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THE CLARKE AWARD

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Three year wait for Harry?

The American publishers of J.K. Rowling's best-selling *Harry Potter* series, Scholastic, have had to issue a warning to share-holders that the next instalment of the forest-consuming series, *Harry Potter and the Order Of The Phoenix*, may now not be appearing until as late as June 2003, a full three years after the last instalment. However over on this side of the Atlantic, the UK publishers, Bloomsbury, have issued a statement saying that they think Scholastic are just "being cautious". J.K.'s PR spokeswoman Dotti Irving, had the following to say: "[J.K.] is writing at her own pace... she loves writing, but she wants it to be perfect". But at this rate won't her young fan base have grown and be having kids of their own by the time the seventh, and last book, in the series is published?

Not that Rowling is not keeping busy. Although she is now married, much has been made of her single-mother status when she began writing, not least by the author herself. Rowling is ambassador for The National Council for One-Parent Families and recently donated to them £12m to set up a website. Now she is launching Magic, a new anthology of writing to raise more money for the Council. Recently she commented against the Government's stigmatising of one-parent families: "It is definitely time we exploded the popular myth that most of us arereckless teenagers trying to get council flats."

The video and DVD release of the first *Potter* film has poured more money into Rowling's bank account, rapidly becoming the fastest selling DVD and video of all time grossing £1.25m on its first day alone. The sequel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* will hit cinemas later this year.

After that the *Potter* film series may be

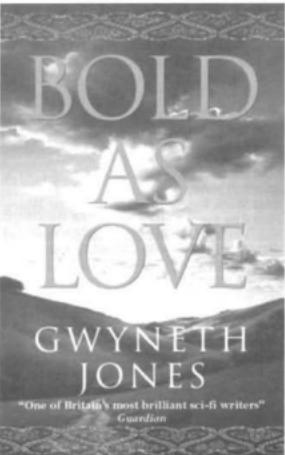
taking a strange turn with the Mexican writer/director of teen road-movie *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (*And Your Mother Too*), Alfonso Cuaron, reportedly been approached to take over from the director of the first two films, Chris Columbus, for the adaptation of the third book *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Columbus has apparently decided that two is enough, and is keen to return to the US with his family. *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, scheduled for release in November 2004 is expected to be darker than the previous two films as the story centres on Sirius Black, an escaped mass murderer who is stalking Harry. *And Your Mother Too* gained an 18 certificate in this country, but at least Cuaron is no stranger to literary adaptations, having directed a version of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Ethan Hawke.

Harry's magic continues to extend into real life. After school 'Potter clubs' are nothing new but one 'failing' school in Kent has turned its fortunes around by renaming all its houses after those in Hogwarts, Harry's school, and adding the books to their literacy hour. Can Potter A-levels be far away?

Of course not everyone's happy. "Harry Potter is the devil and he is destroying people," announced Pastor Jack Brock from the Christ Community Church in Alamogordo New Mexico at one of a number of recent book-burnings.

But all the publishers are still looking for Rowling's successor. Teenage fiction was the main focus of attention at the Bologna Children's Book Fair this year. The big deal of the event was a six-figure sum paid by Hodder for a fantasy trilogy by first-time author David Lee Stone.

Jones fifth time lucky



See page 14 for more details

Ice on Mars

Vast quantities of water ice have been discovered just below the surface of Mars. Astronomers think there is so much of the frozen water that if melted there would be enough to flood the planet to a depth of half a kilometre. The discovery was made by the Mars Odyssey spacecraft, which has been gathering data since late last year. Scientists have now been able to answer a question that has puzzled Mars researchers for decades – there is plenty of geological evidence that the planet was water-rich in the past, so where did it all go? The answer now appears to be that it is frozen into the regolith – the layer of loose rock and dust on the surface.

The gamma-ray and neutron spectrometers on the spacecraft detected an area of hydrogen less than one metre beneath the Martian surface. Astronomers believe that the hydrogen must be locked-up in crystals of ice. They were amazed at the strength of the signal. The researchers had expected to take a year to gather enough evidence to confirm the theory that water was trapped as subsurface ice but managed to do so in just a few weeks.

They announced preliminary findings in March, but now have good data confirming large amounts of the water-ice just beneath the surface south of 60 degrees latitude. The scientists suspect the same to be true of the

Scottish Frankenstein?

A paper published in the May issue of the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* has added a new twist to the hugely influential gothic classic *Frankenstein, A Modern Prometheus* written by Mary Shelley. Christopher Goulding, a postgraduate student at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, argues that *Frankenstein's* scientific inspiration comes not from central Europe but from a retired Scots physician living in Windsor. Many academic careers have been founded on criticism of the novel, but most previous research has addressed the social and moral questions that the novel raises not its scientific inspiration. This apparently came via Mary Shelley's husband, the poet Percy Shelley, who had a long interest in medicine and chemistry. Goulding argues that Shelley's interest was developed while a schoolboy at Eton, by his mentor James Lind MD (1736-1812), who lived in Windsor. Apparently Lind was one of the first people in Britain to conduct electro-medical experiments on muscle tissue and "make dead frogs jump like living ones". Lind also suggested using electric shocks to cure the madness of King George III. In his later life, Shelley said of Lind: "I owe that man far - oh! Far more than I owe my father".

A contemporary description of Lind's study makes it sound similar to Frankenstein's – having "telescopes, Galvanic batteries, daggers, electrical machines and all the divers apparatus which a philosopher is supposed to possess." Lind himself was educated by William Cullen, an Edinburgh physician who developed procedures for bringing people who seemed to have died, from asphyxiation or drowning, back to life. While Mary drew on numerous sources to develop her horror story, Goulding argues that "the novel's science comes, via her husband, from the Scottish Enlightenment".

— EDITORIAL —

FILTHY

First congratulations are in order for Martin Sketchley, writer of our web column, who has just sown up a three-book deal with Earthlight. The first novel *The Affinity Trap* will be published in 2003. Martin resisted my fine-tuned journalistic probing: "What's it about?" I asked. "Lots of things," he replied. However according to the press release it sounds positively dangerous: "hugely original ideas explode from every page"... Hopefully now he's a filthy pro he'll still talk to the rest of us.

Oh yeah, an answer to a related question, I am the same 'Gary Wilkinson' who has a few things published in *The Guardian*, although most of the time it doesn't feel like it.

This issue we welcome Martin Lewis as another regular media reviewer. If there is anyone else out there who is looking to contribute to *Matrix*, either writers or artists, please get in touch via the main editorial address. Hey, you may end up a pro too!

Congratulations to Gwyneth Jones on winning the Clarke award, your humble editor was there and survived the ever-flowing red wine, well just about, to bring a report on the event and later talk to Gwyneth.

"till next time
cheers,
Gary

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

northern hemisphere, but cannot make the appropriate observations until later this year due to the Martian winter in the north.

The dramatic discovery may guide the selection of future landing and exploration sites on Mars and may suggest areas to look for evidence of past life. Water is, of course, essential for life as we know it, so the discovery enhances the belief that Mars could have had life in the past and perhaps in the present as well. Having water just below the surface will also be an enormous boon to any future astronauts who travel to Mars.

Although there are planned landings next year, The European Beagle 2 and Nasa's twin Mars rovers, neither are currently targeted at the region where the ice may exist. Ironically the Mars Polar Lander is to touch down in exactly the right spot in 1999 and would have undoubtedly detected the ice had it not malfunctioned on the way down.

It is thought that NASA will shift its priorities to bring back a sample of the ice and rock back to Earth via an unmanned probe as soon as possible.

NASA tax

Michael Williams, a Republican candidate for the 5th Congressional District seat, has put forward a novel way of funding future NASA missions - by taxing science fiction. His proposals are centred on a suggested: "1 percent 'NASA tax' on science fiction books, science fiction comic books, space sciences books and any other space-related literature." The tax would also apply to "space, space-related, and science fiction toys, puzzles and games". This is in exchange for tax breaks for the middle classes.

Williams is also thinking ahead as well as a proposal for a "global grand convention", that would ensure that all inhabitants of Earth enjoy the same basic rights found in the U.S. Constitution, he also wants a constitutional convention when 30,000 colonists have settled or been born "on the moon, Mars or any other celestial body besides the Earth."

Don't panic yet because Williams faces Stephen Engel of Athens in the June 4 primary. The winner then faces U.S. Rep. Bud Cramer in November.

Snippets

As reported in *Locus*: Ray Bradbury has received a star in the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Michael Marshall Smith is being rechristened Michael Marshall in the US after confusion between his forthcoming book, *The Straw Men* and recently released thriller by Martin J. Smith. Joe Haldeman has sold *Sea Change*, a second untitled novel and a collection, *For White Hill*, to Ace. William Gibson has delivered *Pattern Recognition* to Susan Allison at Putnam and Tony Lacey at Penguin UK. James White's "Sector General" novels *Code Blue: Emergency* and *The Genocidal Healer* went to Orb via Ashley Grayson — Tor now has the entire series, which Teresa Nielsen Hayden will continue to edit. Glen Cook has sold a new untitled fantasy trilogy to Patrick Nielsen Hayden at Tor. Garth Nix has sold *A Confusion of Princes* plus a second untitled novel to Ruth Ketcher at HarperCollins in the US, sold British rights to his "Sabriel" trilogy to HarperCollins UK and sold British paperback rights to his "Keys to the Kingdom" series to David Levithan at Scholastic UK.

Awards News

Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall Of Fame inductees announced

Samuel R. Delany and Michael Moorcock will be inducted into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame, organisers announced at ConQuet 33, held during Memorial Day weekend in Kansas City. The late James Blish and Donald Wollheim are also to be recognised posthumously. The inductions will take place at the University of Kansas on July 5th as part of the John W. Campbell and Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Awards ceremony.

Nebulas

The 2001 Nebula Awards were given by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) at its annual awards banquet at the Westin Crown Center in Kansas City

Novel: *The Quantum Rose* by Catherine Asaro

Novella: *"The Ultimate Earth"* by Jack Williamson

Novellette: *"Louise's Ghost"* by Kelly Link

Short Story: *"The Cure for Everything"* by Sevanna Park

Script: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* by James Schamus, Kuo Jung Tsai, and Hui-Ling Wang

A special President's Award was presented to publisher Betty Ballantine for her service in the field of science fiction. Betty and her husband Ian Ballantine brought mass market paperback publishing to the United States, and later founded Ballantine Books, which was one of the earliest houses to publish a line of paperback science fiction novels, and so were instrumental in introducing science fiction in novel length as a viable commercial mode.

Analog AnLab Awards

Analog Science Fiction and Fact presented its AnLab Awards, and *Asimov's Science Fiction* handed out its Readers' Awards during the Nebula Awards weekend. *Analog* readers determine the winners of the Analytical

Laboratory (AnLab) Awards, and readers of *Asimov's* pick the winners of that magazine's awards.

Novella: *"Sunday Night Yams at Minnie and Earl's"* by Adam-Troy Castro

Novellette: *"Tower of Wings"* by Sean McMullen

Short Story: *"Jake, Me, and the Zipper"* by Rajnar Vajra

Fact Article: *"Up in Smoke: How Mt. St. Helens Blasted Conventional Scientific Wisdom"* by Richard A. Lovett

Cover Art: Bob Eggleton, July/August 2001

Asimov's Readers' Awards

Novella: *"Stealing Alabama"* by Allen Steele

Novellette: *"Into Greenwood"* by Jim Grimsley

Short Story: *"Old MacDonald Had a Farm"* by Mike Resnick

Poem: *"January Fires"* by Joe Haldeman

Cover Artist: Michael Carroll

Interior Artist: Darryl Elliot

Tiptree Award

Hiromi Goto's novel *The Kappa Child* has won the 2001 James Tiptree, Jr Award given annually to a work of science fiction or fantasy that explores or expands gender roles. The jury also released a short list of works it considered worthy of attention: *Half Known Lives* by Joan Givner; *Dark Light* by Ken MacLeod; *The Song of the Earth* by Hugh Nissenson; *The Fresco* by Sheri S. Tepper.

Sidewise Awards

The judges for the Sidewise Awards for Alternate History have announced the finalists for the 2001 Sidewise Awards.

Long Form:

(60,000 words or longer or complete series)

"The Age of Unreason" series of books 1998 - 2001 by J. Gregory Keyes

Chronospace by Allen M. Steele

The Children's War by J.N. Stroyar

Short Form:

(shorter than 60,000 words)

"First to the Moon" in Spectrum 6 by Stephen

Baxter & Simon Bradshaw
"The Human Front" by Ken MacLeod

The Sidewise Awards, founded in 1995 to recognise excellence in alternate history, are named for Murray Leinster's short story "Sidewise in Time".

The Stoker Awards

Presented every year by the Horror Writers' Association, for superior achievement in the field of horror writing.

Best Novel: *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman

Best First Novel: *Deadliest of the Species* by Michael Oliver

Best Long Fiction: *In These Final Days of Sales* by Steve Rasnic Tem

Best Short Fiction: *'Reconstructing Amy'* by Tim Lebbon

Best Fiction Collection: *The Man with the Barbed-Wire Fists* by Norman Partridge

Best Anthology: *Extremes 2: Fantasy and Horror from the Ends of the Earth* edited by Brian A. Hopkins

Best Nonfiction: *Jobs in Hell* edited by Brian Keene

Best Illustrated Narrative: No Award

Best Screenplay: *Memento* by Christopher & Jonathan Nolan

Best Work for Young Readers: *The Willow Files 2* by Yvonne Navarro

Best Poetry Collection: *Consumed, Reduced to Beautiful Grey Ashes* by Linda Addison

Best Alternative Forms: *Dark Dreamers: Facing the Masters of Fear* by Beth Gwinn & Stanley Water

Lifetime Achievement Award: John Farris

Focus editor Simon Morden brags, sorry comments: "I'm on *Extremes 2*, along with ex-*Focus* editor Liz Holliday and ex-copper and Bill scriptwriter Paul Finch. E2 is the first epub to win a Stoker. The artist on E2 was Marge Simon, who by no coincidence at all illustrated my forthcoming collection from Lone Wolf."

News: Gary Wilkinson and Janet Barron

Gary Wilkinson rounds up all that's happening in film and TV

Buffy to bow out?

Buffy the Vampire Slayer looks like it may finish at the end of the series, the seventh, that is planned to shoot next year. Nicolas Brandon, who plays Xander in the series, claims the show's creator Joss Whedon has too many commitments. "It sucks, but because with how this year ended, and with what's going to happen next year, it's going to go out on top," he commented in an Australian interview. "This last year was my most fun doing the show, but that's life. I'm show-business and I'll just do something else." As regards Whedon he went on to say: "It was his baby so if he can't be part of it, it's just not going to run. It's going to be really sad for me – a hundred and forty four episodes and it's my first job."

Buffy herself, Sarah Michelle Gellar, has already recently discounted any film follow-up should the series come to an end, citing the poor performance of the original *Buffy* movie shows that the concept is not suited to the big screen.

All work and no play...

This year *Big Brother* is taking place in a house that has been built at Elstree Film Studios adjacent to the site where Kubrick's version of *The Shining* was shot. Hopefully they have not given any of the housemates an axe. The huge amounts of salt that were imported (160 tonnes on one day alone) to act as substitute for snow in the exterior shots of Jack 'Here's Johnny' Nicolson staring horror flick have permanently contaminated the land.

Matrix x2

It's been reported that Warner Bros. is planning to release the two sequels to *The Matrix* within months of one another next year. The first one, *Matrix Reloaded*, is due to be released in May, and the second, *Matrix Revolutions*, in August or November in the US. In an interview with Time magazine, star Keanu Reeves said cryptically that the 1999 original was: "About birth. The second is life; the third is death." ...er right. And spoons?

Elemental DVD

There is a whisper that cult television favourite *Sapphire and Steel* will soon be released on DVD for the first time. The series, starring David McCallum and Joanna Lumley as 'elemental' time detectives, was never repeated and has been unavailable on video for over a decade.

Spanish st!

Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz have been connected with a new Spanish language sf film *Tarantula*. The film has been optioned by the Almodovar brothers for more than a year now, but in Cannes, Producer Agustín confirmed that the Spanish language's two most bankable stars would be taking the lead roles in a "futuristic film noir" to be directed by his brother Pedro. Based on a French novel, *Tarantula* is set a decade or so in the future and is the story of a plastic surgeon who takes revenge on his daughter's rapist by giving him a forced sex-change operation. *Tarantula* is set to mark a return to Spanish-language films for Banderas and Cruz, both of whom jump-started their international careers in Almodovar films – Banderas in 1988's Oscar-

nominated *Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown* and Cruz in 1999's Oscar-winner *All About My Mother*.

Indy IV

Although it's not been confirmed yet it appears that Frank's adaptations of Stephen King prison novels set in the past Darabont has been given the nod to pen the eagerly-awaited fourth *Indiana Jones* movie. George Lucas had previously been after either 'mister twist', M. Night Shyamalan (*Sixth Sense, Unbreakable*) or 'quality' Tom Stoppard (co-writer, *Shakespeare in Love*) but it is believed that Darabont's previous experience with the Indy oeuvre – he wrote several of the *Young Indiana Jones* tv shows and films – as well as his work on *The Green Mile*, (what, he's promised to better next time?) may have swung the pendulum in his favour.

New Voyage

Jim Cameron's next project is reported to be a remake of *Fantastic Voyage*. The original 1966 film, novelised by Isaac Asimov, starred Raquel Welch and Donald Pleasence as part of a group of scientists who were shrunk, along with a submarine, in order to be injected into the US Presidents' blood stream and travel to his brain to zap a clot. Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich had previously planned a remake but instead plumped for the *Godzilla* revival project. They maintained an interest, hawking around a plot involving a team injected into an alien to solve a disease mystery but the producer / director team are no longer connected with the team. "Cameron is doing *Fantastic Voyage* now, unfortunately for us," Devlin recently confirmed. "But I think he's going to do a great job. It's one of those things, if anyone is going to do a project you wanted to do, you'd rather it be him."

B5 DVD

News from B5 creator, J. Michael Straczynski himself, via his own website www.jmsnews.com: "Yeah, it's real...I was holding off saying anything until WB or someone else could announce it, but since it's come up here via the captioning Institute - yeah, as noted, it's real. Season One will be out in a boxed set this Fall, and they're going to be including at minimum two commentaries from me, probably on 'Signs and Portents' and 'Chrysalis' (it's a matter of how much time and energy I can give to it given that there's no fees involved and I'm in the midst of *Jeremiah*), and if possible, 'Babylon Squared', maybe 'Sky Full of Stars'. They'd also like to film an on-camera intro by me (but I guess folks will buy it anyway, even with that particular horror included). They're pulling together a lot of stuff on this release so that there are plenty of extras this time around, now that the value of the DVDs has been shown by the first release."

Horror movies

Author Peter James has cut a deal with Gary Hamilton's ArcLight Films and the UK's Spice Factory to produce films based on three of his horror novels - *Possession*, *The Truth* and *Perfect People*. The Danish director Peter Flinth has had his name pencilled in to direct *Possession*. James said of the deal in general: "I've been looking to become more active and join forces with a film production company in

the UK. [Spice Factory] are always so inspired and full of energy and I'm looking forward to working with them."

Arnie robot again

After the lack-lustre performance of *Collateral Damage*, Arnold Schwarzenegger is looking to revive his career with a remake of *Westworld*. Written and directed by Michael Jurassic Park Crichton, the 1973 original featured a theme park with Roman-, Medieval- and Westworlds staffed by androids that the visitors, in those carefree un-politically correct times could shoot and have sex with. Of course everything goes wrong... Arnie is tipped to play the robot gunslinger originally played by Yul Brynner. Ironically the character was a big inspiration for the unstoppable killing machine in Schwarzenegger's break-through film *The Terminator*. "I am very happy to be working on *Westworld*," the Austrian oak told the press. "I loved the original and have wanted to remake it for years. I'm thrilled that it has finally come to Warner's."

Following that could be a third instalment of the *Conan the Barbarian* series. The original film's director John Millius is currently taking his turn over a screenplay.

Cop-out

Peter Hyams director of *Outland*, *Capricorn One* and er... *Timecop* is to start principal photography on June 24 on *A Sound of Thunder*, adapted from the celebrated time-travel story by Ray Bradbury. A Warner Brothers production, it will star Edward Burns, Ben Kingsley and Catherine McCormack.

Hardy sticks the boot in

The director of the original *Wicker Man*, Robin Hardy, has publicly mocked the idea of a Nicolas Cage re-make. His comments have been widely spread around the internet including: "I'm particularly looking forward to the moment when Nicolas Cage is looking up the hill from the wicker man, pulls out the Beretta from beneath his jacket, annihilates the pagans and scuba-dives back to Los Angeles."

Wacko!

False-nose rumoured popstar (whose musical successes are a long way behind him), Michael Jackson, is planning on producing and starring in *Wolfed*, a werewolf that will be the first project by his new production company, Neverland Pictures. The film is purported to be a Gothic thriller, adapting the little known Alexandre Dumas novel *The Wolf Leader*. Though how faithful is it going to be if they are changing the title for a start? Set in 17th Century France, it tells the story of a shoemaker who is nearly beaten to death by a group of aristocrats and is saved only by making a pact with the devil who appears to him as a large black wolf. The devil offers Thibault the power to harm or kill anyone he wants to, but the more evil acts the lad commits, the more wolf-like he becomes...

Is Jackson trying to recapture his *Thriller* glory days? Well, he is hiring multi Oscar winning make-up artist Rick Baker who did the effects for the *Thriller* video in which Jackson appeared as werewolf as well as a zombie. Baker was also the make-up artist responsible for the effects in *Thriller*-inspiring *An American Werewolf in London*.

SITTING IN THE DARK

"AGGRESSIVE NEGOTIATIONS"

Gary Wilkinson sees it all again in *Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones*

And here we go again...

You can never go back – so it was entirely wrong to expect, as some of the true-believers did, that *The Phantom Menace* was going to recapture the experience they had when they saw their first *Wars* film when they were a kid. And perhaps not even a kid – my mother is still telling the story that when she had reluctantly taken me to see the original *Star Wars* she ended up pulling the strap off her handbag because she was so excited during the final attack on the Death Star. No, *Phantom* did not "rape and murder my childhood", my sf interests have become too broad for that, but I still went into the latest instalment with low expectations.

In many ways it's hard to judge *Clones* as a film at all. It is its own advert, merely one part of a hyper-efficient self-promoting machine designed to ship out vast amounts of tie-in product to the consumers (toys, books, DVDs, CDs, videos, posters...) However even the occasional advert is entertaining, so is *Clones* any good? Well I'll give it a cautious yes...

Phantom was an out-and-out kids film but one that was supremely annoying for adults with nonsense like Midichlorians, a garbage plot, 'Annie' Skywalker and J'r J'r. It would have been a near-impossible to make a film as bad as that again and *Clones* is much improved. It does suffer from similar faults to its predecessor but no way near to the same extent. And Lucas plays to his strengths as a visual director. The opening scene is truly impressive, a set piece that is hard to beat. A silver spaceship, its lines as sleek as a '50s automobile, throbbing like a World War II bomber, descends from space through fluffy clouds to the planet-city of Coruscant that is an amalgam of a million pulp covers and no sooner than it touches down it is blown apart on the landing platform. There are many more visual spectacles to come: a breathless night-time chase on flying vehicles between towering skyscrapers, a duel on a planet of perpetual rain, a mad scramble up, over and between the conveyor belts of a robot foundry, a dog-fight in an asteroid belt. And then there's the ending – basically one long, huge, multi-location, multi-character battle leading up to that lightsabre duel.

Okay, many of these are obviously there to sell the spin-off computer games but that does nothing to diminish their visual power. Unlike *Phantom* where for the most part the screen was an over-cluttered, primary coloured, headache-inducing nightmare, this time the technology, and the art direction, produces a much more integrated, more realistic image even in the most busy battle scenes. And we're not even seeing it at its best. The whole film was shot and edited digitally and only transferred to film stock right at the end. This system is not perfect as yet and there is a certain graininess when you see large areas of flat colour for more than a few seconds. In fact a few cinemas in the States have been equipped to digitally project the virtual version which reportedly gives a much sharper and brighter image. We'll have to wait for the eventual DVD release for that. Along with the visuals there is a great sound track with Williams' score picking up themes from the other films and great chest-vibrating Dolby sound-effects.

Well of course Lucas has his faults and these are all too

evident in *Clones*. The plot is muddled, although give it a bit of thought and it is lot more clever and subtle, in ways I'm not going to spoil here, than many have given it credit for. And as it's building on *Phantom*, it's almost a miracle it's this good. Co-writer Jonathan Hales' contribution is keenly felt, with better defined characters and an altogether smoother story. It's ten years on since the last film and Senator Amidala has been targeted for assassination. Obi-Wan Kenobi investigates who or what is behind it whilst Anakin Skywalker is assigned to protect her. In their closeness a romance blossoms. There are lots of problems with the minutiae of the plot with things left hanging – though some of those will have been deliberate, left for the next in the series or even spin-off novels, such as the mission Kenobi and Skywalker are returning from at the beginning of the film. Or perhaps it's just the dark side muddying the waters – the dark side, as Yoda might say, very handy for scriptwriters that is. All the previous films have a ridged structure and this is no different: the scroll at the beginning, leading to the shot of a space ship; the split narratives; "I've got a bad feeling about this"; the big set piece battle / light sabre fight at the end; the final wordless tableau-shot in the coda that finishes the film - they are all here.

McGregor seems much more comfortable as Kenobi this time around and Hayden Christensen gives a pretty reasonable performance as Skywalker. At times he just comes over as a whiny teenage brat, but occasionally he raises his performance to put some real power in the role and gains our sympathy for the impossible position he finds himself in. Though the film does drag a lot during a few of the romance scenes and especially during the droning info-dumping talky bits towards the beginning it's not a fatal flaw.

Possibly the worst aspect of the film is C-3PO. I was soon dreading every time the droid appeared as this would inevitably be accompanied by some absolutely risible attempts at humour i.e. R2-D2 is pulling C-3PO's decapitated head back towards his body. C-3PO: "This is such a drag." – give me strength! Is there anyone, even a toddler, who finds this funny, in the slightest? I mean there are a couple of half-decent jokes: "you'll be the death of me," Obi-Wan complains to Anakin at one point. So why has good old bitchy moaning C-3PO been reduced to a stooge, spouting clanging one-liners is beyond me.

As *Phantom*, *Clones* and the next are all prequels it is interesting to speculate on the 'final' film, to quote Randal from the sublime *Clerks*, like *Empire* it has got to "end on such a downer" – the rise of the Empire, all the Jedi (except for Kenobi and Yoda who have to flee into hiding) being slaughtered, Anakin turning to the dark side and becoming Vader. How do you sell toys off that? Will Lucas end his life's work there? Perhaps he will sugar the pill a little. Or even go back on his promise and in his dotage make the fabled last three films that were always planned to follow *Jedi*...

Clones is not as bad as *Jedi* or *Phantom* but does not reach the highs of *Empire* or even the original. Not quite a handbag destroying experience but *Clones* is a decent enough ride.

Oh yeah and Yoda really *really* does kick ass.

WORLD WIDE WEB

The dynamic duo, Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc, sort the spin that entangles Spider-Man

So at last it's here. After years of pre-production nightmares and a string of potential directors hired and fired, *Spider-Man* finally reaches the big screen for the first time in a nearly a quarter of a century. At the helm none other than Sam Raimi, the genius behind *The Evil Dead*, *American Gothic*, *A Simple Plan* and, er, *Cleopatra 2525*. But amidst the hype and the tidal wave of box office returns from the States (at the time of writing it's already the sixth biggest film in US history) the question remains: is it any good? After all, box office returns have never been a good indication of quality and *Spider-Man* has had more than its fair share of set-backs. All bodes ill but miraculously Raimi has managed to pull it off, despite the inevitable (and deeply tedious) nit-picking of on-line Spider-fans disgruntled at the film's alteration of the web-slinger's origins. Like anyone cares and as if 40 odd years of a comic book can be successfully distilled into 2 hours of running time - short of taking a page a frame and leaving everyone with a migraine.

Poor old geeky Peter Parker. He's been in love with his neighbour and schoolmate Mary Jane for longer than he'd care to mention but she's dating the local bully. To make matters worse, he gets bitten by a genetically enhanced super-spider on a school trip. When he awakes the next day, he seems to have developed some altogether peculiar powers - he can run fast, punch hard, climb walls, oh, and shoot out extra-strong webbing from his wrists. After his uncle is killed by a criminal, he vows to use these skills to fight crime. Meanwhile his best mate's dad, a research scientist, has done a very silly thing and inhaled ridiculous quantities of nerve gas, which has resulted in him developing another personality, manifesting itself as the Green Goblin. Suddenly Peter has an arch-enemy to deal with, much crime to fight, a job with the local paper and, horror of horrors, his best mate has started dating his beloved MJ.

Raimi's approach is to tackle the underlying themes of Stan Lee's comic book hero and is about as accurate a conversion as you could reasonably expect. In the emergent sub-culture of "geek-chic" Tobey Maguire suits the role perfectly - part pubescent nerd, (eventually) part empowered übermensch, all family boy. Perhaps the drastic budget cuts have actually worked in its favour, for the proceedings are certainly more engaging when they involve the relationships between the characters and Peter Parker's awakening powers. Stan Lee's hero reflected the anxieties of adolescence and sexual awakening in an allegorical manner (see him in *Mallrats* - convincing Brodie that he would have given up the fame, fortune and comic books for one more day with the girl of his dreams, this despite Brodie's obsession with superheroes' genitalia) and Raimi mercifully retains this thread in his film. At times it also seeks to be a teenage version of Cronenberg's *The Fly* (itself, of course, concerned with the fusion of man and bug, of uncontrollable sexual urges and self-doubt). Parker has to balance life with his aunt and uncle, his desire for a girlfriend and the onslaught of teenage angst. Oh, and save the world from the heinous attentions of the Green Goblin.

Raimi tackles his human subjects with a touch that

shows his recent work on *The Gift* and *A Simple Plan* was not in vain, despite their relatively poor performance at the box-office. Kirsten Dunst and Maguire certainly share their on-screen moments with a certain amount of crackle and the domestic sitcom situations involving his aunt provide much needed comedy relief in the post-*Buffy* mould. Were this purely "mature" Raimi, many punters would feel disgruntled at parting with their six quid. Fortunately though Raimi's hyper-kinetic camera style and visual inventiveness comes out when the action heats up. Spider-man's swings through the city streets are truly exhilarating in their execution and mercifully play a greater part than mere eye candy. If the Green Goblin looks a touch ropy every once in while, blame the money men, but there's enough action to keep the undiscerning from walking. Unfortunately the confrontation with the nemesis feels a bit like an afterthought. It's a common problem with comic book films (that don't have the luxury of years of build-ups, part-works, back stories and ever expanded "origins") - by the time you've established how a superhero is born you need to show how his/her nemesis evolved leaving little additional exposition time to generate anything other than a cursory (normally blatant) reason for conflict. In many ways it's inevitable (the *X-Men*, *Batman* etc all suffer the same problem), leaves the film open for a lucrative franchise but normally rids any potential sequels of the headline villains (*Batman* ditched The Joker but *X-Men* cleverly retained its nemesis). In the case of *Batman* this opened the sequel up to a far more interesting set of ideas, one can only hope for the same here.

Raimi is of course no stranger to the world of comic book cinema. His earlier films *The Evil Dead* and *Crimewave* are EC Comics and The Three Stooges (themselves little more than live action comics) come to life. However it is to *Darkman* that Raimi's skill as a comic book director in the superhero mould really came to the fore. *Spider-man* lacks *Darkman*'s Sadian streak and some of the more outré camera work. The inner conflict of the protagonist here is not of one on the brink of insanity and pain, but of identifiable 'normal' feelings of growing up. In this sense *Darkman* is a far more operatic film to *Spider-man*'s soap-operatic, a matter born out in the former's effects-work that seeks to be intense and expressionist (pixillation, animation, colour palette cycles) rather than internally realistic. Indeed it is *Spider-man*'s normality that makes it endearing and *Darkman*'s abnormality that makes it a far more confrontational film.

Film adaptations of comic books invariably upset the loyal core but then film adaptations of literature do that too. In recent years we've had to sit through a variety of comic book adaptations of varying quality from the simply excellent (*Ghost World*, *Josie and the Pussycats*, *Batman Returns*) and the highly commendable (*X-Men*, *Mystery Men*) to the downright abysmal (*Batman*). *Spider-Man* at least makes it to highly commendable. It's not art but it is good solid Hollywood film-making. Now, hands-up who can't wait for Ang Lee's *The Incredible Hulk*?

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Andrew M. Butler predicts the success of *Minority Report*

Steven Spielberg makes remarkable movies: about Jews that survive the holocaust, slaves that go home and dinosaurs that aren't extinct. This is a recent part of his career; in his early years he directed a number of thrillers – *Duel* (1971), *The Sugarland Express* (1974) and *Jaws* (1975) – which can still excite even to this day, and in the latter invented the summer event movie. Increasingly he began to make family melodramas, or rather melodramas with families at their heart – whether alien abduction, genetically engineered dinosaurs or Captain Hook was the menace, his narratives attempt to repair broken families.

At least in the *Indiana Jones* trilogy the family was kept out of sight until the third instalment, and the Saturday morning thrills kept us hooked enough not to care about the racism and the dubious ideology (and the continuance of his fascination with the Second World War that had begun with his early flop *1941* (1979) and resulted in the overrated *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)). But some point in the 1980s Spielberg got Serious and Grown Up, and made a series of literary adaptations – *The Color Purple* (1985) being the first. Whether it was a failure to fully address historical context, or telling someone else's (some other race's?) struggle, or an inability to hold the sentiment, I find these films less forgivable than hokum like *The Lost World: Jurassic Park II* (1997). And then with *A.I.* (2001) a peculiar posthumous collaboration happened with that most mature of sf directors, Stanley Kubrick. So *Minority*

Report could go one of two ways: rollercoaster hokum or dubious adaptation. Indeed Spielberg has been talking up the intellectual content of the film; he doesn't want this to be just another event movie, a *Mission: Impossible III*. But he casts Tom Cruise anyway.

The source for the movie is 'The Minority Report', a slight novella by Philip K. Dick, published in *Fantastic Universe* in January 1956. In the future all crime is predicted by three autistic savants, with criminals being arrested before they transgress. This should offer a utopia, but the head of police, an ageing, divorced John Anderton, is worried that the army want to take charge of Precrime and that his ex-wife is out to get him. When it is predicted that he will murder someone who he has never heard of within the week, Anderton goes on the run to clear his name. The pay-off shows the warped paranoid logic that Dick had developed by then, but he failed to develop the thematic thread of the dubious imprisonment of thousands of non-offenders.

Adapting a short story, rather than a novel, the scriptwriters can afford to enrich rather than condense:

Anderton (Cruise) loses about twenty years, and grieves for his kidnapped son. This is serious stress: he even buys illegal drugs to try and merge with VR footage of his son. The crisis is occasioned by jurisdiction: Washington DC is the trial location for Precrime before it goes national, and the FBI in the shape of Danny Witwer (Farrell) seem to want to take-over, or discredit the scheme if they can't. Anderton is fingered as a potential killer, and he hits the street to clear himself.

In a nice touch the three precogs are called Dashiell, Arthur and Agatha (Morton), and the film is full of nice touches. The stand out sequence is a visit to an eye transplant surgeon (played by Peter Stormare with movie stealing relish) which echoes several parts of Kubrick's *A*

Clockwork Orange (1971). It seems likely that Spielberg has been rewatching Kubrick, and even seems to be using the score like Kubrick did. Certainly it's a long time since Spielberg has shown such dark humour – probably the 1970s – and Anderton's eyes offer a whole series of opportunities for it. From the opening shots – a (violent?) sex act, a stabbing (in reverse?), the grainy footage – this seems to be a very mature Spielberg at work here.

At the same time there's a failure to think things through. A wonderful sequence shows Anderton escaping with the aid of precognitive abilities, which shows some attempt to think through the gimmick's implications. But the setting seems just convenient for the

next bit of chase – Docklands style buildings seem adjacent to Victorian era idylls, deserted but still working factories next to mean streets back alleys (here called the sprawl, a half-assed piece of thievery from cyberpunk). Five lane highways in three dimensions nestle near the Washington monument, although the view from the White House appears unspoilt. And there's a generically necessary retreat to the house by the lake in the country.

The brain begins to kick in – do the precogs only measure murders in Washington DC? How can it be attuned to one locale? The twist ending begins to cast doubt upon the likelihood of Anderton committing the murder – the motivation behind his motivation seems impossible to discern. But once you start playing with twists you risk bursting the film's balloon and being left with hot air.

Spielberg has produced another worthy summer event movie, which perhaps nods towards the possibility of the cerebral – the debate of predestination vs. freewill – but it should be enjoyed with the popcorn, until the next event comes along. For once Spielberg almost keeps the sentiment on hold, but it could have been a whole lot worse.

"WHAT ARE YOU SCARED OF?"

Gary Wilkinson howls at Dog Soldiers

On Internet Movie Database there is a review recommending *Dog Soldiers* because it has: 1) Things exploding; 2) Automatic weapons with unreasonably large quantities of ammunition; 3) Werewolves; 4) Gore and 5) A joke every ninety seconds. Well, what more do you want?

A squad of soldiers, led by Sean Pertwee, are on an exercise in a remote Scottish valley where they have to sneak past a team of special ops. One creepy night later the soldiers easily achieve their objective... due to the fact that all of the special ops soldiers have been slaughtered. All except for one badly wounded survivor who has been reduced to screaming: "There should have been only one!" One what? Well they are big and hairy and they are coming back... One bad mauling later and the survivors are barricading themselves into a nearby farmhouse. Will they survive the night?

What we have here is a highly efficient, highly enjoyable, low-budget British horror film. Well, jointly co-produced by Britain and Luxembourg; plus it was also filmed in the latter country. Although there is a lot of humour (some of it I'm sure is unintentional) this is not some bland American teen horror gag-fest nor, although there is equally a large amount of gore, it is an unintelligent splatter-movie. Those two factors are effectively combined at many points - most memorably where one drunk character whose guts have spilled out onto his lap repeatedly shouts "sausages!".

Actually I am truly amazed this is only an '15' certificate.

Dog Soldiers shows great love for its genre. In fact genres, because it takes the horror flick into the war movie. There are many moments that are reminiscent of *Aliens*, *Assault on Precinct 13*, *Southern Comfort* and, deliberately referenced by the one cast at one point, *Zulu*.

The werewolves themselves are well done, helped by the fact that we only see quick glimpses of them or see the action from their perspective in grainy black and white, until almost the end of the film. First time writer/director, Neil Marshall's background was in special effects and make-up and it definitely shows. If there is a problem with the film is that the beasts are too hard to kill - you keep thinking that none of the soldiers are going to survive.

If you want to get really *la-de-dah* you could see it all as a metaphor for the conservative vision of Britain, besieged by hairy nasty foreigners or from a Marxist viewpoint as the common man, the lower ranks, who with their variety of accents represent the whole of the country, being betrayed and used as 'wolf'-fodder by the upper ranks of society, the officer class. Or perhaps not...

With *Dog Soldiers* Marshall has pulled off the best horror debut since the *Evil Dead*. In years to come I'm sure this will become a cult classic, one to settle down in front of with a few beers and your favourite junk food - though I'd definitely recommend avoiding hot dogs.

CORUSCATING DISKS

SIX SIDES

Martin Lewis checks all the angles on the *Cube* DVD

Upon its release a lot of hopes rested on the shoulders of *Cube*. Finally here was an intelligent science fiction film where values like narrative and dialogue weren't sacrificed at the altar of special effects. Unlike *Pi* (1998), a low budget science fiction film from the art house tradition, *Cube* was solidly rooted in genre tradition. Indeed with its ensemble cast of unknowns and limited sets in some ways it resembles an episode of *The Outer Limits*.

Cube is based on a simple premise. In fact it's the old 'put half a dozen guys in a house and chop them up' premise taken to its extreme conclusion. Several strangers awake in a room, fourteen feet on a side, with no idea how they got there. Each side of the room has a door and each door leads into an identical room; a seemingly infinite maze of cubes. None of the group seem to have anything in common except their identical coveralls: Quentin (Maurice Dean Wint) is a cop, Holloway (Nicky Guadagni) a doctor, Leaven (Nicole DeBoer) a student, Rennes (Wayne Robson) an escaped prisoner and Worth (David Hewlett) a cynical office worker.

Authority figure Quentin soon assumes the role of alpha male and the group attempt to find a way out. They quickly discover however that some of the rooms are booby trapped in such a way as to inflict horrific injuries on those who enter the rooms. This means the group has to act together in order to unpick the secrets of the *Cube* and work out how to survive and how to escape.

It soon becomes apparent though that they are in more danger from each other than the rooms. As in *The Lord Of The Flies* the absence of authority leads to a catastrophic breakdown of civilised behaviour. In the claustrophobic and deadly environment of the *Cube* this process is accelerated and the illusion of unity soon disappears. Further strain is put on the group by the arrival of Kazan (Andrew Miller), whose autism is an extra burden for them to deal with.

Emphasising the tiny sets with tight camera work, director Vincenzo Natali creates a pressure-cooker atmosphere. This suits his purpose of peeling away the veneer of humanity from the characters and exposing their more bestial side. Read as a direct allegory of purgatory *Cube* is a little too pessimistic to be palatable but there is no doubt Natali is chiefly concerned with the sinfulness of man. In this he is aided by uniformly good acting, particularly from DeBoer and Hewlett. Guadagni just about manages to tame the histrionics written into her character though Wint is perhaps a little heavy handed in his depiction of Quentin.

There are few complaints you can make about *Cube*. The violence occasionally seems gratuitous but then it is there to engender terror. It is also unexpected, allowing the viewer to empathise with the disorientated inhabitants. There a few niggling implausibilities but they are swept away by the power of the drama. In all *Cube* is a compelling and sharply written film that lives up to the weight of its expectations.

— COMING TO A SHELF NEAR YOU —

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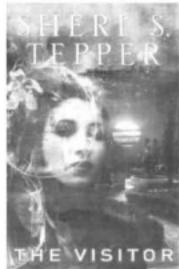
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— OUT OF FOCUS —

Simon Morden 'speaks', in this interstitial appearance from Matrix's sister magazine Focus

Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking... well, that's not strictly true – but the weighty matter of standing up and making a fool of myself in front of an audience has been preying on my mind. One Best Man's speech aside, it's only recently that I've had to read anything I'd created out loud in a performance. Previous to that, my coping strategies for extreme nervousness had worked very well.

In my previous incarnation as a research scientist, I spoke at national and international conferences, armed with nothing more than an overhead projector and some coloured pens. To stop my self from throwing up in fear, I did three things: practised what I was going to say until I could say it without notes, made sure the auditorium was dark so I couldn't see the assembled experts staring at me, and took off my glasses so that I really couldn't see the assembled experts. I'd also like to add at this point that I was mainly dealing with experimental results. Interpretation and theory were the last five minutes of a twenty minute talk.

It worked fine: in fact, as long as I could convince myself there was no-one out there, it worked great. I even presented a drive-time show on local radio – but it was just me, a producer and a microphone.

Then I entered the Gateshead Libraries Short Story competition: I was a finalist, and had to read part of my story out loud to an audience which included the Lord Mayor, with both the lights and my glasses on. I was sick to the pit of my stomach. I did it, but I don't think I was particularly impressive. If this was performance, then I was the Sinclair C5 of the literary world.

Damn fool that I am, I ran a workshop on story writing at the Greenbelt Arts festival later that year. Then again the next year. And this year, I'm going to do it all again, as well as help host the 'open mic' sessions in the Storytelling venue. And yes, I'm going to have to read some of my work out.

If this sounds like an arachnophobe purposefully covering themselves in live spiders, then you're pretty close to the mark. But it does occur to me that if I'm going to be a writer, then performance readings, panels and workshops are part of the deal. In fact, in the contract for my novel, it specifically stipulates that I make myself available for

publicity. Ouch.

That's what it comes down to: publicity. Certainly, altruism plays a part – wanting to help other people write their stories better in the same way that I was helped. But having always coasted along on the back of greater worthies in magazines and anthologies, it's now got to the stage where it's just my name on the cover. The project stands or falls on me (this is the Small Press – advertising budgets are non-existent). I don't want to let my publishers down. They've taken a risk, and I have to do what I can.

Fortunately, I'm better at reading aloud than I was. After reading 'Mog's Christmas' for the hundredth time, I had to do something, anything, to stop myself from going stark staring mad. I had to make it interesting. So I practised my intonation and my accents (Mog is a Yorkshire cat. Didn't you know?) Reading to my kids is a performance in itself – do it badly and they lose interest and wander off. And I get to practice my breathing at the same time.

I also own a little webcam that plugs into the back of my computer. I can read to it. I can make sure I'm not mumbling, tripping over words, and that I actually look up occasionally. I can check that I'm not stooping: posture is as important for speakers as it is for singers. I can also listen to my own voice as others hear it – which is an experience not for the faint-hearted.

All of this is to a purpose: good reviews and word-of-mouth will sell copies. So will a good performance at the microphone. I don't want the audience to believe that a dull, monotonous delivery means a dull story, but I'd bet a euro to a cent that's what they'd be thinking. On the other hand, if I tell a good story well, it might just persuade one or two of them to buy the book.

Links: www.greenbelt.org.uk

Entries are starting to come in for the *Focus* competition (huzzah!). More taxing than 'Test the Nation', more fun than 'Lotto'. Details in *Focus* #41.

Simon's first collection of short stories is due from Lone Wolf Publications (www.lonewolfpubs.com) any day now... the first novel is out in September from Razorblade Press.

RESONANCES

Stephen Baxter wonders if we are all robots

My novel-in-progress is a fictional survey of human evolution – including the evolution of intelligence. But intelligence is not always so easy to identify.

In May 2000 I wrote in these pages about the E Coli, a humble bacterium which appears to display a talent for homing in on food sources – and yet all that is actually ‘running’ the bacterium is a simple set of navigation rules, an algorithm you can replicate in a three-line computer program. So applying simple logical rules can mimic intelligence on the level of a bacterium. But that surely doesn’t apply to higher animals ... does it? (This example is taken from *Wild Minds* (Penguin, 2000) by US psychology Professor Marc Hauser.)

Suppose you are a rhesus monkey, and you turn up an unexpected cache of food. You have a choice. You can call out, announcing your discovery. Or you can stay silent.

Whether or not you call, you will soon be joined by other monkeys. If they don’t find you with the food, you get to keep it all, of course. But if they do find you with the food, their reaction depends on whether you called. If you did call, you might have to share, but you’ll get some of the food. But if you stayed silent and got caught out then you’re in for a tough beating, and you’ll probably finish up with no food at all.

What’s going on here? If you observed such behaviour among humans in the wild (think *Big Brother* ...) you’d probably conclude that the silent rhesus was trying to deceive his or her fellows. After all if you get away with it you might get all the food, whereas if you call out you’re bound to lose some of it. The reaction of the other monkeys – *let’s beat up the liar* – seems to fit that interpretation.

But lying is a pretty advanced cognitive feat. To be able to lie, you have to understand that other creatures have beliefs, that those beliefs can be different from yours, and that your behaviour can affect those beliefs.

This isn’t trivial. You understand that others have beliefs, I do – but two-year old human infants don’t, for example. And, most of the experts seem to agree, neither do the animals, not even the higher primates.

You see, there’s a much simpler explanation for the food ‘deception’. As a rhesus you could be applying a rule almost as crude as the E Coli’s, which would run something like: *Call out if somebody stronger is nearby. Don’t call otherwise.* It’s a simple cost-benefit analysis: if you’re bound to be caught, you may as well call and make the best of it, hoping to save at least some food; but if there is a reasonable chance you won’t be discovered it might be worth gambling for all the grub.

All you need for this rule to work is to be able to predict the behaviour of your fellow monkeys. You don’t need to infer anything about their beliefs or desires: they may as well be furry robots, utterly devoid of mind, and the trick



would work the same.

All this is fascinating in terms of animal psychology, and is a cautionary tale about our proneness to anthropomorphism. But what does it say about the nature of humanity?

Our sense of fully conscious control is an illusion. To some extent our consciousness follows the actions of our bodies, rather than governs them. Could it be true that even higher forms of decision-making are actually governed by rhesus-monkey algorithms? Are we all walking, talking robots, governed by biochemical equations of whose presence and power we have no understanding or knowledge? Do we only *imagine* we have control of our thinking?

I don’t believe so. But then I would think that, wouldn’t I?

Omegatropic, a collection of non-fiction by Stephen Baxter plus two rare short stories is still available from the BSFA, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants, NN11 3BE hardback £20; paperback £8; Postage free for BSFA members, otherwise £1 for the first book and 50p for each additional copy in the UK. Cheques payable to: BSFA Ltd. If ordering in the USA please see the BSFA’s website: www.bsfa.co.uk.

PULPITATIONS

***** reads an anonymous magazine

Hooray! There's a new kid on the block! I was delighted to receive a copy of a brand-spanking new magazine for review. These days that is a rare enough event in itself, but I was especially pleased to see that it was such a high-quality production. Welcome to the fold, *nemonymous*, and may you be blessed with many more issues!

The first issue contained 16 stories, many of the 'short-short' variety, which ranged from the surreal to the very clever. Two examples of the first would have to be: 'A Smile in the Sky' about an 'everyman' character who sees a (you guessed it!) smile in the sky throughout his life, and 'With Arms Outstretched' in which a man finds his ever-attentive, but tiresome, wife does end up having her uses. The clever variety would have to include those stories where the influence of past masters shines through, for example, 'The Unmiraculous Life of Jackie Mendoza' which is reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Grey', the chilling and Poe-like 'Balafer de Vie' and, my personal favourite, 'The Idiot Whistled Dead', with its magnificent use of language a la Dylan Thomas even to the point of making a special reference to dear old 'Llareggub'. In addition, I especially liked those stories where I could clearly recognise the cast of real-life characters who provided inspiration: 'The Friends of Mike Santini' sheds a devilish slant on a thinly disguised 'Rat Pack' and 'Double Zero for Emptiness' sees someone not unlike a well-known and best-selling horror author set out on a date with destiny.

In sum, this is all good stuff ... but, I've got a few quibbles with the package. At the risk of sounding nit-picking and, perhaps, just plain stupid, I've still got to have a go anyway. The full title of the magazine is *nemonymous: a journal of parthenogenetic fiction and late labelling*. I don't know about you, but this took me a while to decipher, and the p-word definitely sent me off to the dictionary because I thought it meant 'characterised by reproduction by development of an unfertilised gamete that occurs especially among lower plants and invertebrate animals' - which it does. As this is probably far more technical than the editor intended, I'm happy to go with 'virgin birth' instead. Although I'm still not quite sure why ... 'Nemonymous' I took to mean, with my extremely rudimentary Greek, 'no-name' and as the names of the authors in this issue will not appear until the next issue, this sort of adds up - especially as the

words 'late labelling' are tacked on. Call me Baldric, but isn't this all a bit too clever for its own boots or am I missing the joke? I can't tell, you see, because there is no editorial statement of the magazines aims contained within its covers. Instead, the reader is referred to a web site (which didn't, I might add, work, but I'm willing to believe that this is only first issue teething troubles and I was able to access an alternative - although this only contained deservedly good reviews, but still no editorial statement or even guidelines for submission for potential contributors). The web site then refers you on to a web group with (arrgh!) still no editorial statement.

Although a paying market for authors is always welcome, I can't help but feel that the publishers are making things just a little too difficult for their potential pool of contributors and, even, their potential readers. Web sites and web groups are all very well for supplementing 'established' magazines, but how in the world are people meant to get the information in the first place? What about those people who don't have access to the web? (Yes, there are still a few of those about!) I can't help but feel that there is a danger here that reliance on technology this early in the game will get in the way of getting those all-important circulation figures up. Please don't get me wrong here, *nemonymous* is a good magazine and I can't recommend it too highly, but I can't help but feel that it is handicapping itself with its exclusivity. (To contact *nemonymous*: *nemonymous@hotmail.com* or *nemonymous@postmaster.co.uk*; the web group is at http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/veils_and_piques)

Just when I'd given up hope, *Ragnarok: The Journal of Fantasy and Science Fiction Wargaming* turned up. (You may recall that I mentioned this magazine in a previous column.) This is a gem for all devotees of F&SF gaming, and not just the Warhammer crowd. It is packed full of game scenarios, gaming and society news, reviews of the latest output from the miniatures manufacturers and some genuinely good artwork (I especially liked the 'Captain Scarlett O'Hara' cartoon). There are some interesting scenarios here. 'War Kites' by Mark Caldwell is a nice alternative history piece from 1890 involving, you guessed it, war kites. 'Upred - Na Zapad' by Ray Turner enables some serious squabbling to take place between the Power Blocs of Old Earth in the far reaches of known space. And, for those of a more traditional fantasy bent, 'The Crimson Bunions' by Matthew Hartley has plenty of Dark Elves and Orc action. With an editorial team that includes Lord Asriel (Steve Bleasie), Iorek Brynison (John Wilson) and Pantalaimon (Roger Webb), how can *Ragnarok* go wrong? (And it's nice to know that Amazon Miniatures is coming out with a line of scantily clad women figures including Biker Babes, Barbarian Babes, Guns and Girls and Arabian Nights! That should make some wargamers happy!) Is that the clickety-click of dice I hear?

Magazines for review, including small press, should be sent to Glenda Pringle, 22 Mead Way, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2BJ; email: chris@kidlington66.freereserve.co.uk.



nemonymous's 'eye' symbol

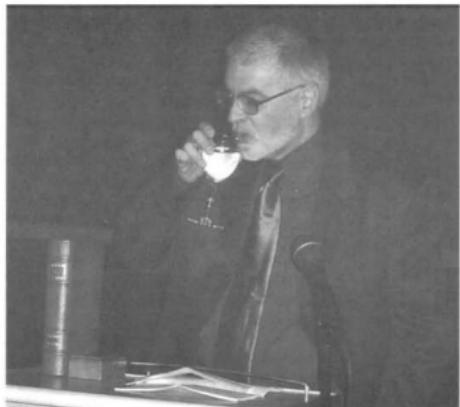
—THE CLARKE AWARD

Gary Wilkinson was there and later spoke to the winner Gwyneth Jones

The 2002 Arthur C Clarke Award was presented in a ceremony at the Science Museum in London on Saturday, 18th May to Gwyneth Jones for *Bold as Love* published by Gollancz. Gwyneth was presented with an engraved bookend and a cheque for £2002 by last year's winner China Mieville (who impressed many in the audience with his sartorial elegance). Also present were four of the other five short-listed authors Jon Courtenay Grimwood (nominated for *Pashazade*), Peter F. Hamilton (*Fallen Dragon*), Paul McAuley (*The Secret of Life*), and Justina Robson (*Mappa Mundi*); unfortunately the fifth, Connie Willis (*Passage*), had a previous commitment. The ceremony itself was in the suitably impressive and sf-looking IMAX cinema.

This year's judges were Paul Billinger and Tony Cullen for the British Science Fiction Association, Doug Millard for the Science Museum, and Liz Sourbut and Lisa Tuttle for the Science Fiction Foundation. Judges for the 2003 award were announced at the ceremony: Tony Cullen and Iain Emsley for the BSFA, Doug Millard for the Science Museum, and Paul McAuley and Liz Sourbut for the Foundation.

During his speech, award administrator Paul Kincaid described *Bold As Love* as: "There are dreams and romance aplenty in *Bold As Love* by Gwyneth Jones, for this is a novel which brings one of the most hallowed of all British storytelling traditions, the legend of King Arthur, into a world of twenty-first century technology, global warming and pop counter-culture. The result is what one judge called a passionate plea for imagination in politics. It is a clash of ideas and ideals that should not work. That it does work, and works so well, is a virtue of the questions it makes us ask. Questions about the nature of politics and our individual involvement in the state; questions about how our utopia might work and, more importantly, why it might fail." He also stressed that: "All the books were very good and very different, which made choosing just one winner particularly difficult, but after three very tense hours of discussion this afternoon we arrived at a decision we all agree on."



Award administrator Paul Kincaid pauses during his speech



Gwyneth Jones receives her award

Before the award was announced a special presentation was made to Fred Clarke, Sir Arthur's brother, in recognition of all his tireless work behind the scenes over many years for both the Clarke award itself and British science fiction in general. The presentation was made by Andy Sawyer and Maureen Kincaid Speller and consisted of an original painting by Danny Flynn. Fred Clarke, though recovering from a recent heart attack was in good humour: "We're not getting a 50 foot Sir Arthur, are we?" He had exclaimed on learning the presentation's location. ((Clarke had made an appearance via a (much smaller) screen at last year's ceremony).

Gwyneth, you seemed genuinely surprised by your win. Was that the case?

Well, yes. I had my money on Justina (not real money. I'm the kind of betting woman who never actually parts with the money), with Paul McAuley near to the same odds, and Connie Willis as an outside chance on the grounds that statistically, women from North America have an edge over everyone else. I thought Jon Grimwood and I were equally disadvantaged by the fact that our books were clearly each the first in a series.

It was your fifth nomination, did you ever feel it was always the bridesmaid never the bride?

I didn't take the nominations for *Escape Plans* or *Kairos* seriously. The Clarke shortlist always includes novels that definitely aren't going to win, but somehow deserve mention... *White Queen* should have had a chance, but *North Wind* was the second book in a trilogy. I don't think that's ever happened.

A very pastoral, English tale with nods to Shakespeare and several pieces of classic Englishness (Elizabeth I, King Arthur, folk law...)

Well, it's supposed to be a novel about England. About



Fred Clarke receiving the Danny Flynn painting

living outdoors, in the English weather and the English landscape. So yes, of course there are Shakespeare, Robin Hood, Elizabeth I, King Arthur, English folksongs. But you also have to remember I live in Brighton, and think of the Levellers, the Travellers movement, etc. Someone said, (aside from Francis Spufford [who reviewed *Bold as Love* for the *Guardian* – Ed]) that it's about a place, and that place is an outdoor concert on a wet English summer weekend. Yes, that's it. That's exactly the atmosphere, and I don't know why it should be so attractive, but thousands and thousands of us think it is...

As an East-Midlander it was good to see Cleethorpes etc. get a mention

That was one of the things I really enjoyed about *Bold as Love*. It certainly got me out and about. I did epic journeys, (have you any idea what it takes to make a day-trip to Cleethorpes from Brighton?) on our crumbling rail system, through floods and confusion, and got to see a lot of England. Same goes for *Castles* [The sequel]

Continued on page 22



"Your name's not down, you're not coming in," – Security was tight. Later a fantasy author was heard to exclaim – "It's only a suit!"



The winner and some of the judges, L to R: Tony Cullen, Paul Billinger, Gwyneth Jones, Paul Kincaid, Liz Sourbut

—AN IRONING BOARD ON A DUCK POND—

PEPPER-POTS AND POLICE BOXES

Martin Sketchley looks for the Doctor on the web

Not what or where, but...

OK, hands up all those of you who used to hide when the Daleks appeared on TV in Doctor Who. No, me neither. The Daleks were great; better than the Cybermen, who flinched at the sight of a wedding ring, but perhaps not as scary as the sea devils, with their seaweed hair-dos and waxy skin. (Heaven knows what L'Oréal could achieve if it were to enter the undersea market – I'm sure all sea devils are worth it!) And, of course, as all the most innovative smart arses will point out when making derisory comments on Dr Who or sf in general, the Daleks couldn't climb stairs or go over rough ground (although they do emerge from the darkness of the Thames in *Dalek Invasion Earth 2150 AD*, which will be rather impressive when it happens, as no doubt the river will still be littered with bicycles by that time). However, I happen to know where you can get your own Dalek. Moreover, it'll be one which, the makers claim, is able to pass through a standard front door!

Licensed by BBC Worldwide Ltd, This Planet Earth manufactures and sells full size reproductions of Daleks, the TARDIS, Cybermen, and, if you really must, K9. There are several types of Dalek available, including Remembrance TV Daleks, Imperial Daleks, Genesis Daleks, and the somehow less impressive but oddly more expensive Movie Daleks.

Prices range from (take a breath) £1,395 for the Special Weapons Dalek, to just under £2,000 for a Movie Dalek – garden gnome replacements, they ain't! However, they do give you the opportunity to scare the hell out of the neighbours or boss by yelling "exterminate" and "you will obey" in aggressive monotone. Alternatively, if you're feeling stressed or have a hangover, get someone to throw a blanket over the eye of the Dalek and spin round and round shouting "vision impaired! vision impaired!". If you haven't got the cash to splash out on a full-size version of one of our wheeled friends, then you could opt for the half-size version. Available in a range of colours, these cost £490 including VAT and have a four-week waiting time.

While all the Daleks look like incredibly faithful reproductions – particularly the Genesis Daleks – the images on the Dalek construction page are somewhat disturbing, as they show a man holding the top half of a Dalek having separated it from the base. This in itself is not the problem, as it does not reveal the slimy, organic interior of a *real* Dalek – but his posture is simply terrible! As far as I could see his work clearly contravenes Health and Safety regulations.

If you're feeling really flush you could bid for a Dalek dome signed by Jon Pertwee. One of the last pieces signed by Pertwee before his death, bidding for this dome starts at £4,000. Visit the This Planet Earth site for a gander, and if you fancy your chances – and can afford it! – then e-mail the current owner, Rob Thompson, on shoestrings@teisprint.com.

The TARDIS reproductions are available in 9/10ths scale and full size options, and are manufactured in GRP with Perspex windows. The company offers delivery and an option to assemble it for you in your home. The full size TARDIS costs £1,995, but I'm afraid I couldn't find a price for the 9/10ths version. Each full size TARDIS is just over

2.8 meters tall, and can be installed without the light, or even without the roof if your ceilings aren't high enough to accommodate it. The 'general width' is quoted at 125cm (10cm less than the base width), but interestingly there are no internal measurements (presumably these are infinite). However, if you think a TARDIS might be for you, you'd better hurry and place your order, because the company says it is soon to cease production of these replicas. I tell you, prices will rise in the long term: ten years from now you won't be able to find a decent TARDIS with less than twenty billion years on the, um, clock.

K9. I couldn't stand it personally. The thing marked a major shift in Dr Who, from a science fiction/horror/drama series – albeit a cheesy one at times – to a children's programme. But nonetheless there are people who disagree, and it is undoubtedly towards these that This Planet Earth's K9 replica is targeted. Each K9 costs £795, is made to order in fibreglass and has a delivery time of six weeks. Thankfully, a dog tag is supplied with every one purchased, so if your K9 decides to run off after the Dyson cylinder vacuum cleaner down the road then he can be returned to you.

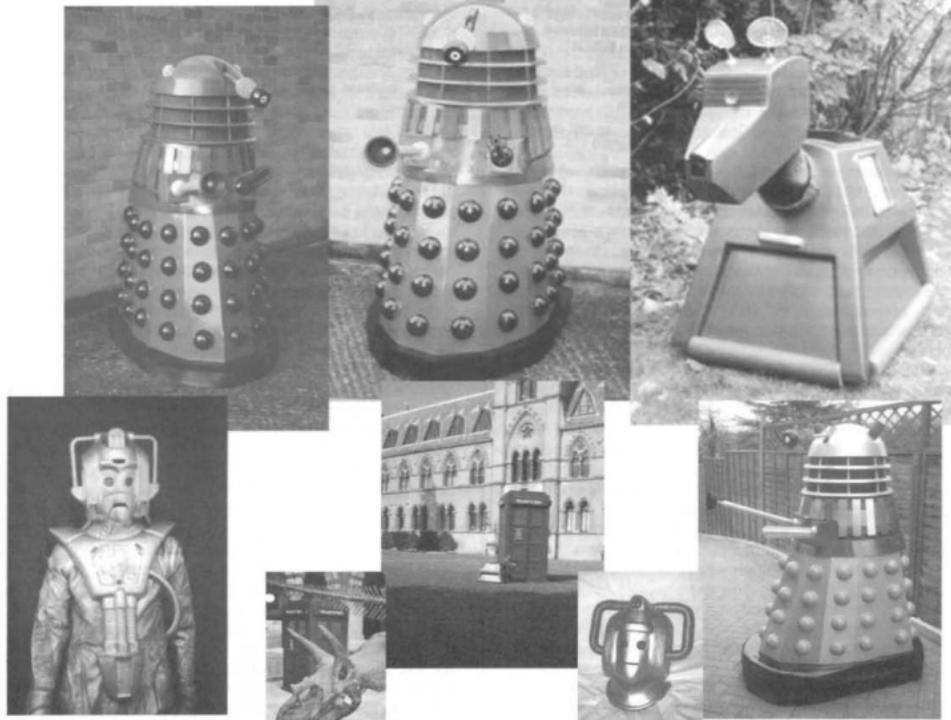
This Planet Earth also offers Cybermen, either heads on their own or full suits. Heads are available in 'Revenge' and 'Earthshock' models (the latter look is *the cyberman head* in my opinion), and cost £295 each plus £10 p&p. The full Earthshock cyberman costs £1,695, although opportunities for fun with this are limited as the company doesn't recommend that you actually wear the suit due to potential friction problems – nasty! However, it does offer a mannequin at £355 including VAT plus £25 p&p, so you can display the item effectively. "Individual Cyberman parts", such as Earthshock gun, gloves and boots are to become available mid-2002.

I found the official Dr Who website by far the best of the Who-themed sites I visited, offering all any fan of the series could want, including CDs, videos and DVDs to buy, and it reminded my just how much I enjoyed the programme. There's also a great range of clips to download, such as William Hartnell fleeing from the cavemen (who wouldn't?), and the designers have thoughtfully included high and low bandwidth options for these. There's also a virtual TARDIS in which you can fly around the universe and have adventures – no, really – as well as numerous images to download for your desktop, factfiles on all the "monsters", and quizzes to test your Dr Who knowledge.

In truth my interest was waning by the time Peter Davison and Colin Baker came along (this coincided with my increasing interest in girls, as I entered the 'lost period' mentioned last issue) and by the time Sylvester McCoy had the keys to the TARDIS I wasn't watching at all – it seemed no one was going to compete with the Golden Age, when the Doctor was played by Jon Pertwee and then Tom Baker. However, I did watch the much derided Paul McGann film, and rather enjoyed it to be honest, even though it bore little resemblance to its ageing TV forefather.

Alas, it seems to me that such times when we were able to enjoy such programmes in innocent naivety have gone

[this planet earth ltd]



forever, consigned to time cells we are only able to temporarily visit via the conduit known to humans as – UK Gold.

URLs of relevance:

- <http://www.thisplanetearth.co.uk/>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/doctorwho/>

Spinners

I received an e-mail from someone called Tony Thorne (MBE, no less), who said: "I recently won first prize in the www.literaryagent.co.uk 2001 Short story competition with my first sf story for years! Should any *Matrix* readers care to read it, it's still being featured on the site." Actually, the story may have been taken off the site by the time you read this, but if you're interested just send the fellow an e-mail and he'll send a copy right back to you. His address is Tonythorne@aol.com.

Andy Cox's *The Third Alternative* has a new message board area called TTAlkback, where you can communicate with many fine writers, artists or just like-minded individuals on

topics of mutual interest. The URL is <http://www.ttapress.com/discus/>. And for God's sake *subscribe to the magazine!* (Allen Ashley's *The Dodo Has Landed* column is worth the price alone...)

The people at This Planet Earth Ltd., featured above, are on the lookout for vintage Action Man figures and accessories, and will buy items of choice or exchange their value on the products they offer. This apparently nothing to do with Dr Who – they just like playing with Action Man.

That's all the news there is, and I've struggled to dredge that up! For pity's sake, there must be more going on than this... The Internet is dead – long live the Internet.

If you have any specifically web-related news that might be of interest to *Matrix* readers, or ideas for future articles, please send me an email. Be sure to include the relevant URLs.

(Check out www.bsfa.co.uk for this, and past, articles including links and colour pictures!)

OBITUARIES

JOHN NATHAN-TURNER 1948 - 2002

Dr Who novel writer **Nick Walters** on the show's last producer

Doctor Who's longest-serving producer, John Nathan-Turner, died on May 1 of liver failure, after a long illness.

His association with Doctor Who goes back much further than those not acquainted with the show might think. He first worked on the programme during the late sixties as a Floor Assistant, gradually rising up the BBC production ladder. In 1979 he replaced Graham Williams as the show's producer.

Those tuning in to Part One of 'The Leisure Hive' in the late summer of 1980 saw immediately the changes Nathan-Turner – or JNT as he liked to be known – had wrought. The familiar 'time tunnel' title sequence had been replaced by a 'star field' effect, and the music updated to a more contemporary synthesizer-based sound. Production values were clearly much higher than the previous year's, and the camp, comedic slant the show had taken under Graham Williams had been superseded by a more serious, 'hard sf' angle.

During the early years of his tenure, the programme's ratings remained healthy and the show continued to be popular with the public – though not quite on the same scale as it had been in the Tom Baker era – and, largely, the fans.

All this was to change. In 1985, the show was 'rested'. Further troubles lay ahead as, after the return season failed to pull in significantly improved ratings, the show's star Colin Baker was controversially 'sacked' by BBC Controller Michael Grade. JNT stayed on even after this, casting Sylvester McCoy as the new Doctor and taking the show in a new direction which, though initially uncertain, by the 26th Season was beginning to show promise. But the BBC had scheduled the show directly opposite the most popular television programme of the time, *Coronation Street*, and the season was to be Doctor Who's last. It was finally cancelled in 1989.

JNT's time as producer was turbulent and controversial. He enjoyed an uneasy relationship with Doctor Who fandom; early on, most fans applauded his new direction for the show, but later on, some fans began to question his

suitability as producer of the programme they loved. The most vociferous anti-JNT fans even ran a campaign calling for his removal.

We are bound to see some re-appraisal and reassessment of Nathan-Turner in the coming months. But his passing should not mean we should put up our critical blinkers and universally praise all the stories he produced. He was responsible for ten years' worth of television, and to expect consistent quality across such a span would be naive. But long before his death, during the Nineties, fandom was beginning to look at the 'JNT Era' more objectively, to celebrate its successes while to some extent forgiving its failures, as they began to put the show in the context of its entire run. Successes like the outstanding 'The Caves of Androzani', Peter Davison's final story, an enthralling weave of action and tragedy and one of the most popular stories with fans. Failures such as (and this is only my opinion, there are fans who enjoy this story, bless them!) 'Time And The Rani', Sylvester McCoy's first story, an embarrassing mish-mash of slapstick and cod sf (though I blame the writers rather than the producer).

Whatever you think of him, John Nathan-Turner certainly made his mark on Doctor Who. A larger than life figure in his trademark Hawaiian shirts, he continued supporting and promoting Doctor Who long after the show's cancellation, right up to the time of his illness, appearing at conventions, advising BBC Worldwide on video releases, and publishing his 'memoirs' in the *Doctor Who Magazine*.

A few years ago I saw him preside over an auction of memorabilia at a 'Doctor Who Day' at Longleat. A natural showman, he was very witty, with a wicked line in bitchy put-downs, and kept the audience totally entertained with his comments on some of the rather sad items up for auction (such as an orange Time Lord robe which he referred to as a 'Time Lord nightie.') Afterwards, he said 'Hello!' to me, as if he recognised me, though our paths had never crossed before, and never would again.

DAMON KNIGHT 1922 - 2002

Gary Wilkinson on a prolific all-rounder

As a fan, critic, writer and above all editor Damon Knight had a huge impact on science fiction. He was a fan from an early age, in his teens travelling from his home in Oregon to New York, where he was to become part of the Futurians, a group of fans and writers which included the young Frederik Pohl and Isaac Asimov among many others. Later Knight would write an acclaimed book-length memoir of this period, *The Futurians*. He was a prolific writer and wrote many short stories during the fifties and the sixties including 'To Serve Man' which was memorably adapted for the *Twilight Zone* television series. He also wrote the occasional novel from *A for Anything* in 1961 to *Humpty Dumpty: An Oval in 1996*. He was perhaps the first critic of science fiction to treat the subject with due rigor famously demolishing A. E. Van Vogt's *The World of A* in his first published essay. His reviews were collected into *In Search of Wonder*, for which he won a Hugo Award as best Book Reviewer in 1956. Also

a biographer, Knight wrote a biography of Charles Fort among others.

In 1965 he founded the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA), and served as its first president. With Blith and Judith Merril, Knight co-founded the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference in 1956, which ran for over 20 years, and inspired the more famous Clarion Writers' Workshop.

He was however most notable for his work as an editor, especially the *Orbit* series of original anthologies starting in 1966 to *Orbit 21* in 1980, which helped launch the careers of several major writers including Gene Wolfe (who in turn dedicated the classic *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* to Knight), R.A. Lafferty, Kate Wilhelm and Gardner Dozois.

Knight won a Pilgrim Award from the Science Fiction Research Association in 1975, and a Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America in 1995.

GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER 1947 - 2002

Gary Wilkinson on a prolific writer

A graduate of Clarion, Effinger was the author of numerous short stories, over a score of novels, working in crime, as well as the science fiction genre and also created several computer role-playing games. His most notable work was the multi-award winning novelette 'Schrodinger's kitten' but he also created the popular cyberpunk *Marid Audran* series starting with *When Gravity Fails* in 1987.

Effinger originally intended to become a surgeon but soon it became clear that writing would be his chosen profession. His first wife, whom he met while she was browsing in the science-fiction section of the New York bookstore where he worked, introduced him to Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm, who became important mentors.

He said that his writing career really began with the Clarion summer writing workshop in Pennsylvania in 1970: "I wrote my first story, sold my first novel, and I never looked back."

Effinger married his third wife, fellow novelist Barbara Hambly, in 1998, and moved to Los Angeles. "We were co-guests of honour at a science-fiction convention, and it was love at first sight," Hambly once said. "We were married in November of 1998."

Effinger had been unwell for several years, his life was complicated by recurring illness and addictions to painkillers and alcohol.

"In the last four years of his life, he went through rehab twice, he was in 12-step programs." Hambly commented. "The last five months of his life he was completely clean and sober. He was working again, he has two short stories in anthologies coming out in the next couple of months, and he had a good shot at getting his life back together and starting his career again. He put up a hell of a fight."

RICHARD COWPER 1926 - 2002

Gary Wilkinson introduces an anecdote by writer Christopher Priest

Richard Cowper was a man of many names. He published two volumes of autobiography, *One Hand Clapping* (1975) and *Shadows on the Grass* (1977), and four literary non-sf novels as Colin Murry as well as sf as Cowper but was actually first 'John Murray' as Christopher Priest explains below.

After working for some years as a teacher, he adopted the pseudonym Cowper for the sfnal *Breakthrough* in 1967. He had met H. G. Wells as a child and, perhaps not coincidentally, Cowper's writing was deeply influenced by him.

His best-known novels were *The Twilight of Briareus* (1974) and the 'Corlay' trilogy *The Road to Corlay* (1978), *A Dream of Kinship* (1981), and *A Tapestry of Time* (1982). He was also a regular contributor to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, when Murry retired from writing - his stories frequently being nominated for awards.

Cowper's death had been tragically proceeded by his wife's by only a few weeks

Here Christopher Priest explains how his friendship with Cowper first started.

A MEETING WITH RICHARD COWPER

I knew him by his real name, John Murry. He was born John Middleton Murry, the same name as his father, the influential critic, essayist and pacifist. Later I heard him addressed as 'Colin', another name he wrote under: this was the Colin Murry who had published four general novels in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of John's family still called him by his boyhood nickname 'Col', or even 'Carl'. I once asked him what name he liked to be called by, and he just laughed and said he'd answer to almost anything so long as it wasn't obviously rude. To most people in the sf world, and in particular to those fellow writers who went to the Milford Conferences with him during the 1970s, he was Richard Cowper, or Richard.

My friendship with him did not start auspiciously. In the summer of 1971 I was asked for an opinion on a manuscript by the publishers Victor Gollancz: it was Cowper's novel *The Twilight of Briareus*. I had never read anything of Cowper's at this time, although I had heard of him. He had published two or three novels with Dennis Dobson and because of the general low status of that list, and also because those books had not made waves in the sf world, I unfairly assumed his stuff wasn't up to much. In addition, the fact that the new MS had been offered to Gollancz

seemed to suggest it must have already been rejected by Dobson. I started reading it without many expectations.

By the time I'd finished it I was a Cowper convert. Yes, there were one or two minor things that needed fixing, but nothing for anyone to worry about. It was a smashing novel: a fresh take on the 'disaster' story, with many good satirical touches. I wrote an enthusiastic reader's report to recommend it and assumed Gollancz would publish it at some time in the next year or so.

About ten months later, I was looking forward to taking part in the first British Milford writers' workshop. One morning I received a phone call from James Blish's wife, Judy, who was organizing everything. She told me that numbers were a little lower than expected and that there was room for a couple more people if I knew any of the newer writers who might be able to come. Richard Cowper was the first and only writer I thought of. I had kept a note of his address from the manuscript I'd read, so I passed it on to her.

A month or so later Judy Blish circulated the list of attendees, and there was Richard Cowper's name on the list. I was pleased my recommendation had been taken up and I looked forward to meeting him.

The first British Milford was held in September 1972. The scene needs to be set, because it had a bearing on what was to follow.

Fifteen writers took part, which meant that over the course of the next three days we had to read and discuss five manuscripts a day. Anyone who has taken part in such a workshop will realize what a heavy commitment that was, involving hours of intensive reading. The hotel was a small one, with the lounge chosen for the workshop only just big enough to hold everyone. With our arrival at this place, we started learning about The Rules.

The workshop was being introduced to Britain by the American writers who had been to the U.S. Milford conferences, and they were running the show. In practice, this meant James and Judy Blish, and the nominal chair of the workshop, Anne McCaffrey. They were keen on rules, these people, and they policed them like beadle.

The first rule, for instance, was that the manuscripts had to be placed in the workshop room from the start of the conference. No copies of any of the manuscripts must ever be removed from that room – for example, they weren't allowed to be taken to one's own hotel room for a quiet read – because that would make it difficult if someone else wanted to read it. Everything therefore had to be read in the main room in the company of everyone else. No manuscript must be discussed with anyone in advance of the workshop session, and this included a ban on making expressive noises, like groans of disappointment, gnashing of teeth, hysterical laughter, and all that. Notes must be kept private. Silence must be maintained at all times so as not to break the concentration of people still reading. Judy Blish issued these directives in a voice of chill authority, appealing to our innate professionalism and reminding us that this was a meeting of fellow professionals, one which depended for its success on the equal status of all taking part. In this she echoed the words of her husband, who had recently been GoH at the British Eastercon and devoted his speech to a description of the way a Milford workshop was organized. He too was strong on the rules, describing them as a formula that worked.

Even though I was one of the youngest and most inexperienced writers at the conference, right from the start I found myself bridling against the authoritarian tone of these people. I had never before been to any sf meeting when people didn't talk endlessly, have a laugh, hang around in the bar, fall over in a foolish way and so on. While we were all crammed into that small hotel function room, Judy Blish made me feel I had enlisted in the army for the weekend.

And what was all this 'fellow-professional' stuff she kept going on about? Everyone else was in fact a professionally published writer, a precondition for being there, but she wasn't. She'd never sold a thing. She was there because she was James Blish's wife. For a while I assumed she was being allowed in on sufferance because she had done the organizing, and would keep out of the way once the workshops began. As things turned out, she was to take part in all the workshop sessions; this was one of several of their own rules that the Blish Mafia interpreted in different ways, depending on who you were. Later on, for instance, Brian Aldiss tried to get his teenage children in so they could listen to his manuscript being discussed – this mild request led to a bad-tempered confrontation which ended

with Aldiss leaving the conference before the end. Judy Blish, a non-writer, was apparently exempt from her own rules. It wouldn't have mattered if she hadn't made it matter.

Anyway, all that was ahead and did not directly involve me. I looked around at the others. Many of them were already friends, or at least they were people I thought might become friends. In addition to the Blishes, and McCaffrey, the attendees were Mark Adlard, Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, Ken Bulmer, George Locke (who had published stories as 'Gordon Walters'), John Phililift (who was 'John Rackham'), David Redd, Josephine Saxton, Andrew Stephenson, Peter Tate, myself and Richard Cowper. It was an interesting group to be in. While that first evening slowly passed, as the full import of the Blish Rules fell on me, what I really wanted to be doing was breaking the ice in the bar, complaining about publishers, listening to stories, talking shop. Instead, La Blish instructed us that the sooner we began the mute reading of the manuscripts, the better.

In fact, on that first evening we weren't up to full strength, because Richard Cowper hadn't arrived. He had phoned ahead from somewhere: his car had broken down on the way and he was going to be delayed. The hotel staff put out a cold supper for him, and we settled down to our reading.

Late in the evening, car headlights flashed across the windows from outside and a few minutes later a slim figure slipped past on his way to the hotel reception. It was our first glimpse of Richard Cowper. Anne McCaffrey went out to reception to greet him on our behalf.

The workshop sessions began in the afternoon of the next day. Because he had been late arriving, and therefore hadn't had the same chance as everyone else to read the early manuscripts, Richard's own submission was one of the ones to be workshopped on the first day. It was an extract from *Briareus*, which also conveniently made my own reading load a little lighter. When the piece was workshopped, several people said how much they enjoyed it and that he should go ahead and complete the novel. When my own turn came to comment on the manuscript I couldn't resist revealing that I knew Cowper had already finished the book, and that it was every bit as enjoyable as everyone seemed to think it would be. While I was speaking, Richard was giving me a funny old look from across the room.

Afterwards, during the short break before the next session, he came beaming across to me. He asked how I had managed to read the whole manuscript, so I told him about Gollancz sending it to me.

"Ah-hah!" he cried. "Then it was *you*!"
"Me?"

"The man with the golden rule of science fiction. We meet at last! Ah-hah! Found you!"

He was grinning through all this, so I didn't take it too seriously, but it was obvious I'd somehow touched a raw nerve without knowing what it was. We sat down in the bar and had a couple of quick beers together. I told him I'd loved the novel and, with the exception of a couple of small things I'd noted, I had given it a wholehearted recommendation. I added that I was surprised that Gollancz hadn't published it yet and had been expecting to see it announced at any moment.

"Not on your nelly," he said. "The buggers turned it down flat. They claimed it broke the golden rule of science fiction. They sent me a copy of the report they'd had from their sf

reader."

"What? I've never heard of that. If anyone said it, it wasn't me. I don't even know what the golden rule of science fiction is!"

Their reader said that golden rule of science fiction is that you mustn't have two unbelievable things in the same story."

"Oh."

It was news to me and I said so. I was amazed that there was even such a formulation, and I said that too. I immediately thought of half-a-dozen exceptions to the 'rule'. One of the most obvious is of course John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, a classic of sf by any definition, yet one which turns on two global catastrophes: sudden worldwide blindness, and the simultaneous emergence of deadly, walking plant hybrids.

We didn't get too far with this conversation because Constable Blish was patrolling her beat, rounding up stragglers so we could get on with the next story. Richard and I blended back in with the rest of the workshop and no more was said about *Briareus*.

However, I remained astonished by the news that Gollancz had rejected the novel. It was exactly the kind of sf Gollancz could do well with. It was by a British writer for one thing, and they had always actively supported the Brits. Also, the writer's skill showed on every page: the book was extremely well written and psychologically convincing, it was satirical, moving, worrying, occasionally funny and well told all the way through. Since when had this supposed 'golden rule' come into effect? It rather reminded me of the endless rules we were living by, down there in Milford on Sea.

Then came the next day and with it, for me, a full quota of manuscripts to plough through. One or two of them were huge, more than ten thousand words in length, and I found several of the stories pretty difficult to read or think about. One of the worst of these stories had been put into the workshop by Anne McCaffrey.

It seemed incredible to me that a so-called professional writer (and by this time McCaffrey had become a big name, at least in the USA) could produce such amateurish and shoddy work. It was in general incompetently written, but even worse than that it was incomprehensible and illogical. It looked like prentice work, something a new writer would draft then throw away while getting ready to start submitting work to magazines. I sat on the uncomfortable chair in a corner of the cramped lounge, trying to keep my mind on McCaffrey's dreadful story. I was constantly distracted by the presence of so many other people around me. Everyone was maintaining silence, but it was the sort of oppressive non-silence where you can hear whispering all the time, and there was constant movement as people fidgeted, or got up and walked about the room. I kept restarting the manuscript from the beginning, trying to make sense of it and keep my mind on it. Each time I tried I could only get about halfway down page two before either losing interest or having my attention distracted.

Time was passing and the deadline of the afternoon workshop session was approaching. Before breakfast that morning, while exploring the hotel, I'd come across a small TV lounge tucked away at the far end of one of the corridors. After the fifth attempt to get past page two, I quietly stuffed the manuscript under my jacket and slipped

out of the workshop room. I walked down to the TV lounge and went through the door. Already in the room, horizontal on a sofa, was Richard Cowper. He had an unfinished manuscript open across his chest and a cigarette smouldering in his fingers. He was staring at the ceiling.

The moment I saw him I backed away. "Sorry," I said. "I didn't realize there was anyone in here."

"Come in, come in!" he said, conspiratorially. "Come in and close the door and I'll buy you a drink." I realized then that it was McCaffrey's appalling manuscript he had been trying to read. As he sat up, he brandished it at me. "I can't get past page two of this bloody story," he said. "What do you think of it?"

"I'm on page two as well. It's impossible to read, isn't it?"

With these words, and because we had already ignored the ban on removing manuscripts, we had broken at least three of the Blish Rules and no doubt went on to break many of the rest.

Richard and I sat in the privacy of that tiny lounge and found we had a lot to talk about. We were united by our enraged reaction to the McCaffrey manuscript, by the way its amateurish style and unsophisticated ideas were actually offensive in the context of discussion by other writers. What did Anne McCaffrey expect us to do with such poor work? It couldn't be taken seriously as a piece of achieved writing, so did she want her fellow writers to correct her spelling and grammar? Sort out her illogical plot for her? Explain how to tell a story? *Teach her how to write?*

We knew it was hopeless. Already, Ms McCaffrey had been laying down the law to us: she was a Hugo and Nebula winner, after all, and although her manner was theatrically friendly there was a kind of barrier in there. She liked telling people what to do but she didn't seem to be much of a listener. I hadn't really thought about it until then, but Richard, giggling and exclaiming and groaning amusingly, put everything into context. We sat in that tiny room for another hour, occasionally sneaking out to the bar to replenish our glasses, the copies of the execrated manuscript lying unread on the floor between us.

"By the way," he said, as lunchtime approached. "Do you see anything wrong with my eyes?"

"Eh?"

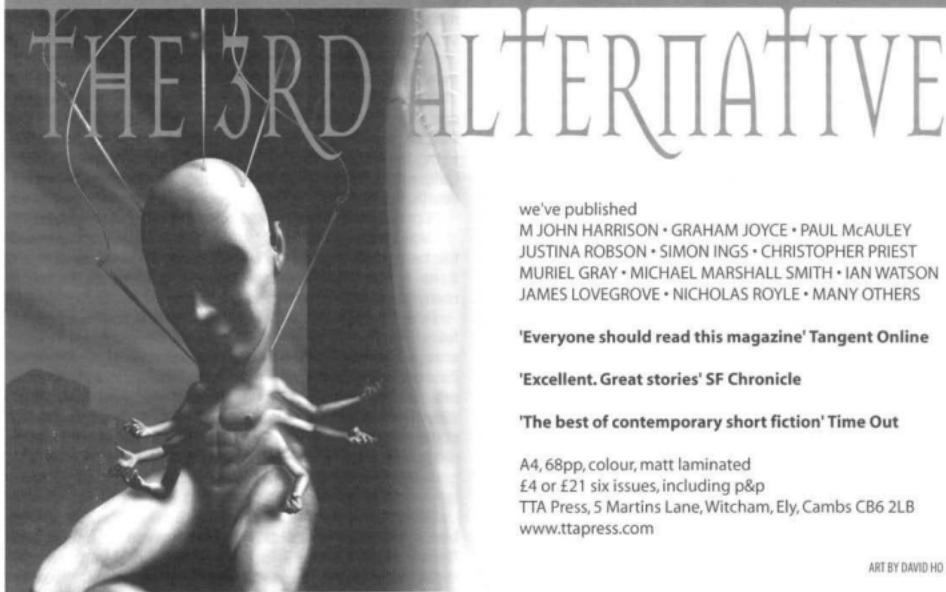
"The other night, when I arrived late, I was just signing the guest book in reception, when this woman I'd never seen before in my life came rushing up to me. Scared me out of my wits! She grabbed me by the shoulders and stared straight into my face. 'You have the eyes of a prune!' she yelled, then she kissed me."

"A prune?" I said.

"Her very words! It was Anne McCaffrey. I tell you, mate, at that moment I nearly ran back to my car and fled."

Later, feeling much jollier and amused by all the nonsense, we returned to the main room, sat in our respective corners, ground our way mutedly through the unintelligible McCaffrey manuscript. We must each have finally found something to say about it that wasn't completely rude, and the next day the workshop finished and we all went home.

The eyes of a prune? It was inexplicable and ridiculous, but it helped found what turned out to be a thirty-year friendship. Now he has died, suddenly and far too soon, and it is all over.



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ART BY DAVID HO

Continued from page 15

Where did the idea(s) come from for an English Rock and Roll story?

Briefly, the ideas come from my own life history, (talking 'bout my generation). It's ironic, and complicated: the USA is supposed to own rock and roll, but on the other hand, we gave them The Beatles, Graham Nash, David Bowie... My own experience started with Gerry and the Pacemakers; then the Beatles and Rolling Stones, The Who and Led Zep then I went to University and became a hippy, so I was converted to the US. But later, I became very English Rock & Roll in the early 1980s, and you can read about that in the original 'Bold As Love' story, still posted on *Infinity Plus*.

There was a fair amount of controversy regarding the Interzone extract. Has that died down now?

A faithful *Interzone* reader, Geoff Hough of Cheadle, wrote in and said he was disgusted by the extract (which describes a girl of twelve getting 'seduced' music biz style - i.e. served like a sandwich to a megastar at his stately country house) and he had called the police. David naturally took no notice, but then the police turned up and confiscated a few copies, but they never came back (so far as I know) with a judgement on the issue. You can read all about it (including the offending extract) on the website. Later, after David Langford had been sarcastic about the affair in an *Ansible* column, Geoff Hough wrote again and said really, his complaint was that *Interzone* material had been getting weaker and weaker and the 'Saltbox' story was

the last straw. Seems an odd reason to call the police, but there you go.

In Bold as Love (and sequel *Castles Made of Sand*) there is a frontispiece by comics artist Bryan Talbot. How did this come about?

I met Bryan a few years ago when he lived in Preston and I went up to visit the sf group there. I asked him to read *Bold As Love* because I admire his work, and it's a very visual book, and also, I can spot a good test-driver and I treasure them. He liked the book, and I thereupon decided to ask him to do a frontispiece, which led to him also doing character sketches of Ax, Sage and Fiorinda [See *Matrix* cover – Ed]. It's a real privilege having his portraits of my characters, and the frontispieces are great too. I have a fantasy of convincing Gollancz they should commission a Bryan Talbot colour plate frontispiece and several line drawings in the text for the next edition... but dream on.

Although the book does have closure I feel bad times are ahead for Sage, Ax and Fio...

You'll have to read *Castles Made Of Sand* and find out.

I'm sure I will! Thank you, Gwyneth.

The *Bold as Love* website is at: www.boldaslove.co.uk

Infinity Plus is at: www.ipius.zetnet.co.uk

More of Bryan Talbot's work can be found at: www.bryan-talbot.com

The Clarke Award website is at: www.clarkeaward.com

UNCONVENTIONAL

CHANTING

Maureen Kincaid Speller was at the joint BSFA/SFF joint AGM, *Signs of Life*

When Eastercon goes to Jersey, the BSFA and the Science Fiction Foundation can't legally hold their AGMs during the convention as has become their habit over the years. Which means that the AGMs have to be held elsewhere, elsewhere. This year, the two organisations collaborated on a one-day event at the Friends Meeting House in London, incorporating the two AGMs. Called *Signs of Life* it was a miniature convention in its own right, with one stream of programming, featuring Gwyneth Jones and M. John Harrison as guests, a book stall presided over by Brian Ameringen, with BSFA and Foundation publications also available.

I chaired the first item of the day, a discussion of science fiction in the last fifteen years, as reflected by the shortlists of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, but this quickly diversified into a very lively discussion of sf awards generally and whether they truly represent the tastes of the reading public. No clear-cut conclusion was reached, but it was fascinating to see how a subject which has been discussed at conventions for as long as I can remember still generates an amazing amount of interest.

Gwyneth Jones assumed her Ann Halam persona to present 'How To Write A Ghost Story', a talk she gives to schools, casting the audience in the role of a class of school children. Quite apart from being extremely good fun, it also gave us another view of the business of being a writer, encouraging creativity in others and looking after tomorrow's writers, as well as describing how a story comes to be written. What struck me most powerfully when I first heard this presentation was how children are currently very reliant on tv series for their ideas about the supernatural, and how limiting this can become.

After the BSFA AGM, ably conducted by Paul and Elizabeth Billinger, and lunch, life became very interesting, in a very Chinese way. The Quakers have a very ecumenical outlook and had hired out an adjacent auditorium to a very large group of Buddhists ... who were

chanting ... a lot. This washed over into our room during Mark Bould's interview with M. John Harrison, leading to some very surreal moments, and a few problems for those of us right at the back of the room (though I gather the interview will be published, so I'm now much less frustrated about missing part of what I gather was a really good discussion on the nature of fantasy).

Even more surreal was the devious quiz set by fiendish quiz-master Andrew M. Butler, in which the Foundation and the BSFA battled it out, the Foundation winning, not quite hands down, thanks to its secret weapon, quiz doyen Roger Robinson, though even he was stumped on occasion. Steve Jeffery and Chris Hill meanwhile nobly upheld the honour of the BSFA. And the day concluded more seriously with the Foundation's AGM, chaired by Farah Mendlesohn.

What impressed me most about the day was the huge number of people attending ... signs of life indeed, though occasionally a tight squeeze in the function space! Someone calculated that more than a hundred people had passed through the room during the day, and both AGMs were extremely well attended. Compare this with the AGMs at Eastercon, which have to compete with the rest of the programme for their audience, inevitably coming off a very poorly attended second best. Over the years, many BSFA members have been reluctant to attend an AGM, with no access to the rest of the convention, and I can't say I blame them. But the enthusiasm for *Signs of Life* suggests a really strong argument for taking the AGMs out of the Eastercon altogether and holding a separate one-day event, showcasing the AGMs. After all, the BSFA/SFF connection with Eastercons wouldn't be lost, what with the BSFA Awards, the sponsored programme items and the George Hay Lecture, while an extra event will give more people a chance to meet authors and discuss sf. Certainly, if this means more events like *Signs of Life*, I'm all for it. I enjoyed the day immensely.

LOC AND LOAD

Letters received. Please forward all comments etc to the main editorial address marked 'For Publication'. Letters may be edited. Best letter is awarded a prize.

Steve Green on Stephen Baxter's Resonances column on the comics of his youth in Matrix #155

Ref. Stephen Baxter's entertaining memoir on his comic-collecting childhood, TV21 didn't actually die: it merged with another Anderson-inspired comic, Joe 90, bringing from the latter the only (so far as I'm aware) weekly Star Trek strip. Later still, this merged with Valiant, to become TV21 & Valiant.

I'm surprised he missed out on *Countdown* ('incorporating *Rocket!*'), though; this was a true sf comic, with a strip at the back curiously utilising the spacecraft designs from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (drawn by John M Burns, later to produce *The Sun's 'George & Lynne'*).

Stephen Baxter replies:

Steve, thanks for your comment. I've actually expanded this as an essay on TV21 for Vector, which covers its demise, etc., and focuses on the future history. But I do remember *Countdown*, which featured a lot of TV21 reprints!

Gary S. Dalkin writes on H.G. Wells' hidden talents (and wins his pick of the Freebie Pile):

A user writes on the Internet Movie Database regarding the new film of *The Time Machine*: "I was also amused that the big catastrophe to end our current culture happened in the year 2037 - one year before the signed 32 bit Unix time counter will overflow. Was that an insider joke or part of the original book?"

Now we know: Herbert George Wells, journalist, novelist, socialist, visionary and Unix programmer. Several other bright sparks compare the film to "the original", by which they mean the 1960 movie, entirely unaware of the book. Anyone got a time machine? I want to go back to "a more civilised time." Even one in a galaxy far, far away...

[Public service announcement: Matrix advises viewers to avoid the new version of *The Time Machine* (and *Rollerball*) so as not despoil their memories of the 'originals' - Ed]

— AND THE WINNER IS ...

All the news on the BSFA awards from Tanya Brown

Once again, the Arthur C Clarke Award (for best UK-published science fiction novel of 2001) was given to a book that made it to the shortlist of the BSFA Award for best novel, but was pipped to the post. Clarke-winner Gwyneth Jones' *Bold as Love* seems to be one of those novels which provokes strong feelings: many people recommend it vociferously, others just don't get it and will tell you so, at length. It's less of a hard sf novel than Alastair Reynolds' *Chasm City*, which won the BSFA Award for best novel. *Bold as Love* is set in near-future England rather than the distant, interstellar sf-noir milieu of *Chasm City*, and the future it paints is rather grubbily dystopian.

The two major British awards for sf novels have, once again, been won by two very different books, which is no bad thing. It's another way of celebrating the diversity of the British sf renaissance, and of recognising different trends – Reynolds' almost Banksian 'space opera noir', Jones' focus on the ways in which society will change around us – that are being explored by some of our best writers.

And next year? Maybe next year's awards will once again go to the same novel – as happened in 1998 with *The Sparrow*, by Mary Doria Russell. Maybe one, or both, awards will be given to a writer that none of us has even heard of yet. The Clarke Award may be jury-based, but the BSFA Awards are your call!

Nominations for the 2002 Awards (which will be presented at next year's Eastercon, Seacon '03 in Hinckley) as at 4th June 2002 are listed below.

Novel:

Schild's Ladder – Greg Egan

Effendi – Jon Courtenay Grimwood

The Scar – China Miéville

Altered Carbon – Richard Morgan

The Years of Rice and Salt – Kim Stanley Robinson

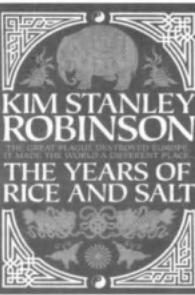
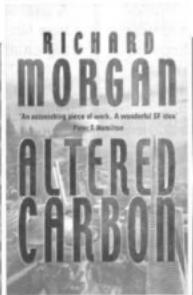
Short Story:

'Singleton' – Greg Egan (*Interzone*, February 2002)

Non-Fiction:

Lucius Shepherd's review of *The Time Machine* (2002), at <http://www.electricstory.com/reviews/timex.asp>

Up-to-date news on the contenders can be found on the BSFA web page (www.bsfa.co.uk), and there'll be an



The novels nominated so far

update in each issue of *Matrix* between now and the deadline at the end of next January.

You can nominate a piece of work for the award just by sending me an email: awards@amaranth.avnet.co.uk. There's a handy link on the web page too. Nominate early and often! Remember, the items with the most nominations are those that will appear on the final shortlists in the spring: unlike the jury-based Arthur C Clarke Award, the BSFA Awards are democratically bestowed. If you like something, nominate it for the relevant award – even if others have already done so.

The closing date for nominations is 31st January 2003.
The rules of eligibility are as follows:

Best Novel, for the best novel first published in the UK in the calendar year 2002. This award is (in theory, at least) open to any work of fiction – not just adult-oriented science fiction.

Best Short Fiction, for the best short fiction that first appeared, regardless of country of origin, in the calendar year 2002. Stories in non-UK magazines, anthologies, and even on the web are eligible. Please let me know where the story appeared (anthology title and editor, magazine name and number, URL) as well as the author and title of the short story.

Best Non-Fiction, for the best single piece, anthology or full-length critical work to appear in the UK in the calendar year 2002. Please give author or editor, title, and magazine / journal details if applicable.

Best Artwork, for the best single piece of artwork that appeared in the calendar year 2002. Where possible, please give the artist's name and the title of the work, and where the item appears (magazine name and number, website URL, and so on).

Please note that 'advance votes' are not eligible: the book, short story, critical essay or piece of artwork must actually have been published, not just be due for publication.

If you're not sure whether something qualifies, send in the nomination anyway: I'll check eligibility and let you know.

Steve Green brings us news of all things fannish

Having devoted previous instalments of this column to news of conventions, fan funds and lawsuits, it strikes me now would be a suitable point to focus a little upon the phenomenon which pretty much started the whole shebang off and still plays a huge part in many of our lives: the fanzine.

To fully explore all its myriad forms would take up entire issues of *Matrix*, from a history dating back to the 1930s through the bizarre printing technologies variously employed to the favoured system of barter for distribution (almost every current fanzine is available for "the Usual", either an expression or real interest, a letter of comment on the previous issue or – best of all – your own fanzine in trade).

Among the best training grounds for fanzine production are amateur press associations, a co-operative publishing system co-opted by sf fandom a mere seventy-five years ago, when Donald A Wollheim inaugurated the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. The concept was, and remains, gloriously simple: a set number of members produce an identical run of fanzines and forward them to a "central mailer" (aka "official editor"), who then collates the available material and sends it back out. The advantages are numerous: low print and distribution costs, a ready audience, guaranteed feedback in the next bundle ("mailing comments").

Though Wollheim is sadly no longer with us, FAPA survives and presently features many well-known names from fannish and professional ranks alike (Robert Silverberg, Harry Warner Jr and Gordon Eklund to name but three), with the 260th mailing scheduled for August. Fortunately, there's a membership drive on at the moment (UK members have always been welcomed); full details can be obtained from Robert Lichtman at PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, California, CA 95442 or robertlichtman@yahoo.com.

Britain's longest-established apa is BAPA, a comics-related group which celebrates its quarter-century over Christmas; there's an election pending for the central mailer's post, but any enquiries can be made directed to this column on sfcheckpoint@yahoo.co.uk. Almost as old is The Women's Periodical, a discussion apa restricted to female fans either living in the UK or having links to British fandom; enquiries should be forwarded to 27 Coltfoot Drive, Waterlooville, Hampshire, PO7 8DD.

Staying in recruitment mode for a moment, Steve Jeffery's kindly updated me on the meetings last Thursday of each



Glasgow in 2005 – the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC). [Some say armadillo, but I'm sure it's a cybermat – Ed]

month at the Plough in Wolvercote, North Oxford ("A34 exit for Kidlington / Pear Tree Roundabout, or No. 60 bus from Oxford"). As well as a wide selection of decent beers, many *Matrix* regulars start turning up around 7:30pm, which sounds fun. Info via: peverel@aol.com.

A little further north, Birmingham's own Black Lodge entered its eleventh year last Halloween. It's very much an informal complement to the more famous Brum Group (est. 1971), and is slightly more open to horror and comics fans. Meetings are held from 8:30pm at the Hogshead on Newhall Street (a couple of minutes' walk away from Snow Hill Station, and the bus ranks on Colmore Row and New Street). Contact ghostwords@yahoo.co.uk for updates.

Among the highlights for many at the second <plokta.con>, other than the opportunity to avoid the royalist fervour over

the June bank holiday (not to mention the international m u r d e r investigation after a nearby

resident was discovered in instalments a stone's throw from the hotel), was guest of honour John Meaney's call upon those gathered to form a martial arts army. Fortunately, word didn't reach the CIA and the Basingstoke Hilton wasn't immediately targeted for a nuclear strike, even when the committee scheduled a Bollywood costume party on Sunday night.

The following afternoon's closing ceremony featured a live link-up with the distant kingdom of Jersey, so that TransAtlantic Fan Fund victor Tobes Valois could share his glee and commiserate with rival Chris O'Shea. A worthy campaign, well-fought by both.



Finally, with the "race" to run the 2005 world science fiction convention now virtually sewn up by the Glasgow contingent, a post-victory launch has been pencilled in for Novacon 32; a good time to discuss the big questions and map out the route ahead, mayhaps? As well as guest of honour Ian MacDonald, others taking part will include the crew of Britain's new genre magazine, 3SF, and James Tiptree Award winner Gwyneth Jones. Plus, we'll also be presenting the Nova Awards – for fanzines, which brings us right around to where we started. (Full membership is still £35.00, payable to 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ – or e-mail Steve Lawson on xl5@zoom.co.uk.)

News items, gossip, loose change and incriminating photographs should be forwarded to sfcheckpoint@yahoo.co.uk or 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ.

—EVENTS—

Future conventions and other gatherings

28 Jun-27 Oct 02 - Star Trek: Federation Science Exhibition

The Museum of Science and Industry, Castlefield, Manchester. £4.50; concessions £1.50 off, 10 am to 5 pm every day. Booking: 0161 833 0027. More info: 0161 832 2244.

9-11 Aug 02 - ConteXXt (Unicon 20)

University of Gloucestershire. Guest of Honour: Keith Brooke. Joint event with HARMUNI 2 (film). £25 reg, £15 concessions, small children £1. Contact 17 Cow Lane, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 7SZ.



16-19 Aug 02 - A Discworld Odyssey (DWcon 3)

Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leicestershire. Guest of Honour: Terry Pratchett. Guests: Stephen Briggs, Paul Kidby, Dave Langford and more. Reduced rates from 1 April: £45 reg, £30 concessions, £10 supporting. Reverting to £50, £35 and £15 at the end of July. No memberships after 16/7/02. Contact: SAE to 23 Medora Road, Romford, Essex, RM7 7EP; info@dwcon.org; www.dwcon.org

17-18 Aug - Caption (Small-press comics)

Oxford Union Society, St Michael's St, Oxford. £9 reg (£6 students/unwaged), £12 at door. Contact 18 Hawkins St, Oxford, OX4 1YD.

29 Aug-2 Sep 02 - ConJosé (60th Worldcon)

McEnery Convention Center, San José, California. Guests of Honour: Vernor Vinge, David Cherry, Björk & David Trimble, Ferdinand Feghoot, Toastmaster: Tad Williams. Membership: \$180/\$125 reg until advance booking closes on 31 July; \$200 at the door (\$180 on Sat 31 Aug). Contact: PO Box 61363, Sunnyvale, CA 94088-1363, USA. info@conjose.org, www.conjose.org; UK Agents: 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, RG30 2RP; www.sfsfc.org/worldcon/



30 Aug-1 Sep 02 - The Festival of Fantastic Films

Renaissance Hotel, Deansgate, Manchester. Full attending Membership: £65; Day membership: £30. Contact: www.fantastic-films.com/festival email: sales@manchesterfantasticfilms.co.uk; Tel 0161 7073747.

21 Sep 02 Fantasycon

Champagne Charles, 17 The Arches, Villiers St, London, WC2N 4NN. 10am-6pm, pub later. Guests TBA. £17 reg, £12 for British Fantasy Soc members, £20 at the door. Contact Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire, CW9 8PQ.

4 - 6 Oct 02 - Conquest (media con)

Essex County Hotel, Southend-On-Sea. £50 reg, £20/day, £32 two days. Contact: 73 Bournemouth Park Road, Southend-On-Sea, Essex, SS2 5JJ. Tel: (01702) 469093.



19-20 Oct 02 - Octocon 2002 (Irish national con)

Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Co.Dublin. GoH China Mieville; many other guests. 20 euros Irish cheques to 'Octocon' c/o Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland; £15 sterling to 'Dave Lally #2 A/C', c/o Dave Lally 64 Richborne Terrace, London, SW8 1AX.

25-28 Oct 02 Cult TV 2002

Southport Theatre and Floral Hall Complex, Merseyside, UK. Various guests, including Terry Jones. Contact PO Box 1701, Peterborough, PE7 1ER.

31 Oct-3 Nov 02 World Fantasy Convention 2002

Hilton Minneapolis and Towers, Minneapolis, MN. Guests of Honour: Dennis Etchison, Jonathan Carroll, Kathe Koja, Stephen Jones, Dave McLean. Membership: \$100 to 4/11/01, then more. Info: World Fantasy Convention, c/o DreamHaven Books, 912 West Lake Street, Minneapolis, MN 55408, wfc@dreamhavenbooks.com, www.dreamhavenbooks/wfc.html

1-3 Nov 02 - Novacon 32

Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall (as in 2001). GoH Ian McDonald. £32 reg to now, £35 to 20 Oct 02, and £40 at door. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Shefford, SG3 3HQ.

5-6 July 03 - ConStruction (Convention running con)

Cardiff. Info: ConStruction, 37 St Peters Street, Duxford, Cambridgeshire, CB2 4RP, ConStruction@DragonEvents.ltd.uk, www.Dragon Events.ltd.uk



18-21 Apr 03 - Seacon '03

(Eastercon)

Venue confirmed as the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leics (same as 2001 Easter event). Guests of honour: Chris Baker (artist known as Fangorn and involved in Spielberg's *A*), Chris Evans, Mary Gentle. £40 full attending membership. Contacts: www.seacon03.org.uk or 8 The Orchard, Tonwell, Herts, SG12 0HR, UK

9-12 Apr 04 - Concourse (Eastercon)

Blackpool Wintergardens. GoH Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Danny Flynn, Christopher Priest, Philip Pullman, Sue Mason. £25 register, £15 supporting, £15 children (5-17), infants (0-5) free. Rates to rise in June if not before, except that full reg for the unwaged will be held at £25 until the con. On-line credit card payment facility planned. Contact 479 Newmarket Rd, Cambridge, CB5 8JU.



28 Aug-1 Sep 03 - Torcon 3/Worldcon 61

Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Canada. Guests of Honour: George R. R. Martin, Frank Kelly Freas, Mike Glyer. Membership: C\$200. Info: Torcon 3, Box 3, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1A2, Canada, info@torcon3.ca, www.torcon3.ca

2-6 Sep 04 - Noreascon 4 (62nd Worldcon)

Boston, Mass. Guest of Honour: Terry Pratchett, William Tenn, (fan) Jack Speer and Peter Weston. \$120 reg (kids \$85), \$85 supp conversion, \$35 supp. Mastercard and Visa accepted. Contact PO Box 1010, Framingham, MA 01701, USA.

Note

- Always include a stamped self-addressed envelope when contacting conventions by post.
- Please mention *Matrix* when responding.
- We do our best to ensure the accuracy of this information but always check. Never make a journey to a convention without enquiring first.

Please forward updates, corrections and any information on new events to the main editorial address.

— GROUPS —

Local groups and other gatherings of fans and writers

Belfast Science Fiction Group

Alternate Thursdays, 8:30pm at the Monaco Bars, Rosemary Street, Belfast. Contact Eugene Doherty, 02890 208405; tinman@technologist.com; www.terracon3000.org.uk/sfgroup.htm

Birmingham: Brum SF Group

Second Friday of the month on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New St. Membership is £15/year. Contact Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, W. Midlands WV13 1HX. bsfg@borlas.demon.co.uk

Cambridge SF Group

Second Monday of the month in The Cambridge Blue, Gwydir Street, Cambridge.

Cardiff SF Group

First Tuesday of the month 7:30pm in Wellington's Café Bar, 42 The Hayes, Cardiff.

Colchester SF/F/Horror Group

Third Saturday of the month at 12:30pm in The Playhouse pub, St John's Street. Contact Des Lewis 01255 812119.

The Croydon SF Group

Second Tuesday of the month, 8pm in The Dog and Bull, Surrey Street (by the market), Croydon, Surrey. We are sometimes upstairs or out in the garden. Contact Robert Newman on 020 8686 6800.

Glasgow SF/F Writers' Circle

Alternate Tuesdays at 8:00pm, The Conference Room, Borders Bookstore, Buchanan Street, Glasgow (actual dates are publicised in Borders' events guide, available in store, or ask at the Information Desk). All genres and standards of proficiency welcome. Contact: Neil Williamson 0141 353 2649, or e-mail: neilwilliamson@btinternet.com

Hull SF Group

Second and Fourth Tuesdays, 8.00 to 10:30pm at The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull. Contact Carol & Steve on 01482 494045 or Dave and Estelle on 01482 444291. Please note that the pub room is not always available so if you intend to come along, please phone first to check on venue, or see: www.mjckeh.demon.co.uk/hulstf.htm for the current list of events.

London BSFA meetings

Fourth Wednesday of the month (except December) from 7:00pm at the Rising Sun, Cloth Fair (off Long Lane), EC1. Barbican/Farringdon tube.

Check Ansible for details and guests, or organiser, Paul Hood on 020 8333 6670; paul@auden.demon.co.uk.

London Circle

First Thursday of each month from around 5:00pm at the Florence Nightingale ('Dead Nurse'), on the Westminster Bridge Road/York Road roundabout. Waterloo/ Westminster tube.

Manchester: FONT

FONT meets on the second and fourth Thursday of the month at The Goose on Piccadilly from about 8.30pm onwards. Contact Mike Don on 0161 2262980.

North Oxford

Last Thursday of the month at The Plough, Wolvercote from 7:30pm. Irregular and just starting, so contact Steve and Vikki on 01865 371734 or peverel@aol.com for details.

Norwich Science Fiction Group

Second & fourth Wednesdays from 8:00pm at the Cellar Bar, Ribs of Beef, Fye Bridge, Norwich. Contact 01603 477104; NSFG@wcwom.net

Peterborough SF Group

First Wednesdays at the Bluebell Inn, Dogsthorpe and third Wednesdays in the Great Northern Hotel, opposite station. Contact Pete on 01733 370542.

Portsmouth/South Hants SF Group

Second and fourth Tuesdays at the Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth.

Reading SF Group

On a Summer Tour from July to August. The early meetings on the third Monday of every month will be at The Monk's Retreat from 19:30 as usual but for details of additional pubs they are visiting contact: Mark Young via RSFG@onetel.com or see www.RSFG.org.uk for the pubs they are visiting.

Southampton: Solent Green

Every third Thursday, 7:00pm, at The Duke of Wellington, Bugle Street, Contact Matt 01703 577113 werkhaus@tcp.co.uk

Please forward updates, corrections and any information on new groups and gatherings to the main editorial address.

— NOTICES —

Notices are free for all BSFA members -- please forward to main editorial address.

Contact

Intelligent, straightforward female, 37, varied interests (films and theatre, cryptozoology, alternative history) WLTM fellow enthusiasts for cinema trips, discussions over dinner, long walks and possibly more. Contact takver01@hotmail.com. Terrestrial location West Yorkshire.

For Sale

The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction: An Illustrated A-Z edited by Peter Nicholls. Granada paperback 1981. Good condition, though spine and corner of front cover are creased, and pages are slightly age-yellowed round the edges. Will accept £8. (If buyer is in the UK, I will pay the p & p). Contact: Barbara Davies, 4 Murvagh Close, Cheltenham, Glos. GL53 7QY (email: bhdavies@cheltenham1.demon.co.uk)

Magazine Chain

American sf magazines (*Analog*, *Asimov* and the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*) are bought and passed round a circle of people. Each person pays a set amount (currently 25p per magazine) plus the onward postage (44p per magazine at the moment except for 'heavy' double issues etc). How to join - write with a cheque/postal order, made payable to BSFA Ltd, for a minimum of £3 (12 mags) - with what mags you want. Contact: Keith Freeman 269 Wykeham Road, Reading, RG6 1PL (e-mail: K.H.Freeman@rdg.ac.uk).

Wanted

Your editor is still after videos (post season 1) and books etc relating to *The Survivors* television programme. Contact: main editorial address.

—JO'S TIMEWASTERS—

Competition 156

Do any eight answers you wish. They all have something in common, as should become apparent...

1. What you would have needed to pay cash for *Solaris* when it was first published.
2. Fritz Leiber short which won the Hugo in 1975.
3. Author whose first two published stories, 'Keyhole' and 'Women Only' appeared in the same volume of *Vortex* in 1953.
4. Story about Mink and the Invasion from *The Illustrated Man*.
5. Author of *We*, supposed to have inspired the writing of *1984*.
6. Where the Damon Knight novel *The Other Foot* (aka *Mind Switch*) is largely set.
7. Where the survivors of *The Chrysalids* went.
8. 1971 film in which world government have decreed that no children are to be born for 30 years.
9. Oscar Winner for special effects in 1950 for *Destination Moon*.
10. "There is a fifth dimension beyond those known to man". Thus spake Rod Serling's intro to which TV series?
11. Population-explosion novel by John Brunner.
12. Publishers of Amazing Stories from 1938 to 1965.
13. Two-headed survivor of the Total Perspective Vortex.
14. Author of "... And call me Conrad".
15. The great prophet who appeared at Milliways.
16. An employee of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation.

Answers by Aug 10, please, to John Ollis, 49 Leighton Road, Corby NN18 0SD

[Please note that from now on the prize has been increased to £10, so no excuse not to enter! —Ed]

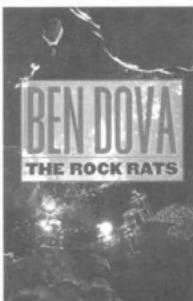
SIG

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Thanks to all contributors, Carol Ann Kerr Green, Steve Jeffery, Gary S Dalkin, Bryan Talbot, Gwyneth Jones and especially Chris Priest (sorry again!). Belated thanks, and much apologies for forgetting to mention it before, to Amanda Kear (aka Dr Bob editor of *Dog Breath*) for helping to set up the interview with Matt Smith in *Matrix* #155

Illustration Credits:

Cover, Bryan Talbot (From the top, clockwise: Fiorinda, Sage and Ax - sketches for the frontispiece for *Bold as Love*). Photos page 14-15 - courtesy of Tanya Brown. The rest: Gary Wilkinson



It looks like that someone at Amazon.com got a bit bored one afternoon and decided to play around with Photoshop. It was a while before the management noticed. It should of course be Ben Dova.

Stop Press

From next issue Janet Barron will no longer be bringing us book news due to an increased workload from a new job. Congratulations on your promotion Janet and thanks for all your past contributions! This of course leaves a vacancy in the *Matrix* editorial team - please don't hesitate to get in touch via the main address if you think you can fill it - Ed.

Results of competition 154

A splendid and exceptionally silly entry for 'Renamatible'; a selection...

Laughterhouse Five; 2001 – A Pace Odyssey (one small step for man); *Time For The Stairs* (BBC's Book at Bedtime); *From the Earth to the Moron; Star Wars; Tar Wars* (gritty novel of underhand dealing in road-building); *All the Craps of Earth*.

And nicely leading on from the last one, the winner is Nigel Parsons for *A Torrent of Faeces* where Blish's Okies find employment shovelling 'night soil' on the world of Capri. Thanks also to Mike Brain, P Gardner, Theo Ross, Graham Smith, Jack Smith, and the rest.

—WHAT'S THIS?—

Result

This mystery picture was loosely related to one of the articles, news stories or reviews in issue #154. Mainly variations on hobbit excreta or body parts (as there was the LOTR review). Most off the wall was Simon



Morden of *Focus* fame with: "granola - but I can't find any healthy breakfast food related articles in the last issue" which made me laugh anyway. Closest was Glenda Pringle with 'wargames terrain'. They were actually 'model' asteroid for use in table top space battles. Both the above, in the grand tradition of the BSFA giving awards to itself, get their pick from *Matrix* Freebie Mountain.

—TV DVD COMP—

Live action Anderson!

In an effort to get a few more entries I'm making these a bit easier...

UFO

To win a copy of Vol 1 of *UFO* answer the following: What does SHADO stand for?

The Protectors

To win a copy of the three CD boxed set of *The Protectors* answer the following: What was the name of the character that Robert Vaughn played?

Answers by Aug 10, please, to the main editorial address.

THE Protectors
© 2002 Fox 2000 Studios. All rights reserved.
Produced by Gary Anderson
Directed by Michael Crichton
Written by Michael Crichton
Music by Alan Silvestri
Starring: Robert Vaughn, Diane Venora, Dennis Hopper, Michael Crichton, Alan Alda, and others.
A Kiosk of Wild Pictures