

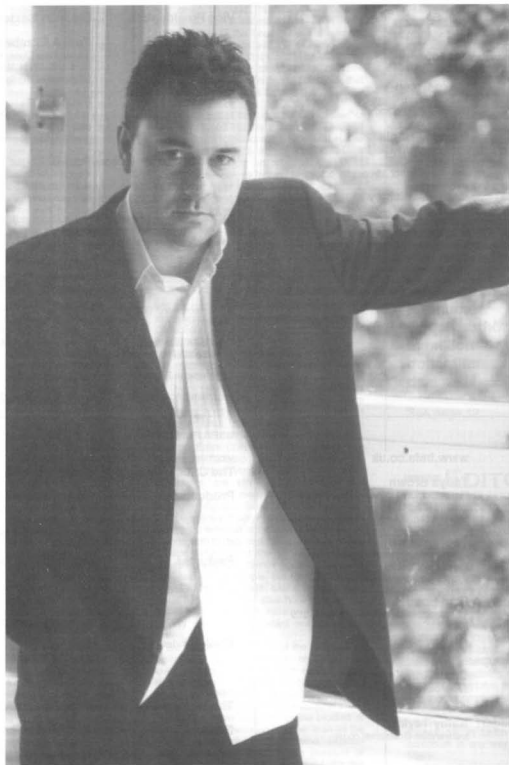
# MATRIX

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**RICHARD MORGAN**

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# Pratchett wins major award

Terry Pratchett has won his first major literary award, being declared a "brilliant" and "outstanding" winner of the Carnegie Medal. Though worth only £5,000, the 66-year-old award is highly prestigious.

Previous winners have included Arthur Ransome, CS Lewis, and most recently Philip Pullman.

Pratchett, 54, was not even told he had been entered as a candidate, because of previous disappointments.

"I'm delighted and genuinely shocked," he said when he heard that his *The Amazing Maurice* and *His Educated Rodents* was the victor over six other short-listed entries from a field nominated by librarians "I'd have bet £1,000 against me! I'm especially pleased because *Maurice* isn't just fantasy but funny fantasy, too. It's nice to see humour taken seriously."

In his acceptance speech at the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards at the British Library, Pratchett rounded on those who had previously ignored him.

He declared that, though his work dealt with profound themes, "put in one lousy

dragon and they call you a fantasy writer".

Pratchett also tilted at JRR Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, which is considered a more respectable work of fantasy than his. "You can tell that Maurice is a fantasy because it looks like one," he said. "It has rats that are intelligent. But it seems to me even more fantastic that in the book there are humans that are intelligent as well. Far more beguiling to me than the idea that evil can be destroyed by throwing a piece of expensive costume jewellery into a volcano is the possibility that peace between nations can be maintained by careful diplomacy."

The leader of the judges, Karen Usher, of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals which makes the award, said the choice of Pratchett was unanimous. "This is an outstanding work of literary excellence - a brilliant twist on the tale of the Pied Piper that is funny and irreverent, but also dark and subversive."

Runner-up was Geraldine McCaughrean's *Stop the Train*, and Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog* was commended.

## Gibson legacy

Canadian SF Collector William Robert 'Bob' Gibson - not to be confused with the cyberpunk author of the same(ish) name has left his collection of 30 - 40,000 volumes of science fiction dating back to the nineteenth century to the University of Calgary. The gifts instantly makes the university a world centre for sf research. However, the university estimates that it will cost at least half a million Canadian Dollars to clean, preserve and catalogue the collection.

Highlights of the collection include Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and a nearly complete run of *Astounding/Analog*. Gibson, who died last year at the age of 92 amassed a collection that filled the family attic, garage and a separate storage shed. Shortly after his death, his son, Andrew, a U of C alumni, approached the university about donating the collection.

"There isn't a thing here that isn't of interest," said Dr. Janis Svplis, a U of C English professor who teaches a course in science fiction and has written about pulp magazines. "What we have here is a complete account of our changing attitudes toward science. This makes Calgary a major source of material on early science fiction."

"This really is a priceless gift, an embarrassment of riches," commented Blane Hogue, the library's Director of Development. Librarians have not yet been able to conduct a detailed appraisal of the collection so have not been able to put a monetary value on the whole collection. However some of the items that they have managed to unpack are said to be worth hundreds of dollars whilst some of the magazine sets are worth thousands.

"Our next challenge," Hogue said, "is to find the necessary funding to clean, preserve, catalogue and house the Gibson Collection." Librarians estimate it will take roughly \$20 per item to complete those tasks; the library hopes to raise about \$500,000 - from public and private sources - to maintain the collection.

Eventually, it is hoped the Gibson Collection

will be made available to students, scholars and members of the public through the Special Collections Reading Room at the U of C's MacKimmie Library. Depending on funding, it could be ready for use in about a year. None of the materials will circulate, however, since they are far too fragile.

The Gibson collection immediately becomes one of the strongest resources anywhere for the study of science fiction. In North America, the Merrill Collection at the Toronto Public Library has about 57,000 items, and the Eaton Collection at the University of California - Riverside has in excess of 65,000 items. Other universities with much smaller collections are still considered important resources for research, however. For example, Michigan State University has about 12,000 science fiction items and ranks itself in the top 20 research collections of its kind.

It is anticipated that the presence of the Gibson Collection at the U of C will attract donations of other science fiction materials to the library. For example, the Merrill Collection began in the 1970s with only a few thousand items. Library officials also hope that having the Gibson Collection here will attract the literary papers of important science fiction writers.

Dr. Susan Stratton, one of the first English professors at the University of Calgary to teach courses in science fiction, says research in the genre can reveal important insights about the prevailing cultural, social and political attitudes of the day. "Researchers now are likely to view literature as the product of the culture that produced it, rather than as the product of the individual great mind," Stratton said. "Speculative fiction is the literature of the age of science and technology. It's the literature that imagines change in an era of increasingly rapid social change."

For additional information on the Gibson Collection see [www.fp.ucalgary.ca/unicomm/news/gibson](http://www.fp.ucalgary.ca/unicomm/news/gibson)

## John gone

### Jarrod leaves Earthlight

John Jarrod, senior editor of Simon & Schuster UK's SF and Fantasy imprint, Earthlight, has left to explore several exciting opportunities. John joined Simon & Schuster in May 1997 to set up Earthlight which was launched in April 1998. Earthlight now publishes bestselling and award-winning authors including Terry Brooks, Ray Bradbury, Robert Holdstock, Jude Fisher, Guy Gavriel Kay and Jon Courtenay Grimwood.

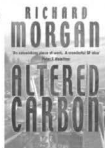
"It has been the most fulfilling period of my time in publishing," said Jarrod. "Starting up a list from scratch was a wonderful experience, and I hope whoever takes over from me feels that I have left a vibrant bank of authors and books. I think that one sometimes has to pass on the torch. That is the case now."

John Jarrod has also published thriller authors for the Simon & Schuster list, including Lorenzo Carcaterra, John Sandford and Stel Pavlou.

Simon & Schuster UK's Publishing Director, Suzanne Baboneau, said: "John has started a fabulous list of authors to make Earthlight a high-profile imprint for us to build upon. We thank him for his expertise and wholehearted support and wish him well in his new ventures."

## First time British author in million dollar firm deal

See page 12



## EDITORIAL OVER AND OUT

Eagle-eyed readers will have noticed a last minute announcement that Janet Barron would no longer be writing for *Matrix*. Sadly Glenda Pringle is now going to be joining her. I want to pass on my many thanks to the two of you for all your contributions to *Matrix* in the past and luck with your ventures in the future.

And they are not the only ones going - sadly I'm going to be joining them. *Matrix* takes an enormous amount of my free (and not so free) time, time that I can no longer spare. It's time I started earning a living! I've been editing the whole magazine for a year now and edited the media news and contributed/edited the media reviews for unmet issues before that. I think it's time for someone else to take over. Please get in touch if you think you can contribute in any way to 'new and improved' *Matrix*.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed and helped in other ways over my time. To quote *Things to do in Denver When You're Dead* - 'Boat Drinks' to you all!

That's all folks  
Cheers  
Gary.

## Robot does a runner

After four months of entertaining puny humans at the Magna science centre, predator robot Gaak made a bid for freedom. The robot had originally been programmed to sink a metal fang into smaller, nimble 'prey' robots, and then consume their electric power, Gaak showed that a two-year experiment in maturing robot thinking may be proving all too successful.

Left unattended for only quarter of an hour, the 2ft metal machine crept along a barrier until it found a gap, squeezed through then navigated across a car park until it reached the exit by the M1 motorway in Rotherham. Only then was its dastardly plot foiled, and its fatal weakness exposed as the dappled shade from trees fooled its solar batteries into steering it round and round. A visitor almost ran it over as it circled.

"I knew Magna's robots interacted with each other but didn't expect to be greeted by one," he said, before returning it to its inventor, Noel Sharkey of Sheffield University.

After switching off Gaak (a name taken from *Star Trek's* Klingons), Sharkey said that it would take time to work out how the robot had been so cunning.

"There's no actual intelligence in what he did - it's more the absent-minded professor forgetting to switch him off," Sharkey said. "The predators can hallucinate they're seeing prey if you shine a light at them. A lot of light streams into Magna and Gaak may have been chasing sunbeams."

## Thrud's back

Second only to Dave Langford's legendary Critical Mass review column, the greatest thing in Games Workshop's *White Dwarf* magazine (before it became entirely an advert for *Warhammer* et al) was Carl Critchlow's *Thrud the Barbarian* one-page b/w comic strip. Now Thrud has a new full-colour 24 page comic all to himself. Issue 1 is out now and issue 2 will follow in November. Carl has adapted a more open cleaner look to the art, but rest assure the humour's just the same (Scorchor To-Me Ku-Pa is back...)

Badger your nearest comic shop or send a



cheque/PO for £2-60 (inc P&P) to Carl Critchlow to Thrud the Barbarian, PO Box 371, Southport, PR8 6YE

More info at: <http://www.thrudthebarbarian.com/> where you can also read some of the old Dwarf strips (along with conversions into new-look Thrud).



## FLICKER

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

### Batman and Robin voted worst film ever

*Batman and Robin* has been voted the worst movie of all time in a poll in *Maxim* magazine. The action adventure - starring George Clooney and Chris O'Donnell as the undynamic duo - topped the poll, hotly followed by the Julia Roberts tearjerker *Steel Magnolias*, Robin Williams' abomination of a biography, *Patch Adams* and the big-budget blockbuster *Armageddon*. The poll in full: 1: *Batman and Robin*; 2: *Steel Magnolias*; 3: *Patch Adams*; 4: *Armageddon*; 5: *Staying Alive*; 6: *The Postman*; 7: *The English Patient*; 8: *It's Pat!*; 9: *When Harry Met Sally*; 10: *Little Nicky*

### Blake's back

The BBC are planning to release a comprehensive series of DVDs of *Blake's 7* early in the year. There will be four boxed sets, of a season each, in a co-production between BBC Worldwide and Fabulous Films. Each set will have a 'Making of' documentary made by Kevin Davies who previously brought us 'making of' *Hitch-Hikers* and *Dr Who* videos.

### Law lifts off

Jude Law will be the new Superman, beating off competition from Johnny Depp and Colin Farrell. Law has been chosen by producers for the high-profile role in new movie *Batman Vs Superman* because he doesn't fit-in to the normal superhero stereotype - it's rumoured that they wanted to get away from the mega-

muscular action stars. Although Farrel missed out on Supe he may be doing a cape as Batman but there are conflicting reports that Christian Bale has signed up for the role. The film will be directed by Wolfgang Petersen, the man behind *Air Force One*, *The Perfect Storm* and the cult German submarine drama *Das Boot*.

### Another Aardman feature

Studio Aardman Animation has announced that popular characters Wallace and Gromit are to star in their first big screen outing. *The Vegetable Plot* will be directed by multi Oscar winning animator and *Chicken Run* creator Nick Park, in conjunction with Steven Spielberg's Dreamworks Studio. Whilst *The Vegetable Plot* is in production, Wallace and Gromit will also be appearing in a series of one-minute movies that will be available through the Aardman animation website in the autumn. The animators have also announced another joint venture with Dreamworks. *Ratropolis*, will begin production later this year after Spielberg's company decides whether to include computer-generated sequences alongside the more conventional 'claymation' technique that Aardman favours.

### The Lion, the Witch and the Ogre.

The director behind last year's animated hit, *Shrek*, has signed to adapt CS Lewis's children's fantasy classic *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Andrew Adamson has signed with Walden media to shoot the feature. The screenplay will be by Ann

Peacock, who won an Emmy for her work on a television adaptation of *A Lesson Before Dying*. This will be the first time CS Lewis's Narnia books have been shot as a live-action feature for the big screen. Previously, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has been adapted in Britain both as an animated feature, and as a live-action mini-series in 1995. The tales, heavily embroidered with Christian allegories of redemption, concern a group of children who discover a door in the back of a wardrobe which leads to a magical world in the throes of a battle between good and evil. Walden has optioned the rights to the entire set of Narnia books, if the first is a success

### Bionic Woman rebuilt

The USA Network is planning to bring back *The Bionic Woman*. The show, a spin-off from *The Six Million Dollar Man*, originally starred Lindsay Wagner as Jaime Summers, a tennis pro, who after a skydiving accident, was rebuilt with a bionic ear, legs and arm and then led a double life as a teacher and undercover government agent. Jeff Watchel of USN said: "It's an old title that is ripe for reinvention".

The show was shown in Britain in the late seventies and was at one point the most popular program on ITV.

The new version will be produced by the Todd team responsible for the *Austin Powers* series. Suzzanna Toff of Team Todd commented: "We will take advantage of the fact that what then seemed beyond credibility

# Awards News

## European Science Fiction Society Awards

The European Science Fiction Society announced its annual awards at Eurocon 2002, held in Chotobor, Czech Republic.

**Best Author** Valerio Evangelisti (Italy)

**Best Translator** Paulina Braiter-Ziemkiewicz (Poland)

**Best Promoter** Yurii Ilkov (Bulgaria)

**Best Journal** Fantazia (Slovakia)

**Best Publisher** Leonardo - Jiri Pilch (Czech Republic)

**Best Artist** J.P. Krasny (Czech Republic)

**Best Fanzine** Terra Fantastica (Bulgaria)

In addition, Encouragement Awards were given to Alexander Karapanchev (Bulgaria), Vitali Kaplan (Russia), Alexandra Pavelkova (Slovakia) and Miroslav Zamboch (Czech Republic)

## Mythopoeic Awards

This year's Mythopoeic Awards were announced at Mythcon XXXIII in Boulder Colorado. The winners were:

**Adult Literature** *The Curse of Chalion* by Lois McMaster Bujold

**Children's Literature** *The Ropemaker* by Peter Dickinson

**Scholarship Award for Inking Studies** Tolkien's *Lengendarium: Essays on the History of Middle Earth* by Verlyn Flieger & Carl F. Hostetter

**Scholarship Award for Myth and Fantasy Studies** *The Owl, the Raven and the Dove: The Religious Meaning of Grimm's Magic Fairy*

Tales by G. Ronald Murphy

## Aurora Awards

The Aurora Awards for Canadian science fiction were announced on Friday, August 9 at Convergence in Calgary.

**Best Long-Form Work in English** *In the Company of Others* by Julie E. Czerneda (DAW, June/2001)

**Best Long-Form Work in French** *Les Transfigurés du Centaure* by Jean-Louis Trudel (Médiapaul, 2001)

**Best Short-Form Work in English** 'Left Foot on a Blind Man' by Julie E. Czerneda (*Silicon Dreams*, DAW)

**Best Short-Form Work in French** 'Souvenirs de lumière' by Daniel Sermin (*Solaris* 138)

**Best Work in English (Other)** 'Underwater Nightmare', Isaac Szpindel (*Rescue Heroes Cycle II* - Episode 17a, air-date Aug/2001) (TV screenplay)

**Best Work in French (Other)** *Solaris*, Joël Champetier, red. (Les Compagnons à temps perdu)

**Artistic Achievement** James Beveridge (On Spec Spring/01, On Spec Summer/01)

**Fan Achievement (Fanzine)** *Voyageur* Karen Bennett & Sharon Lowachee, eds. (USS Hudson Bay / IDIC ([www.idic.ca](http://www.idic.ca)) [clubzine])

**Fan Achievement (Organisational)** Peter Johnson (USS Hudson Bay / IDIC)

**Fan Achievement (Other)** Alex von Thorm, fan writing/écriture fanique

## Stop Press: Hugo Awards

**Fan Artist** Teddy Harvia

**Fan Writer** Dave Langford

**Fanzine** *Anisile* (edited by Dave Langford)

**Website** *Locus Online*

**Semiprozine** *Locus* (edited by Charles N Brown)

**Pro Artist** Michael Whelan

**Pro Editor** Ellen Datlow

**Dramatic Presentation** *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* directed by Peter Jackson

**Related Book** *The Art of Chesley Bonestell*

**Short Story** 'The Dog Said Bow-Wow' by Michael Swanwick

**Novellette** 'Hell is the Absence of God' by Ted Chiang

**Novella** 'Fast Times at Fairmont High' by Vernor Vinge

**Novel** *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman

No surprise was that Glasgow won the 2005 Worldcon bid. The convention will be called Interaction and the guests are: Chris Priest, Robert Shekley, Jane Yolen, Greg Pickersgill and Lars Olov Strandberg. See <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/>

News: Gary Wilkinson

in the 70s - the advancement in prosthetics and replacement limbs - is really now. The idea that they exist today and people use them - not in a superhero way - will allow us to something interesting and different".

No one has yet been cast for the new series but will most likely be tall, athletic and blonde like the original.

## Monster match

It's been rumoured for many many years but it looks like at last that *Alien Vs Predator* will be hitting the big screen soon. Fox's long-delayed project with combine the franchises of the Sigourney Weaver-starring *Alien* series and the *Predator* films, the first of which starred Arnold Schwarzenegger back in 1987. The project has been under discussion for about a decade and now Fox wants to refresh both ailing franchises. Several years ago, the comic company Dark Horse that held rights to the two separate franchises produced an *Aliens vs Predator* comic series. An official script based on this rather good story and written when a film adaptation was first mooted has floated about on the internet for years. No surprise is that the new film will not be based on this. The new nonsense plot, based (oh joy) on the *Aliens Vs Predator* video games sees a bunch of boffins on a distant planet turned into dinner after genetic experiments on *Predator* and *Alien* life forms go awry. And worse news the director has been named as *Resident Evil*'s Paul Anderson.

## Thunderbirds are go again

*Thunderbirds* are go once again with *Star*

*Trek: The Next Generation*'s Jonathan Frakes (William T. Riker) at the controls. Frakes has recently signed on to direct a new live-action version of the cult 1960s television series. Originally conceived as an adult action-oriented film, the revival will take flight under Frakes as a movie for all the family.

Created by Gerry Anderson, *Thunderbirds* ran between 1964 and 1966. The series used 'supermarionation,' a combination of puppets and models, to tell the story of the 21st century Tracy family who ran International Rescue. Former astronaut Jeff Tracy and his five sons were ably assisted by their British intelligence agent Lady Penelope and her chauffeur, Parker. In 1966, a feature film version, *Thunderbirds Are Go* was released.

The project was originally being developed by Working Title for director Peter Hewitt, but never got off the ground. Produced by Universal Pictures, *Thunderbirds* is expected to start filming in 2003.

Frakes started his directorial career on the set of *The Next Generation*, and went on to helm the *Star Trek* features *First Contact* and *Insurrection*. He later served as executive producer and a regular director on television series *Roswell*, before helming the family-friendly *Clockstoppers*. Frakes most recently directed the pilot for UPN's new *Twilight Zone* series.

## Pan picture

A new version of J.M. Barrie's classic story is set for filming in Australia. In a rare three-way funding combination, Universal Pictures and Joe Roth's Revolution Studios have joined up with Columbia Pictures to provide the cash for

a new live-action version of *Peter Pan*. The movie will be directed by Australian native P.J. Hogan (who was behind the excellent dark comedy *Muriel's Wedding*) and filming in Australia is likely to begin almost immediately as the film has been planned for a Christmas 2003 release. The search is on for a unknown to star as the 'boy who never grow up'. The state-of-the-art special effects will be produced by Industrial Light & Magic (as usual).

The screenplay has been written by Hogan and Michael Goldenberg, and the script has been approved by Great Ormond St Hospital For Children in London, which was bequeathed the rights to the book in 1937 in a special act of parliament. The hospital is charged with ensuring that any adaptations are in keeping with the spirit of the original.

## The new worst film?

In the glorious tradition of ...ahem... *Spiceworld* (one film I just could not sit through when it was shown on television - even though I was half comatose after Christmas dinner) we will now be having a film starring pop group S-Club inflicted on us. And it's sff! The plot revolves around a mad scientist who is trying to clone teen pop stars. Cameos are expected from Gareth Gates, Will Young and S Club Juniors. If you have no idea what I'm talking about count yourself lucky or ask a (very) young relative.

## IN THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND

We don't normally review things twice, but here's Gary Dalkin with his minority guilty verdict against *Minority Report*

These are strange times indeed. Last issue Andrew M. Butler, an authority on the works of Philip K. Dick and generally less than enamoured by the films of Steven Spielberg, gave *Minority Report* a fairly positive reception in these pages. While I know less about Dick than Dr. Butler I've usually been more receptive to Spielberg's work, finding that such is his skill as a filmmaker he can usually deliver high quality entertainment from even the most flawed material. Usually. Now *Minority Report* has received almost universally ecstatic reviews, the film being repeatedly hailed as a superlative return to top form for Spielberg, and a landmark piece of intelligent, adult science fiction. And this worries me because it exposes a paucity of critical thought, a complete lack of basic analytical ability, a startling disregard for the craft of good storytelling and filmmaking. If *Minority Report* is regarded as good, serious, intelligent sf, it lowers the possibility of the genuine article reaching the screen.

Now let me say three things. Such is Spielberg's skill as a filmmaker that *Minority Report* is, especially in the latter half of its long running time a gripping, entertaining film which cumulatively generates considerable tension - though it does so largely through John Williams' superlative score which is in an entirely different league to everything else here - and delivers a handful of genuine surprises. *Minority Report* is by any serious standard a very bad film, being a thriller dependent upon a complex plotting which makes no sense, which is riddled with serious flaws in internal logic and sfnal world building at every level from the macro to the micro, and suffers from wildly inappropriate shifts in tone coupled with some of the worst cinematography ever to disgrace a major motion picture. On the assumption that everyone who wants to see *Minority Report* by now has, and so as to explain specifically why I believe the film is so poor, this review will be filled with major spoilers.

In 2055 there exist three psychics ("precogs") who can predict murders within a few miles of their vicinity. Somewhere deep inside the HQ of the Pre-Crime department of the Washington D.C. police force they spend their lives floating in a swimming pool barely or not at all conscious of the present day world. Eventually we will learn that the pool has a plug hole sufficiently large to allow humans to exit through it, something which seems a dangerously bizarre design feature and exists

only to allow for what should be an impossible escape. Spielberg doesn't even try to make what follows plausible on screen - detective John Anderton, Tom Cruise, escaping from the HQ carrying a barely conscious woman, cutting to them already outside in a car making their getaway.

Every so often the precogs predict a murder. Though at least one of the precogs, Agatha, well played by Samantha Morton, can speak perfectly good English, the predictions are delivered by a Heath Robinson device

Agatha describes in considerable detail the life one character would have lived to the age of 23 had he not been abducted and presumably killed as a young boy.

These are however minor inconsistencies. One fundamental part of the story involves the imminent expansion of Pre-Crime from an experimental programme confined to Washington D.C. to a system covering the entire USA. We are told the precogs' ability is limited in time and space, to a few days into the future and a few miles around their physical location. We know there are only three precogs. Without hundreds, if not thousands of other precogs the imminent expansion of the Pre-Crime system across the USA is impossible. Yet this expansion is a key driving force of the plot.

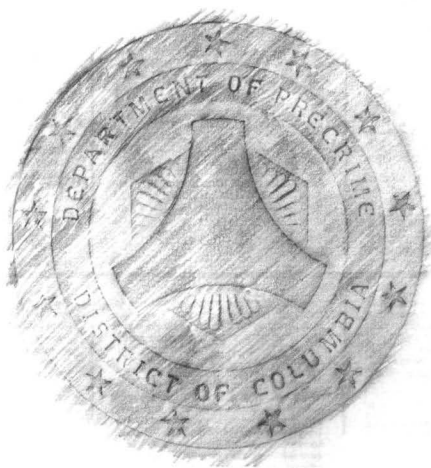
One day the precogs predict senior Pre-Crime detective John Anderton will commit murder in 36 hours. Anderton, like Logan before him, runs from his colleagues. In well choreographed yet ludicrously out of place action set-piece Anderton evades perhaps as many as a dozen of his work mates, despite their being heavily armoured and equipped with *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) police jet packs. The comedy which intrudes in this scene is especially jarring, the low point being a jet pack flame grilling a row of hamburgers. It is an Indiana Jones moment, not worthy of inclusion in a film which 95% of the time takes itself very seriously indeed. But then this is the sort of film in which the occupants of a block of apartments continue with their meals quite unconcerned while a

massive police confrontation takes place in the alley outside, and latter in which the occupants of a different apartment building go about their nightly business with barely the bat of an eyelid during what one would assume was at the very least a disturbing incursion of spider-like police robots swarming from room to room scanning everyone's eyeballs; vision, and therefore eyes, are a symbol throughout. At one point Anderton has his removed and replaced; later he has the originals in a plastic bag. In a ridiculous black comedy moment he drops them and one falls down a drain beyond any possible retrieval. Later it is back in the bag.

But before then the fight continues into an automated car factory. An oddly small factory located in a warehouse among apartments. One thing is clear - Spielberg has been having a chat with his mate George Lucas - and they have both decided to put factory set-pieces in their respective summer blockbusters. Set-

which carves the names of killer and victim on two wooden balls. Considering the testosterone fuelled nature of the scenario, and the fact that the police could just ask Agatha, one might say this was a metaphor for the entire film. In defiance of all logic, it is most convenient for the construction of edge-of-the-seat set pieces that the precogs always provide the names of the killer and victim, and always to the last second the time at which the murder will take place, but only the most vague visual clues to the location. Still, this is not a film to concern itself with logic.

We are told that the precogs can only detect murder and sometimes other extremely violent crimes such as rape, because they cause the greatest disturbance of the "metaphysical fabric". Later there is a scene in which Agatha proves to be aware of every little thing which is about to happen, moments before it does. We are told that the precogs can only foretell what will happen, not what might happen. Later



pieces in which the hero goes through a conveyor belt and nearly becomes part of a piece of machinery. Lucas pulls the whole thing off with infinitely more flair, imagination, excitement and visual scale and style in *Attack of the Clones*. Spielberg's attempt looks like a TV movie imitation by comparison, even if he does manage a clever film buff in-joke.

Alfred Hitchcock long wanted to begin a film with a scene of a car being constructed, following the progress of the machine along the production line in a single shot. When the car was finished someone was to open one of the doors, and a corpse would slump out. Hitchcock never figured out how to incorporate this into a story. Spielberg comes close, having a car built around Anderson, who then drives away in it. But we must wonder, why don't Anderson's former colleagues continue the chase? The only answer is because it is the end of the set piece, and time to move on to the next scene.

Despite all the futuristic surveillance technology that would surely exist in this future authoritarian Washington Anderson has no problem driving to the home of a lady I can not help but think of as Mrs Mad Exposition. The film calls her Dr Iris Hineman and she is played by Lois Smith as if reprising Poison Ivy from *Batman and Robin* (1997). Mrs Mad Exposition is a loopy genetic scientist who spends her time making comedy customised killer plants. Anderson goes to see her so that she can deliver vast amounts of exposition for the audience's benefit. We are supposed to believe that Anderson does not know the origins of the three precogs on which his entire work depends. Mrs Exposition also explains what the title of the film means, yet later on it appears Anderson is the only one who did not know what the supposedly secret minority reports are. Not only do his juniors on the force know, but even an outsider, the excellent Colin Farrell playing FBI agent Danny Witwer, knows.

Witwer, we are supposed to assume, is the villain. The guy who has put Anderson in the frame for a murder he will not commit, either to discredit the Pre-Crime initiative, or to pave the way for the FBI to take it over. But anyone who has seen a few thrillers will know that not only can't it be that simple, but that the presence of an elder statesman actor, here Max Von Sydow, as a seemingly benign paternal figure can mean only one thing.

This might not be so bad were the events which followed not both derivative and impossible. Von Sydow (playing Lamar Burgess - just one of the film's references to *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) - offers a scheme for framing Anderson which works only in retrospect. All he does is hire a man to be in a hotel room at a certain time, with photographs of Anderson's missing son scattered on the bed, there to confess to killing the child. This is supposed to be enough for Anderson to go to the room and kill the man, resulting in the precogs predicting the killing 36 hours before it happens. Yet other than the precogs prediction, there is no reason whatsoever for Anderson to go to that room and meet that man... It is the central plot axis of the film, and it makes no sense.

There are many, many more flaws, large and small. But just a few more will suffice. In a very muddled scene paralleling the "New You" scene from *Logan's Run* (1976), Anderson has his eyeballs swapped in an implausibly filthy apartment by a back street surgeon, Dr Solomon (Peter Storemare). Once Anderson is partway under the anaesthetic Solomon tells

Anderson that he once sent him to prison, where he had a most unpleasant time, not the least of which involved being sodomised in the showers. This we assume is a precursor to Solomon attempting to exact nasty revenge on Anderson, keeping us in suspense as to how Anderson will escape. But then nothing happens except that Solomon performs the operation and leaves Anderson with food, drink, an alarm clock and very strict and repeated instructions not to remove the bandages before the clock indicates 12 hours are up, or he will go blind. After some inappropriate gross out comedy a robot shines a very, very bright light in one of Anderson's new eyes after six hours, with no ill effects at all.

Pre-Crime only deals with serious, very violent crime, but Washington has got rid of all its other detectives because it no longer needs them. Newspapers can update themselves in real time, but people still have a fresh on delivered every morning. Other than futuristic vehicles and fancy police technology the future looks very much like now. Stores and clothing are, bar interactive advertising, pretty much identical 53 years from now. The names and logos are the same. But so are the products and store design and layout.

Oddities abound. We are meant to empathise with Anderson though he never once questions whose head his new eyes were once in, or the circumstances by which they left it. But then the man is addicted to a drug called "Clarity". The fact that not only doesn't it affect his performance, but may enhance it, given his superior abilities throughout the film, delivers a presumably unintended pro-drugs message. But then, we are meant to empathise Anderson despite his regarding the precogs as sub-human processing machines. And we are left wondering how, politically, such a world was allowed to develop in an America which in most other respects is more now than when, more present than future. But then, given that, *Doctor Who*-like, those arrested for murders they haven't committed are immediately placed in an electronically induced coma and contained in the very next room to the precog's swimming pool, where they are guarded by a mad organ-playing redneck, perhaps there are no grounds for taking this silly comic book at all seriously.

Let me now just point out that the main plot structure - older, senior man sets up younger investigator as the fall guy for a murder of a woman which he himself has committed, all played out as a race against time amid Washington power politics - is appropriated from *No Way Out* (1987), itself a remake of *The Big Clock* (1948), which may just have influenced Dick's original story. To this are added elements of *Fahrenheit 451*, *Logan's Run*, *Blade Runner* (1982), and in the manner of the death of Danny Witwer, *LA Confidential* (1997). A device for altering Adson's face appears as a reference to the masks used in *Cruise's Mission: Impossible* franchise. The finale plays out like a variation on the climax of *The Fugitive* (1993), with a lavish reception and gala dinner leading to a rooftop showdown. Most notably of all, *Minority Report* is littered with visual references to Nic Roeg's masterpiece, *Don't Look Now* (1973).

Both films involve women having psychic visions of death. In both the deaths involve water. In *Don't Look Now* a little girl in a red

coat drowns. In *Minority Report* a boy of similar age is abducted from a swimming pool - the first act of Spielberg's previous film, *AI* (2001) ended with a dead boy at the bottom of a swimming pool. In *Minority Report* a woman is murdered at the water's edge wearing a red coat. In both films there is an elderly woman laughing ominously in a hotel. In *Don't Look Now* visions of blood and broken glass are mixed. *Minority Report* opens with a comparable image. The only difference is *Don't Look Now* is a great film and *Minority Report* is simply engaging in infantile film buff post-modern referencing for the sake of it. It's Tarantino's game and not worthy of a serious picture where every shot is there because it needs to be, not because it pays homage to a previous film. But the game is played for all its worth - one character is called Crow, referencing Cameron Crowe, director of Cruise's previous film, *Vanilla Sky* (2001).

*Minority Report* is photographed in antiseptically bleached Super 35 with an incredibly ugly, grainy, high contrast look which makes The Lord of the Rings: *Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) look like *My Fair Lady* (1964). This visual bleakness might serve a rather more serious and stark a film, but here seems like no more than pretension to darkness; the coda wraps everything in cosy terms, with Anderson no longer even concerned about the still unresolved fate of his son. The post-modern referencing continues to the end, with the final shot borrowing from *Solaris* (1972), as well as echoing the bucolic studio imposed ending of the originally released version of *Blade Runner*, to entirely unsatisfactory purpose. Are we supposed to believe three young people, two male, one a beautiful woman, living in total isolation for the rest of their lives is a happy ending, rather than a precursor to pain and tragedy?

As Spielberg continues his obsessive exploration of broken families - there is more than one in *Minority Report* - the result is an unpalatable mixture of the superficially intelligent and the utterly idiotic, the would-be serious and the popcorn blockbuster. A film which somehow grates despite its myriad flaws, it is one of Spielberg's weakest works, and in falling so far short of what the sf can achieve on screen quite the most incoherent, muddled and ludicrous big budget genre exercise since *Waterworld*, a film which at least was honest about its ambitions to be no more than mindless entertainment. As James Cameron's infinitely more coherent exploration of future paradox, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), argued, "there is no future but that we make ourselves." Since Spielberg attempted, and failed, to wrestle back the title of king of the world of action movies back from Cameron with *Jurassic Park* (1993) his more mainstream work has suffered from inconsistency, massive plot holes and inappropriate changes of tone. *Minority Report* exemplifies these failings to the nth degree, and appearing in cinemas less than a year after *AI* feels like a rushed piece of multiplex fodder with misplaced ambitions. Predicting Spielberg's future I foresee more technically accomplished but unconvincing work, to be greeted with more unrestrained critical praise, until the genius who invented the summer blockbuster with *Jaws* (1975) looks at his own back catalogue and realises he has a choice. To continue to murder his own talent or not. The future is not set...

## INNER AND OUTER SPACE

### Martin Lewis enters *The Cell* and blows up *Supernova*

Released to wildly mixed reviews *The Cell* is a synthesis of two very different sub-genres: both virtual reality and serial killer films. Whilst this could have produced a B-movie mess it is actually a highly intelligent, well-structured thriller that employs the tropes from both genres with great skill.

Catherine Deane (Jennifer Lopez) is a psychotherapist caring for a young boy in a coma. She is using an experimental machine that allows her to project herself into the boy's subconscious. Here we have a form of virtual reality where the computer creating the artificial environment is the patient's brain.

Meanwhile Carl Stargher (Vincent D'Onofrio) is abducting and murdering young women in order to satisfy a ritualistic sexual fetish. He is being pursued by Special Agent Peter Novak (Vince Vaughn), from the FBI's Behavioural Science Unit.

Though there have been several critically acclaimed serial killer films one film dominates the genre: *The Silence Of The Lambs* (1991). One side effect of this is that the superhumanly intelligent Hannibal Lector character has become a ubiquitous archetype. Stargher, in contrast, resembles the more realistic serial killer in that film, Buffalo Bill. He is a child abuse survivor who suffers from severe schizophrenia which he is unable to control with medication. Rather than playing an intricate cat and mouse game with the police, baffling them with his intellect, Stargher is actually apprehended quite easily: the police discover him at his house, naked and in a coma.

Part of Stargher's ritual is to slowly drown the women he captures. This means Novak has forty hours to rescue Stargher's latest victim but he has no way of finding out where she is being kept. In order to discover her location Catharine is persuaded to enter the nightmarish fantasyland within Stargher's head.

The first thing you notice about the film is how beautiful it is, even when the subject matter tends towards the grotesque. The cinematography, design and costumes are all breathtaking. Yet the sumptuous visuals never dominate the film or distract from its thoughtfulness. This is emphasised as soon as the characters open their mouths. Rather than glibly spouting exposition they actually sound like real adults having a conversation. It's a sad reflection on modern genre cinema that this comes as a surprise.

This air of low-key realism is captured in a short scene early on when Catharine returns to her empty apartment. She feeds her cat, smokes a joint whilst flicking through her case notes and then falls asleep with the TV on. In keeping with the rest of the film the acting is unfussy and intelligent. Jennifer Lopez in particular reminds us why she was regarded as such a promising actress following the release of *Out Of Sight* (1998). Opposite her Vince Vaughn, wearing the same clothes throughout the film, perfectly embodies the hollow-eyed crusader Novak.

*The Cell* it is an extremely well constructed film that works on every level and it is a shame director Tarsem Singh has yet to follow it up.

By the time *Supernova* arrived on British shores its studio had already effectively disowned the film and it sunk without a trace. The production was a Hollywood horror-story with constant studio interference. Director Walter Hill removed his name from the credits as did editor Francis Ford Coppola leaving the question of who actually was responsible for the final cut in some doubt. All in all this suggests a film of epic awfulness. In fact *Supernova* still hints at what might have been.

In the early 22<sup>nd</sup> century Nick Vanzant (James Spader, playing against type) is transferred to the medical search and rescue spaceship Nightingale. A recovering drug addict and ex-military pilot he is serving his probation as co-pilot to Captain Marley (Robert Forester). The rest of the crew is composed of the chief medical officer, Evers (Angela Bassett), a pair of medical technicians (Lou Diamond Phillips and Robin Tunney) and a computer technician (Wilson Cruz). On the way to a distress call from an abandoned mining colony the FTL jump they are required to make goes wrong. This leaves Vanzant in charge as they investigate the signal.

Unfortunately it is around this point that the writing switches to autopilot, leaving the characters as sketches and the film to descend into by the numbers, hunt the superhuman baddie nonsense. Astonishingly after this, the film manages to pull out an interesting conclusion, underlining *Supernova's* contradictory nature.

So whose fault is it? Hill isn't known for his subtlety but rather his violent, efficient thrillers such as *48 Hours* (1982). On the other hand the writers seem to have severely

overreached themselves. The best example of this is the desperately underwritten relationship Vanzant and Evers form.

Spader and Bassett are the best actors here and they struggle heroically with their characters but the material simply isn't there. Some insight into the film's troubled genesis is provided by the DVD release which contains thirteen deleted scenes. Several of these scenes are simply chunks of exposition or flashbacks wisely omitted for reasons of pace. However it also includes an alternative beginning and ending as well as an entirely excised plot thread. Rather than representing a possible director's cut these scenes are actually worse than those that made the final cut. The alternate beginning in particular illustrates perfectly the gap between the writers' aspirations and abilities.

On top of this many commentators have been quick to point out its derivativeness. Certainly it bares more than a passing resemblance to *Event Horizon* (1997) and is also obviously informed by the *Alien* films. Likewise the central revelation is familiar from any number of television shows. In fairness though this probably wouldn't be noticeable if the film was a little better.

The fundamental problem is that *Supernova* cannot decide whether it is a contemplative film built around the relationships of those on board Nightingale or an all out action-adventure. The miracle is that *Supernova* emerges from this ugly tug-of-war as coherent as it is.



## THE V WORD

### Kathy Taylor gets her teeth into *Ultraviolet*

*Ultraviolet* was first shown on Channel 4 in September 1998 and later on the Sci-Fi Channel. Although the series gained a lot of critical acclaim within the SF field, and a pilot for a follow up USA series filmed, a second series was never made. Thus the DVD can claim that it contains 'all the episodes ever made', all six of them. Each of these six episodes tells a self-contained story, but also adds to and advances the overall arc. In recognition of this strong arc the DVD provides a 'this is the story so far' section with the second to sixth episodes.

If you have not yet seen this series and are lucky enough not to know much about its premise I would advise you skip the rest of the article and buy *Ultraviolet* to watch first. Although I don't intend to discuss the plots in detail the review will invariably contain a few spoilers. You have been warned.

The basic premise of the series is that vampires are a real and modern day threat. They are not however referred to as vampires, in fact they are seldom referred to at all. When they are named, they are called leeches or Code five (Code V). Nevertheless vampires are clearly what they are; they suck blood from neck wounds, burn in ultraviolet (daylight), are invisible in mirrors - as well incidentally as in cameras and videos, and for some strange reason they are inaudible over a telephone.

Vampires and 'normals' have always co-existed but now they are changing their policy towards us. With the growing world problems of AIDS and pollution they fear their food supply is set to self-destruct. As Pearce Harman says at the end of the first episode, if they are not stopped then "our free range days are numbered".

To oppose this threat CIB was set up. This somewhat shadowy organisation has full government backing, and is paid for, at least in part, by our taxes. After all "it's a public health problem". The CIB is shown as having four main agents backed up by subsidiaries with a lot of high tech gear. The high tech gear seems foolish out of context; allium (garlic) grenades and carbon dum-dum bullets; but the utter seriousness and gritty realism of the series means that they work within it's own context. The other agents involved include helicopter pilots and a vanload of black masked soldiers. These are never fleshed out and the stories and arc concentrates on the four main protagonists.

While the genre may be fantasy and the trappings high tech the structure of each episode is closest to a police procedural drama. This is particularly noticeable in the opening episode. In this the main protagonist, an honest cop called Michael, finds himself under investigation by a covert squad, CIB, for something that may have to do with corruption. Initially very distrustful of them as the episode continues he learns more of their task. Despite some misgivings he ends up recruited by them.

The characterisation is very, very, strong and this combined with attention to the back-story helps provide the sense of internal realism. All the CIB operatives including

Michael are driven, usually by loss. Michael has lost his best friend Jack to the leeches and fears the loss of Kirsty, Jack's erstwhile fiancée. Dr Angela Marsh, medical researcher and practitioner, lost her husband and five-year-old daughter to them. Vaughan Rice, soldier, lost the rest of his unit to them. Pearce Harman, the leader of the unit, is a priest driven by the need to stop them. Why is less clear, fear, or for the sake of humanity, or on religious grounds, or even because he has lost his own life to the priesthood? Each character thus brings their own emotional baggage and prejudices to their work.

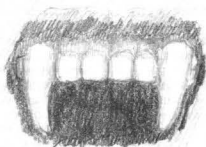
The scripts are well written dealing not just with the obvious menace but raising ethical and political issues such as paedophilia, abortion and genetic engineering. In many of them an interesting moral ambiguity is apparently presented. The vampires are intelligent and persuasive. They seldom kill their victims and assert that they take (i.e. turn into a vampire) no one who does not truly wish it. They claim that they are searching for a peaceful solution to the conflict and for answers to many of humanities great problems. They ask how can Michael trust the CIB when it is a Vatican funded successor to the Inquisition. And some of the behaviour of the CIB members' does indeed raise the question 'have they lost their own humanity?' The DVD has

a 15 certificate and its adult themes warrant it.

The direction of the series is excellent. The first episode uses subtle hints and effects so that the viewer who is paying close attention can gradually work out what has happened. Later episodes radiate scenes of powerful menace with the penultimate episode, 'Terra Incognita', containing one of the most tension filled scenes and best direction I've watched on a screen.

The box set is well presented with an atmospheric cover in moody violet with a clear layout. Technically it's nothing special. The picture format is PAL 4:3 and the sound in stereo, both a natural consequence of the fact it is a made for TV production from four years ago. My copy is a Region 2 one that provides a running time of about 300 minutes on the two discs. I understand the US version is longer with more extras.

The extras are again nothing special. There is the inevitable gallery of stills, cast & writer/director biographies, and trailers. There are also two extras that only work on a PC, a screensaver and web-links. I installed the screensaver directly off the disc easily; unfortunately it was rather dull. After an initial promising few seconds start, wherein the machine pretends it is scanning you to see if you are authorised, the screensaver turns out to be nothing more than a three by three grid of small stills from the series that appear slowly. The web links wouldn't run from disc on my machine but for those interested a few minutes with a web search engine turned up several *Ultraviolet* links, including an interesting interview with the writer/director Joe Aherne at [www.worldproductions.com/wp/content/shows/other/uv/interview3.htm](http://www.worldproductions.com/wp/content/shows/other/uv/interview3.htm)



## SYMPHONIES OF SICKNESS

Mark Greener goes to the extreme as he looks for the horror in metal

Why do you read or watch horror? Ok, it gives you a thrill. But on a deeper level, I suspect many of us read dark fantasy because it acts as a counterweight to the prevailing dumbed down, saccharine-nice, sanitised media. As Ice-T's metal-rap band Body Count once commented: "Sometimes, I sit at home and I watch TV / And I wonder what it would be like to live someplace like the *Cosby* show ... But shit ain't like that! It's real fucked up."

Consciously or subconsciously, horror movies, books and comics offer a balance for the onslaught of politically correct, intellectually sterile media that Ice-T savages. I suspect his lyrics strike a cord with many horror readers. Dark fantasy shows, often too clearly, that life really is fucked up.

Lovecraft put it somewhat more eloquently. He commented in his seminal essay *Supernatural horror in literature* that dark fantasy helps balance the tendency towards "a didactic literature to 'uplift' the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism". Later he derides the "empty literary conventions such as the happy ending, virtue rewarded and in general a hollow moral didacticism, acceptance of popular standards and values".

Expand literature to encompass 'multi-media experiences' and you have a pithy characterisation of much of today's mainstream television, films, best-sellers and magazines. Modern mainstream media - as David Edwards remarks in his thought-provoking book *Free to be human* - aims to create "a buying environment which maximises advertising sales. This requires the careful avoidance of stimulating deeper thought that interferes with the buying mood."

Or as Demolition 23 (formed around the remains of the glam-punk band Hanoi Rocks that sadly made just one album) put it: "We used to laugh about our legacy / Couldn't get arrested on MTV".

But such sanitisation alienates as easily as it entices. Increasing numbers of people seem to want to detach themselves from the image of life portrayed in the vacuous aspirational media. And that's where dark fantasy comes in. As Lovecraft again noted, supernatural horror fiction demands "a capacity for detachment from everyday life". That detachment can lead the reader to question assumptions about the 'cosy' world portrayed by the media.

The more extreme forms of heavy metal achieve much the same effect, often stalking the same supernatural hinterlands as horror fiction. They avoid the pop song's "smirking optimism". They overtly reject "popular" musical and lyrical "standards and values". (A black metal band such as Mayhem is as far from Bon Jovi as it is from Steps.) And, by the music's intensity, by its distance from prevailing pop and rock norms, extreme metal helps the listener attain the same "detachment from everyday life" as dark fantasy. That's one reason why every dark fantasy fan should at least explore the genre. They are two sides of the same intellectual coins.

Take Cradle of Filth for example - largely because they're one of the few extreme bands to reach mainstream consciousness, usually for the wrong reasons. (You can get arrested for wearing some of their T-shirts [*Famously sloganed*: 'Jesus is a cunt' - Ed]: which doesn't say much for

our police services' sense of humour - not to mention the value we place on freedom of speech.) Earlier this year, CoF released a compilation - *Lovecraft and Witch Hearts* - of selected tracks, out-takes, re-mixes and cover versions from the mid-90s on.

It's not a bad introduction to extreme music generally and CoF in particular. (Although *Cruelty and the Beast*, a concept CD based on the Balthory legend, is more coherent musically and conceptually. So this ambitious work might be an even better introduction). The new compilation illustrates that extreme metal can be more than an ear-splitting noise. At times, CoF are restrained, lyrical, almost operatic.

*Lovecraft and Witch Hearts* also includes a number of cover versions - including songs originally by Iron Maiden and Slayer - which offer a relatively easy way to gain an ear for more extreme music. (Six Feet Under's CD of covers *Graveyard Classics* is another excellent introduction to extreme music. Their rendition of Smoke on the Water, leaves Deep Purple's looking decidedly washed out.) Nevertheless, for me, CoF's music lacks the visceral intensity of many other death and black metal bands, such as Darkthrone, Mayhem or even Slayer. But extreme metal can be a drug. Start on CoF and you'll soon be on the hard stuff.

Darkthrone, Mayhem, At the Gates and the other Scandinavian death and black metal bands certainly take their music and the philosophy behind it seriously. Some rock writers believe the Scandinavian bands take it all too seriously. But for me, the almost intimidating drive and intensity characteristic of Scandinavian black metal is liberating and cathartic. They offer a bleak, nihilistic soundtrack that forms a perfect backdrop for living in a world characterised by frustration, torment and alienation. Some of Darkthrone's and At the Gates early CDs have been re-released recently. For example, *Transylvanian Hunger* and *The Red in the Sky is Ours* by Darkthrone and At the Gates respectively are powerful CDs full of dark passion, sobering, downbeat lyrics and an intense, unrelenting drive that leaves me almost speechless every time I hear them. For me, Lovecraft's intellectual legacy is in their hands, rather than some modern horror writers.

Over the years, the extreme metal movement fragmented into several sub-genres. One of these - gorecore - takes the horror ideal to the extreme. This isn't for the faint hearted. The classic gorecore CD - Carcass's *Symphonies of Sickness* - includes songs like 'Crepitating bowel erosion', 'Swarming vulgar mass of infected virulency' and 'Cadaveric incubator of endoparasites'. Perhaps it's just as well your granny won't understand the lyrics. First released in 1989, *Symphonies of Sickness* isn't as intense as some later gorecore cuts. But it's still a masterpiece, perhaps the one gorecore album every rock fan should own.

It's worth giving some of the gorecore bands a listen or three. (Don't dismiss them after the first few cords. As with all extreme music it can take several plays to appreciate the CD.) It's a lively sub-genre with numerous bands to choose from. But Cannibal Corpse have been in the forefront of gorecore for years and their latest CD, *Gore Obsessed*, is the aural equivalent of the splatter movie you rent on a

Saturday night. As with stalk-and-slash, there is a danger that gorecore can become an almost self-limiting, perhaps self-parodying, genre, but it's hugely enjoyable. And Cannibal Corpse are gorecore's masters. Their unrelenting attitude, rabid speed and deliberately offensive, but humorous, lyrics make *Gore Obsessed* essential listening.

In their song 'Hammersmith Palais' Demolition 23 wrote an anthem that perfectly captured the disillusionment of a generation brought up in Punk's strange mix of nihilism and optimism. Kick hard enough and the world would change. It didn't. So Demolition 23 lament the fact that "Once upon a time the world made sense. Now there's nothing straight enough to rebel against."

It's an easy mindset to become trapped in – especially

when you're assailed on all sides by the mainstream media. But extreme metal offers the perfect antidote. Like dark fantasy, extreme metal detaches us from our everyday life and acts as a catalyst for us to question our assumptions about the 'cosy' world portrayed by the media. And isn't that what most of us look for in horror and sf generally? Well, would you rather read Aldiss or watch AI?

## — OUT OF FOCUS —

**Focus** *ed Simon Morden lives science fiction*

I've been thinking about what makes science fiction science fiction. Is it the ray guns and flying cars? Is it the outlandish costumes and bizarre wigs? Is it the sub-humans, super-humans and aliens that inhabit fantastic worlds?

I'm coming to the conclusion that it's a little of all those things, but that it's chiefly about ideas, attitudes and opinions. The reason I got into this train of thought, apart from all the nostalgia programs generated by the Queen's Jubilee, was that my son went into hospital for heart surgery early this year. Ten, fifteen years ago, they would have cracked his rib cage open and transfused a bucket of blood. Twenty, thirty years ago, they probably wouldn't have been able to detect his condition at all, leaving us unaware of the possibility of him just dropping dead one day.

But we got state-of-the-art 21st century surgery, all done with tiny tubes and bits of wire, and less than 48 hours in hospital. So heart surgery is still heart surgery, but my attitude to it, while not quite blasé, is phlegmatic. He's still my son and I worry about him, but it wasn't like the near-death experience it would have once been. Staying with medical matters, a friend's kid had his finger severed by a garden gate. They went to hospital and had it sewn back on. Rather than contemplating life without a little finger (a career in the yakuza beckoned), the chief concern was 'will it heal completely?'

Imagine in years to come: will parents become careless as to the usual disasters that befall their offspring, simply because the surgeons can always make it better? This isn't a new sfnal idea – Michael Marshall Smith's 'Spare' and Larry Niven's organleggers touch on different places within it. Screamed orders of 'Stop playing with the door' will have the same historical resonance as 'Polio epidemic'. I don't have to worry about my kids getting a whole raft of diseases that I caught. What won't my kids worry about their kids doing?

Look at your house. Central heating? Windows? Running water? These innovations aren't so much spectacular as to their technology, but as to their social effects. We can now live comfortably in places which wouldn't naturally support the density of human life we impose upon it. Rather than having to live where the resources are, we now span the planet. It's a sea-change in attitude. Las Vegas is in the middle of a desert. There's nothing there, and yet... so what? Got a computer? Email people? Think for a moment

how incredible and at the same time how mundane it is. It's only an improvement on the telegraph, but every time we use it, we shrink the world to the size of a point. Governments can no longer censor information, squash rumours, 'disappear' people in secret. The word is out with a press of a button.

Vietnam was the first television war. What's going to happen in the first internet war?

Mobile phones are another case in point. I could swap it for a bulky radio pack. I could have it implanted in a tooth. What's important here is the mobility of communications, the idea that I can always be reached, that I'm never more than a keypress away from help. Whether I'm hanging upside down from a mountain in Scotland, or floating adrift in the seas off Java, I can make that call, and I can be saved. Will future generations blithely wander the globe, armed with nothing more potent than a fourth generation phone, and believe that harm is an outdated concept?

We've decoupled sex from procreation, eating from growing, travelling from distance, community from physical location, rights from responsibilities; ideas that are really, truly alien from those a couple of generations ago.

I always believed that good science fiction explored the future, not just to see what lay ahead, but what we might want to change about now. As always, it is a literature formed by its time and its culture, yet more than any other genre, manages to transcend those constraints. I can't imagine Steven Baxter as Prime Minister, but I can imagine him as a Special Adviser – one that might actually earn his keep. What's the end point of all this? Perhaps the day when death itself will die. The ultimate price of folly, of anger, of self-abuse will be no more than a temporary inconvenience. How then will we view life? What philosophies will we hold when we are effectively immortal? Will we act like gods, or will we behave like devils?

Simon's first collection of short stories *Thy Kingdom Come* is available from Lone Wolf Publications ([www.lonewolfpubs.com](http://www.lonewolfpubs.com)). His first novel *Heart* is out now from Razorblade Press - order through [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk) or via any good bookshop.

Richard Morgan recently made headline news after his first novel *Altered Carbon* was read by uber-producer Joel Silver who promptly persuaded Warner Brothers to cough up \$350,000 for the first option.

Most of the action takes place in 25<sup>th</sup> Century San Francisco but mankind has conquered the stars. Death is a minor inconvenience – your personality is stored on an implanted cortical stack and can be uploaded into a new body (or beamed across space) – if you can afford it, that is. Takeshi Kovacs, an ex-UN Envoy (i.e. trained killer) is recruited by the ultra rich Bancroft to investigate the murder of Bancroft's last body. Extreme mayhem follows...

*Matrix* tracked down Morgan via cyberspace.

**Gary Wilkinson** How would describe *Altered Carbon*?

**Richard Morgan** Future noir gets closest, I think. It's intended primarily to be a science fiction novel but the stylistic conventions and narrative are borrowed directly from the Chandler school (though I originally got into that school via a big signpost with the name William Gibson carved into it.)

**GW** And now it's going to Hollywood, I take it you are pleased?

**RM** Well, "going to Hollywood" is a relative thing. The book's been optioned, which is great both from an ego point of view and from a purely practical standpoint – substantial cash infusion means I'll be able to write full time from now on – but from option to movie is a very long road, and there are no guarantees even when you've got big names like Joel Silver involved. I was told quite candidly by Hollywood insiders not to get my hopes up too high at this stage. So, yeah – I'm very pleased, but I'm keeping it tamped down.

**GW** I've heard Spielberg optioned a Michael Marshall Smith novel several years ago, but nothing, has yet come from it.

**RM** Well, quite.

**GW** Who's your dream cast / director?

**RM** Ridley Scott or James Cameron are obvious choices – these are men who know how to "do future", but I'd also be delighted to have Kathryn Bigelow in the chair. She's not as high profile as the other two but I'm a big fan of her work – *Strange Days*, *Point Break*, *Near Dark* – these were all beautifully shot, violently fast forward but still intensely human movies.

**GW** *Strange Days* has the obvious 'mind-swap' vibe for *Altered Carbon*. *Near Dark* was a real interesting 'western' vampire theme which adds really 'bloody' violence.

**RM** Yes – *Near Dark* was revisionism at its best – there was very little Anne Rice-style romance in the bloodletting – no swooning maidens and delicately punctured necks, drinking blood is MESSY. I also liked the fact that the vampires hadn't attained any sort of grace or nobility from their eternal life – they were still essentially a bunch of small town hicks, bitching and fighting just like a soap opera family. The only other vampire movie I've seen that even comes close to this tone is

John Carpenter's *Vampires*, and that went rapidly downhill as soon as it became apparent there wasn't really any plot to speak of. In *Near Dark*, Bigelow managed to intensify the blood and violence, and still retain a very human story. She also – and I loved this – provided a real density of background. There were all these superb hints of detail from the vampires' pasts and that was what really brought the characters to life (uh, well, to Undeath).

A real outside choice would be Michael Mann – I know he doesn't do sf, but after seeing *Last of the Mohicans* and *Heat*, I'm convinced he could handle any period of history with the same panache, and in terms of violent intensity, he's up there with the best of them.

**GW** Mann is an interesting choice. Have you seen *Manhunter*, his version of the serial killer thriller *Red Dragon*? Has the best screen *Lector*. Unfortunately they have just remade it, with Hopkins...

**RM** Yeah, I've seen it (*Manhunter*, that is). I'd have to disagree about that being the best *Lector*, but sure, it was very well done – I forget the actor's name, but he was nicely understated, which is probably why it didn't make the splash you got with *Silence*... In fact, I found *Manhunter* a bit too glossy-eighties – Mann's *Miami Vice* past showing its face – the idea of a serial killer's mental torment coming across like a Human League video was a bit much for me – the book isn't like that at all – Harris is absolutely brutal with his subject. I think Demme's film captured that, and the sordid aspects of serial murder much better. By all accounts those aspects are completely gone again in *Hannibal*, and the urbane gloss is all maxed up – so I don't think I'll be hiring the video of that one, or the *Red Dragon* re-make, probably.

Actors – well, for Kovacs you need someone pretty grizzled and battered looking. Willem Dafoe's my current favourite, mainly because I was watching *Light Sleeper* a couple of days ago and I'd forgotten how superbly he puts across this sense of damage and loss. But equally, I could see De Niro, Bruce Willis, Tom Sizemore or Mickey Rourke in the role. With Ortega, I think you're in trouble because any major studio is going to want to cast some standard Hispanic beauty like Jennifer Lopez or Penelope Cruz, and that's not who Ortega is. She's far harder edged. You need someone like Linda Fiorentino or Famke Janssen to carry that edge. Or maybe Madeleine Stowe, although I have this perverse desire to cast her as one of the villains – like Sergio Leone making Henry Fonda the bad guy in *Once Upon a Time in the West*.

**GW** You're a EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher?

**RM** Yes – EFL teacher and teacher trainer, though neither of those for much longer. Thanks to the Warner Brothers option on *Altered Carbon*, a generous second contract with Gollancz and a number of other unexpected successes the book has had, I'm going to be able to write full time from the end of September. After fourteen years of EFL, it turned out surprisingly hard to quit the profession, but now my notice is in, I'm getting used to the idea.

**GW** Have you read Greg Egan?

**RM** No. To be honest, I've been put off him by something M John Harrison said in a website article. He cites Egan's *Distress* as an example of "the classic autistic male sf writer/reader, unable to relate successfully to others and wincing away into a fiction which approves and codifies that inability". Pretty harsh language, huh? Well, could be I'm being unfairly dismissive here, but faced with something that unequivocal (and from a writer whose work I'm a big fan of) plus a limited amount of time to read an almost limitless supply of sf, I haven't got round to Egan.

**GW** To a large extent I agree. For me, his work is intellectually mind-warping but emotionally cold. (Actually I sometimes wonder if he really exists and is some sort of AI... he never turns up to receive awards and I not even see a photograph). The reason I mentioned him is that he's written a couple of short stories that feature a similar idea to your 'stack' – but takes the idea in a different direction.

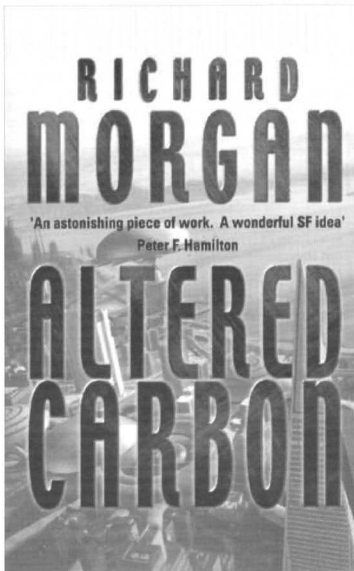
**RM** Well, it's nice to have your pre-conceptions confirmed – "mind-warping but emotionally cold" isn't quite as brutal as the Harrison comment, but it still sounds pretty bad. I want the mind warp AND the emotion.

**GW** What about China Mieville?

**RM** I read *Perdido Street Station* a couple of months ago. The first hundred odd pages of that book are magnificent. Really powerful stuff, beautiful baroque detail. I loved the whole concept of New Crobuzon from the moment it hit me – the city's a major imaginative achievement all by itself.

**GW** There is a density to *Station*'s milieu that reminded me of *Altered Carbon*. Plus I remember a remark as to it being a fantasy that 'you would not want to live in', which kind of mad me think of *Altered Carbon*. Possible infinite life but that could be infinite pain...

**RM** Yeah, basically what Mieville has done is up the ante for the whole fantasy genre (though some would argue he's really just taking it back to its Gormenghast/Viniconium roots). In either case, it's a satisfying kick in the arse for the back-to-nature peasant-and-princess crowd. New Crobuzon has a reality that none of those bucolic pre-industrial fantasies ever attempt – with the result that you take it far more seriously than anything by, say, Eddings or Zimmer Bradley. (I'm not including Tolkien in that crowd – I know Mieville has a serious down on him, but I think there's something iconic in Tolkien's work that transcends the need to create believable scenarios – it's essentially mythology, which of course was always what he claimed to be creating in the first place. And still – within that context, I do think he manages to write some very close focus and sharp edged human detail. He's very good on the fear and misery (and savagery) of war – I mean, the guy did survive the trenches in the first world war, and I think that experience comes through in the hobbit's eyes of war in *Lord of the Rings*. It's just a shame he had so many dodgy views on race and class, but then again, who didn't back then? Look at T.S. Eliot, George Orwell... ) ANYway, getting back to the point which was, uhhhhhhhh,



density of milieu, right? Yes. I've had Kovacs' milieu floating around in my head for so long that it's taken on that density more through a process of marination than anything else. But rather than go the Mieville route and give chapter and verse, I prefer to just throw in the odd allusion here and there to something outside the text. It's a technique I learnt from Roger Zelazny – he suggests (in *Unicorn Variations*, I think) that you should write a very brief piece about your main character which will not appear at any point in the novel you're working on, but can be alluded to obliquely. For the reader, this gives the character an existence larger than the novel he/she is in, and (I find) for the writer it provides a separate source of musing stock which can then be fed back into the novel as new ideas and associations spin off the external piece. Zelazny uses this to brilliant effect in a short story called *Half-Jack* where the consequences of a fire are mentioned – a kicked-in door, still unrepaired – but the fire itself is never described.) Of course, I didn't ever have to sit down and write an external piece like that because I had a whole stack of rejected Kovacs short stories already kicking around waiting to be used!

The infinite life thing is interesting, isn't it. All this time the materialists among us have been

trashing the idea of heaven and hell as impossible, and then suddenly, not only can you conceive it, you don't even have to be God to BUILD it – you just need a couple more centuries of development in data processing technology and a big, reliable power supply. As the immortal Scooby Doo would say, YOIKS!!!!!!

**GW** What other writers would you count as influences?

**RM** Well, I'd better own up to the obvious William Gibson debt straight away – it was his short stuff in *Omni* back in the late seventies that really lit me up, made me see what the potential was for SF noir – but that's probably no surprise, and also a pretty standard acknowledgement for anyone writing SF today. We all owe Uncle Bill. Back before that, my very early SF influences were old school writers Poul Anderson and Bob Shaw – in both cases, it was the emphasis on character and human relations in their work that really attracted me. And then, there's

one book which proved a huge influence all by itself and that was M John Harrison's *The Centauri Device*. I picked a battered, yellowed, front coverless rth hand copy of that book out of a street barrow in Istanbul, started reading and didn't eat or speak to anyone until I'd read it through. Then I went back to the beginning and started all over again. It's some of the most beautiful prose you'll ever find lying around in SF (or any other genre for that matter).

Parallel with all of this, by the time I started writing *Altered Carbon*, I was also heavily into American crime fiction. Four major influences there were James Ellroy, for the sheer nerve shattering violent intensity of stuff like *White Jazz* and *American Tabloid*, Lawrence Sanders, for the grim realism of his Matt Scudder series, and then James Salis and James Lee Burke both for daring to deploy an almost lyrical style alongside their hard-boiled characters and plot.

**GW** I take it you've seen *Bladerunner*?

**RM** Is there someone in the house who hasn't?

**GW** Ah, a bit flippant perhaps (must sharpen

my journalistic probing!) ... I suppose this is, for me, still the best example of cyberpunk on the screen. Let's hope *Altered Carbon*, if it reaches the screen, can be as good. And Rutger Hauer for Kovacs! ... no perhaps not...

**RM** Yeah, twenty years old and still nothing to touch it in the genre. It has to be my all time favourite movie. What I find most fascinating about it is, that if you watch Ridley Scott's *Black Rain* (which was pretty crap, to be honest, but that's not the point), there's this fantastic panning shot across Osaka from the air – and it's the *Bladerunner* skyline all over again, except this time it's not a model! That's where he got the damn thing from. Turns out, the future is sooner than you think. In fact, it's already banging on the front door.

If *Altered Carbon* turns into a movie that good, then I'll die a happy man. But there's no way Rutger Hauer could ever be Kovacs. Back then he was just far too otherworldly – and now he's just far too CUDDLY.

**GW** There is a huge dense background that the events of *Altered Carbon* take place against; a lot is only mentioned in passing. The Martian stuff is particularly intriguing. I take it you will be returning to examine some of this?

**RM** Yes – *Broken Angels*, the sequel to *Altered Carbon*, is out in March next year and picks up the theme of the Martian legacy. There's a lot more detail on the Archaeologist Guild and the academic infighting that goes on within its walls, as well as some background on how the Protectorate came into existence and the politics necessary to maintain that existence.

**GW** I think *Altered Carbon* revitalises cyberpunk by taking it back to its noir roots.

**RM** Well, first comment – thank you very much. That's a substantial compliment. Now, let's see if I can live up to it. Yes, I think the original power of cyberpunk is derived from the gloom and fury that comes from acknowledging the underbelly of the human condition (and that's, basically, what noir is, I suppose). The fury comes from a perception of the injustice underlying human behaviour, and the gloom from a sense that there's not a whole lot you can do about it. The world is a shitty place, and any justice, redemption or just plain decency usually has to be bought at huge human cost. That general tone is something that crime fiction has been dealing happily with since the days of Chandler and Hammett, but SF, oddly enough, isn't nearly as comfortable with it. In a way, I suppose that isn't such a surprise. By nature SF is quite a brash, optimistic genre – it is, after all, rooted in a fascination for human progress and human technological achievement – and that's always made it susceptible to a kind of Heinleinque Rocketman CanDoism. For a while at least, cyberpunk had that rather irritating attitude under fire. The focus was not just on the new wave of cyber- and biotech, but on the human cost of those technologies. The characters in Gibson's early short stories are often as much suffering from as benefiting from the technology they've accessed. It's not that cyberpunk was ever anti-technology – it just wasn't technosmug. Now, unfortunately, I get the sense that a lot of post-Gibson

Continued on page 19

**Stephen Baxter** looks for our 'alien' origins

The discovery of a new human-like ancestor in the deserts of Chad (see, for instance, *New Scientist* of 13 July) is electrifying for anybody interested in such matters (like me – see my upcoming human-origins novel *Evolution*). The new ancestor is some two million years older than any hominid relic found before. From the back its skull looks like a chimpanzee's; from the front it looks like an australopithecine.

It's hard to say where the new find fits. Many experts now argue that our family 'tree' is probably a bush, with lots of branches petering out to nothing – a bush of which we represent the only surviving twig. Maybe the new critter isn't our grandmother but an aunt, demonstrating that such features as bipedalism evolved more than once.

The truth of our evolution remains tantalisingly obscure. All the pre-human remains yet unturned would fit comfortably on a single good-sized dining room table – but a mountain of anguished theorising has been built on these fragments.

We endlessly labour to set aside preconceptions, especially those driven by vanity. The famous 'Dawn of Man' sequence of Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* dramatised the then-popular notion that humans had arisen as ferocious killer apes. It now seems probable our australopithecine forebears were basically just forest-fringe scavengers – and fairly low down the league table of scavengers at that.

And for some key questions there appear to be no compelling hypotheses at all. For example, humans of fully modern form including our large brains appear to have emerged around 130,000 years before the present – and yet for another 90,000 years they lived much as their predecessors had. What were they doing with their big brains all that time?

In drafting my novel I tried to draw on the best thinking in the field. But where no expert guidance was available I had



A more advanced life-form

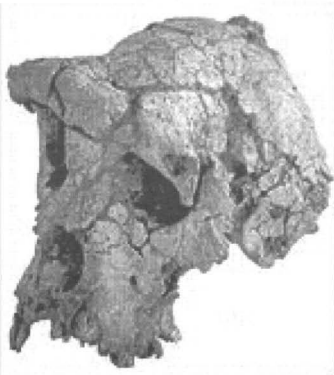
to think up my own suggestions. I speculated that we might have been indulging in another characteristically human activity that would leave little trace in the fossil record: trading. To trade you have to be able to bargain; you have to remember who you can trust – and who not. Social complexifying seems to have driven our cognitive advances right back to the trees; maybe the extended relationships of traders provided the spur for the final push. Perhaps we are a species of shopkeepers ...

But such 'explanations' are only the surface of the great story. It's surely impossible to understand how it was to be a pre-cultural modern human. And the further back we look, the harder it gets. How would it have felt to be a Neanderthal – or a *Homo erectus*, who made the same tool over and over for a million years?

We will understand more in the future. The archaeologists nowadays squeeze a remarkable amount of data from those tragically scattered relics: tiny flakes from a knapped flint can be used to show the actions of the Neanderthal knapper, even how she was sitting as she made her hand-axe. Such reconstructions briefly make us feel, as H.G. Wells famously wrote (in 'The Grisly Folk' in 1921), as if we can "walk again in vanished scenes, stretch painted limbs we thought were dust, and feel again the sunshine of a million years ago".

And if you think about it this is a kind of alien contact.

We tend to compare *Erectus* and Neanderthal to ourselves, marking them down for the human-like things they couldn't do. But these different sorts of people were not flawed humans; though our closest cousins, they were actually intelligent aliens. Perhaps all our archaeology is a groping for contact with alien minds, minds separated from us by time rather than space – a SETI of the rock layers.



The skull

## Poetry and superheroes - a mixed bag from Glenda Pringle

I am always full of admiration for those gifted souls who publish their own fanzines, newsletters, magazines, etc. Such labours of love take a lot of time and dedication, and are often seen by only a very 'select' few. Those of you who are fond of SF and Fantasy poetry might like to check out *Handshake: The Newsletter of the Eight Hand Gang*. I recently received a copy of issue 48, so this is obviously no young upstart. Comprising a single sheet of A4, liberally paste-up with both typewritten and word-processed text, this publication might not win any beauty contests, but it should garner prizes for being so informative and entertaining.

Side one consists of news and reviews, including convention dates and short reviews/notices of new poetry collections and other relevant books (e.g., *Light's List of Literary Magazines* and *The Small Press Guide*). Side two contains a selection of poems with delightful titles like 'Alice's Adventures Through the Windshield/Raising X-rated Children in a PG-rated Society' (by Andrew Darlington) which purports to be 'the penultimate truth about the Rosicrucian-Illuminatus-McDonalds-Global-Military-Industrial-World-Bank-Papal-K2-Lodge Conspiracy, and the Men in Black who control them all ...'. The poetry ranges from downright surreal ('Not in the Script' by Richard Lung) to deeply profound ('Equilibrium' by Neil K Henderson) to just plain creepy ('Return Journey' by Steve Urwin). I thought it was all great stuff and it certainly brought a smile to my face. It shows me, once again, that there is a lot of talent and dedication out there.

To obtain a copy, send an SAE to John F. Haines, 5 Cross Farm, Station Road, Padgate, Warrington, Cheshire WA2 0QG.

I know I've given a lot of column space recently to publications dealing with role-playing gaming/wargaming, but I hope you'll indulge me one more time - especially as I am going to talk about a comic book that 'takes the mick' out of one of my favourite pastimes. *PVP* (a Dork Storm comic) is a slick production, with some excellent artwork. Not only that, it has made the transition from its humble beginnings as a comic strip in *PC Gamer* magazine to the web, and then taken the giant step of putting out a print as well as an electronic version. (Although this sounds somewhat retrograde, it certainly satisfies a 'webphobe' like me!) The web version (found at: [www.pvponline.com](http://www.pvponline.com)) contains an archive of well over 800 strips which is, I am assured in the letter pages of Issue 2 of the print version, regularly read in one sitting by those who are far sadder gamers than I could ever hope to be.

I especially like the stereotypes in the main strip 'When Titans Clash'. The earnest, balding referee sporting a shirt-and-tie who endeavours to hold the players egos in check. The cynical, aggressive, testosterone-hyped woman who wants to hog the scenario. (Hmmm... that sounds familiar) The pony-tailed yuppie 'dude' who knows his character sheets (and the rules) inside out. And the quiet little bespectacled teenager who has a frighteningly large pile of notes from previous scenarios in front of him. (Ring any bells for you role-playing gamers out there?) However, these are just the players. Their alter egos range from Brunhilde ('the Icelandic princess with a penchant for striking very dramatic poses'), Silly Putty ('who has yet to

master his stretching superpowers') and Chessmaster (I think you can guess that one). What a team to tackle the



Dork Storm - Glenda confronts the Matrix ed.

dastardly villains who transformed the International House of Pancakes family restaurant into a den of evil!

The magazine is rounded off with short strips, including 'Nodwick' which documents the perils of confusing resurrection and reincarnation spells and 'Lethal Doses' which shows how sticking to routine can make players disinclined to try out something new.

I found the whole thing to be a wonderful parody of the whole gaming ethos, and clever without being geeky. (Geel! Issue 3 is going to all be in Japanese Manga style!) Subscription

information for *PVP*, as well as its sibling publications *Dork Tower* and *Nodwick*, is available by calling Pegasus Games at 010 608 833-GAME or by checking out the web address given above or [www.dorkstorm.com](http://www.dorkstorm.com).

One to look out for! Big Engine will be launching a NEW SF magazine in October 2002 entitled *3SF*. As well as new fiction from such worthies as Michael Moorcock, Ian Watson, Brian Stableford and Mary Gentle, there will be reviews and media coverage, fan news, interviews and a special subscriber-only website with enhanced content. Not only that, but that nice man Ben Jeapes is one of us and has kindly offered his fellow BSFA members a discounted subscription rate of £18 for 6 issues if they send their BSFA number with payment. (If that last line sounded like a gushy attempt at being put on the list for a review copy, it was.) Contact: *3SF Magazine*, Big Engine Co. Ltd., PO Box 185, Abingdon, Oxon. OX14 1GR or visit the website at: [www.bigengine.co.uk](http://www.bigengine.co.uk) (cheques should be made payable to Big Engine Co. Ltd.). Just think, Volume 1, Number 1 could be a collectors' item someday!

Finally, I realised that I neglected to include contact details for the Society of Fantasy and Science Fiction Wargamers in my review of their journal *Ragnarok* in the last issue of *Matrix*. The subscription rate is £15 for five issues of the journal, which includes membership of the Society. Cheques (payable to 'SFSFW') should be sent to: SFSFW, 4 Old Acre Road, Whitchurch, Bristol BS14 0HN. Alternatively, visit their website at: [www.sfsfw.org](http://www.sfsfw.org).

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

# —AN IRONING BOARD ON A DUCK POND—

## BALL LIGHTNING AND FLYING NIPPLES

**Martin Sketchley** looks for aliens on the web

Like the majority of people interested in science fiction, I've always been fascinated with the idea of extraterrestrials, what they might look like, where they might come from, what they might do on their days off, etc. Indeed, conscious awareness of the possibility that aliens might visit us here on little old Earth – or might already have done so – has been a thorny issue for mankind for thousands of years, particularly given the existence of ancient, mysterious cave paintings that appear to depict such visitations.

I'm not talking about some microscopic smears of algae stuck to a fragment of a meteorite buried in the arctic circle for thousands of years here; what I'm interested in is the real deal: "proper" aliens from advanced civilisations who fly around in big spaceships – preferably saucer- or cigar-shaped, with lots of flashing lights – and who have wrap-around eyes and lipless mouths.

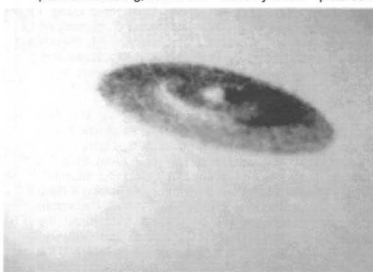
However, despite my open-minded attitude towards physical visitations by intelligent creatures from other worlds, indeed, a wish that this would occur, if only to draw the news away from house and share prices, I remain sceptical that this has happened as yet, or is likely to in the immediate future. After all, if you had a spaceship with FTL capabilities, and could visit any of the undoubtedly countless wonders within a million light year radius of your home planet, would you choose to visit the West Midlands? (Answers on a post card, please, to "oi down now, maitre" competition...)

So, in search of Actual Evidence to either prove or disprove that we have been visited by aliens – hey, I'll even settle for an alien spacecraft passing close to the Earth's surface – I set out to explore The Internet, where, so they tell me, all the answers to all the questions in the universe lie. All you have to do is find them.

Two things I decided I was interested in: good quality, undisputable photos of aliens themselves, wrap-around eyes, lipless mouths and all, or of alien spacecraft in flight (or failing that, parked up, with aliens sitting next to them sipping a warm beverage from a receptacle designed

specifically for their lipless mouths).

The picture gallery at the Protree UFO Centre web site proved interesting, with a few – but only a few – pictures it



'somebody's nipples'

seemed hard to dispute at first glance. Apart from the one that was clearly somebody's nipple, that is. However, these quickly degenerated into pictures of the kind I have the greatest problems with – those of craft taken at very low level, usually between trees (it's just too darn easy to hang something from a branch) and pictures of "lights in the sky". However, there were nonetheless one or two images that stirred the blood somewhat, and in that respect the possibility – some might say "probability" – that they're fakes doesn't really matter that much.

The Alien Press Links site was also interesting with, as you might expect, lots of links that might be of interest to someone seeking The Answers. There was even one for "new age aliens", which I thought might lead to a page about aliens who listen to Enya or even less palatable "world music". However, it turned out to focus on "channelling" and such like, which, although interesting to some I'm sure, wasn't really what I was after, although there were lots of other interesting links.

In the end, having looked at umpteen sights claiming to contain images of either UFOs or aliens for the purposes of this article, I became increasingly exasperated for two reasons. The first was that a large number of these images proved to be identical, mostly related to the alleged Roswell incident or the movie made about it, clearly depicting what amounted to little more than a mannequin – albeit a fairly impressive one – generally being prodded and poked at by clumsy human hands. The other was that upon entering the majority of these sites a myriad of other pages seemed to open up, offering me everything from mobile phones to the chance to gamble my fortune away in an online casino to a high



'...undisputable photos of aliens themselves...'



quality escort – and I'm not talking about a motor car here, either! (At this point I'm tempted to make a joke about "headlamps" but decide against it...)

If you've got kids who are into this sort of thing, then you might find The Alien Village site interesting, as it offers you and your kids the opportunity to build, um, an "Alien Village". There are instructions of how to build eight alien houses, a spaceport and a transporter, aliens, robots, alien plants (not Triffids, either), and five – go on, count 'em – 3D spaceships! But, the best thing about this site is the audio content, which is so sadly lacking from the majority of web sites. Obviously created by someone with a Bontempi or possibly Casio keyboard in the corner of a pub having supped too many beers, the sound is, in truth, the site's crowning glory.

In a shock coincidence I found even more music at the UFOs, Mysteries & Phenomena site, which features "Paranormal experiences faced by many, and not to be ignored". Well, if you say so. One particularly interesting link was to an article entitled "Aircraft Carrier Meets God"; not quite sure why there was no exclamation mark in that headline, as it is surely deserved of one. Anyway, it turns out that in the Bermuda Triangle in 1970 "in a awesome [sic] display of power, a 200 foot diameter pulsing, glowing spherical UFO hovered directly over the USS J.F. Kennedy aircraft carrier for 20 minutes, following the ship as it cruised." Hmm. My immediate thought at reading this was "ball lightning!". This is a phrase which often leaps into my head for no apparent reason, as it happens, but is in this instance actually relevant. However, I'm not sure ball lightning can be that large (maybe like Dougal from Father Ted, they had trouble telling the difference between "small" and "far away").

Finally, in my ongoing search for evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence, I decided to visit the SETI site. The most interesting thing about this is that you can take part yourself, actually assisting in the search for intelligent life not of this Earth. All you have to do is download a screensaver which runs when your PC is idle, analysing the data it's collected from SETI. The analysed data is then uploaded again once it's been analysed.

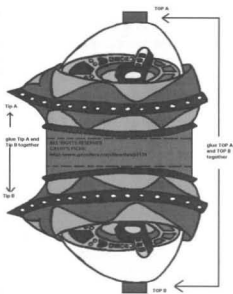
This is possible because the data can easily be chopped into pieces, all of which can be analysed independently from each other. When the data's sent back to SETI having been analysed by your computer, it's all returned to the database and flagged as "done". This is rather sensible in my opinion. When your PC's ready to receive a new chunk of work the computers look for some un-analysed data for it to work on, flagging it in the database as being "in progress", when it's sent; again, eminently sensible. Each chunk of data is analysed several times to make sure it's all processed correctly, and that nothing's been missed. And that's not the only way you can help. If the idea of lending use of your PC to someone thousands of miles away doesn't appeal, regardless of the fact that it might, just *might* be your little piece of sky in which those first signals appear, you can simply become one of SETI@home's supporters, joining an impressive list of people you've probably never heard of. And, hey, donations are fully tax deductible.

## Spinnerets

Apparently there's a new web site for writers in the form of

Writers - Zone.com: "Writers - Zone.com is a web site where everyone is free to publish their work no matter what the texts are about. We want to keep this site open to all different tastes."

And then there's Eternal Art Productions, which "will be open to everyone but the focus is aimed at alternative, "darker" types of writing such as "3D-Spaceships!" horror stories, gothic tales, science fiction, dark poetry etc."



That's it. Like last time, I've been absolutely overwhelmed with exciting news to spread via this prestigious organ, so if you have any specifically web-related news that might be of interest to *Matrix* readers, or ideas for future articles, please, please send me an e-mail at the address below, ensuring you include the relevant URLs. Go on; you know you want to.

## URLs of relevance:

- <http://www.protege.com/pufo/ufo.html>
- <http://www.aliendave.com/UtahUFOPic.html> — worth a visit for the music alone. Honest!
- [http://www.fortunecity.com/marina/reach1987/aliens&ufos\\_photos.htm](http://www.fortunecity.com/marina/reach1987/aliens&ufos_photos.htm) — some interesting photos but lots of annoying pop-up boxes that hijack your browser.
- <http://www.aliens.co.uk/cosmicphotos.html> — transcripts of alleged conversations between ground control and Apollo missions.
- <http://www.angelfire.com/nv/mywebpage/aut2.html> — Roswell photos.
- <http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/> — Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence
- <http://www.alienpress.com/sci-fialiens.html> — Alien Press Links
- <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/7134/Alien/alien.htm> — Alien village for kids to build!
- <http://anw.com/mysteries.htm> — UFOs, Mysteries & Phenomena site.

Martin's own site is:

[www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

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

## JOHN B. SPENCER 1944 – 2002

**Jim Burns** on an *sf* 'phenomenon'

I'd like to take the opportunity to pay brief homage through the columns of *Matrix* to the memory of a man who, though probably not known at all to most fans or professionals within the genre of science fiction, in my opinion played his own rather important role back through the first half of the 1970s.

John B. Spencer was a multi-talented individual whose career included music (his first love) and novel writing. He wrote seven novels altogether – most of them gritty, London based crime thrillers though some of the earlier such as *The Electronic Lullaby Meat Market* (1975) and the Philip K. Dickish *A Case For Charley* (1984) have distinct genre connections. His career as a musician/song writer was lower-keyed than it should have been. *Time Out* once referred to him as "The best song writer in Britain" and the one time I saw him performing (at the Trowbridge Village Pump Festival in Wiltshire) with his then group, The Louts his talent and ability to hugely entertain an enthusiastic audience was manifestly obvious. He had charisma, huge talent and was nowhere near as well-known as he should have been. Through the 80s he toured with his group, the John Spencer Alternative comprising various members of earlier folk rock outfits such as the Albion Band and the Home Service. During the 90s declining health started to curtail his energy for such things though he went on writing up until his last novel, *Stitch* in 1999. I didn't see a lot of John during this time but when I did, despite serious illness, his charm, wit and enthusiasm for life was totally undimmed.

But I knew John best of all for another totally different career strand he took up in 1970. After a period as head of production at Panther Books in the late 60s, John founded his own illustration agency called Young Artists. It was John who, on seeing my diploma exhibition at St Martins School of Art in 1972, where I'd been studying for the previous 3 years, said to me "I can get you work - do you want to hop aboard?"

He had an eye for the direction the future was beginning to take in the world of *sf* art. He was totally tuned into the zeitgeist of the time and had a way of inspiring one perfectly in the right direction. An absolute understanding of the field. During the first half of the 1970s John hailed aboard myself, Les Edwards, John Harris, Tony Roberts, Angus McKie, Ian Craig, Bob Fowke, Alan Daniels - and others - as

well as many talented artists working in other areas of illustration. Not all of these guys are still working in the field but many are and I for one feel that without John's encouragement - and generous financial help at awkward times, my career at least may have taken a very different direction. For me he was a "triggering moment" as it were. As such, the look of the covers that graced the *sf* novels of the 70s and 80s owes a huge amount to the generosity, encouragement and insight of this man. And certainly during this time the visual side of the genre became an increasingly important factor – inspiring in no small way the development of contemporary *sf* cinema. I don't think it's an overstatement to say that John, in his own way made a contribution, albeit anonymously, to the field of science fiction art and I felt it important to register that fact here.

Young Artists evolved into Arena back in the 80s. From 1980 it was run by my current agent Alison Eldred who brought new energy and efficiency to bear on the business (The lure of performing his music on stage was too much of a diversion to John at that time!). But the unique atmosphere and progressive attitudes that John brought to the business remained. I'm still with Alison in her new incarnation as Alison Eldred Artists - but the spirit of the thing that John created more than 3 decades ago remains. I shall always be grateful to this man. He gave me a career.

John was only 57 when he died - with far too much still left to give the world. His funeral - a humanist ceremony - and indeed a celebration of a life well-lived was held at Putney Vale Crematorium on the 8th April this year. It was hugely attended. As was the pub-wake immediately afterwards where we all drank to John's memory and the words of perhaps his most famous song – 'One More Whisky'. A man much-loved and sadly missed. And more important than he perhaps ever really knew.

By some bizarre conjunction as I write this - Andy Kershaw on Radio 3 is playing some tracks from a live session John performed for the programme back in 1987. Andy has also made the comment that an 8th novel by John - entitled *Grief* - will be published posthumously in 2003. The guy was a phenomenon!

He is survived by his wife Lou, who he married in 1966, and three sons.

**Herman Cohen (1925?-2002)**, US film producer of schlock horror cult films aimed at teenagers including *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, *Blood of Dracula* and *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* The latter launched Michael Landon's career. He also made Joan Crawford's last film the flop *Trog* but became a close friend of hers. His career lasted to 1973 with his last film *Craze*. "I have always felt that most teenagers think that adults - their parents, or their teachers, anyone who was older and who had authority - were culprits in their lives," he once said. **Leo McKern (1920-2002)** Australian-born actor most well-known for the outstanding Number Two in *The Prisoner*. Genre film role ranged from *X the Unknown* (1956) to *Ladyhawke* (1985) and included notable parts in *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961), *The Omen* (1976), and its sequel. **Rod Steiger (1925-2002)** US

actor he won an Oscar for the sublime *In the Heat of the Night*. His genre work included *The Illustrated Man* (1969) -- with Claire Bloom, second of his four wives -- *The Amityville Horror* (1979), *Mars Attacks!* (1996) *End of Days* (1999). **Bernard Wilkie (1920-2002)** pioneer of TV special effects and co-founder of the Visual Effects Workshop at the BBC (where he worked from 1948 to 1978). His *sf* projects included *1984* (1954), *Quatermass II* (1955), *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-9), and *Dr Who* as well as *Monty Python* and *The Goodies*. **Ward Kimball** a pioneer of movie animation and one of Disney's fabled 'Nine Old Men', died on 8 July aged 88. Many many animation and animation-director credits including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia*. including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia*.

Continued from page 13

cyberpunk is missing that point. The old technomugness seems to be creeping back in, forcing out some of the noir as it comes. Spliced-in technology gets reduced to the level of fashion accessory. Back jacket book blurbs start to read like hi-tech shopping lists, webbed together with the occasional character name. I get the sense that the selling point of cyberpunk has become the hardware itself, rather than the human consequences it creates. And that definitely wasn't what I wanted for *Altered Carbon* – so, I suppose yes, I went right back to the original dark places Gibson got his tone from, and did the same splice.

**GW** Two things every review mentions is the novel's violence and your prose.

**RM** OK, prose first. Everyone has been hugely complimentary here, even a somewhat sour three star dressing down I got on the Amazon reader reviews page stopped the catalogue of indictment long enough to praise the prose. Now that's very nice of course, and much appreciated, but I confess to being a little saddened at what some of this praise seems to imply – namely that well written prose is some kind of luxury extra in genre fiction. I know there seems to be some kind of trade-off mentality operating in the readership – sort of *oh well, the prose is crap but it's got snappy dialogue and a cracking pace and you can't have everything* – but this is absurd. This is the slippery slope that leads to people mainlining Matthew Reilly. I think the SF readership needs to be far more demanding. Genre fans shouldn't be telling themselves poor prose is the price you have to pay for a fast narrative and interesting ideas. A decent author should be able to do the whole lot – prose, dialogue, narrative pace, characterisation, background detail, and all at quality levels. It might take longer to produce a novel like that, but I mean, this *is* what we get paid for, isn't it?

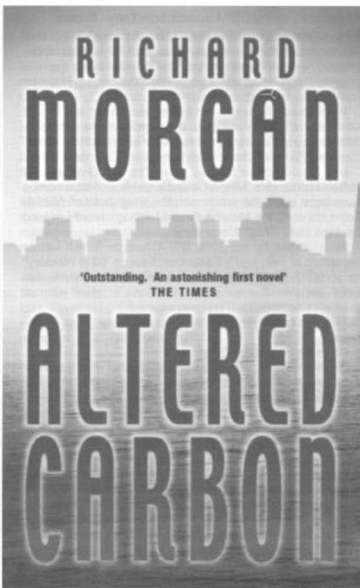
Now – the violence. Yes, there's quite a lot of it. *Altered Carbon* deals with issues of power, the abuse of power inherent in the way we allow ourselves to be governed and the consequences that abuse gives rise to. It is a book about criminality both socially sanctioned and not. It's inevitable that it will contain violence, and the only real issue is how this violence is going to be dealt with. Are we going to have A-team style violence, the crisp smack of the hero's fist against the villain's jaw and bullets that make neat little red holes in the bad guys and cause them to fall down like children playing at war? Or are we going to have the power and confrontation of violence that we've seen in movies like *Platoon*, *Salvador*, *Reservoir Dogs* and *Fight Club*? Well, I'll give you a clue – I never liked the A-team. I give you my readers to go away filled with a comfortable feeling of self-righteousness and gung ho locker room bravado as Takeshi Kovacs cuts a swathe through a Play Station screen full of eminently deserving bad guys. That's the kind of attitude that gets Afghan shepherds and their families blown to bits. No. If you're riding with Kovacs, I'm sorry, you don't get to stay that squeaky clean. I want my readers to feel a sick thrill as Kovacs commits his acts of vengeance, and then have to examine and live with that human knowledge about themselves afterwards. I

want readers to understand at a visceral level that torture isn't just a bit of Hollywood bad guy slap and cackle, a few bruises and a split lip, and then a daring rescue; it's a process that methodically tears a human being apart and it's being done, right now, at this moment in a thousand police cells all over the world.

And speaking of torture, there's one reader review on the Amazon site that I occasionally go back and re-read because I still can't quite get my head around it. This reader made much of the fact that they would have given *Altered Carbon* four stars out of five but they reduced this to two stars because the torture sequences had made them "feel quite sickened". Er – sorry? Run that by me again? Isn't that rather like saying I would have given this book four stars but the sex scenes made me feel aroused so it only gets two? Reading about the torture of a young woman made you feel sickened. Well, uh....good. That was the idea. I'd be worried if it didn't. The violence is there to engender a whole range of violent emotions from exhilaration to sickened revulsion, because that's what it does to humans in real life. Above all, when people read *Altered Carbon*, I want them to feel something real, because in the end that's what good fiction – good fiction in any genre – should be about.

**GW** Is Kovacs' first name taken from Japanese film-maker 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano, responsible for *Violent Cop* among others.

**RM** Quite possibly. Certainly, I am a big Kitano fan (there's a fleeting reference to a street in Millsport named after him) but to be honest, I don't remember. *Altered Carbon* first started to come together in 1993, and the character of Kovacs pre-dates even that by a few years. By the time I started writing the book, I'd definitely seen and been impressed by *Violent Cop*, but that was only one high point in a whole web of Japanese cinema and literature that I was working my way through at the time. And Takeshi's a common enough Japanese name. What I do remember was that Kovacs got called Tak a lot in earlier drafts and short pieces, and that I'm sure comes from a character in an unusually sensitive and noirish Heinlein novel called *Double Star* – the resident hard man there was called Darius K



Broadbent, Dak to his friends. But as *Altered Carbon* developed and the Japanese element came more and more to the fore, Tak got edited out in favour of Takeshi. So, uh, that's not really an answer, is it? The answer is – I don't know. Possibly. Quite possibly.

**GW** I think I read that you've not been to an sf con yet? I expect that *Altered Carbon* will be getting plenty of award nominations this time around so you'll have plenty of a good excuses...

**RM** Actually, since I said that, I've been to Helicon, which was a lot of fun. And now I'm quitting the day job to write full time, I'm viewing cons and the like as a part of what I do – so I'll be around. Award nominations – well, let's wait and see. I'm up against some stiff competition. Mieville's *The Scar* and M John Harrison's *Light*, to name but two.

## — AND THE WINNER IS ... —

All the news on the BSFA awards from **Tanya Brown**

By the time you read this, the British summer will be over (I'm beginning to believe in all those future dystopias where the sun never shines!) and you'll all be inundating me with the award nominations that you've been inspired to make by your holiday reading ...

It does seem to have been a slow year so far, and I'm not sure why. Plenty of sequels and continuations around – *Effendi*, in Jon Courtenay Grimwood's 'El Iskandryia' series; *Castles Made of Sand*, the sequel to Gwyneth Jones' Clarke Award winner *Bold as Love*; *The Iron Grail*, second in Rob Holdstock's 'Merlin Codex' arc – but no new names have burst upon the scene with the magnitude of Alastair Reynolds or China Miéville. Or am I wrong? Have I missed the Next New Thing? Nominate it ...

Nominations for the 2002 BSFA Awards (which will be presented at next year's Eastercon, Seacon '03 in Hinckley) as at 10<sup>th</sup> August 2002 are listed below. Items nominated since the previous issue of *Matrix* are marked with an asterisk.

### Novel:

*Schild's Ladder* – Greg Egan  
*Effendi* – Jon Courtenay Grimwood  
*The Iron Grail* – Robert Holdstock  
*Castles Made of Sand* – Gwyneth Jones  
*The Scar* – China Miéville  
*Altered Carbon* – Richard Morgan  
*The Years of Rice and Salt* – Kim Stanley Robinson

### Short Story:

'Singleton' – Greg Egan (*Interzone* 176, February 2002)  
"If Lions Could Speak" – Paul Park (*Interzone* 177, March 2002)  
"Five British Dinosaurs" – Michael Swanwick (*Interzone* 177, March 2002)

### Non-Fiction:

Lucius Shepherd's review of *The Time Machine* (2002), at <http://www.electricstory.com/reviews/timex.asp>  
"Once There Was a Magazine", by Fred Smith (Becon Publications, 2002)

### Artwork:

\*Peter Gric: 'Experiment 1' – cover of *The Third Alternative*, July 2002 (online at <http://www.ttapress.com/pub/TTAcurrent.html>)  
\*Fraser Irving: page 1 of *Judge Death: My Name is Death*, in 2000AD Prog 1289 (1<sup>st</sup> May 2002)

Up-to-date news on the contenders can be found on the BSFA web page ([www.bsfa.co.uk](http://www.bsfa.co.uk)), and there'll be an 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 to [awards@amaranth.avnet.co.uk](mailto: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 31<sup>st</sup> January 2003.**

The rules of eligibility are as follows:

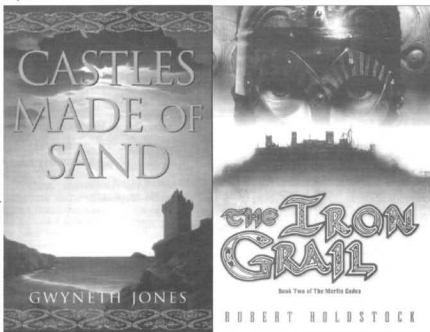
**Best Novel**, for the best novel first published in the UK in the calendar year 2002. This award is (in theory, at least) open to any work of fiction – not just adult-oriented science fiction.

**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.



The new nominees

**Steve Green** brings us news of all things fannish

Despite the obvious attractions of the internet, one of the best ways to get involved with fandom – and more importantly, to forge the friendships which differentiate “us” from most other single-interest groups – is via local science fiction meetings. They may no longer provide an oasis in a social desert, now there are genre-related events virtually every other weekend, but they remain a vital breeding ground for the fanzine publishers and convention organisers of tomorrow.

One of the longest-running is the Belfast Science Fiction Group, which grew out of a series of night classes conducted at Belfast Technical Institute by the late James White about thirty years ago. Pupils used to adjourn to a nearby pub, the aptly-named White's Tavern, and continued to do so long after the courses terminated.

By the mid-1980s, the original venue's penchant for trad jazz proved too much for the half-dozen core members, and they decided to cross Lombard Street and relocate to the Monico Bar, where they still convene on alternate Thursdays (forthcoming dates include 26 September and 10 October).

“The group has never been big on the serious side of sf fandom,” Eugene Doherty admits. “Most are hard sf fans with a strong interest in films (both sf and mainstream), and two are published writers.” However, there is an infrequent clubzine (*The Monocle*), members did once produce a sf round-robin (*Naked Came the Alien*) and several of the group have published their own fanzines, most notably Tommy Ferguson and Mark McCann (*Tommyworld*, *Gottterdammerung*).

Further details of their activities can be obtained by sending Eugene a reply-paid envelope at 110 North Parade, Belfast, BT7 2GJ, or by accessing the group's website at [www.terracon3000.org.uk/monico.htm](http://www.terracon3000.org.uk/monico.htm).

Down in Portsmouth, the South Hants Science Fiction Group is celebrating its twenty-first birthday on 21 September, with a lightly-programmed gathering from noon until 6pm at the Maggie pub on Fratton Road (five minutes' walk from Fratton Railway Station and site of regular meetings on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month).

Although no longer as active in print as it once was (Phil Plumby's *Terminus Borealis Times* having recently followed John Bark's *Death Rays*, Keith Cosslett's *Cyberspace* and Jeff Suter's *Periphery* into fanzine heaven), the SHSFG has extensive concurring credentials (including the popular Wincons and the 1997 Eastercon) and a hyperactive social calendar.

Coincidentally, the same day sees a shrunken Fantasycon move from its traditional home in Birmingham down to Champagne Charlie's in London. As well as guest of honour Graham Joyce, the event also offers putative novelists the opportunity to pitch their pet projects to Jo Fletcher (Orion

Books) and Dorothy Lumley (Dorien Literary Agency).

Tickets cost £17.00, which seems a little steep for a one-day programme (although British Fantasy Society members get a £5.00 discount), payable to Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire, CW9 8PQ.

London's own monthly tribal congress (the infamous first-Thursday “Tun”) is on the move again, following a change of landlord at the Florence Nightingale (aka “The Dead Nurse”).

The latest candidate is the Silver Cross in Whitehall, which got off to a bumpy start on 1 August, when a group of rowdy policemen refused to depart on schedule, but the management has promised sole use of the function room in future.

Also off to pastures new: Manchester's FONT. (Friends of Norman Tebbit? Federation of Norwegian Trawlermen? No idea, I'm afraid.) Their new venue is the Crown and Anchor, Hilton Street, second and fourth Thursday of the month; full details on 0161 355 0599.

Hard as it is to believe now, Britain once had a thriving film industry. “Hammer: The Bray Studio Years” is a day-long celebration of one chapter in that history, hosted by director Norman Warren (*Satan's Slave*) at London's Cine Lumiere on 12 October.

Tickets are £20.00 (which includes four films, among them the wonderful *Plague of the Zombies*), payable to Norman c/o 25 High Hill Ferry, Bakers Hill, London, E5 5HG.

Sadly, the eighteenth issue of Mike Murphy's Hammer fanzine *Dark Terrors* is also his last. A true work of love, it's a damned shame the level of support Mike's received from Hammer staff and cast-members over the past eleven years was never reflected in his sales figures. Forget lack of money or production hassles: nothing kills a fanzine faster than reader indifference.

Copies of the photo-packed final issue, which includes a fulsome directory of Hammer material available on DVD and a tribute to studio boss Sir James Carreras, cost £2.25 from Mike at 6 Wesley Place, St Ives, Cornwall, TR26 1SL.

Perhaps *Here & Now: The Magazine of Urban Fantasy* will fare better, though publishing small press fiction is always a long shot. Edited by Jenny Barber, the first issue is available for £3.25 from 3 Tamworth Close, Lower Earley, Reading, RG6 4EQ [www.bradanpress.co.uk](http://www.bradanpress.co.uk). I hope to have more on this, as well as Big Engine's forthcoming *3SF*, next time out.

Finally, let us all wish TransAtlantic Fan Fund delegate Tobes Valois *bon voyage* as he heads off to San Jose as Britain's ambassador to the sixtieth world science fiction convention. Those attending Novacon 32 in November can follow his adventures in a special TAFF slideshow on Saturday [www.novacon.org.uk](http://www.novacon.org.uk).

News items, blackmail photos, unfranked stamps and incriminating lithographs – plus club news, of course – should be forwarded to [sfcheckpoint@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sfcheckpoint@yahoo.co.uk) or by post at 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.

### 21 Sep 02 Fantasycon

Champagne Charlie's, 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.

### 21 Sep 02 South Hants SF Group Birthday Party

Magpie pub, Fratton, Portsmouth, noon to about 6pm. Guests TBA. Admission free to all, but there will be a raffle to cover buffet food etc.

### 4 - 6 Oct 02 - Conquest (media con)

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

### 12 Oct 02 - Hammer Films: The Bray Studio Years

Cine Lumiere, London. Four-film showing, including the 'classic' *Plague of the Zombies*. MC: horror director Norman J. Warren (*Inseminoid*). Tickets £20 to him, c/o 25 High Hill Ferry, Bakers Hill, London, E5 9HG.



### 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 McKean. Membership: \$100 to 4/11/01, then more. Info: World Fantasy Convention, c/o DreamHavenBooks, 912 West Lake Street, Minneapolis, MN 55408, wfc@dreamhavenbooks.com, www.dreamhavenbooks/wfc.html

### 1-3 Nov 02 - Novacon 22

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, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

### 21-23 Feb 03 - Redemption (B5/B7)

Ashford International Hotel, Ashford, Kent. £45 reg, rising to £50 on 1 September; £55 at door. Day: £30, £35 at door. Children £15 or £10/day. Concessions 10% off weekend, 5% day. Contact 26 King's Meadow View, Wetherby, LS22 7FX.



### 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.I.*), Chris Evans, Mary Gentle. £40 full attending

membership. Contacts: www.seacon03.org.uk or 8 The Orchard, Tonwell, Herts, SG12 0HR, UK

### 1-3 Aug 03 Finncon X - Eurocon 2003

Turku, Finland. Contact Turku Science Fiction Society, PL 538, 20101 Turku, Finland.

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

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



# TORCON3



### 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.on.ca, www.torcon3.on.ca

### 10-12 Oct 03 - Grissecon 1 (Wraeththu)

Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford. GoH: Storm Constantine. £40 reg to 30 Dec 02, £50 to 31 Aug 03 (booking closes). Contact 6 St Leonards Ave, Stafford, ST17 4LT.

### 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 8JJ.

### 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 sup. Mastercard and Visa accepted. Contact PO Box 1010, Framingham, MA 01701, USA.



### 4-8 Aug 05 - Interaction (63rd Worldcon)

Glasgow, UK. Guests of Honour: Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Sheckley, Lars-Olov Strandberg, Jane Yolen. £75. Attending, £30 Supporting. Contact: Interaction, 379 Myrtle S2 3HQ, UK; http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/; info@interaction.worldcon.org.uk

Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S2 3HQ, UK; http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/; info@interaction.worldcon.org.uk

## 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 Clarks Lane, Willenhall, W. Midlands WV13 1HX. bsfg@bortas.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/hullsf.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**

**Changed** First Thursday of each month from around 5.00pm (downstairs bar booked from 7.00pm) at the Silver Cross, Whitehall opposite the Whitehall Theatre, thirty yards south of Trafalgar Square. Nearest tube stations are Charing Cross (the closest), Embankment, Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus and Westminster. Charing Cross rail station is nearby and Waterloo is about ten minutes' walk away (over the new Hungerford foot bridge).

### **Manchester: FONT**

**Changed** FONT meets on the second and fourth Thursday of the month now at the Crown & Anchor, Hilton St from about 8.30pm onwards. Info 0161 355 0599.

### **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@cwcom.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 Maggie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth.

### **Reading SF Group**

**Changed** Now meeting at nine o'clock every Monday in the Brewery Tap in Castle Street, except for the third Monday of the calendar month, when we meet at seven thirty in the Corn Stores in Forbury Road. See www.rsfg.org.uk for details or contact: M.Young@twinfair.co.uk

### **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*

### **Wanted**

Copy of the recent issue of *SFX* containing a feature on John Meaney, Justina Robson and China Miéville. Copy of *Interzone* or *Interzone* anthology featuring short story entitled 'The Only One' by David Garnett. Will pay reasonable price plus postage. Martin Sketchley 232 Alvechurch Road, West Heath, Birmingham, B31 3PS msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

## SIG

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Thanks to all contributors, Carol Ann Kerry Green

All artwork - Gary Wilkinson.

# JO'S TIMEWASTERS

## Competition 157

It's high time we had you writing some verse, I think. Sonnets, senryus, Limericks, haikus, Latin hexameters – use whatever you wish, as many as you like, with a minimum of two, which can be of the same type. Any sf subject, even *Matrix* – there's plenty of rhymes for 'Gary'. Entries by 31 October 2002, please to John Ollis, 49 Leighton Road, Corby NN18

## Results of competition 155

I knew nothing about comics and no idea whether this would be easy or not. There was a small entry, nobody got it right, but least wrong was John A Spencer.

1. b) June 1938.
2. a) Arthur C Clarke.
3. a) Green Lantern.
4. a) 1905.
5. a) True, written by Murray Leinster. b) Bob Kane.
6. c) Bob Monkhouse (almost put me off sf for good).

# MEGA 2000AD COMPETITION TAKE 2

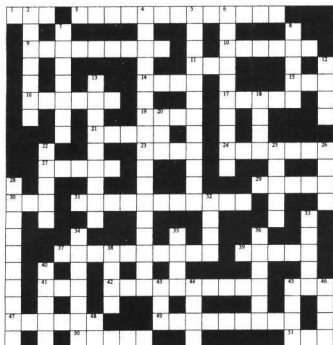
Well there was disappointing number of entries for this one – precisely one! There are obviously the winner but as there are still prizes to get rid of (sorry give away) I'm throwing it open again. Also given the recent upheaval regarding late magazines and my departure I'm extending the entry previous comps that have not have their winners announced to six weeks after this appears.

1. What's 'perp' short for?
2. "Something, Something, Oranges, Something" - Fill in the 'somethings' and what strip is it from?
3. Feek the Freak, what strip?
4. "Be Pure. Be Vigilant. Behave." What strip?
5. "I'm a pipe-fitter!" Which strip?
6. "She went out." Who?
7. Who likes "Big Jobs!"?
8. Who might say: "Oh my heartsels!"?

9. Who had, as one of his friends, a robotic cigar?
10. In *Judge Dredd*, Citizen Snork was famous for what?
11. Hammerstien the robot from the *A.B.C. Warriors* and *Ro-Busters* has which car badge on his front?
12. What is Judge Anderson's first name?
13. And what is Judge Dredd's?
14. Old One-Eye is what?
15. Judge Dredd lives in which block, (well until very recently)?
16. Name all the Dark Judges
17. Who was Chief Judge Cal's deputy?
18. Who or what is the Wally Squad?
19. Who has a companion called Ukko?
20. In the Cursed Earth of *Judge Dredd* the head of what President has been added to the Mount Rushmore of the future?
21. What free gift was given away with Prog 1

# GRIDLINKED

Compiled by Neal Asher



## Across

- 1) Simian on tape (3)
- 3) Bit odd this John? (4,9)
- 9) Not a heavy time (5,4)
- 10) Mars satellite (6)
- 11) Constellation in the mane (3)
- 14) Explosive car? (4)
- 15) An age in the rain (3)
- 16) Alternative gene (6)
- 17) Writing for punks (5)
- 19) A blight on this writer (4)
- 21) Cures prince of frogginess (5)
- 23) What was before 14 (4)
- 24) Flora the flesh eater (7)
- 27) Turns in Ursula's Heaven (5)
- 29) Atmospheric moon (5)
- 30) 7<sup>th</sup> Greek letter (3)
- 31) Occam's sprinter? (5,6)
- 37) Carroll's talking saucepan (10)
- 39) Orbital hypocrite (5)
- 41) Say this after doing 49 (3)
- 42) City on the Fritz? (10)
- 45) Twisted elf (3)
- 47) Orbital fairy king (6)
- 49) Not a lolly to lick (9)
- 50) Vogt's second series (4,1)
- 51) Soldier ask... (3)

## Down

- 2) For lain's consideration (7)
- 4) Rust-free rodent (9,5,3)
- 5) Unload Person (4,8)
- 6) Demist echo (1,1,3,5)
- 7) Source of liquid metal (1,1,5)
- 8) Feet of clay (5)
- 12 & 44 down) Sugar rain (4,4)
- 13) Calcutta crusher (5,4)
- 18) Morlock munchies (4)
- 20) Inter this mesh (3)
- 22) Present danger obvious (5)
- 25) Pier's hero with an edge (5)
- 26) In the desert, frankly (4)
- 27) Tragic king (4)
- 28) Main rotter in this film (10)
- 32) Old devil (4)
- 33) A coherent flasher (5)
- 34) A sticky particle, in time (7)
- 35) Laumer's tank (4)
- 36) 3.262 times 9 (6)
- 38) Explosive device (4)
- 40) Vance's clever hero (5)
- 43) Solid mythical bird? (3)
- 44) See 12
- 45) The prophetic film (3)
- 46) Brief curtsy (4)
- 48) 13<sup>th</sup> Greek letter (2)