

# FIRST CONTACT

The Newsletter of the Irish Science Fiction Association

Volume 2, Number 7

August, 1995

ISSN 0791-3966

## Michael O'Hare in Dublin

It seems only a couple of months (well, it was) since I reported a Babylon 5 convention in DCU and a trek convention in the RDS. Well, they're back. If you attended the first Jumpgate, you'll definitely want to be at the second. It'll cost a few quid more -- £10 -- but this is due to the higher cost of getting Michael O'Hare to attend. Seating is limited, so e-mail [babylon5@dcu.ie](mailto:babylon5@dcu.ie) ASAP.

## Worf for Deep Space Nine

It's been rumoured for a while now that Paramount were talking to Michael Dorn to discuss his joining the Deep Space Nine cast in an attempt to attract the Next Generation viewers who've given up on the programme. And, despite numerous magazine reports this month to the contrary, it looks as if Dorn has agreed to once again spending hours a day in the make-up chair and will oversee Federation security on the station.

## X-Files Crossover

There were hints that The X-Files was going to have a crossover with a programme called Picket Fences, which would have been unfortunate for those of us who're unable to see it as one part would have been shown in each of the shows. Rejoice, however, as the idea's been axed. However, you can look for-

ward to seeing Kyle McLachlan reprising his Twin Peaks role of Special Agent Dale Cooper in a third season episode of the X-Files. Rumour has it that David Lynch will direct the episode.

## There Can Be Only Four

The first one was wonderful, the second sucked and I didn't see the third. Now for those of you out there who like that sort of thing, there's a fourth Highlander movie on its way. It's called *Highlander: The Immortals*, so I guess it won't be about normal humans.

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## Stuff that's Inside

1. News; in which the highlights of the SF world are brought to your very fingertips.
5. Video Review; what was the Timewarp 2 video *really* like?
6. Letters
7. Films; Judge Dredd vs Batman
9. The Good Guide to Bad Reviewing; or *How not to do it*.
11. Book reviews; lots of 'em.
20. Jumpgate; you've read about the second one; now find out how cool the first one was.

## Editorial

A pox on email! A thousand days of painful piles to whomever decided that promised articles wouldn't appear because of e-mails bouncing back to their owners. Well, no more! From now on, First Contact will be written in crayon, and each copy will be individually hand-numbered. No more computers for me. Submissions must be written in vermilion, and on refill pads. Three hundred fonts on my machine? Pshaw! If god had meant us to use computers, he would have built a serial port in the back of our necks.

However, the dearth of stuff this month means that I'm fairly certain that next month you've a cornucopia of goodies awaiting you. I'll reveal none of the details now, letting you instead spend the next thirty days pondering; what's going to be in it? I make no claims; you'll have to wait and see.

Meanwhile, a comics reviewer is still needed. As long as you can write 500-1,000 words on a few releases each month, then you'll be welcomed here with open arms, a mug of Blue Mountain and a chocey bickey (while supplies last).

Robert, Man of Destiny  
The Dark Editor Returns

FIRST CONTACT is published monthly by  
THE IRISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION  
21, St. Joseph's Road  
AUGHRIM STREET  
Dublin 7  
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It was the noon of the second age of mankind, fifty years after the second world war. The First Contact project was a dream given form. Its goal: to provide a place where SF fans and trekkies could work out their differences. It was a port of call, a home away from home for readers, X-Philes, fantasy fans and trekkies. Writers and artists, whose work remains copyright (c) 1995 the respective creators, wrapped in twenty pages of photocopy paper, all alone in the night. It can be a dangerous place, but it's our last, best hope for a monthly newsletter. This is a copy of the last of the newsletters (up to now). The year is 1995. The name of the newsletter is First Contact.

...contd from page 1

### Book News

#### As if Seven Wasn't Enough

It looks as if L. Rob Hubbard set a trend after his second death, and it's no longer to count one's demise as an excuse to stop writing. Since his death a few years ago, there've been numerous books with Isaac Asimov's name on the cover; some expansions of Asimov's short stories, some anthologies in which Asimov's participation ranged from almost none right down to bugger all. Latest in this trend is an announcement that HarperCollins have commissioned three new Foundation novels by three authors. The first of these, *Foundation's Fear*, is to be written by Gregory Benford. This will doubtless be better than Asimov's own last three Foundation books; reading *Foundation and Earth* is still an experience I'm trying to forget.

### TV News

#### New Captain for seaQuest

After Roy Scheider decided that he wasn't getting enough creative control — I guess he thinks the show sucks as well — Michael Ironside will take over as captain of the seaQuest, beating Clancy Brown to the position. You'll remember Ironside losing his arms in *Total Recall* and blasting lizards in *V*, if you were unfortunate enough to have seen the series. Scheider will appear in five episodes, having been promoted to Admiral.

#### Doctor Who Returns

The BBC have announced that they'll be making a two-hour Doctor Who movie with Universal Television. That's

two American hours, remember; it's ninety minutes to the rest of us. It'll be written by Matthew Jacobs, the man behind such epics as *Lassie*. I can see it now. "K-9! What is it?" "I think I want you to follow me!"

#### New Programmes for '96

Coming soon to Channel 4 is *American Gothic*, a programme that sounds suspiciously it was made to cash in on the current *X-Files* mania. I can't help wondering when it'll be shown; C4 have a policy of showing only homegrown programmes during prime time, so it'll have to be either stuck in *Babylon 5*'s six o'clock spot, or shown after ten.

Also coming soon is *Third Rock from the Sun*, a comedy starring John Lithgow as the leader of a team of aliens sent to observe Earth, which they do by pretending to be a family. I wonder will Lithgow's character be called Mork?

Oh, and the BBC have bought *Space : Above and Beyond*. However, as BSkyB were one of the backers of the show, don't expect to see it on terrestrial TV until after Sky have finished showing it.

#### B5 is Back

Did anyone notice that smug announcement on Channel 4 about showing *Babylon5* for the first time anywhere in the world? And the episode itself... mind-blowing. Awesome stuff. Check out the remaining three episodes -- before our American chums -- Tuesdays at 6:00.

### Movie News

#### Emma to Play Emma?

It seems that we won't have to see

Sharon Stone in the role of Emma Peel in the Avengers movie after all; if director Nicholas Meyer gets his way, we'll see Emma Thompson playing her instead. Hurrah! By the way, it looks as if Mel Gibson is too busy to play Steed, so if you're interested, send Meyer a copy of your CV.

### **Avast, Me Hearties!**

After a lull of a number of years, it seems that Robert Louis Stephenson is once again popular with film makers. Currently on the drawing board is a really cheesy-sounding adaptation of Treasure Island called Treasure Planet. Much more interesting sounding is The Muppets' Treasure Island, which features the usual suspects as well as Tim Curry as Long John Silver. But best of all, it's got Sam the Eagle in it

### **Fan News**

#### **Visicon Is Go**

DCU seems to be the venue of choice for media conventions at the moment; not only is it the site of two Jumpgates (well, the second is coming), but Visicon, a Star Trek convention, is being held at that very location in -- can you wait? -- June 22-23, 1996. With guests from both Deep Space Nine and Voyager (Nana Visitor and Robert Picardo, respectively), it promises to be most entertaining. Write to Visicon, PO Box 1996, Dublin 14, including the obligatory SAE.

### **Stargazer Con Is On (again)**

After what appeared a distinctly half-arsed attempt at organizing a professional

Trek con -- which was cancelled without any notice -- Stargazer Productions are once again trying to bring the stars to the RDS. Although Armin Shimmerman has been dropped from the list, it's a creditable lineup, including Dean Stockwell (Quantum Leap), Claudia Christian & Jerry Doyle (Babylon 5) and Denise Crosby (Star Trek : The Next Generation).

However, if you're only interested in seeing one guest, you'll have to gamble on the day you attend as each of the guests will only be there on specific (undisclosed) days, and may only be signing autographs for one hour. And at a price of £37 per day, you'd better guess right. For details, write to Stargazer Productions, 22 Reindeer Court, Worcester, WR1 2DS, England. To book your ticket, phone (01)456-9569.

### **Random Stuff**

#### **US Allows Entry to Aliens**

The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service allowed entry to two aliens from outer space early last month, it was revealed. The two aliens, Vladimir Dezhurov and Gennady Strekalov, have been on the Mir space station for the past three months, and were returned to Earth in Atlantis. Our cosmonautological chums forgot to apply for entry visas, and so the US state department requested a waiver for them so they wouldn't be arrested by the INS on landing.

# Video Review

## **Timewarp 2 : The Video, 60 mins. approx, £6**

Timewarp, if you remember, was a Star Trek convention held in Malahide, with well over 1,000 trekkies gathered under one roof to celebrate the phenomenon that is Star Trek Fandom. There with their video cameras, recording all for posterity, were Mascon, and the result of all this filming is a nicely put together, one hour video that can be yours for the price of a paperback. Worth it? Well, that's up to you.

Interspersed with the trademark Mascon computer animation, Timewarp 2 : The Video has little by way of structure; random interviews with passing attendees along with a number of passages from Guest of Honour Majel Barret's speeches. This is a technique that works well, and shows that the film's editors have learnt from previous experiences. On the first Timewarp video, George Takei's talk was slapped onto the video in one long sequence, testing the patience of even the most ardent trekkie. Having it spread through the tape in smaller sections makes it much more palatable, and provides a little framework for the video as a whole. Of course, I've no interest in hearing what Majel Barret has to say, so I must confess to fast forwarding through her speeches after the first thirty seconds.

Any major part of a Trek con is the video room, which is difficult to cover in any recording of the event such as this video. However, attendees were asked their opinions on the Voyager pilot, which many saw at the con for the first time. Coverage of the dealers' room was much more extensive, and good fun to watch. Asking the dealers their opinions of trekkies resulted in a number of diplomatic (and some less than tactful) responses, and the general tone of the video showed a convention that the dealers enjoyed as much as the attendees.

Coverage of the masquerade and disco was standard fare for this sort of video, with the inevitable Star Trekkin' making another unwelcome appearance. However, there were some nifty shots of the contenders in the masquerade, particularly of the two winners.

My main complaint is that Mascon seem to have fallen into the familiar trap of interviewing, in the most part, the same people who always get interviewed at conventions. The camera people seem happier interviewing their friends or people who they know will give a suitable response, which means that, while the video will appeal greatly to anyone in it, it holds slightly less appeal for the other 1,000 people who were there. The Octocon table in particular seemed to be quite prominent, and this prominence got annoying after a while, especially as little was said of Octocon or Timewarp.

All in all, though, an entertaining video. Much tighter than some previous offerings. Timewarp 2 : The Video will make good watching for anyone who was at the convention; it's perhaps less interesting for those who weren't there.

You know what these are, don't you? Yes, they're made of plastic and you use them to stick things on the fridge.

## Letters

Dear Editor,

While I've enjoyed the last few news letters, but I can't help wondering if the ISFA isn't getting a little stale. If they even still exist, of course! Because there used to be a report on what the ISFA was up to, and what they're going to be up to next. But these days it seems, that the newsletter exists completely on its own, in isolation from the rest of the others.

I realise that the ISFA committee changes from time to time, and that it always takes a few months for a new committee to settle in and get used to the way things were before. but even so, I'm sure that they know what they've got planned for future meetings, and surely this information could be passed on to you for inclusion in your mag?

Perhaps I should explain what I meant when I wrote "even if they still exist" above: I didn't mean it to be rude, but instead to show that I was trying to indicate a sense of loss. I think the old days were better, sometimes, but especially when it seems like everyone wanted to go to the meetings. Now, everyone just seems to not even bother much. I don't even know if I'll bother rejoining when my membership expires.

That's all I have to say for the moment. Thanks for a great news letter.

*A Concerned Reader*

*Editor's Reply: Cor! Another anonymous letter! Can it be that the members of the ISFA too cowardly to print their own names? Can it be that they fear the wrath of the committee? Can it be that we're so stuck for letters that we've decided to Heck with it, let's print any dumb thing we get?*

*Well, yes, to the latter at any rate. Our con-*

*cerned reader does make some interesting points, though: Should First Contact be more concerned with the month-to-month happenings of the ISFA? Acons ago a decision was made by our forebears that - as many First Contact readers don't live in Dublin - it would not dwell on events to which they were unprivvy. Of course, it has occurred to me that as First Contact receives sod-all in the way of feedback, I can do whatever the Hell I like with it. And no-one but these anonymous creeps - who don't count - are going to say anything. So, from next issue, First Contact will be reduced to a single, one-sided A4 sheet, and the price will be increased to £5 an issue.*

Yo, Rob...

Stick this in First Contact... There's a guy called Hugh R. Rutgen from the US who contacted me over the net. He's interested in putting together a database of Irish sf/fantasy/horror writers. He says that each person should have at least one sf-related article or story published before they're eligible. Anyway, I don't know whether you want to put this in the news section or with the letters, but the guy can (probably) be contacted at:

hhughrr@aol.master.enrey.gpo

I say "probably", because all my messages keep bouncing back, so I don't know if he's still at that address.

Mike.

*Editor's Note: Michael Carroll included the above note with the disk containing his Batman Forever review. I decided to include the text verbatim, because I couldn't be bothered retyping and paraphrasing it. If anyone can get through to Mr Rutgen, please let us know.*

Two tickets in the no-talking section, please... Yes, it's time for some

## Film Reviews

### *Judge Dredd*

*Starring Sylvester Stallone, Diane Lane*

*Dir. Danny Cannon, 90 mins.*

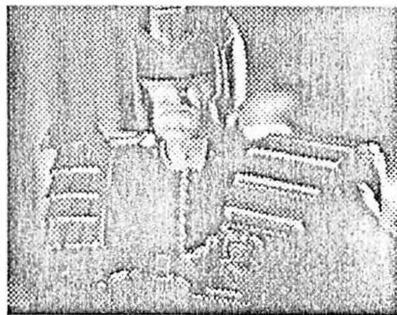
"I am... the law!" quoth the Judge as he stands between two warring blocks. As if anyone dares to doubt this, he proceeds to prove it, by blowing away seven creeps who had the misfortune to come up against the wrong judge. Thus we are introduced to Judge Dredd in the guise of Sylvester Stallone.

Judge Dredd is a film that can be, if you'll excuse the word, judged on two levels; as a plain old gung-ho actioner, and as a film adaptation of what has become a comics institution. The man who has missed only two issues in what is fast approaching its thousandth issue has been etched indelibly into the skulls of those of us who've been reading the comic for years, and there are thousands of squaxx dek Thargo out there who'll be very critical of any changes made.

Changes are, of course, inevitable, and the most obvious one is that we get to see Dredd's face; in fact, apart from the opening minutes, he rarely wears the helmet. This caused howls of protest from readers, and was considered by many to be unforgivable. This is, of course, a ridiculous attitude; in 2000AD the fact that Dredd never removed his helmet was parodied in the story itself; I remember one prog where we see Dredd, complete with helmet, taking a bath. This sort of thing illustrates exactly how serious we should be taking the 'forever helmeted' dictum, and the writers were right to ignore any silly protests.

Having said that, though, it must be said that the helmet is more than a Judge's hat. It's an icon; it represents Judge Dredd more than anything else. When Hershey calls out to Dredd in the film, the person we see answer is Sylvester Stallone, Star of Action Movies Like This One. I've had no problems with Stallone in the past; in fact Demolition Man was a won-

derful movie. However, in this I found it hard to separate the actor from the character. This could be down to any number of reasons, none of them, I suspect, the writers' fault. Put it down to my having, instead of a life, a wardrobe full of back progs of 2000AD.



That niggle notwithstanding, the writers and director did a creditable job of bringing Dredd to the screen. I feared the worst when I heard the film was being made, but Danny Cannon has done a great job of bringing Mega City One to life. In the initial stages it looked as if he was ripping a few pages out of Ridley Scott's book as far as atmosphere was concerned, but as the film settled down Cannon's own style broke through, and a fine style it is too. The bad guys of the piece, The Angel Gang, Rico and an ABC warrior, are all displayed wonderfully, and my only niggle is that Rico wasn't also played by Stallone. Not that Armand Assante didn't do a fine job, but you'd expect that as they're clone brothers, they'd look exactly alike.

Obviously, the film concentrates on our eponymous chum, and as far as the character goes the writers have followed the comics Dredd very closely, adding only a close relationship with the still-living Judge Fargo. It manages to show quite sympathetically the doubt Dredd feels when he has to question whether the law in fact is always right, and all in all the film Dredd is a much more three-dimensional char-

acter than the comics Dredd.

OK, so let's ignore the fact that this is an adaptation. What was it like as a movie? Well, I must say I enjoyed it a lot. As someone who has fifteen years' of Judge Dredd stacked in the aforementioned wardrobe, I entered the cinema fully expecting to hate the film. However, as action movies go, this was definitely one of the better ones. It contains its fair share of silly scenes and some scientific ideas that are most generously described as 'dubious,' but in the whole it's an entertaining ninety minutes that was three quid well spent.

Robert Elliott

*Batman Forever*

*Starring Val Kilmer, Jim Carrey*

*Dir. Joel Schumacher, 122 mins.*

You all know what the movie's about: so I won't rehash the plot - What? You want a summary? Well, okay, very quickly then... Bruce Wayne rejects an invention of his admiring employee Edward Nygma. Hungry for revenge, Nygma uses the invention to make himself into an evil genius. He becomes The Riddler. Meanwhile, ex-District Attorney Harvey Dent, half of whose face was hideously scarred in a courtroom acid-throwing incident, kills the parents and sibling of young circus acrobat Dick Grayson, who vows revenge. Nygma seeks out Dent, and together they plan to destroy Batman, who - in his Bruce Wayne alter-ego - regrets that he was unable to save Grayson's family, and subsequently offers to take in the young man. But Bruce is not without problems of his own: he's haunted by childhood memories, and is a patient of the attractive psychiatrist Doctor Chase Meridian, with whom he is secretly in love. But Chase rejects Bruce, for she is in love with Batman, without knowing that Wayne and Batman are one and the same. Meanwhile, Derek and Angela need half a million dollars for an operation to help save young Timmy's life, but Derek's rich step-aunt, Clarissa, is still furious over not being invited to the wedding, and refuses to speak to them... Now read on.

As a sequel, *Batman Forever* doesn't quite

tie in with its forerunners. Mainly because Bruce Wayne is younger, and I don't just say that because he's played by a younger actor. Kilmer plays Wayne as a charming, intelligent and slightly naive person, whereas Michael Keaton played him as more of a loner, as someone who has been through the mill and discovered he doesn't like flour. Kilmer's interpretation is more fitting for this movie's intended lighter tone (bad dreams notwithstanding): *Batman* and *Batman Returns* were adult movies. *Batman Forever* is a family movie, but thankfully without all the saccharine that the phrase might suggest.



The inclusion of Robin / Dick Grayson should a long way towards making *Batman Forever* more accessible to younger viewers, but it doesn't. In many ways, Grayson is much darker, more adult than Wayne. Instead of the young teenage Robin we've come to expect, Chris O'Donnell's character is in his early twenties (at least, he looks and acts it... I don't remember if his age is ever mentioned in the movie). Half-way through the movie he witnesses his family's death at the hands of Two-Face, and boy, does he get moody. Not that I blame him, but he's definitely not a chirpy little Robin. He wears an earring, drives a motorbike and takes the Batmobile out for a joyride. What sort of message is this sending to our kids?

The villains of the piece are Tommy Lee Jones as Harvey Dent / Two-Face and Jim Carrey as Edward Nygma / The Riddler. I have to admit I was a bit disappointed with both of



them. As the movie presents the story, Two-Face has been in action for some time, and we're supposed to believe that he doesn't really become dangerous until he teams up with the Riddler. I reckon it was the wrong way around: it would have made more sense to have the Riddler as a nuisance character, not really evil, and have him recruited by Harvey Dent when he becomes Two-Face. Of the two, Harvey is the more interesting character, but he's forced to take a side-line (i.e., he's the one who Robin gets to beat up, therefore he's less dangerous) to Carrey's Riddler. Both actors do as good a job as you'd expect, but neither are anything special.

As for the supporting characters: Nicole Kidman is believable as the token female / love interest. She doesn't have a tremendous amount to do, but she does it well. Brilliant as ever is Michael Gough as Alfred... there is some fine rapport between himself and Grayson. Pat Hingle is thankfully given a lot more lines this time around, but still not enough. The Batman movies continually ignore the relationship between Commissioner Gordon and Batman. I'd like to see the next movie address this.

So what did I think of it? Well, the movie was spoiled for me by four things: Number one, the kid behind us who wouldn't shut up. Evidently his father is deaf and followed the movie by lip-reading. Number two, the guy in front of us who kept rummaging through a big plastic bag. Number three, the geeky teenager beside me who only stopped talking to his mates when I tapped him on the shoulder and said "Shut up or die." Number four, the trailer for *Judge Dredd*, which completely blew me away.

All those things considered, I enjoyed the movie. If I hadn't been so tense from all the distractions, I might have enjoyed it more. I'll have to see it again, but at this stage I believe it's far better than the boring and overrated *Batman*, but not quite as good as the brilliant and underrated *Batman Returns*.

Michael Carroll

## The Good Guide to Bad Reviewing

This is a game anyone can play: You work on a newspaper or movie magazine. You start out with 100 points, and the object is to review some SF-related stuff while retaining as many points as possible.

Here are the rules:

Okay. You've just reviewed the *Judge Dredd* movie. If you've used the word "Dreddful", subtract five points. If you've mentioned similarities between Mega-City One and *Blade Runner*'s Los Angeles, subtract another three. If you've referred to Dredd as a fascist, lose another five. Lose three points for every mention of *Robocop*. Lose five points for any mention of Sylvester Stallone's height. Lose two points for calling him "Sly", and another two for calling him "the Italian Stallion." If you've said "the real stars of the film are, of course, the special effects," lose ten points.

All right, then... You've reviewed *Batman Forever*. Lose eight points for beginning your review with "Holy sequels, Batman!" or anything similar. Lose two points for every reference to the Adam West *Batman* series, and another two for calling it "the camp 60s show". Lose ten points for any pun on Dark Knight. Subtract a further ten points for mentioning that Nicole Kidman is Tom Cruise's wife. Subtract eight and a half points for using the phrase "bring the kiddies." If you've said "the real stars of the film are, of course, the special effects," lose ten points.

You've just reviewed *Star Trek: Generations*. Lose ten points for beginning the review with "Beam down to your local cinema." Lose twenty points for mentioning Doctor Spock. Lose another twenty for using the phrase "to boldly go", and while

you're there, lose another five for making the usual crack about split infinitives. Lose four points for mentioning William Shatner's wig, and another four for calling him "T.J. Hooker". If you've picked on *Deep Space Nine* for no reason, subtract five points. Lose ten points if you've said "the real stars of the film are, of course, the special effects."

General rules for SF movies: Lose four points for any mention of "Sci-Fi". Lose ten points for the phrase "blockbuster extravaganza". Lose ten points for mentioning the movie's budget. If you've mentioned *Star Wars* or *Blade Runner* (and they're not directly connected with the movie), subtract another five points. Lose twenty points for any phrase such as "Sci-Fi has come a long way since the old *Flash Gordon* serials." And, of course, lose ten points for "the real stars of the film are, of course, the special effects."

Or you can review books. Any mention of Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett, J.R.R. Tolkien or Stephen King - unless directly related - automatically loses ten points (and a further ten if you have the word "comparable" in there somewhere). Lose another six points for mentioning Asimov's three laws of robotics, and lose a further five for listing them in a little box underneath a picture of C-3PO labelled "R2D2 from Star Wars." Subtract ten points if you called Anne McCaffrey a fantasy author. Lose thirty points for reviewing fantasy or horror books in your Sci-Fi section.

Alternatively... You've written a newspaper article about comics. Lose ten points for the headline "Bam! Pow! Comics aren't just for Kids!" Lose five points for any mention of *The Beano* or *The Dandy*. Lose five points for the phrase "gaudily-clad superheroes". For any review where the you give more words to the shiny cover than to the contents, lose four points. Subtract everything you have left for making jokes about Superman wearing his underpants outside his

trousers.

If you have less than minus 100 points, you can get a job writing reviews for one of the Irish or British daily newspapers. But remember... you should never, ever like what you review. If you do, you'll be fired immediately (unless it's a movie and the movie's distribution company has taken out a large ad in the paper, in which case you are obliged to give it a positive review without mentioning what you thought of it). However, you can also lose a further fifty points if you include a "competition" to win one of only two hundred thousand movie posters.

Ahem. Bitter? Me? Never. I just wish that those people out there knew what they were talking about. Would you respect a reviewer who opened his review of *Unforgiven* with "I don't normally watch westerns, but ..." For that matter, would you review a western, or a war movie, or something else with which you're not too familiar? Of course not.

Yet those lucky sods in the media who are paid good money to write reviews generally can't tell the difference between *Babylon 5* and *Lord of the Rings*. They bring their photographers to conventions where they interview the Klingons and ignore the authors. They make copious references to train-spotting and anoraks. They visit the dealers' room and pick up Captain Kirk action figures, and ignore the hundreds of SF books. They ask the attendees about their numerous badges, without ever trying to understand what the badges are for. And they *always* make some comment about "Beaming down."

So... If you've been wondering whether to go and see *Judge Dredd* or *Batman Forever*, or any of the numerous new SF movies, don't bother reading the reviews in the papers. Read the reviews in *First Contact* or some other respected SF journal. You owe it to your intelligence.

Michael Carroll

Hrm. It looks as if only three people read books this month. Or maybe everyone read the same books. Where are the reviews from the rest of you?

## Book Reviews

*The Fugitive Stars*, Daniel Ransom, Daw, \$4.99, pp288

Daniel Ransom, we are assured by no less than a personage than Dean R. Koontz, is "one of the best." His writing, apparently, is "strong, fast and sleek as a bullet." No other quotes adorn this book, but surely the one is enough to convince even the most hardened of souls to consider this tome?

I've got nothing against quotes, even when it's obvious — as in this case — that our Daniel asked his old pal Dean for a quote for his book. However, it grates a bit when the book you've just spent a fiver on turns out to be a somewhat silly yarn with little going for it.

*The Fugitive Stars* is a tome that, initially, reads like a children's book. At 288 pages, it's small enough by today's standards, and when you add in the huge leading and chunky type, mixed lovingly with a rather simple style, you're left with the inescapable conclusion that this book was originally intended for the YA market, and only later were the swear words and the odd reference to sex thrown in to make it an 'adult' book.

The plot, such as it is, concerns Michael Raines, a telepath who stumbles onto what the blurb describes as a conspiracy of 'extraterrestrial proportions,' whatever the hell that means, and only he (naturally) can stop it.

The nature of the conspiracy concerns an alien virus that, once it infects a victim, takes over their mind, the only hints being a rash on the arm that soon disappears and a strange orange glow in the eyes that,

fortunately for all concerned, doesn't. Will our Michael be able to stop this conspiracy before it spreads to the Oval office, and thence the world? Find out for yourself: you can either read the book or ask me in person. I recommend the latter method as being a lot less painful.

There's only one real problem with this book; its plot. The characterisation is fine, and the writing, once you get used to its simplistic style, is ok. However, the plot's just too silly. What started out with a hint of a promise of a bit of real science quickly evaporates into this 'orange eyes' silliness, the sort of thing only ten-year olds and trekkies can take seriously. The ending, too, smacks a bit too much of deus ex machina (oops, have I given something away?), and even though Ransom was leading up to this ending for at least fifty pages, it still comes as something of a disappointment that he didn't have something more plausible in mind.

If you're determined to read this book, I suggest that you head to your local video library and rent 'Conspiracy,' a first-season episode of *Star Trek : The Next Generation*. It's got the same cheesy plot, and cooler special effects.

**Robert Elliott**

*The Ferengi Rules of Acquisition*, Ian Stephen Behr, Pocket Books, pp84, £3.99

All over the world, even as we speak, jealous writers are gnashing their teeth and wondering why they didn't think of it first. Imagine, a sure-fire best-seller that requires no writing, and little work beyond watching about fifty hours of *Star Trek : Deep*

*Space Nine* (although some would say that that alone is worth his advance).

The Ferengi Rules of Acquisition, in case you didn't know, are 285 rules that govern the way the Ferengi do business. Each episode of Deep Space Nine reveals one or two more, and each time one was revealed, Behr wrote it in his little notebook and waited for the day when he could walk into Pocket Books and say "I've got this cool idea for a book."

So far, about eighty rules have been revealed, and these rules are the only ones to appear in the book. Behr hasn't added any, ensuring the future accuracy of his little book.

During my many years' experience of dealing with trekkies, I've seen them do some ridiculous things. I've seen people pay huge wedges of cash for the most unbelievably tacky merchandise, I've seen them pay fifteen pounds for one trading card. But I don't see about everything when I see this book sell out; most shops are on their second orders.

If you're all into Deep Space Nine, you probably already know the rules of acquisition; if you don't, then let me assure you now that "Win or lose, there's always Hyperian Beetle Snuff" (rule #65). I'm still hoping someone will explain that one to me.

By the way, Behr left out rule #286; "When Mom leaves, it's all over." Of course, this is one made up by Quark, so I suppose he had a reason (I looked it up, by the way. Research. I didn't know it).

It's become a truism of reviewing Trek shite that ninety-five per cent of readers will take no notice of the review; they'll buy it or leave it on the basis of the words 'Star Trek.' As I write this, I've no doubt that there are hundreds of demented individuals around the country learning off rule #109 ("Dignity and the empty sack is worth the sack")

and that thousands more will rush out and start a-learning as soon as they find out the book exists. To you people, I salute your monomania. Happy studying.

**Robert Elliott**

*Babylon 5 #2 : Accusations, Lois Tilton, Bantam, £4.99*

After the disappointment that was the first Babylon 5 novel by John Vornholt, I must confess to being a trifle trepidant about approaching this second one; I've never read a book by Lois Tilton, and resolved that if it was crap, I'd leave the rest alone unless they were written by real authors. Fortunately for both J. Michael Straczynski's royalty cheque and my book collection, it proved to be a damn fine book, and well worth reading regardless of whether you're as rabid about the series as some of us seem to be.

The plot centres around Commander Ivanova, and the problems she faces when she comes under suspicion of murder and terrorism. Her academy flight instructor turns up on the station and asks to meet her, and soon turns up, shall we say, metabolically challenged. Garibaldi starts to investigate, but the case is soon handed over to a couple of security dudes from Earth Central who don't know Ivanova like we do, and promptly accuse her of all sorts of heinous stuff.

Unlike the first B5 novel, this has characters that are consistent with the series; apart from a couple of niggles about Ivanova herself, all the main players present are represented fairly. None of the ambassadors is present (although G'Kar is on the cover of the book), and the action revolves around Ivanova, with supporting roles from Talia Winters and Garibaldi.

The main problem with this sort of novel (and, I suppose, all Star Trek novels, X-Files novels...) is that because they rarely

take place at the point from which we've seen the series, more stuff has happened that we're not supposed to know about (which can make for some nice foreshadowing, or can be annoying), but more often it manages to ruin any suspense: we always know what the result of Ivanova's suspension will be: we've seen the next episode. Of course, no writer could get away with doing anything major in a novel, but even the minor things that occur are without suspense, as we're already aware of the results. This, however, is only a small cavil that's true of every book of its type, and not a complaint that can be levelled at this tome in particular. Sorry I mentioned it, really.

But back to this book. It's tautly plotted, and well told. The characters all interact well for the most part (the occasional hiccup I mentioned earlier is actually some of the conversation between Winters and Ivanova), and there's none of that ridiculous description of Talia Winters' body parts every two pages that suffused Vornholt's novel.

It's kind of unfortunate that Vornholt is writing the next book, as I'd much rather see a second novel from Lois Tilton instead.

Robert Elliott

*The Bohr Maker, Linda Nagata, Bantam Spectra, \$4.99, pp325*

It's been a while since we've seen a definite trend emerge in SF: the last one I can think of is the Cyberpunk explosion of the early 90s. However, it seems that more and more people are now jumping on the Nanotechnology bandwagon: and it's a bandwagon I can only see becoming more popular.

Although there are quite a few nanotech novels around, few of them are great, and fewer still manage to grasp the major significance that nanotechnology is going to

play in the future. In fact, I can only think of two novels: Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* and Linda Nagata's *The Bohr Maker*.

Comparisons with *The Diamond Age* are inevitable: not only are they both concerned with nanotechnology, but both feature young girls who, unbeknownst to themselves, have been influenced heavily by the use of nanotech: there are other similarities as well. This isn't to say that the book is a rip-off: they came out within a couple of months of each other, and it's just unfortunate for Nagata that Stephenson got there first.

The Bohr Maker of the title is a nanotech device that, once 'installed' in a user, gives them abilities that to the uninitiated (which includes most of the population) appear as magic. When Phousita, an uneducated girl living in the slums of Sanda, ingests the Maker accidentally, she is given almost messianic status by her peers as she has the ability to heal people of any disease. Hot on her heels, though, are a number of people, all of whom want control of the Maker for different reasons. There's Nikko who was bioengineered, and has an expiration date that's rapidly approaching, and Kirstin, a cop for the commonwealth, a union of worlds united in their attempts to control the effects of nanotechnology. The race is on to see who'll get to Phousita first, and what they'll do with the Maker if they ever manage to get control of it.

For me, the best thing about the novel was the world in which the book takes place. The Commonwealth for which Kirstin works is a paranoid amalgam of countries, united in their attempts to control nanotechnology. No-one must have technology greater than that of the police, and they're willing to go to extremes to ensure that this is the case.

As first novels go, this is one of the best

I've read in a long time. The plotting is taut, while taking nothing away from the superb detail of the world that's been created. The characters are believable, and Nagata does a creditable job of showing each viewpoint. The effects of nanotech have been carefully extrapolated with a detail that's all too lacking in other stories of this type. All in all, a wonderful book.

**Robert Elliott**

*Doom: Knee Deep in the Dead, Dafydd ab Hugh & Brad Linaweaver, Pocket, \$4.99, pp250*

I've read books based on computer games before. *Bard's Tale* books are standard questy types, and the *Wing Commander* novels are standard space opera. But how do you write a book based on *Doom*? The whole point of the game is to go around with a shotgun blasting everything that moves; I was half expecting a story along the lines of "I shot a monster, and turned a corner I shot another monster. I reloaded. Then I shot another monster." Thankfully, there's a little more to the book than that. Not *much* more, but enough to ensure that it isn't a struggle to get through the 250 pages.

As in the game *Doom*, there's little point in mentioning the plot; it only gets in the way of the blasting. The action takes place on Phobos and Deimos, and involves a Marine by the name of Flynn Taggart, described by the blurb as the best warrior the twenty-first century has to offer. The book starts the same way as the game, with our hero having nothing but a handgun, and as he goes on his carnage-ridden way, he picks up bigger and stronger weapons, climaxing in the BFG 9000 (or Big Freakin' Gun, as our hero calls it; this is one Marine who doesn't swear).

The book follows the game quite closely; so closely, in fact, that anyone who's

played the game will recognise a number of levels. The only real difference is that our hero is joined later on in the tale by a couple of other people; in the game you stand alone.

I've never read anything by Dafydd ab Hugh before, though I've heard a number of people say nice things about his *Deep Space Nine* novel. This book is in the main well-written, although a little judicious editing wouldn't have gone amiss; the word 'literally' pops up far too often, and frequently quite inappropriately. There's also the case of the monster that's described as 'running around like a chicken with its legs chopped off'; obviously a talented chicken.

If you don't expect much by way of a story, then you won't be disappointed by this book. Anyone who's spent ages going through the game surely has the couple of hours necessary to read this book, but I must confess that as I ploughed my way through, I was feeling a little guilty about wasting my time on such mindless stuff. The back of the book tells us in huge letters that this is 'in the grand tradition of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*', a comment with which I must respectfully disagree. While similar in tone, I'll take Heinlein's opus any day over this. Having said that, this is a quiet, inoffensive read that'll appeal to lovers of mindless violence everywhere.

**Robert Elliott**

*Larque on the Wing, Nancy Springer, AvonNova, \$4.99, pp277*

*Larque on the Wing* is, if I may be permitted a brief lapse into technical jargon, a weird bugger of a book. An urban fantasy, it focuses on one Larque Harootunian, and her life as a wife and mother. That is, until she decides to become a man, and enters a strange area of town known as Popular

Street. Here she meets Shadow, who moulds here into a new form, but still female. A quick trip to the Penis shop, and a strapadectomy later, and that's rectified. Of course, there's a lot more to the book than that. Larque (or Lark, as her male incarnation is called) and Shadow's lives are entwined, along with such people as Argent (Shadow's lover) and Larque's mother, who herself possesses some strange abilities.

As I said, this book is a fantasy, but a fantasy that's unique in its approach. Larque has the ability to produce 'doppelgangers' of people or objects around her; these doppelgangers are lifelike in every way, and they just appear from nowhere. Those around Larque accept this as being normal, as it's just Larque's way. When the strangeness really starts, it's accepted by most people, despite the fact that nothing like this has happened to them before. It's not even described as 'magic,' in the words of Homer Simpson, it's just a bunch of stuff that happened.

As well as the strangeness of the plot, the book is filled with wonderful characters. The stoic Hoot, Larque's husband, appears only infrequently, but is described wonderfully. Larque's friend Doris is a total flake, but is treated in such a way that she's by no means the pain in the bum such characters normally are.

The best word I can use to describe this book is 'weird.' A wonderfully eccentric novel, I'd probably describe this as my favourite fantasy novel of the year; a position I was convinced *The Thread That Binds the Bones* would keep; silly me. I've never read any of Springer's work before; judging by this novel, that was a tremendous oversight on my part.

**Robert Elliott**

*Mall, Mayhem and Magic, Holly Lisle &*

*Chris Guin, Baen, \$5.99, pp219*

Holly Lisle, we are assured by all manner of blurb at the back of this book, is one of today's rising stars of fantasy. This is a reputation she gained, first by co-writing with such luminaries as Mercedes Lackey and S.M. Stirling, and later through her own books. This is obviously a favour she's returning, and has lent her name to Chris Guin's opus in an attempt to sell a few copies. A few novels down the road, and doubtless we'll see Chris Guin lending his name to some new hopeful.

Of course, it's possible that Lisle did more than just lend her name and possibly some proofreading to this book, but I doubt it. For a start, it's dedicated to her. She also gets thanked in the acknowledgments, hardly what one expects of a co-author. Okay, so she didn't write the book. Let's ignore that fact, and examine it like any book that isn't a blatant attempt at conning the readership.

*Mall, Mayhem and Magic* is a straightforward, light fantasy. It concerns one Jim Franklin, humble bookshop worker who yearns for the attention of his co-worker Sharra. Alas, his yearnings remain unreciprocated, so when a grimone falls mysteriously into his hands, he heads straight for the love spells and goes to work.

Alas, all is not as it seems with this tome, and our Jim accidentally opens a bridge between two worlds, dragging four demizens of that other world into ours. Then, elves, larcenous little twelve inch lads and lasses that they are, soon set about their old ways, ripping off jewellery stores and the like.

Things soon start to happen, and we realise that almost no-one is as they appear. If Jim doesn't act soon, he's going to have an evil sorcerer unleashing ravenous hordes of demons on our poor, unsuspect

ing world.

This is a novel that's in no danger of winning any awards. However, if you take it on the level on which it's intended, as a quick, light read, then it's a fun book that'll pass a couple of hours quite painlessly.

Although by no means a comedic novel, it's got some touches that, while they didn't have me rolling around the floor, did cause the odd snirk or giggle.

If you're one of those people who absolutely can't stand 'happy elf' fantasy, then you've already doubtless decided that this isn't the book for you. If, however, you're willing to devote a couple of hours to this 'BERRATED Edge' type of fantasy, then you won't be disappointed.

Robert Elliott

*Nanodreams*, Edon Elliott (ed), Baen, pb, \$5.99, pp285

The debate about the perfect form for SF has been going on for many a year now, and it shows no signs of being resolved. Up to now, I've been fairly neutral in this debate, being as I am a fan of both short stories and novels. I imagined that I'd always be that way; I'd never have suspected that one book would be able to convince me. I've yet to be totally convinced, but *Nanodreams* has gone a long way towards placing me in the 'short story' camp.

*Nanodreams* is a collection of short stories and essays on the subject of nanotechnology. As I mentioned earlier in my review of *The Bohr Maker*, nanotechnology is the latest trend in SF, possibly because it's so close to becoming a reality; informed estimates place machines a nanometer or less in size less than twenty years hence. Small wonder, then, that SF writers are leaping onto the bandwagon.

If you've never read anything on nanotechnology, then *Nanodreams* is an

excellent place to start. Containing as it does twelve stories (six original and six reprints) and three essays on the subject, it serves as an excellent introduction to the field and provides a number of viewpoints from both authors and scientists.

Individually, the stories range from good to excellent. Best of the lot is Marc Stiegler's "The Gentle Seduction", followed closely by Charles Sheffield's "Deep Safari" and Gregory Benford's "Statesmen". However, the inclusion of Benford's story bemused me somewhat, as it doesn't seem to deal directly with the subject of nanotechnology, a point he makes in his afterword. However, the connection is there, albeit somewhat tenuously, and it's such a good story I'm willing to forgive a lot.

The essays in the book deal with similar themes to the stories; the future of nanotechnology and its impact on society. There's little by way of jargon or technical information, probably because the field is very much in its infancy and there isn't that much information to disseminate. However, they give a good overview of the field and its history, and of some of the impacts it will have on society.

For me, this book epitomises good science fiction, and has gone a long way towards convincing me that the purest form of SF is not the short story, but the short story anthology with a few essays thrown in. The diversity of authors (of whom, interestingly enough, I've never read seven of the twelve previously) means that we're given a number of viewpoints, each one showing a different way in which nanotechnology can be used or abused. The book perhaps concentrates a little too much on the good points of nanotech, ignoring to some extent the catastrophic side-effects abuse of the technology could bring, but *Nanodreams* nonetheless re-



mains one of the finest examples of SF I've ever read.

**Robert Elliott**

*Name of the Beast, Daniel Easterman, HarperCollins, £4.99*

Wonderful, I thought, a horror thriller. I grabbed Easterman's book and settled myself for a good long read. It started well but then disintegrated into a wad of information given in the ruse of people talking to each other. There was too much. The horror is there and it does retain a lot of the thriller story but it falls flat and I was inclined to skim read many pages.

It's Egypt, 1999, and an Antichrist has come to power. Michael Hunt, of the British Secret Service and A'isha Manfaluti, a beautiful (of course) female archaeologist join forces to stop him... Fanatics of the Islamic Religion become involved and start to act like the Third Reich? The story should have been heart-stopping and I'm mad that Easterman's editor didn't cut the work by about 100 pages deleting all the gratuitous small part characters.

However the story is interesting and towards the end when all the bits have been set in place the real characters in the book act. I still think Easterman should have been told to rewrite and get me more involved. Too many people are introduced at the beginning of a chapter and killed off a few pages further on. The female character was in parts not consistent with the iron in her soul, and from time to time fell into the bimbo class.

I was disappointed it was not more personal with the main characters.

**Nu. Lyons**

*The Quantum Society, Danah Zohar & Ian Marshall, Flamingo, £6.99, pp319*

Mind, Physics and a New Social Vision is the caption written on the cover and to tell

you the truth I thought this book would be a dull and boring reference book to be dipped into when I needed to check a fact. Indeed the scientific wording at the beginning verified my misgivings. Ahh but I was wrong, very wrong. This book is thought provoking and within a few pages it had me caught. I had to read it to the end, talking out loud, disagreeing with or querying an idea.

The idea is that quantum physics is the physics of our century. It overrides the physics of the fixed atom, i.e. that atoms collide and disperse, they are only self contained units. In quantum physics atoms work in unison to create waves. Waves overlap.

If our society is to improve on its sorry lot we must be different and not try to override each other, nor must we give way to each others ideas. We must hold fast with our ideals until the separateness creates waves which would be the embryo of a new order.

The style is engaging and only once falls into the sermon mode. A different type of book; it takes time to read but it is worth the effort even if only to make us wonder. She quotes Alice through the Looking Glass. Read it. It makes the brain cells pay attention.

The first book in the series is called The Quantum Self.

**Nu. Lyons**

*Sleep, Pale Sister: (A Gothic Tale), Joanne Harris, Arrow, £4.99, pp101*

Henry Chester, a Victorian mediocre painter likes pure young girls. He finds his perfect model in nine year old Ellie and ten years later he marries her. But Henry Chester is emotionally disturbed, cannot have normal sex, and returns to the brothel. Ellie takes a lover, Mose Harper, who introduces her to Fanny the owner of the

brothel. Fanny's ten year old daughter had been killed ten years earlier on a night when Henry Chester was present. But no-one can prove he killed young Marta. Fanny encourages Effie to visit and takes her revenge on Henry Chester by psychic means. Joanne Harris tells the story in the first person. It opens with Henry Chester talking to the reader, then Effie tells her story and so on... I found the style interesting and the tale unusual especially when Fanny is introduced and the intrigue begins with each character revealing themselves.

Poor Effie is a pawn in the hands of the other three and she never had a chance from the moment she met Henry Chester. Like taking a roller coaster ride she has no power over her own destiny but must stay on until the end. Not a powerful book but a pleasant read none the less.

**Nu. Lyons**

*The Ghosts of Sleath, James Herbert, HarperCollins, £4.99, pb, pp409*

David Ash, psychic investigator, comes to the village of Sleath, sent for by Grace Lockwood to help her father, the local vicar. One of his parishioners has told him that her dead son has returned to life. The vicar himself has seen the boy. This is the beginning of the ghosts that return to haunt the village. David Ash is there to see if the supernatural is at work and he brings his equipment. But he is tormented by his own past and, as he unfolds the sequence of old horrors in this seemingly innocent village, he suffers.

The dead return to exact blood payment for foul deeds.

James Herbert is a past master at the dark art of horror. He effortlessly draws on the hidden depths of fear and shows how the world is composed of the past and present, but the present is merely a causative factor of the past. Ghosts live on. Some of them,

as well we know, do not pass over to the other world. These are the creatures James Herbert takes to haunt us, because we cannot hide from them.

His style is swift and sure. He brings the reader to each page with high expectations of finding a reason for the terror. Ah! But he's better than that and will not let go until the last page.

A second David Ash book and an excellent read. The jacket illustration is by Bill Gregory and vividly portrays the contents of this beautifully crafted book.

**Nu. Lyons**

*Rama Revealed, Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee, Orbit, £9.99, pb, pp477*

Rama Revealed is the conclusion of the Rama series. It would be helpful if one has read the previous books but not necessary as a brief résumé of the story so far is given at the start, so newcomers to the series can still enjoy this final episode.

Nicole Wakefield, the night before she is to be electrocuted for treason, escapes from New Eden and joins Richard, her husband in that part of Rama they call New York. The next escape brings the whole family and a few friends to join them.

But the soldiers are at their heels. They flee into the subways of New York and are captured by ctospiders. The Aliens refuse to allow them to return to their own kind and force them to live in the alien environment. How the events unfold, to bring the reason for the building and enabling of Rama, to wander through the universe is told in a sure voice.

The style is solid and meaningful. Each chapter shows us more marvels of scientific achievement. The biological achievements are explained in detail and the information is given in such a way so as to be easily available to people like myself who have very little knowledge of these mat-

ters. The aliens are given a moral code similar to that of humans, but then a human is telling the story. Arthur C. Clarke is the master storyteller and along with Gentry Lee he has woven a magical future for mankind. Well, a part of it anyway. Of course as with all good storytellers he knows where to end his story and leaves us in no doubt that the human race along with other aliens are continuing with their journey through life but without us. This is the end and the final explanation of the Rama series.

#### **Nu. Lyons**

*Shadow of a Dark Queen, Raymond E. Feist, HarperCollins, £5.99, pp560*

Raymond E. Feist's words flow in such an unconscious way that the reader has reached page ten before they are aware that he has caught them in the current and is sweeping them out to sea. Needless to say, he is a master at his art and the way he presents the Sauur ensures that you feel so integrated with their plight that when they are cast as the destroyers on the following pages, you can understand why. The story so far, because this is the first part of the Serpentwar Saga, is that the children of the Sauur have to flee their world, the demons are conquering and eating as they come, and go through a magical gate into the world of the Dark Queen 'a distant world under an alien sun.' They have been betrayed and must fight for the Dark Queen.

Feist introduces Erik von Darkmoor, the bastards son of the Baron of Darkmoor.

Erik and his friend Roo kill Erik's brother the baron's heir, and have to flee.

Miranda, a magician, saves them. Later they are sentenced to death only to survive to join a crack team to gather information about the Sauur.

Sorry for the ladies, there are no lady warriors in this book. They only women are a magician, a nasty mother, and victims. But the book, about a man's war, is a good read nevertheless.

#### **Nu. Lyons**

*Flux, Stephen Baxter, HarperCollins, £5.99*

This book is set within the mantle of a star Dura, a human-like occupant, goes on a voyage of discovery along with her compatriots to find out all there is to know about this place with its superfluid air, machines and jet-fart propelled pigs. I kid you not. There's something terribly imaginative about this book and also something quite painful about it to read. The physics of the place are incredible, a feast of the imagination and yet the day-to-day living of the people is dull and totally mundane. Having read *Raft*, which I enjoyed immensely, I feel that the author is trying to create an even more challenging realm which borders more on science fantasy than science fiction. If you're going to read this book, you'd better put your thinking cap on and throw your suspension-of-disbelief right out the window. Recommended for the die hard SF fan.

#### **Martin Brady**

# Jumpgate — The *Babylon 5* Convention

*Saturday, 20th May, DCU-*

*Vincent Canning*

Ah, Jumpgate, what a con! The event itself was scheduled to start at ten of the morning clock on Saturday, but for myself, the excursion began at the slightly earlier time of Friday Evening, when I found myself in a public house imbibing beverages of an alcoholic nature. This results in my failure to arrive home and instead I arose the next morning in the residence of a certain Octocon committee member. Realising that despite wishful thinking, Guinness is not a food, we proceeded to procure some nourishment from a purveyor of fast food known as Supermac's. We were soon joined at this early hour by several other lifeforms of an Octoconic nature, and together we all set off merrily towards that glorious seat of learning that is DCU.

Arriving on the campus, which as someone remarked to me was rather like the village in *The Prisoner* except less animated, we found our way to the convention hall. Upon entering, fashionably late of course, I handed over my £5 only to have my hand seized by a staff member who proceeded, using a rubber stamp, to decorate my wrist with a large green ink marking. I supposed at the time that this strange behaviour was due to some grave shortage of cardboard and safety pins which meant the organisers could not pay the exorbitant fees which surely would have been necessary to make some simple badges.

Following this assault, I wondered what to do with myself. Ah yes, I thought, I shall survey the pages of my programme and see what events I may attend, or perhaps read an article to amuse myself. However I found myself somewhat perplexed as I could not find a programme about my person. This was quite odd, as I had paid my membership fee, so surely I was entitled to a programme? But alas, my naïveté was to be shattered, as I discovered the shocking truth; that one was expected to part with more coinage of the realm in order to receive a programme. Although at first taken aback by this, I soon recovered as I realised that the most likely reason for this turn of events was that not only were cardboard and safety pins scarce, but paper was also in short supply. Once I put these harsh realities of life behind me I must say that the con went rather well. At first some previously-seen but nevertheless enjoyable episodes were screened, but later on of course new episodes from the States were shown which were of the "Wow" and "<Stunned silence>" variety, especially when you find out that... oh, I better not say.

Another highlight of the convention was Peter Jurasik, who plays Londo, although at first one would wonder about this claim as there is not much resemblance without makeup. However, once he spoke in his distinct Centauri accent, all doubts were assuaged. He proved to be quite amusing and personable, even when attacked by two Narns called Simon and Paddy. Despite encouragement from attendees, though, he wouldn't give much away about future B5 plotlines.

The only event at the convention which rather gnawed upon my being and made an attempt to draw will to live was the screening of a compilation of computer graphics clips from *Babylon 5*. While good visually, any positive impact it could have had was completely negated by the accompanying soundtrack "I Need a Hero" by Tina Turner, which I found to be so distasteful as to feel almost nauseous (although there is a fair chance it was Guinness from the previous night mixing with Supermac's double decker burger and chocolate muffin that was my breakfast).

By the end of the day I was quite pleased not only with the convention but also because I had managed to avoid spending inordinate amounts of money on raffle tickets at the Octocon table. Instead I laughed heartily at those poor souls who did.

Yes I'll say it again; Jumpgate, what a con! (Even if I am still annoyed over the extra expenditure required for a programme and that I spent several days trying to get ink off my wrist).