

"I ran all the standard tests and even a few unorthodox ones. No trace of any biological infestations. In truth, the damage was more closely associated with the kind induced by some form of energy or radiation exposure."

"Za-Carr, could the damage to the power couplers have breached the reactor shielding and flooded the ship with radiation?"

"Negative Mark, such a breach would contaminate the ship, registering as abnormally high background radiation. Scanners read no such contamination, just normal background levels."

"Meaning it was most likely induced from some outside source." Replied Mark. "Za-Carr, check their course, have they passed by any strange stars or such?"

"Perhaps their ship's computer log can tell us something." Za-Carr moved to the Captain's console and his hands danced over the buttons, keying the controls with a cool confidence. He placed a jack to his ear and started listening intently.

"Negative Mark, a standard course, all astronomical bodies they encountered are cataloged and fall within nominal standards."

"What about the Captain's log? Maybe he can tell us something."

"Very little," Za-Carr replied quietly, "ship's log reveals the freighter to be owned by a small, independent company. They were currently involved in transporting a load of Zyon ore to the planet Exlonodus in the Setanian system. Everything is normal, no report of trouble."

He was silent a moment, listening intently.

"Here's something, the Captain now reports some mysterious deaths, no marks on the body, a look of absolute terror on the face. They can find no clue as to method or motive."

Another moment of silence. "Here's something else, something has happened, reports are more frantic, less coherent... They seem to be involved in several small battles on board ship, with what they don't specify. There are desperate requests for information from the data banks, insufficient data, the computer has no answers. Something has them terrified..."

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THE VULCORMITE CONNECTION

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more deaths... unable to call for assistance... more fighting... wait, the Captain seems to be entering a last desperate plea. The menace seems to be..."

He shook his head and put down the earpiece. "No, I couldn't read it, it was too garbled. All I know is there were frantic searches on known lifeforms. The last few passages were entered in a panic, the Captain was practically hysterical when he made them."

"This makes absolutely no sense," Mark ran one hand through his hair, "a freighter owned by some penny-ante company, carrying a load of common Zion to some Godforsaken planet like Exlundus is just..."

"I'll give you one more thing to add to the mystery." Andrus rumbled quietly. "I checked the holds as you requested on the way up here.

The hold containing the Zion is a shambles. All the crates ripped open, not neatly, but actually torn apart, as if by some wild animal, and ALL the ore is missing."

"Every bit of it?" Inquired Mark.

"Everything but a few traces laying around on the floor, not much to speak of."

"What could have happened to the ore?" Mark mused quietly to himself.

"Could they have jettisoned it?" Asked Marcox.

"Then why remove it from the crates? And why tear the crates open?" Answered Mark. "Even pirates would have taken crate and all. This is getting deeper by the minute. All we're finding is questions and no answers. The captain requested info on known lifeforms, the crates were clawed open, it's got to be an animal of some kind, are you sure there's no other lifeforms on board?"

"All scans show negative," Replied Marcox, "and I double checked on my way up here."

"Perhaps," suggested Za-Carr, "there was some incident en route that induced psychosis. Then they incapacitated the engines and jettisoned the ore before expiring."

"Then what killed them?" Asked Marcox. "Their injuries had a physical cause and were not the type they could inflict on themselves."

"If it was an animal," Prompted Andrus, "maybe they killed it just as it got the last of them."

"Unlikely," answered Mark, "you heard Za-Carr, the captain was in a panic when he made the last entry. That means there was still something to be afraid of. Besides, if they killed it where's the remains? We've searched the entire ship and found nothing. They couldn't have flushed it out an airlock if they were all dead."

"Maybe it left the ship after killing them?" Asked Marcox.

"Negative," Replied Za-Carr, "scans showed all hatches secured when we approached. There was no way to get out."

"All right," Stated Mark looking about bewilderedly, "we can stand here guessing all day but I don't think we'll find out anything more on this old hulk. We know something happened on this ship and we can't find anything on board. So maybe it happened either en route or before departure. I say we retrace their route back to their port of departure and if we don't find anything unusual along the way then maybe we can dig something up at the port that will help us make some sense out of this."

"That would seem the most prudent action." Replied Za-Carr.

"I guess we can't do any more here." Said Marcox.

"Anything, as long as we get off this tub," Declared Andrus, "it gives me the chills."

"According to the log," announced Za-Carr, "the ship received its cargo from the mining colony on Zeta Alraston."

"Isn't Zeta Alraston well known for its large Vulcomite deposits?" Asked Andrus quizzically.

"And since Vulcomite is the basis for the fuel that runs every power plant in the galaxy, it seems like they would find more profit in shipping it, rather than a relatively useless ore like Zion." Mentioned Marcox.

"Except that Exlundus, their destination, only has trading agreements with the United League of Worlds. They're not a full member due to the hostility between them and their neighbor, Xerytron, which has sometimes escalated to open aggression. Consequently, Vulcomite in its natural form is contraband on either planet, due to its potential to be used as a weapon." Explained Za-Carr.

"Unless..." Mark spoke quietly, his hand on his chin, lost in thought, "Before we go Za-Carr, I want you to go down to the hold and get us a sample of that ore. Get Thoc to run some tests on it, the results could be interesting."

"Have you got something Mark?" asked Marcox.

"Maybe nothing... and certainly not the entire answer, but maybe, just maybe, another piece of the puzzle."

"How 'bout letting us in on it." Rumbled Andrus.

"No, not yet, not until I find out if I'm right. Za-Carr, hurry up with that sample, the rest of us be back on the 'Eagle getting her ready to go."

A short time later footsteps echoed and re-echoed down the deserted corridor as Za-Carr made his way back from the empty hold. Calm and seemingly unperturbed he passed through the airlock back into the Celestial Eagle and stepped up to the intercom.

"Za-Carr here, sample procured. You can disengage as soon as you're prepared."

"Roger, get back up here as soon as you've dropped that sample off with Thoc."

Za-Carr pressed the buttons to close the airlock and while the doors slowly slid together

he turned and started up the silent corridor. Unwitnessed by him, the air outside the airlock began to stir softly. As the space between the doors lessened a shimmer suddenly passed through it. For the briefest instant the air seemed to waver, the light flicker, and then it was gone. It might have been a fleeting will-o-wisp, a bit of dust swirling in the air, if not for the ominous, stifling sensation that seemed to fill the corridor.

Za-Carr continued up the empty corridor, the sample bag slung aimlessly over his shoulder, apparently oblivious to the subtle change in the atmosphere. Abruptly he stopped. The antennae on his head prickled up and he stood perfectly still. He thought he heard something. He couldn't be sure, it was faint, virtually indistinguishable, but in the quiet stillness of the corridor he seemed to hear a faint rush of air. It was soft, but rapid, almost like a harsh, animalistic panting. He spun around swiftly to find the corridor empty, the airlock doors just sliding together with a low thump. Za-Carr shook his head and listened carefully. The sound was gone now.

"If I'm not careful," He muttered to himself, "I'll end up as irrational as a human."

On the bridge Mark snapped off the intercom and turned back to his controls.

"You heard the man," he announced to the others, "let's get out of here."

"Not a moment too soon." Muttered Andrus under his breath.

Despite their leaving the edgy feeling he had since they first found the derelict was as strong as ever. That puzzled him, shouldn't it be fading now that they were leaving its source behind them? Well, he thought, maybe they just needed to put some distance between them and this haunted hulk.

Each member of the bridge was silent as they concentrated on their consoles and the delicate work of pulling away from the freighter. Slowly, gently, the Celestial Eagle eased its round, tablet-shaped bulk away from the derelict. Slowly and silently the gap widened between the ships. After about a dozen feet separated the two ships, the Celestial Eagle pivoted gracefully and then rapidly accelerated. In seconds it was no more than a point of light among the stars, with nothing so much as a whisper to divulge its passing.

Even as the Celestial Eagle disappeared into the black void of space, another ship entered the area, drawn by the distress beacon of the derelict. Its regal beaming and stem lines unmistakably identifying it as a U.L.W. Security Forces Cruiser. On its bridge the passing of the Celestial Eagle did not go unnoticed.

"Captain," exclaimed the Scannermate, "I'm scanning a small freighter accelerating from this area on course two, five, seven point eight, Mark three."

"Communications," ordered the Captain,

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"hail the ship. Order it to turn about."

"I'm trying Captain," replied the Communications officer, "but there seems to be some kind of interference. I can't get through. Something is blocking the signal. I did manage to get a registration fix though, the beacon seems to be outside the bandwidth of the interference."

"Shall I plot course in pursuit sir?" Asked the Helmsman.

"No," answered the captain, "they're too far ahead of us. Navigator, plot me a potential course based on their last known speed and heading. Be sure to include all possible ports of destination. We'll pass it on to Headquarters so they can have someone pick them up"

"Communications, have survey teams report to the airlock. I want this freighter gone over with a fine tooth comb. Something strange is going on, and I have a feeling that whoever was on that small freighter is in this up to their necks."

Oblivious to these events, the Celestial Eagle continued its course. In the pilot's seat Mark plotted the ship's course with a skill honed by many years experience. Za-Carr entered the

bridge and took his place at the computer console.

"Thoc is in possession of the sample. He was ecstatic over the challenge and promptly initiated experimentation procedures. We should be receiving the results precipitately."

"That reminds me," said Mark, "Erlonn, you'd better contact the U.L.W. Security HQ for this sector and inform them about that freighter. We don't want to get into any trouble over this."

"As you say Mark." The words were not spoken, their meaning was felt, sensed in the mind. It was a sensation Mark still couldn't get used to experiencing. It made him insecure to realize his thoughts weren't as private as he'd like.

Erlonn, from the planet Sirius IV, turned his small, frail body in his seat and pulled the headset over his large, bald head. The dark, sunken sockets where his eyes should have been stared blankly at the console. A wrinkled fleshy patch that took the place of nose, mouth and chin, pulsed and throbbed as he breathed. His ashy gray skin blended well with the black flowing robe which hung to his feet. The headset was a special design of Za-Carr's to convert Erlonn's thoughts to digitized signals which could

then be transmitted as synthesized speech. For the Sirians have developed their minds to an extremely high degree. They rely exclusively on the extrasensory powers of their minds to sense their surroundings. They communicate through telepathy and have developed other strange abilities.

"I have a problem Mark," Erlonn announced, "something is blocking transmission. I can't get any signal to go through."

"It's probably an ion storm or some such phenomenon." Suggested Mark.

"Improbable." Advised Za-Carr, "Scanners detect no such phenomenon in the area."

"Terrific! Don't tell me now the radio equipment is malfunctioning!"

"I don't think so Mark," replied Erlonn, "systems are passing all diagnostic checks. It's as if some outside field is jamming the signal."

"Run a trace, Erlonn." Ordered Mark, "Try to pinpoint the source. This is just great! What else can go wrong?"

Suddenly the bridge was filled with the strident wail of the warning klaxon and red lights lit up on the damage control board.

...To Be Continued

Heroes

by Ian Letendre

A long time ago (21 years to be precise), in a galaxy far, far away (New Hampshire to be exact)...

A young father & mother, trying to make ends barely meet for his only son, heard a bizarre film commercial on their radio. Something about Droids & Wookies and Jedi having something in common. The father was intrigued by this advertisement. His generation grew up with few heroes, and here was something he might be able to pass down to his children. An icon that defies the logic of it's popularity. An icon of New Hope for generation labeled X.

The parents watched as their three-year-old grew to love this movie. They clothed him in it's T-shirts; they bought him the toys inspired from the film. Each day, the parents sat dumb founded as they watched their son make up his own stories using these plastic toys as his mini stage. They gave into the hype and observed the young boy grew up with the film's subsequent sequels. After all, this wasn't just a "pretty visuals" film; this was a movie that had captivated every boy and girl old enough to say Vader.

Time went by, and the boy grew to be a teenager. His love of the toys had waned, and he spoke less and less of the film. But the parents noticed that something strange had happened. He had begun to read books by writers named Asimov and Herbert. He asked to go to "conventions" and wore costumes of alien space creatures. He joined fan clubs and wrote newsletters about his favorite subjects: Science Fiction & more Science Fiction.

The parents looked at each other in concern. What had this film created? An obsession it surely seemed. But then they saw how it had touched their son. He was no longer a teenager, he was a young man. And he had met the love of his life (together 7 years) and gone on to college to learn craft his space tales to share with others. He had become the chairman of a Science Fiction club in a major metropolitan city. He had a great job. Was well adjusted and respected by others (at least I think I am?). He had gone on to achieve all that the parents could have wanted and hoped for. He had followed and was still following his dreams and his loves. The parents then realized that they had done right that fateful day. They had chose wisely buy going to that quirky little film called *Star Wars*.

I am not going to claim *Star Wars* as the greatest film that ever was (even though it is). But I want to point out how this film especially touched my family and me. Neither of my parents really like SF, but it is one thing that ties me to both my mother and father closely. And I know tons of other people in my age group who aren't even into fandom that attribute this film to having a deep impact on their lives. In a time without heroes, it gave GenX a "New Hope". So, as I know many of you will already, go out see if magic happens again. See if a new *Star Wars* Generation is born this May 19th. In a time of school shootings, Kosovo, the Lewinsky scandal, heroes are needed more than ever.

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ASFS Writers Group News

by Lewis Murphy

The next meeting of the ASFS Writers Group will be Sunday, May 16th at 2:00 p.m.. The location this month is the home of Lewis Murphy and Jayne Rogers, at 1647 Beacon Hill Blvd. in Atlanta. Contact Lewis at lmurp02@emory.edu or Jayne at missjayne@juno.com for directions. Refreshments will be available (soda & chips).

We will have award winning editor Stephen Pagel as a guest speaker on the topic "From Manuscript to Cash Register: The Life Cycle of a Book". He will also field questions from the attendees. The meeting will be followed by dinner at a restaurant yet to be determined. This meeting is open to the entire membership of ASFS, not just the Writers Group, so please feel free to join us. We would like to have a good turnout for our first guest speaker.

About our guest-Mr. Pagel worked for Barnes and Noble for ten years. He was their national science fiction, fantasy, and role-playing buyer for the last three of those years. During his tenure as buyer, B&N had double digit increases in sales of science fiction, fantasy, and role-playing. When Mr. Pagel left B&N for the Director of Sales position at White Wolf Publishing, Inc., **Locus** called him "the most powerful person in science fiction." He was the Director of Sales for White Wolf for two years. Besides being in the sales area of the field, he is co-editor of the anthology series Bending the Landscape: Fantasy with Nicola Griffith. In May of 1998 Stephen and Nicola won the Lambda Literary Award for best Science Fiction / Fantasy work published in 1997 as editors of Bending the Landscape: Fantasy. In October of 1998, Stephen and Nicola received the World Fantasy Award for Best Fantasy Anthology of 1997. In September of 1998, Overlook published Stephen and Nicola's next anthology: Bending the Landscape: Science Fiction. In June of 1998 Stephen left White Wolf to devote all his effort to running Meisha Merlin Publishing, Inc., a genre small press of which he is President and Senior Editor. For more information about Meisha Merlin, see the website at <http://www.angelfire.com/biz/MeishaMerlin/>