

matrix

May/jun 2003

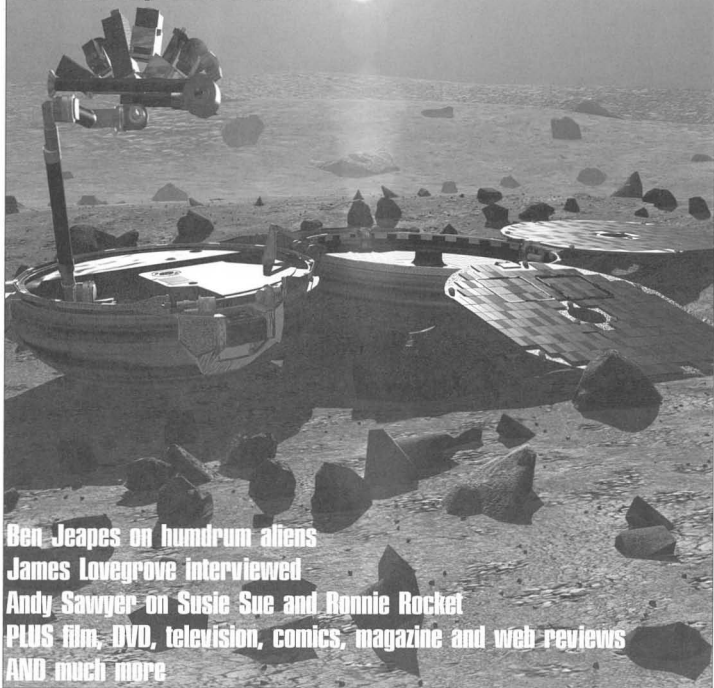
No. 161

£2.25

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

New Martian invasion

**Stephen Baxter on Beagle 2 and
the British expedition to Mars**



Ben Jeapes on humdrum aliens

James Lovegrove interviewed

Andy Sawyer on Susie Sue and Ronnie Rocket

PLUS film, DVD, television, comics, magazine and web reviews

AND much more

matrix

Welcome,

On that day, Mark bought every paper going. *The Guardian*. *The Sun*. *The Sport*. He even – red-faced and furtive – lowered himself to buying *The Daily Telegraph*. (He hid it inside *The Sport* to avoid any embarrassment.) The news? That there was life on Mars.

As soon as he was back at the lab, he dived into the library and devoured all the scientific comment about the meteorite ALH84001. It didn't matter that this wasn't really life, rather carbonate globules containing the putative fossilised remains of Martian microbes. It didn't matter that they could be artefacts. The fact was this was the best evidence yet of life on another planet. And if nano-bacteria could exist on Mars? Well, it was just a small step to Bug Eyed Monsters, greys and perhaps even Vulcans.

That lump of Martian rock continues to create considerable controversy. Mark still believes that the rock is more likely to contain signs of life than not (see for example *Proc Natl Acad Sci* 2001; 98 2176-2181 and 2164-2169). But the debate rages. We need stronger evidence.

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

And perhaps we'll soon have that evidence. As Stephen Baxter notes this issue, the Beagle project will look for signs of life on the Red Planet. It's British – offering Mark a chance to wave the flag that he hid as the tanks began to mass in the Gulf. In the wake of the Columbia disaster it offers a chance to look once again at the stars with some degree of optimism and a sense of wonder. And Stephen played a role in the project, so the BSFA can bask in some reflected glory. That's three good reasons why everyone in the BSFA should wish the Beagle project well.

• We're looking, still, for a fandom editor. Come on, one of you fannish fans must be sober enough for long enough to write us a column every couple of months. And we're also looking for someone to write some regular reviews on SF on television, preferably the new stuff rather than the re-runs on UK Gold. So stop suckling on the glass teat and get writing. Contact Mark at the address below.

Mark & Martin

Commissioning Editor: Mark Greener
16 Orchard End, Bluntisham, Cambs, PE28 3XF
markgreener1@aol.com

Production Editor: Martin McGrath
91 Bentley Drive, Harlow, Essex, CM17 9QT
martinmcgrath@ntlworld.com

Contributing Editors
Fandom: VACANT
If you'd like to take over as contributing editor for things fannish, contact Mark (address above).

Magazines: Roderick Gladwish
27 Perth Road, Bridgeman, Gosport, Hampshire,
PO13 0XX
roderick@gladwishes.freemove.co.uk

Web/Internet news: Martin Sketchley
232 Alvechurch Road, West Heath,
Birmingham, B31 3PS
msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

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BSFA Officers

President: Sir Arthur C. Clarke, CBE
Vice President: Stephen Baxter
Joint Chair: Paul & Elizabeth Billinger
1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants,
NN11 3BE
bfafcom@smof.demon.co.uk

Treasurer: Paul Hood
112 Meadowside, Eltham, London, SE9 6BB
paul@auden.demon.co.uk

Membership Services: Estelle Roberts
(UK and Europe)
97 Sharp Street, Newland Avenue
Hull, HU5 2AE
estelle@lythande.freemove.co.uk

US Agent: Cy Chauvin
14248 Willfred Street, Detroit, MI 48213, USA

Membership fees

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Registered address: 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, NN11 3BE

BSFA Services

Website: www.bsfa.co.uk
Web mistress: Tanya Brown
Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road,
London, SE8 4LH
bsfaweb@smoranth.aviators.net

BSFA Awards: Tanya Brown
Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road,
London, SE8 4LH
awards@smoranth.aviators.net

London meetings: Paul Hood
112 Meadowside, Eltham, London, SE9 6BB
paul@auden.demon.co.uk

Orbiter Writing Groups: Carol Ann Kerry-Green
278 Victoria Avenue, Hull, HU5 3DZ
metaphor@metaphor.karoo.co.uk

Publications manager: Kathy Taylor
kathyandian@blueyonder.co.uk

Other BSFA Publications

Vector: The critical journal of the BSFA

Production: Tony Cullen
16 Weaver's Way, Camden, London, NW1 0XE
tony.cullen@dfes.gsi.gov.uk
Andrew M Butler

Features: c/o Dept. of Arts & Media, D28-ASSH Faculty,
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College,
High Wycombe, Bucks., HP11 2JZ
ambutler@enterprise.net

Book reviews: Paul Billinger
1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants,
NN11 3BE
bfafcom@smof.demon.co.uk

Focus: The writer's magazine of the BSFA

Editor: Simon Morden
13 Egremont Drive, Sherriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5SE
focus.editor@blueyonder.co.uk

RAGE against the... ...humdrum aliens

Not taken with *Taken*? Wish *ET* stayed home? Well, you are not alone. **Ben Jeapes** has had enough of the depressingly familiar aliens with their big eyes and spindly limbs and their obsessive compulsive kidnapping disorder. The truth, Ben argues, isn't out there.

It won't be news to many of you reading this, but: 1. If aliens have ever visited Earth, they did it without leaving behind any trace of their activities. 2. There is not a single artefact on, under or around this world produced by an intelligence other than human. 3. Aliens do not routinely abduct human beings for any purposes, nefarious or otherwise. 4. Even if aliens do exist, they are not thin, grey and spindly.

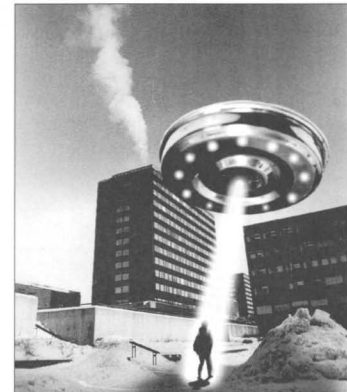
Of course, in good science fiction there is no reason why these points still cannot be assumed as the starting point for a story.

Intervention

Arthur C. Clarke and Julian May are two writers who immediately come to mind as writers of early 'alien intervention' (point one) stories that quite flatter our distant ancestors. There are no doubt others. The flipside is Erik von Daniken and Stargate. As a boy, because I'd seen it in *Dr Who* and *The Tomorrow People*, I was quite willing to believe that aliens might have built the pyramids; an idea that is in fact painfully close to the viewpoint of the nineteenth century European explorers who just could not believe that black people built Great Zimbabwe, and were prepared to cheat, distort and outright lie to 'prove' otherwise. Our regard for the magic and wonder of the real world is so low that rather than be challenged by the abilities of our amazing species, and accept that other cultures might be even half as clever as our middle class, mostly white, western world, we instead assume a humdrum dime-a-dozen alien intervention.

There is nothing to say that there isn't an alien spaceship buried under the polar ice-cap right now (point two), ready to release a homicidal polymorphic alien at a moment's notice. It might be discovered tomorrow. Yup, you can write a story about that.

Even points three and four could in principle make a good story, if the writer was careful to address and explain the fundamental illogicalities of both premises. But these points now appear routinely in



Photomontage courtesy of Johan B. Ojeland

science fiction for no reason other than that the author (or producer) knows no better. It has got to the point where aliens are expected to be grey and spindly, and expected to be abductors. They have become part of our world. The aliens are revealed and - gasp! - they're greys. It shows a mindlessness that is singularly depressing.

Santa Claus

The phenomenon is nothing new. Santa Claus got his red coat and big white beard as a result of the Coca Cola Corporation's marketing activities in the 1930s. Now he is never imagined as anything else - at least, not in the UK or the US. Go to Germany, on the other hand, where they stick more closely to the original legend of St Nicholas, and you're in for a pleasant surprise at Christmas.) Likewise, thin, spindly, abduction-prone aliens made their big screen debut in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* a mere 24 years ago. Now they're everywhere. When I was in my believing-aliens-built-the-pyramids phase, a few years pre-CE3K, I read plenty of accounts of

aliens allegedly landing in front of people... but looking quite human. Maybe a touch angelic - dark they were and golden-eyed, and all that. But definitely human. Post-CE3K, visiting aliens have all turned into greys. Coincidence? I suspect not.

It could be argued that every new story with grey aliens is a valid re-examination of an existing myth. Point taken: sf can do that. Problem is, it's not a particularly good myth. It violates Occam's Razor and it ascribes to the US government a quite implausible ability to keep secrets. Oh, and to the list of points above, may I add 5: something may, or may not, have crashed at Roswell in nineteen forty-whotnot, but whatever it was, it wasn't a spaceship.

Evolve

In their time, the CE3K aliens were quite daring and innovative, though the logic of their actions continues to evade me. But science fiction is meant to evolve. Here in the early twenty-first century, every grey alien is a nail in the coffin of originality. It is like equipping every

fictional starship with a warp core and dilithium crystals, just because that's how *Trek* does it. It's safe - it's a way of hanging up a sign to say that we don't intend to explore this particular avenue any further. "These guys are the aliens, okay? So don't bother your pretty little head - now let's tell the rest of the story." But in a story that has aliens, the aliens should be the freakin' story. Otherwise, why are you bothering with aliens at all?

Jew amongst gentiles

I'll tell you why. Asimov deliberately chose a humans-only universe for most of his output, because he found the alternative of his contemporaries - a Campellian, mixed-species-but-humans-triumphant universe - too similar to the barely veiled prejudice he had encountered as a Jew growing up amongst gentiles. By eliminating the aliens, he bypassed the problem. Since then, science fiction has evolved to be able to accommodate aliens without necessarily classifying them as Jews, blacks, communists or generally un-American. Sadly, the advance of the greys is a step back towards the Campell days. Aliens are rendered instantly understandable and dealable with, and by implication, it's immediately them versus us, and we had better be the winners.

Science fiction is better than that. We are better than that. I'm not afraid to be challenged. Give me aliens. Give me intellectuals vast and cool and unsympathetic, or give me physical forms and intelligences shaped by evolution on an unimaginably alien world. But unless they're lined up with their backs to a wall and blindfolds over their pupil-less eyes, don't give me any more greys.

RAGE against the...

Got something to say? Don't hold back, let us know. Letters are always welcome or, if you're really angry, let rip with your own 'Rage against' whatever you loathe in SF in 750 to 1000 words and send it to Mark at the address opposite. Get it off your chest, it'll do you good.

Big Engine runs out of steam

We're sorry to report that Big Engine – one of the better UK small presses and publishers of 3SF – has gone into liquidation.

In a press release, founder and publisher Ben Jeapes says: "I'm sorry to break the sad news that Big Engine is going down. I'm seeking insolvency as the response to two stages of reasoning. (1) BE is running out of capital and won't be able to keep going as it is. This is not insuperable, and it could be overcome with reinvestment and a renewed spurt of time and energy on my part. But this brings me to (2), which is that I don't really want to reinvest. Over the last couple of years I've had to accept that my strengths are as a writer, not as a businessman. I base this on the facts that my writing has (a) been more enjoyable and (b) paid me more than Big Engine since I started in 2000. I would feel awkward seeking reinvestment as I couldn't put my hand on my heart and say I would do the best that could be done with the money. So, best not to."



Ben Jeapes' "dream company" goes under

Ben adds that 3SF will vanish "at least pro tem. If it re-emerges it will be under someone else's aegis." He confirms that he is looking for someone interested in taking over the magazine and encourages interested parties to contact him.

Over the last couple of years, Big Engine published an eclectic list of books – such as Langford's *The Leaky Establishment* and Maps:

The Uncollected John Sladek... The introduction to *Maps*, by David Langford was shortlisted for the BSFA Award for "best related publication." 3SF the quarterly short fiction magazine launched by Big Engine, though just three issues old, was also beginning to find its voice.

In our last issue (*Matrix* 160) Ben had described the creation of Big Engine as his "dream company" and his hopes that it would, as a small organisation with low overheads, be able to take risks with new authors and "get round the problem of books that are hard to classify and which shops will only tolerate having on the shelves for a couple of weeks. If at all."

However, he also noted that while support for the idea of Big Engine had been widespread there was an "inverse ratio of people willing to offer moral support to those actually prepared to buy a book from you."

Matrix, for one, is sad to see Big Engine go and we wish Ben well for the future.

T3 in print

In June T3: *Rise of the machines* brings the Terminator back to the screen. And Beckett publications plan to launch an on-going tie in comic book. Source: Comics International.

Graphic novels news

A new range of graphic novels from ibooks will include *The Best of the Ray Bradbury Chronicles* and Ellison's *The Continuing Adventures of a Boy and His Dog*. Source: Locust

NewCon2 announced

NewCon2 will take place at the Roadmender, 1 Ladys Lane, Northampton, on Saturday October 4th 2003 between 11.00 am and 6.00 pm. Stephen Baxter, Dominic Harman and Ben Jeapes, former publisher of Big Engine & 3SF are GoHs. An art show featuring the work of Dominic Harman will be displayed in the Roadmender gallery for the month leading up to NewCon2.

Roadmender is in central Northampton beside the bus station and Mayorhold multistorey car park. It's approximately 15 mins walk from Northampton railway station. There are many restaurants nearby and a guest Real Ale will be available in the Roadmender bar throughout the day.

Enquiries about dealers' room (tables free) to: Elizabeth Billinger, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, NN11 3BE; billinger@enterprise.net. Membership is £8 (or £5 students & unwaged) in advance or £9 (or £5) on the door. Cheques made payable to "Northampton SF Writers Group" to Ian Pursey, 16 Albany Road, Northampton, NN1 5LZ.

Tough year for SF mags

Overall, it's not been a good year for the big SF magazines. The big three – *Analogue*, *Asimov's* and *F&SF* – all reported falls in their paid circulation, according to *Locus's* 2002 Magazine Summary (February 2003). *Analogue's* paid circulation dropped 2.4 per cent to 42 115. *Asimov's* by 1.7 per cent to 31 831 and *F&SF* by 10.1 per cent to 23 820. The declines since 1989 are sobering. Then the paid circulation for *Analogue*, *Asimov's* and *F&SF* were 90,404, 82,845 and 54,271 respectively.

Locus blames several factors for the decline including a switch from newsstands to bookstores

over the last year.

On this side of the Atlantic the picture was better for established magazines. *Interzone* managed to keep circulation steady at between 3500 and 4000,

although the magazine has been beset by problems not of its making, such as bad debts. *ITJ's* circulation remains around 6000 – probably before returns, *Locus* says. *Locus* reports

Editor Andy Cox as saying that they'd like to go bimonthly, but that they're not getting enough good stories.

However, the swift and sudden demise of 3SF and the switching of *Spectrum SF* from a quarterly to an "irregular" schedule suggests that start-up British science fiction magazines are not having an easy ride establishing themselves as long-term players in the marketplace.

Locus notes some signs for optimism, however. There have been several start-ups and small press magazines continue to generate enthusiasm.



Awards news

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro won the 2003 World Horror Convention Grand Master Award... Winners of this year's Australian Aurealis Awards include *Transcension*, Damien Broderick (SF Novel); 'Walk to the Full Moon', Sean McMullen (F&SF Dec 2002; SF short story); *The Storm Weaver and the Sand*, Sean Williams (Fantasy novel); *The White Body of Evening*, AL McCann (Horror novel) and "Oracle", Kim Westwood (Redsine #9, Horror short story)... The Isaac Asimov Memorial Award for 2003 was given to Yoji Kondo, who writes as Eric Kotani. The award honours "those who have



Sean McMullen

Photo by Barbara Lerner

contributed significantly to increasing the public's knowledge and understanding of science through his or her writings, and who exemplify the personal qualities...". Previous winners include Stephen Hawking, Stephen Jay Gould, Arthur C. Clarke, Fred Pohl and Ben Bova... Alexander C. Irvine won the IFA Fantasy Award for "outstanding new fantasy writer" for *A Scattering of Jades* (Source: Locust).

Cyberpunk conference

A global conference on 'Visions of Humanity' in Cyberculture, Cyberpunk and Science Fiction' will take place between 11 and 13 August 2003 in Prague. The conference aims to "explore what it is to be human and the nature of human community in cyberculture, cyberspace and science fiction". More specifically, the conference will explore opportunities "for creative thinking about persons and the challenges posed to the nature and future of national, international, and global communities". You can find further details and information about the conference and other Cyberworlds Virtual Reality projects at www.inter-disciplinary.net/cwv.htm and www.inter-disciplinary.net/vhcs03dp.htm.

Deaths

Harry Warner, Jr died on February 17 at the age of 80 years. Warner published the legendary fanzine *Horizons* from 1939. He also published two histories of fandom - *All Our Yesterdays* and *A Wealth of Fable: An Informal History of Science Fiction Fandom* in the 1950s. An expanded edition won the Hugo for Non-fiction Book in 1993 to add to his two Hugos as best fan writer. Warner was also the First Fandom Hall of Fame inductee... Howard Fast, best known as author of *Spartacus*, died March 12 at the age of 88 years. He also wrote several SF and fantasy stories, including "The First Men" (aka "The Trap") and "The Large Ant"... Fred Freiberger died March 2, at 88 years of age. Freiberger wrote *The Beast* from 20,000 Fathoms. Apart from writing for TV, he also produced, including the third season of *Star Trek* and the second season of *Space: 1999* (Source: Locust).



Howard Fast



Big splashes, damp squib

The threat of large meteors striking the Earth has become fashionable.

However, concerns that objects as small as 100 meters across could generate massively destructive waves has been quashed by a recently released 1968 US Naval Research report.

Several decades of research into the hazard posed by waves produced through nuclear explosions shows that the waves will break on the outer continental shelf and produce little onshore damage. The research included experiments performed in 1965-66 that measured wave run-up from blasts of up to 10,000 pounds of TNT in Mono Lake, California. The phenomenon, known as the "Van Dorn effect", after the author of the report, causes wave run-up from explosion waves to be smaller relative to those caused by geological events. These findings would also apply to small meteor strikes. Source: *Spacelightnow*



Galileo's view of the asteroid Ida. Her smaller cousins may be less dangerous than previously thought. NASA/NSDC

No sweat!

Biologists at the University of Pennsylvania found male perspiration had a beneficial effect on women's moods. In a study to be published in the journal *Biology of Reproduction*, researchers collected samples from men who didn't use deodorant for four weeks. The extracts were then blended and applied to the upper lips of 18 women, aged 25 to 45 years.

Effects included increased relaxation and menstrual cycle changes. Levels of the reproductive luteinizing hormone, which typically surge before ovulation, suggested a synchronising of reproductive processes. There was no sign women were sexually aroused by male perspiration. In fact, the women believed they were helping to test alcohol, perfume or lemon floor wax. Source: Reuters

Einstein spooked

Teleportation, FTL communications, Supercomputers. Iconic SF elements that may be brought closer by new research that applies relativity to the idea that two particles can maintain a connection even over vast distances - so-called "entanglement."

"Imagine a particle on Earth entangled with a particle light years away," said Dr Christoph Adami, principal scientist in the Quantum Computing Technologies Group at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. "Whatever happens to particle A on Earth happens to particle B, even if it is on another planet." Einstein thought this "spooky" connection violated the rule that information can't travel faster than light. But researchers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, discovered that entanglement is relative and can be created or destroyed by relative motion. While speeding up ordinary entangled

pairs leads to a loss of entanglement, certain special pairs can be created whose entanglement is increased, thereby increasing the connection.

Entanglement could have numerous SF-type applications. Entangled particles could be used to synchronize atomic clocks, essential for deep space navigation or for quantum teleportation: transferring the precise quantum state of one microscopic object to another using only traditional communications. The research also aids quantum computation, which seeks to build faster, more efficient computers. More information is available at <http://cs.jpl.nasa.gov/qct.html> Source: NASA (Mark Greenner)

Life on Europa?

Scientists at Arizona State University have proposed that the next step in the search for life on other worlds should be the surface exploration of Jupiter's moon, Europa. Galileo, the venerable Jupiter orbiter, produced a huge volume of data indicating that the moon may be one of the few places in the solar system where liquid water can be found. Where there is water, there may be life.

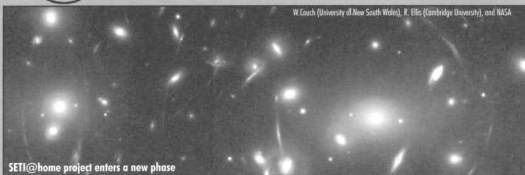
On Earth, life has been observed everywhere there is water, even around deep-sea hydrothermal vents that spew out sulphur-rich water at 350°C. When these high-temperature fluids hit the cold ocean, it provides the right conditions to support life. Sulphate, which is visible on Europa's surface, is probably formed the same way.



Europa - water and life?

SETI@homes in

SETI@home - the distributed computer system that lets a screensaver search for signs of extraterrestrial intelligence - recently completed their "stellar countdown" using the Arecibo radio telescope to re-observe the most promising candidate signals. Originally planned to take three days, the countdown was delayed because of solar flare activity but was eventually completed on March 24th. So far SETI@home has analysed about 10,000 hours of data from the Arecibo radio observatory, producing a database of several billion events. Based on this they re-examined 166 candidates that have the greatest chances of coming from an extraterrestrial synthetic source. In addition the SETI@home



W. Couch (University of New South Wales), R. Ellis (Cambridge University), and NASA

SETI@home project enters a new phase

team, led by Chief Scientist Dan Werthimer found time to target 35 nearby sun-like stars, fifteen nearby galaxies, six candidates from sister project Serendip SETI and five extra-solar planetary systems. The new signals will be analysed by SETI@home users

across the world over the next few weeks.

Even if nothing is found this time the SETI@home team have already laid plans to begin a new search with new equipment in the near future. A faster and more sensitive

seven feed multi-beam array is currently being built in Australia and should be arrive at the Arecibo telescope in April 2004 and be fully operational in early 2005. See planetary.org/stellarcountdown and setihome.berkeley.edu for more information.

On flies the bird

Legendary space rockers, Hawkwind recently released a live CD recorded at the Canterbury Festival in 2001 around the time of Hawkwind Dave Brock's 60th birthday. Tracks include Spiral Galaxy, Dust of Time and, of course, Silver Machine. The latter was of course Hawkwind's big hit. A follow-up Urban Guerrilla could have cemented their position in the overground. However, a spate of IRA bombings led to the BBC banning the record and Hawkwind remained the counter-culture's darlings. However, the neo-punk band Mudhoney recently covered the track for Mojo magazine (March 2003). 'Punk's not Dead' covermounted CD. Timely and, given the current circumstances, apposite, it's actually a fairly good cover version.

More Shrek

The ogre everyone loves - Shrek - will debut in a comics miniseries from Dark Horse. The first comic adapts a short film that's being shown at theme parks. The film follows the two on honeymoon, accompanied by Donkey and Lord Farquaad's ghost. The next three issues follow Shrek's further adventures. There will be four issues, the first shipping end of April, which should keep Shrek fans happy until the sequel, due for release during 2004. Source: Comics International.

New Myths line up announced

'New Myths': Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror' - the Fifth Annual Conference of the

Arts and Media Department at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College on Saturday 3 May 2003 - recently announced a provisional list of papers and speakers. These include: Lincoln Geraghty 'Creating and Comparing Myth in Twentieth Century Science Fiction: Star Trek and Star Wars'; Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc 'Long Live the New Flesh'; Chris West 'Yesterday's Myths Today and Tomorrow: Problems of Representation and Gay (In)Visibility'; Maureen Kincaid Speller 'Gwydion Redux: the role of the once and future magician in modern fantasy'; Oluwatoyin Vincent Adepoju 'HP Lovecraft and the Demonic Numinous'; and Paul Kincaid 'Isomania? Insularity? Exploring the myth of the Island in British Science Fiction'. Contact Dr Andrew M Butler on ambutler@enterprise.net for more information or to attend.

ISFDB back on-line

The Internet Speculative Fiction Database (isfdb.tamu.edu/) is back and fully functioning at its new home sponsored by The Cushing Library Science Fiction and Fantasy Research Collection and Institute for Scientific Computation at Texas A&M University (Source: Locust).

Dunsany reprints

Lord Dunsany, one of the original legends of fantastic literature, is set to return to our shelves after spending way too long out of print. Night Shade books plan to publish his Joseph Jorkens stories - including some never published before - in a three-volume set. Wildside will publish some of his

other work including the novels *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley* and *The Blessing of Pan*. They'll also publish his major collections of short stories. Source: Locust

Tiptree winners

The two winners of the 2002 Tiptree Award are M John Harrison's *Light* (Victor Gollancz) and John Kessel's "Stories for Men" published in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* in October/November 2002.

Ansible Archive

Dave Langford recently published the Ansible Archive on CD-ROM. It contains all the Ansible Newsletters

from 1979 to 2003 with graphics, addenda, *Cloud Chamber*, *FATW* and *TAFF* archives. It's available for £11.75 from 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. Cheques payable to David Langford. We'll review the archive next issue.

Firefly makes it to UK

Firefly, the space-based SF show by Buffy creator Joss Whedon will be shown on Sci-Fi UK from May.

Blatant plug

Mark's new book - the 2nd Edition of *The Which? Guide To Managing Stress* - is out in April. We'll what's the point of being the editor if you can't plug your own stuff now and then...

Telos news

Telos Publishing Doctor Who Novella release schedule's brings *Fallen Gods* by Jonathan Blum and Kate Orman in July 2003 - an Eighth Doctor novella with a foreword by Storm Constantine and frontpiece illustration by Daryl Joyce. They'll follow this with *Fused* by Tara Samms and *Eye of the Tiger* by Paul McAuley - an Eighth Doctor adventure with the deluxe edition frontpiece illustration by Jim Burns. This is Telos's 40th anniversary title. *Companion Piece* by Mike Tucker and Robert Perry, the final Doctor Who Novella of 2003, will be published in December. This is a Seventh Doctor novella features the debut of a companion nicknamed Car.

In other plans, *Telos plan Time Hunter* "a new series in time and space" featuring Honore Lechasseur and Emily Blandish, two characters introduced in *Doctor Who: The Cabinet of Light* by Daniel O'Mahony. Telos describe these as "Part mystery, part detective story, part dark fantasy, part science fiction".

Telos will also publish two Horror books in October. *Aspects of a Psychopath* by Alistair Langston and the 'classic' *Spectre* by Stephen Laws. They'll also publish *Liberation* an unofficial new comprehensive guide to *Blake's 7*.

Game over

Robert Rodriguez's *Spy Kids* series of movies will end with the third instalment. In addition to the usual onscreen high-tech gadgetry at least part of the new film will also be projected in 3D, requiring filmmakers to wear the usual blue and red glasses. *Spy Kids 3D: Game Over* will pit Juan and Carmen against the evil Toymaker, played by Sylvester Stallone, and is due for release in late July.

Purr-fect?

Warner Brothers troubles with superhero franchises continued when Ashley Judd walked away from their proposed *Catwoman* feature this month. They are now lining up Halle Berry to play the purring thief with French director Vidocq behind the camera. If filming goes ahead Berry will become the fourth screen *Catwoman*, following Eartha Kitt, Lee Merriweather and Michelle Pfeiffer. *Catwoman* has a script rewritten by *The Game* and *Terminator 3*'s John Brancato and Mike Ferris.

Space-based thriller

Warner Brothers are actively developing a film version of Peter McAllister's novel *Commonaut*. The novel is the story of a murder aboard the International Space Station and the discovery of a plot to start a nuclear war.

Bradbury rumblings

Genre veteran Peter Hyams (*A Sound of Thunder* based on the Ray Bradbury short story. The story features time travelling big game hunters who inadvertently change the course of history. Ben Kingsley (*Sexy Beast*), Edward Burns (*Saving Private Ryan*) and Catherine McCormack (*This Year's Love*) star

One small step...

Clint Eastwood will produce and direct a film based on an as-yet-to-be-published biography of Neil Armstrong. The book, *First Man: A Life of Neil Armstrong* by Pulitzer Prize-nominated historian James R. Hansen, is due to be completed next year but the deal with Eastwood's production company – Malpaso – has already been completed. There is no script as yet but Eastwood has confirmed that he will not star in the movie.

"Millions of people watched Neil Armstrong step out onto the moon's surface, and millions more have seen those images since the event happened," Eastwood said. "However, Armstrong himself is a very enigmatic person. James Hansen's book examines the life of a private man who shared a profound experience with the entire world; it's a story that I think would make an interesting movie."

Eastwood's last journey into space was as star and director of the poorly received *Space Cowboys*.

as they try to put the world back together again. *A Sound of Thunder* should be in cinemas early in 2004.

Five... four... three...

Ben Kingsley has also been cast as The Hood in the forthcoming adaptation of *Thunderbirds*.

Dark material

As Philip Pullman announces a fourth book set in the world of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, there is news on the production of films based on the original three books. New Line, the company behind Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* movies, have commissioned Tom Stoppard to adapt the novels into screenplays and Sam Mendes (*American Beauty*, *Road to Perdition*)

is, according to a recent report in *The Times*, interested in directing.

Cameron's dimension

There is no news on the title or even the genre of movie but James Cameron has persuaded Fox to spend \$5 million making 500 screens capable of showing his new film. It will use the 3D using techniques developed for his latest underwater documentary *Ghosts of the Abyss*.

Rama-drama still on?

While promoting his latest release *Dreamcatcher* (see review on page 9) Morgan Freeman has confirmed that he is continuing to work on producing a film version of Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous*

with *Rama*. The problem, he told *Sci Fi Wire*, was getting a script which could adequately capture the book's complexity. Freeman seems intent on resisting the pressures to turn *Rama* into just another action flick.

"These things, they always want to make it into an action film," says Freeman. "So you've got to cowboy it up a little bit. You can't do it with this. And we've been having trouble getting someone to see the science aspect of this, the exploratory aspects of it, rather than the blood and guts and stuff."

Freeman says he will continue to push hard on the project, and that it remains a priority for both himself and for David Fincher (*Seven*, *Alien 3*) who is set to direct the film.

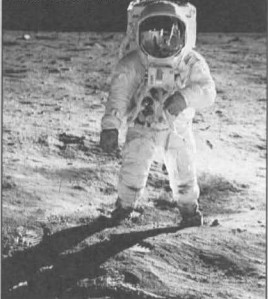
Spidey delayed

The already tight production schedule for *The Amazing Spider-Man* has been threatened by an injury to star Tobey Maguire. Having agreed a \$17 million dollar deal to return for the sequel (up from \$4 million for the first movie), Maguire, who hurt his back while playing a jockey in his latest film *Seabiscuit*, has been unable to get fit in time for the January start date. As a result, principal photography has been pushed back to April 2003 and the film's proposed release date has been moved back two months to 2 July 2004.

Mann comes

Michael Mann (*Heat*, *Manhunter*) will direct *Tonight, He Comes*. The story of a fallen superhero befriended by a young boy is written by first-timer Vincent Ngo.

Neil Armstrong took all the photographs on Apollo 11 but he is just visible here in the reflection on Buzz Aldrin's visor.



Kong Lives!

Peter Jackson has confirmed that his next project will be a remake of *King Kong* produced by Universal Studios. It is a project the director tried, but failed, to get off the ground five years ago before the worldwide success of his *Lord of the Rings* movies.

"No film has captivated my imagination more than *King Kong*," Jackson said in a press release. "I'm making movies today because I saw this film when I was 9 years old. It has been my sustained dream to reinterpret this classic story for a new age."

"The story of *Kong* offers everything that any storyteller could hope for: an archetypal narrative, thrilling action, resonating emotion and memorable characters. It has endured for precisely these reasons and I am honored to be a part of its continuing legacy."

It will be the second remake of the classic monster movie, which itself started life as a remake of the silent classic *The Lost World* [see 'Tapes from the Crypt' on page 10]. Jackson's *King Kong* should be released around Christmas 2005.



World in a spin

The *Core* is a frustrating film, says **Martin McGrath**, delivering surprising self-awareness, good acting and interesting characters but failing to deliver the basic ingredients of a disaster movie - action, plot and excitement. Still there are a couple of good jokes and a plug for *Forrest Gump* in a major Hollywood movie - so it's not all bad.

That *The Core* ends up as a failure won't surprise those science fiction fans who have been laughing at the movie since the plot details first began to emerge last year. What is surprising, however, is how the movie fails.

The plot sounds as though it has been ripped from some old George Pal movie and pasted over with modern special effects. Secret weapon research has, somehow, stopped the rotation of our planet's core. Disaster follows as the magnetic fields that protect us from solar and cosmic radiation degrade. First people with pace makers start dropping dead, a space shuttle crash lands, the pigeons in Trafalgar Square go crazy, then aurora become visible all over the world. Rome is flattened by a huge electrical storm. This is the end of life on earth.

Desperate

Luckily, this is a disaster movie, so some desperate plan to save us from destruction will be discovered. The planet's greatest minds are gathered together - six Americans and a token European - to travel to the centre of the Earth, plant five nuclear bombs, and restart the rotation of the Earth's core. This is achieved with some formulaic self sacrifice and Yankee ingenuity, the world is saved and the good-looking characters get to fall in love.

So far, so humdrum.

What is interesting about *The Core*, though, is how it tries to get through the banalities of a standard disaster movie plot with at least some of its integrity intact.

So, the film uses real science where it can, but where the laws of physics would slow down the plot it resorts to bunkum. However, in doing so, *The Core* nods to the audience and says: "I know this is nonsense, don't worry about it." For example, the magical material that allows *The Core*'s ship to resist the heat and pressure at the centre of the earth is called "unobtainium" and even the characters laugh at the joke. A scientist says it would cost \$50 billion to turn to his barely formed prototype into a working model in three months and the characters discuss whether they should pay for it with a credit card so they can claim the air miles.



Getting ready to save the world, *The Core*'s crew go to work.

There is a playful knowingness to all this that can't help but endear the film to those of us who have watched too many self-important event movies. Any film that has big-brain scientists reference *Forrest Gump* in the opening act has gone a long way to getting me on its side.

Techno-babble

Unexpectedly, amidst all the techno-babble and cool technology, *The Core* finds room to focus its story upon some three-dimensional characters. They are, at least on the surface, a clichéd bunch - the hotshot pilot, the misunderstood genius, the greasy-pole-climbing bureaucrat - but, primarily because of the quality of the actors involved, they become real people. Eckhart and Swank make a particularly handsome leading pair with a nice chemistry and an ability to portray emotion without ever descending into *Armageddon* style histrionics. But it is Tcheky Karyo (*The Patriot*) and Stanley Tucci (*Conspiracy*) who steal the show.

Tucci in particular is excellent as the preening and self-promoting Dr Zimsky. Throughout the adventure he mumbles Sagan-like commentary into a recorder and reveals he already has a two book

deal arranged to promote his part in this "secret" mission. Zimsky is built up as the nearest thing *The Core* has to a villain but even here the film refuses to resort to one-dimensional characterisation and, after a final cigarette, Zimsky is redeemed. It is *The Core*'s best moment.

The Core does the hardest job with ease - it makes us care about its characters - but it fails on those things that we have come to take for granted in Hollywood pictures. It is poorly paced, the story is badly structured and the ending falls apart, throwing away two hours of build-up on a series of increasingly frustrating anti-climaxes.

Slickness

One has come to expect more slickness from the storytelling in Hollywood movies. We expect them to be at least proficient in manipulating our expectations and emotions so that we get our regular doses of tension and excitement. *The Core* throws all that away. What is the point of a disaster movie, no matter how well acted and how well meaning, unless it provides the thrills and adventure we expect?

The answer, sadly, is that there is no point to such a movie at all.

Perhaps if *The Core* wasn't so

wedded to the predictable structure of disaster movies something else could have emerged. As it is, we are faced with a series of crises solved by increasingly predictable self sacrifice until the crew is reduced to those judged just too pretty to be expendable.

Visual effects

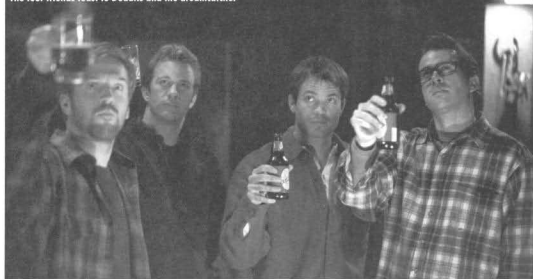
Even more surprising is the poor quality of the visual effects in this movie. Especially since *The Core*'s release was delayed by several months because, the studio claimed, more work needed to be done on the special effects. If these have improved significantly then they must have been awful before. The film features some of the weakest CGI elements I've ever seen in a Hollywood production. One sequence, showing the DESTINI generator, would look like filler on a budget Playstation game.

There is a lot to like about *The Core* and somewhere in here, beneath the studio inspired re-editing and the mushy structure, one feels a good film struggling to escape. A miss then, but an honourable one, *The Core* is better than I expected but not so good that it can be unreservedly recommended.

Bad dreams

Based, loosely apparently, on a Stephen King story *Dreamcatcher* is the story of four young men with extraordinary powers caught up in the middle of an alien invasion. But don't get excited, says **Martin McGrath**, because this isn't a film you'll want to watch twice.

The four friends toast to Duddits and the dreamcatcher



Dreamcatcher is based on a Stephen King novel. I am reliably informed by those who have read the original that this film is an abomination that takes enormous liberties with the source material. This might go some way to explaining some of the often vitriolic reviews of this Lawrence Kasdan directed film.

However, since I haven't read King's novel, I can only comment on what I see on the screen and, while *Dreamcatcher* has some very serious flaws, I can't understand what all the anger is about. This might not be the story that Stephen King wrote, but then it is all but impossible to include the content of an eight hundred page novel in a two hour movie. Taken on its own merits, I found *Dreamcatcher* reasonably entertaining and not offensively stupid.

Mysteriously gifted

The film is the story of four boys who are given special powers by a mysteriously gifted, mentally handicapped fifth boy – Duddits – who they met and rescued as children. As the film unfolds it becomes clear that there is more to Duddits than meets the eye and that his gifts to the boys were, in fact, a way to prepare them to meet a coming menace. Twenty years later the four boys, now adults, find themselves in the woods in the middle of an alien invasion and

discover their destiny.

There are some very nice moments in *Dreamcatcher*. It is true that most of these moments have nothing to do with the plot and that they all come in the opening half an hour but, still, they are well crafted.

Vignettes

The opening vignettes by which we are introduced to the four leading characters are all nicely done – letting the viewer get to know and like these men while tantalising us with a glimpse of their special powers.

Later, as the four friends reminisce meet up on a traditional annual trip, we get the chance to come to like them all. There is some good acting here. Jason Lee (*Mallrats*, *Almost Famous*) steals every scene he's in and Damien Lewis (*Band of Brothers*) carries most of the film despite delivering an English accent of the kind not heard since Dick Van Dyke's prime. Odd, since Lewis is from London.

The scenes in which Lewis's character rushes around his "memory warehouse" are amongst the film's most memorable moments.

It is only after the first act that the problems with *Dreamcatcher* begin to become apparent. We have only two significant scenes with the four central characters together (once as boys then again as adults) but are asked to accept

that they are the closest of friends. Then they are immediately split up and we never see more than two of them together again. It is simply not enough time and, given how good the ensemble scenes were, we are left wanting more. Then two of these characters are disposed of swiftly and the viewer is left rather at sea. From this point on the film moves too quickly for its own good and provides explanations too easily so the audience is overloaded with information and any tension or mystery in the plot is dissipated.

The arrival of the military in the stalwart forms of a nasty Morgan Freeman (Seven) and reliable Tom Sizemore (*Saving Private Ryan*) provides some sub-Apocalypse Now gung-hoism but there is too little for them to do and not enough time for their motivation to become credible.

Reappearance

With the reappearance of Duddits the film begins to pull itself together, but it is too late. The audience has been lost and, in any case, the final struggle between two alien monsters leaves the humans – on screen and off – with nothing much to do and no emotional involvement.

With some very good actors and some pretty scenery on scene *Dreamcatcher* is far from the worst film you'll ever see – but I can't imagine anyone wanting to watch it twice.

Luck out

Martin McGrath takes a chance with high-concept Spanish thriller *Intacto*.



Intacto, by first-time writer/director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, is as high-concept a movie as any Hollywood blockbuster you'll ever see. The idea is simple. Luck is not some randomly distributed force of nature, but a commodity that can be taken and accumulated. From that premise, Fresnadillo creates a story of revenge and betrayal.

Intacto is about more than luck. It is also about guilt. All the characters have survived some terrible disaster – concentration camps, earthquakes, plane crashes and car crashes – and all are trying to come to terms with their survival and the loss of those they cared for.

The idea is brilliant and the execution, at least technically, is superb. This is a film of rich colour and enticing texture. The set-pieces, in which those with the talent for controlling luck compete against each other, are brilliantly realised. In particular the sequences featuring a huge, fluttering, strobing insect and a blindfold gallop through the woods grab the eye. There are images here that will stay in the mind for some time.

Sadly, despite technical excellence and some intellectual depth, *Intacto* is let down by a dragging and increasingly pointless middle section that teeters on the edge of indulgent inspection. The handling of the final shoot-out is disappointing given the quality of what has gone before.

Still, a thought-provoking and somewhat entertaining movie for those not put off by subtleties and who are lucky enough to live near a large city as *Intacto* is receiving only a limited release in the UK. A Hollywood remake of *Intacto* is surely inevitable. But for once you feel this is a film with an idea so big that it deserves another lucky break.

Straight to video

American remakes of foreign movies are usually more miss than hit. So when Hollywood decided to take on *Ring* - the story of a video tape that spells doom to all who see it and the scariest Japanese movie ever - **Gary Wilkinson** was sceptical. They were bound to get it wrong. They would ruin it. Did they?

‘Oh they are gonna remake *Ring*... bound to ruin it.’ I imagine any horror film fan would have had similar thoughts regarding the prospect of a remake of one of the best films ever made in the genre. But then the early reports were that the new version was actually quite good. So have they pulled it off...? Well almost, but not quite.

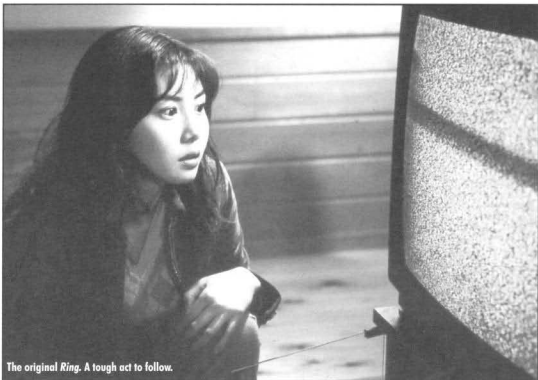
For a start this version wisely sticks very close to the plot of the original, even to the extent of recreating some scenes almost shot for shot, as well as incorporating some ideas from *Ring*'s sequel and prequel, *Ring 2* and *Ring 0* but adding some ideas of their own. Transferring the action to the rainy north-west, in and around Seattle, helps to preserve the drab atmosphere of the original.

We begin with two girls that are bored watching TV and one starts telling this urban legend story about a tape that kills people seven days after you watch it... then the other admits to having seen the tape seven days ago. Ah, but she's only kidding right? Wrong.

Rumour

Actually, don't think about this for too long... the tape's not killed anybody yet so how did the rumour start? (That's also a mistake the original makes). However the film soon gets on to surer footing when we get a tension filled scene of static filled televisions turning on by themselves. The director of *Mouse Hunt*, Gore Verbinski would not have been exactly my first choice for this film but he handles the scares well with some well timed musical stingers and innovative cutting... well it is a maybe a bit too MTV but you kind of expect that from a genre now aimed squarely at the under twenty-fives.

After the effective prologue we are introduced to journalist Naomi Watts (in a role very different, but just as effective, as her appearance in *Mulholland Drive*) who starts to investigate why a group of teenagers all seemed to die at the same time. She soon arrives at the log cabin where the tape was originally recorded and she watches it in fascinated horror. Here one of



The original *Ring*. A tough act to follow.

the problems of the film becomes apparent... The original was, perhaps due to a restricted budget, shot very much in real locations - so when weird things start happening they appear to be more horrific when happening against an ordinary background. The money that allows a helicopter for the second unit to create beautiful overhead shots of a car driving through forest or the short, in some cases almost subliminal, inserts of atmospheric imagery of waves on a shingle shore or clips from the video creates an unworlly atmosphere that does unsettle the viewer but unfortunately leaves you almost expecting strange things to happen. And the over set-dressed moss-covered cabin looks like it's been imported straight from *Swamp Thing*.

Video

The video itself is a poor second to the crackling surreal original, coming over as something that should be accompanying a Marilyn Manson track - "Very film school," one of the characters comments. However the snatches we see of what happened to the victims, using all

the skills of multi-Oscar winner Rick Baker are very potent...

Watts gets the 'seven days' phone call... Convinced she is going to die she seeks help from her ex, conveniently an expert on video recording. Her quest gains new urgency when her young son watches the tape. She eventually arrives at a horse farm on an isolated island that seems to be the origin of some of the images on the tape: a lighthouse and a beach filled with the bodies of drowned horses. One effectively shocking scene new to this version sees a horse going mad and flinging itself off the ferry that carries Watts to the island.

Creepiness

More creepiness follows with skilled cameos from Bryan Cox and Jane Alexander until Watts eventually arrives at a solution back at the cabin. Then we get to THAT scene... anyone who has seen the original knows what I'm talking about and I'm not going to spoil it for the rest of you, although some trailers for the film have had a good go. Suffice to say this was the scene that made the original so notorious.

Unfortunately Verbinski fumbles the ball, cutting away to another location mid-scene and replacing some highly subtle effects work with flickering CGI.

Although the makers have put there own stamp on their version with the horse farm, images of stagnant water and an increased emphasis on psychic powers (the kid conveniently goes all *Six Sense* at several points to get plot points over) it cannot completely escape from the original. *Ring* was rooted in Japanese folklore and culture with its tales of vengeful ghosts, suicidal psychics and sea-dwelling goblins and these do not really translate.

Effective

The *Ring* is an effective film in its own right but, perhaps predictably, does not reach the heights of horror of the original never mind surpass it. I'm not too sure I'd want to watch one that ever managed it.

Gary Wilkinson wrote on the original *Ring* movie series in "Snuff Video" in the September 2002 issue of our sister magazine *Vector*.

Lenny's clip show

Martin Lewis takes a look back at *Strange Days*, a fast moving thriller but one in which director Kathryn Bigelow still finds room for her characters.

Strange Days is predicated on a single technological innovation. It's an SF trope that has been knocking around for a while; the idea that we might be able to record people's experiences. Here headssets like frozen jellyfish download cortical memories called 'clips' into a portable storage medium.

The film immerses us straight into this world, fading up into a bank robbery as seen through the eyes of one unfortunate robber. We then snap out into the real world where we meet Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes), a dealer in clips who is trying out some merchandise. Immediately, the viewer is again immersed into the future as Lenny takes a short drive through the streets of LA. The soundtrack shifts constantly to a background of cops, guns, fire and all the time Lenny wheeling and dealing on his mobile phone. This is a brave opening to Kathryn Bigelow's film and it works well, quickly sketching a 1999 that is loaded with pre-millennial tension. Exposition is the bane of any SF film but *Strange Days* does its best to



keep it to a minimum. Where it is unavoidable it is pretty naturalistic, thanks to Fiennes' mastery of Lenny's gift of the gab.

As you might expect, the film revolves around an incriminating clip, following in the long line of find-the-tape, hide-the-tape films. Lenny agrees to help a friend who is in trouble with the cops and enlists Mason (Angela Bassett) to help. The investigation soon balloons into a realisation that they seem to be dealing with both a serial killer and a fully fledged conspiracy. While this is going on Lenny is pining for his ex, Faith (Juliet Lewis), addicted to memories of their relationship.

He veers between trying to win her back and wallowing in his clips of her. As with several SF films, the similarities between technology and drugs are implied through a shared visual language.

The conspiracy theory is actually the least interesting part of the film, much of this convoluted plotting is secondary to the love triangle between Lenny, Mason and Faith. To this end the film benefits from a pair of extremely strong central performances by Fiennes and Bassett. Lewis is also good, when she is on screen. Luckily the script itself is surprisingly sharp (we might speculate that this is co-scripter Jay

Cocks finessing James Cameron's story) and equal to this task. It is an interesting relationship: he is glib where she is serious, whenever he is in trouble he calls on her yet is unable to show her even basic courtesy. In virtually every respect, Lenny treats her like shit but it is more than a case of every woman loves a bastard. Lenny is drowning in the mire of the underworld and his past (at one point he comments that his wardrobe is all that separates him from the gutter). He is unable to save himself but Mason thinks she can and that he is still someone worth saving. The key scene in this respect is a flashback that shows Lenny and Mason meeting for the first time under very different circumstances.

Bigelow is well known for her direction of action scenes and, yes, the action scenes are well handled but she is also known for crafting character based dramas from genre building blocks. *Strange Days* is a perfect example of this: fast paced, even frenetic but firmly grounded in its two leads.



The Lost World was called the "most marvellous film ever exhibited" when it was released.

Well, its got Willis O'Brien's stop-motion dinosaurs and a rip-roaring plot from Arthur Conan Doyle and Wallace Beery's beard. What's not to love?

Wallace Beery's beard?

Wallace Beery plays Professor Challenger and his beard is the most frightening thing in the movie. It's an enormous bushy growth that dominates every scene. I was at once terrified and yet strangely drawn to it.

Forget the beard!

If only I could.

What about the film? It starts with a shot of Arthur Conan Doyle.

Hollywood doesn't give writers much respect these days – unless they're called Tom Clancy – but yes the creator of Sherlock and believer in fairies opens this film. In the original version, now lost, he was shown typing the first lines of the novel but in this restored version he is shown sitting in his garden.

So this will be a faithful representation of his book then?

Don't be ridiculous! Hollywood was Hollywood even then. They changed the ending to have a giant dinosaur rampaging through London and they added a love story for the dashing young hero and heroine.

Nothing changes. But what makes *The Lost World* special?

Every monster movie you've ever seen owes something to *The Lost World*. Willis O'Brien's monsters inspired a generation of film-makers

and are even more amazing when you realise that he worked alone. His dinosaurs even breathe and slobber. The shining eyes of the allosaur as it emerges from the jungle is a great shot. Wallace Beery dominates as the blustering Professor and Lewis Stone is good as the refined gentleman, Sir John Roxton.

Anything good on the DVD?

The least informative DVD commentary ever. There is an amazing story to tell about the restoration of this version of the film. For seventy years most of *The Lost World* was considered, well, lost. But careful research has put back together 92 minutes of the 104 minute original. Yet the commentary is by someone whose only interest is in the book and who doesn't speak at all for long periods of time. Where are the film historians and restorers and the special effects experts? Twelve minutes of special effects out-takes are quite interesting though and two musical scores – neither of which did much for me.

Any surprises?

Realising that, in the days before David Attenborough, the shots of leopards, crocodiles, sloths and spectacle bears would have been almost as exotic to viewers as O'Brien's dinosaurs. And that black and white films weren't shown in black and white but tinted blue for night, yellow for day and with different shades for sunlight and internal lighting. It adds a surprising amount to the film.

So is *The Lost World* marvellous?

It's pretty much essential for anyone interested in monster movies – after all this is the film that inspired King Kong. Shame about that commentary though.

Martin McGrath take a look at the no longer lost classic, *The Lost World*, featuring Willis O'Brien's dinosaurs and a spectacular beard.

Hell is other people

Gary Wilkinson takes a look at two recent DVD releases: *Cube 2: Hypercube* and *My Little Eye*. Two horror movies that throw relative strangers together to battle the unknown. But only one of these films has the guts to follow its premise to a natural conclusion.

Take a point... extend it through a dimension and you get a line... extend the line through another dimension until you get a square... extend the square into another dimension until you get a cube... then extend the cube into yet another dimension and you have a four dimensional hypercube.

Unfortunately you cannot apply the same logic to film sequels: more tends to become less and the transformation from *Cube* to *Hypercube*: *Cube 2* is no exception.

The original *Cube* was a quirky low budget film that made the most of its high concept. Whilst having flaws the film went on to become a minor cult hit on video.

Some but different

The makers of this version have tried to open out the original concept. However it's mostly the 'same but a bit different' approach that you get with many sequels.

We have a similar group of people trapped in a similar construction. Identical cuboid rooms with entrances at the centre of all six sides that lead into identical rooms that seems to repeat forever. In *Cube* there were physical traps; getting around these and finding the exit was a problem that could be logically solved. This time we have a mathematical construct, the four dimensional hypercube or tesseract. The 'fourth dimension' gives rooms that have askew gravity, different time rates, and copies of people appearing from parallel realities. Soon it also appears that the construct is slowly collapsing in on itself. Unfortunately, these problems cannot be logically 'solved' or avoided. We get none of the interesting mathematical problem solving of the first film - just a lot of running around and shouting.

Unlike the first film, we go beyond the cube. The brief glimpses we see on the origins of the characters work well but the ending looks like sweepings off the cutting room floor from a later series of the *X-Files*, killing the enigma that made the first film so great.

This is director Andrzej Sekula's first major feature. He is an acclaimed cinematographer and director of photography, and is obviously more interested in angles, framing interesting shots and deep focus than plot problems and



My Little Eye "sticks the knife in and does not back down"

character development. The special effects are pretty but lack the visceral impact of the first film. The DVD has some features on the effects and a none too interesting commentary by the editor and producer.

Cube 2 is a harmless ninety minutes but make sure you check out the original.

Reality television

My Little Eye is much more interesting. A really nastily effective British horror film. Shot in Canada, with Canadian and American unknowns but with a British producer and director.

For many just watching reality television like *Big Brother* is horrific enough... however its popularity now coincides with the prime audience for horror, making it a prime candidate for a new sub-genre. The one that paved the way was *Blair Witch*, but even the latest in the interminable *Halloween* series appropriates the concept. Their very roughness creates the illusion of reality, drawing the viewer in (if they are made with care).

Five twenty-somethings are dropped off at a house in the middle of nowhere - stay for six months, don't break the night curfew, don't mess with the cameras and you win a millions bucks. However, if one leaves they all loose.

The film kicks off with the group coming to the end of their time.

In a slow opening we are given time to learn something of them and they at first appear to be just as unlikeable as the average *Big Brother* contestants. Some are poorly defined one-dimensional clichés, but it soon become apparent that we have one each of the horror/teen film clichés of jock, geek, rebel, slut and princess; a sly nod by the director has them watching *Breakfast Club* at one point, just one of several self-aware references to the horror and teen genres.

Mysterious

But then the mysterious 'company' starts to turn the screw. The heating is cut and instead of food parcels they get nasty reminders from their pasts. Is there a psycho out in woods, watching them? And we start to warm to them as they realise the depths of the horror of the situation they are in. Then suddenly, and shockingly, the film really sticks the knife in and does not back down as we tip over into horror overdrive for the last half-hour.

On one level this is just cheap nasty exploitation, just like 'reality television' itself, but the film also takes time to look deeper. "What sort of sick fucker is watching this?" one character asks the camera and is it that big a step from the manipulated cruelties of *Big Brother* through the voyeuristic violence of *Jackass* to this?

Director Marc Evans makes a virtue of using small fixed cameras and he does not cheat. Some scenes are shot with infra-red, giving some great shots of glowing green eyes. Accompanying this is an innovative sound track with whirring zoom lenses, amplified natural sounds, and grinding and beeping modems.

This is Evan's third feature and a big step up from what he has done before. It's too early to pronounce him as the saviour of the British film industry as some have claimed but definitely I'll be looking out for his work in the future and watching his development carefully.

Special edition

The version I saw is the two disk special edition, which has half an hour of extra footage plus the usual trailers and an interesting how-the-film-was-made documentary. The commentary is great value with director and producer obviously enjoying themselves. There is also an 'interactive' version of the film, with loads of extras, which you view as if via a website.

Cube 2 is a messy fudge that doesn't have the courage of its convictions.

My Little Eye has the bravery to set up a situation then not deviate from it, no matter how nasty the result. I hope they show it to the next set of fame-seeking fools who want to go into the *Big Brother* house.



Sci-Fi boosts production

The Sci-Fi Channel in America has announced a massively expanded production slate for 2004/5. Eight new weekly series are entering production.

The most interesting of these include *Dead Lawyers* – unscrupulous lawyers are forced to redeem themselves by helping those they screwed while alive; *The Divide* – a fake psychic, his dead sister and a coroner solve crimes in what sounds like CSI meets *The Dead Zone*; *Stargate: Atlantis* – an expansion of the *Stargate* franchise; and *Clive Barker's The Evil One* – the story of the struggle between good and evil from the point of view of the bad guys.

Also entering production are *Legion* – a man with the ability to recognize the demonically possessed battles evil; *Painkiller Jane* and *Suture Girl* – pilots for comic book adaptations; and *Total Eclipse* – a teacher discovers that his new school is the site of arcane research and strange goings-on.

Previously announced new series from Sci-Fi include *Quantum Leap*, *Anonymous Rex*, *Reveille's 1000 Days* and *Brother Voodoo*.

In addition to ongoing series Sci-Fi also announced two new mini-series. The channel has had considerable success with adaptations of *Dune*, *Children of Dune* and with Spielberg's *Taken*. The new mini-series

are *6 Days 'til Sunday* – a man discovers that he will be murdered in six days and tries to stop it happening – and *The Thing* – a four hour reworking of the classic story of scientist battling a shape-shifting alien in Antarctica.

Other Sci-Fi mini-series previously announced or in production include *Stanley Robinson's Red Mars*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Myst*, *The Forever War* and two Ursula Le Guin adaptations – *The Earthsea trilogy* and *Left Hand of Darkness*.

Having aroused interest and attracted viewers with *The Roswell Crash*, *Starling New Evidence* the Sci-Fi Channel will also be expanding its reality/factual based programming production. The most interesting of these sounds like *Life on Mars* – two teams struggle with the "physical hazards and psychological obstacles in an ultra-convincing simulation of what life on the fourth planet might be like." Also in production are four further *Sci-Fi Declassified* specials "groundbreaking investigations that uncover new and explosive evidence... exploring the often blurry line between science fiction and science fact." And *Lab Rats* a consumer show testing "outrageous claims and miracle promises" in the real world.

Demonic Albion

The BBC may appear to have all but given up on producing sci/fantasy television programmes but at least their website continues throw fans the odd bone. Online now is *Ghosts of Albion*, a Web-based animated supernatural horror series created and written by Amber Benson (*Buffy's* Tara) and Christopher Golden and directed by Benson.

Ghosts of Albion is a tale of demons, vampires and ghosts set in 19th-century England spread across five 12-minute episodes (www.bbc.co.uk/cult/ghosts/).

Also on the cult site is a trailer for the forthcoming retooling of the incomplete Douglas Adams' *Doctor Who* story, "Shada" (www.bbc.co.uk/cult/doctorwho/shada/).

Ripper not dead

Ripper, the proposed *Buffy* the Vampire Slayer spin-off based on the character Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head) may still go ahead, but as a two hour made for television film rather than a mini-series. The actor recently told the website IC Liverpool that both Josh Whedon and the BBC were still keen but that *Buffy's* creator wanted to do something different from the one hour format of his shows *Buffy*, *Angel* and the defunct *Firefly*.

Cop this

Steven Bochco – creator of *NYPD Blue* and *Hill Street Blues* – is working on *NYPD 2069*. A New York cop show set sixty five years from now.

Goa'uld in them hills

Martin McGrath takes a look at *Stargate: SG-1*

If *Stargate: SG-1* were a car it would probably be made by Ford or Vauxhall. It isn't particularly stylish and it will never have the cachet or the celebrity status of one of those flashy shows like *Buffy* or *The X-Files* (which it was good) or *Star Trek*: Whatever but it is robustly made and deserves the serious attention of those looking for reliable entertainment.

Following the Emmerich/Devlin *Stargate* film, the television series follows the adventures of an elite group created by the US Air Force as they explore the galaxy and do battle with the evil Goa'uld and the Replicators and making allies with races such as the grey-like Asgard and the Tok'ra.

As one might expect from a show that has now made more than 130 episodes, *Stargate: SG-1* has built up its own mythos. The heart of the shows arc is the struggle with the Goa'uld – parasitic aliens who take human hosts and pose as (mostly) Egyptian gods and force humans to serve them. The arc has shifted this way and that over the show's existence and, of course, each victory only reveals another enemy who must be faced.

There are limitations to *Stargate's* ambitions. Almost everyone speaks English with an American accent, almost everywhere looks a lot like bits of Canada and America close to where the show is filmed in Vancouver, and nothing much ever really changes but, if you're willing to let it, *Stargate: SG-1* can sometimes surprise.

The show is at its very best when it isn't taking itself too seriously. It has, in recent seasons,

developed a nice line in one-liners – most of which go to Richard Dean Anderson (MacGyver), the show's star and producer, who plays Colonel Jack O'Neill. Many of these are neatly self-referential – mocking the overblown theatricality of the Goa'uld – or references to *Star Trek* – such as O'Neill's failed campaign to have the team's new starship named "Enterprise".

Many of the series best episodes have been wholly comedic. Season four's *Groundhog Day*-like "Window of Opportunity", season five's self-parodying "Wormhole X-treme" and "The Other Guys" from the most recent sixth season all deliver entertaining viewing.

Sometimes, though, the show can deliver on more serious episodes. Season six highlights have included "Shadow Play" as SG-1 struggle and fail to prevent a planet's people destroying themselves in a war, "Unnatural Selection" in which they meet a new form of Replicator and choose to betray one of them, condemning an innocent to imprisonment. Perhaps best of all was "Allegiance", in which mutual mistrust amongst allies leads to tensions.

None of this is groundbreaking and no reasonable viewer could make the case for *Stargate: SG-1* being anything more than bog-standard genre stuff. Still, not every car can be a Porsche or a Ferrari. With a spin-off planned (see *Goggle Boxes*) and a seventh (possibly final – but they've been saying that for three years now) season on the production line, *Stargate: SG-1* proves that being robust and reliable can sometimes go a long way.



The original *Stargate* team – somewhere in Canada.

Small press, big ideas

Small press comics seem to be undergoing something of a renaissance, so **Garen Ewing**, who has published several small press comics, takes looks at the current scene and tells us they are a medium worth taking seriously. But remember: leave the spandex at home.

Small press comics are self-published, usually by amateur writers and artists, and often on a shoestring budget. They could be anything from photocopied mini-comics that fit in your pocket to A4 glossy spine-bound books with a full colour cover. Yes, they certainly should be taken seriously, well, some of them.

A huge variety of people from all walks of life publish small press comics for a variety of reasons.

Small press comics have had a bit of a barren history over the last few years. But recently the scene appears to be re-emerging with new vitality, and with fresh new creators who are taking the form a lot more seriously than some of the now slightly jaded creators who have been slaving away at their comics since 'the early days'. The good thing about the new spark of enthusiasm is that it is reaching many people, not only re-igniting the fire for the more experienced creators, but also bringing in those people who had never thought of making comics for themselves.

There's even a groundswell of artists and writers who want to publish the more traditional kind of comic again. For quite a while, the small press became so underground that only far out and obscure titles were being published, or in many cases, 'made', as they didn't always conform to the regular idea of a booklet. This in itself was a reaction to a proliferation of traditional comics (quite often meaning superheroes) in the first place. The huge variety of the small press is also its great advantage, especially seeing as one of the factors that seems to be stunting the growth of comics as a serious artform is the overwhelming number of titles produced in the west that feature superheroes.

These days, traditional don't often mean superhero. In fact, very few superhero comics are self-



published today. Even one of the best of them, *The O Men*, takes a fairly refreshing look at the genre, and is presented on a very human level. Increasingly, there seem to be titles that reflect a more British approach to the comics scene,

perhaps harking back to titles such as *Warrior (BAM! Bulldog Adventure Magazine)*, *Action (Violent)* or even *2000AD (NuComix)*. Girls' comics like *Bunty* even get a more modern counterpart in the *Girl's Comic*, though as most of its creators have so far been male comic fans, and it is in the early stages of its

run, it hasn't quite found that girls' viewpoint it is aiming for. But it is still a very refreshing anthology.

There are lots of different reasons people make their own comics. For some it is a chance to get their work seen, possibly with a view to getting professional work at some point in the future. This has worked for several creators in the past, such as Eddie Campbell (*From Hell*), Andi Watson (*Buff the Vampire Slayer*), Steve Pugh (*Helblazer*) and Adrian Bamforth (*2000AD*) to name just a few.

The small press scene can act as a training ground for comics, analogous with a guitarist getting out of the bedroom to play in a band at the local pub.

It's still not 'making it', but at least you're out there being productive. Of course, not everyone wants to work in comics full-time. For some, it is the chance to publish a story that they know the major publishers wouldn't be interested in. With self-publishing they can keep complete control over their output. Of course, along with that goes all the marketing and business side of producing comics. For many creators this is a weak point, some, however, relish this aspect.

If comics as a medium have trouble being taken seriously in Britain and America (the enlightened European mainlanders and Japanese accept them as a legitimate form of literature) then the small press has twice the problem. In fact, many self-published creators prefer the term 'independent' to 'small press', as the latter term suggests the scene is somehow inferior. Most independent creators would argue that their comics are just as legitimate, and quite a few titles could sit happily on the shelf alongside comics published

by Marvel or Dark Horse. But the very nature of small press means that a huge variety of standards are published from the awful to the professional, and quite often the 'awful' scar the entire body of work. Awful is subjective, of course. The creator may be a terrible artist, but a very fine writer, or vice versa. Overall, most small press comics can provide good and often thought-provoking entertainment. Another aspect to the market, which could be seen as negative, is that many of the small press creators also make up the majority of its readers, providing a production atmosphere that is not always meaningfully criticised.

Small press comics are easy to make, but difficult to sell. To make them, all you need is bags of enthusiasm and creativity, a pen and some paper, and access to some form of reproduction process - be it photocopying, litho or digital printing, potato prints or even your own laser printer. You don't have to go it alone. If you write you could find an artist, if you draw you could find a writer, and if you do neither, you could edit your own

anthology and seek out contributions. Printing has become cheaper and more accessible thanks to digital printing, and more comics than ever boast a full colour cover. Home computers have helped to make many stages of the creative process easier, from editorial layout, to speech

balloons and lettering, to inking and even promotion, in the form of the massive range of websites that now cover self-published titles. The titles that do best are the ones that can keep to some form of regular schedule, and, therefore, have the best chance of picking up a regular and growing readership.

If you've looked at small press comics before and have not been impressed, take another look. The scene is always changing and no two titles are alike. In fact, there's bound to be a comic out there, somewhere, that would be just perfect for you. Now all you have to do is find it, or failing that, make it!



Suggested websites:

www.bugpowder.com: small press news, opinions and home of BugWiki, a project to gather data on the British self-publishing comics scene.

www.smallzone.com: a small press distribution service that stocks a wide variety of titles for sale.

www.php882.com: developing discussion forum for the UK small press scene.

www.angellfire.com/m/comic/index.html: There Goes Tokyo - includes a big list of small press comics links.



Haunted magicians and exploding old women

Mark Greener takes a look at the first book in a new series from Bloodstone Comics and returns to an old favourite with Warren Ellis's first John Constantine story - *Hellblazer: Haunted*.

An old woman explodes "like a cup of hot fudge that's been micro waved too long". And the wolfman emerges from the corpse. No, it's not the *X-Files*. It's the latest from the files of Carl Kolchak, journalist and investigator of the paranormal.

This isn't a rip off. Indeed, Kolchak predates Mulder and Scully by years, first appearing in an ABC Movie of the Week, *The Night Stalker*, in the early 1970s. And Kolchak's struggle with vampirism in Las Vegas broke viewing records. ABC followed with a second movie and a series. And I still can't quite understand why no one's remade the movie.

In the meantime, Moonstone comics filled the gap with *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*. In the first issue - *Fever Pitch* - people begin exploding and the witnesses each report a terrifying vision. Kolchak inevitably faces cynicism and ridicule. But his investigations soon discover that the truth is out there...

This is a well-drawn, well-scripted comic. The pace never lets up and the storyline remains intriguing to the end. Indeed, in places it seems almost too fast-paced, a tad breathless. The story would,

perhaps, have been better played out over a couple of issues. But it is still effective.

The art captures Darren McGavin's (who played Kolchak) rugged countenance and complements the script. Visually and verbally there's that element of humour and cynicism that is essential when dealing with the supernatural. Kolchak's cold is a nice touch - you'll understand why when you read it. Moonstone plans more from the Kolchak files. Based on the first book, they'll be worth watching out for.

The new *Hellblazer* graphic novel *Haunted* is also worth looking out for - although it's a lot harder than Kolchak. In this collection of issues 134-9, first published in 1999, John Constantine investigates the death of Isabel, an old girlfriend turned prostitute found brutally murdered and mutilated in a Brixton squat. He implicates another magician - Joshua Wright - in the murder. Wright aims to become the next Crowley. But Constantine has other ideas...

Hellblazer has been my favourite comic for years and years. I find John Constantine a compelling and vivid character, in some ways a Jerry Cornelius for the post-punk generation. There are many similarities in style, substance and attitude between the two - even down to the slightly dated fashions they both wear. And like Cornelius, Constantine is an archetypal, almost iconic anti-hero. But like Cornelius, the promiscuity, drug abuse and alcoholism hide a man that is profoundly moral within the parameters he's set himself, though

Kolchak, back in trouble.



these may not be society's values. However, Constantine's values are consistent and valid.

Haunted, one of the best of the late '90 stories, is set in London. *Hellblazer* is at its best when set in cities, and in particular London, rather than in the US of the story arcs *Good Intentions* and *Hard Time*, for example. The capital isn't just the backdrop of the book it is a central element in the narrative, in a similar way to Moorcock or Ackroyd, for example.

Haunted marked the debut of Warren Ellis as *Hellblazer*'s writer. And, as you might expect, it's a remarkably powerful story. Violent. Often brutal. Disturbing. Compelling. Moving. The characterisations, even of the minor players, are excellent. You feel their suffering. The art is uncompromising and pushes about as hard as a mainstream comic can. Constantine ends up on top, but at a physical and emotional price. I cannot recommend *Haunted* too highly.

Top cops

Martin McGrath reviews Alan Moore's *Top Ten* - *NYPD Blue* in spandex, but, you know, funny.

Sometimes Alan Moore's Comics make me feel guilty - especially his more recent work. *Promethia* and *Tom Strong*, for example, are clearly important and clever works, but I just don't enjoy reading them. I want to, but I can't and I feel guilty because even average Alan Moore comics stand out like a beacon in the morass of sword-wielding, large breasted women in lycra that sometimes seem to dominate modern comics.

Thankfully *Top Ten* makes no such demands on my conscience. It is, from start to finish, an unreserved delight. It might not be as profound as *Watchmen* or *V for Vendetta*, but it might just be the most entertaining and enjoyable work Alan Moore has ever produced.

At least part of the credit for that must go to artist Gene Ha who packs each panel with incredible detail. *Top Ten* is one of the few works in any genre or medium that wholly repays repeated and careful rereading. If you aren't careful, you'll miss all the best jokes.

The plots are entertaining but play second fiddle to some great character interplay amongst a fascinating, and enormous, ensemble cast.

Titan Books publish the second collection of *Top Ten*'s too brief run in paperback on the 27th of June, which gives you plenty of time to read and to re-read the first half.

More please Mr. Moore.



ABCD... UFO?

**Foundation
favourites**
Number two: *Susie Saucer* and
Ronnie Rocket by Stella Clair

Andy Sawyer is back with his second selection from the *Science Fiction Foundation Collection* and it is even stranger than the last. *Susie Saucer* and *Rocket Ronnie* reads like a children's introduction to 1950s ufology. Who really wrote it?

The tradition of "talking machines" in children's books is familiar to millions of children brought up in the 1950s on the pleasures of *Thomas the Tank Engine* and *The Little Red Engine*. Few such authors seem to have created spaceships.

One was the (presumably) pseudonymous Stella Clair, author of *Susie Saucer* and *Ronnie Rocket* (London: Werner Laurie, 1954). *Susie's* illustrations (by Edward Andrews) are wonderful period pieces, and the text, when read aloud, really ought to be in that prim vowel-tone and brisk condescension favoured by *Children's Hour* presenters. Of course, it takes a healthy infusion of alcohol in the bloodstream to bring out the full implications of anthropomorphic flying saucers in ribbons and anklesocks passing their exams in Social Astronomy and Heavenly Navigation, but there is considerably more to *Susie*.

Venus

Susie is the last flying saucer made on Venus. She bumps the other saucers as she takes off, and is warned that only saucers who behave perfectly can be allowed out into Deep Heaven, the endless and beautiful gulfs of space. Still, she becomes the personal craft of Flame, the King's grandson, and transports him on his mission to Earth to help his unhappy inhabitants, who do not believe in extraterrestrials. Her first Earth adventure is to be chased by two planes in an incident reminiscent of a Close Encounter. She outmanoeuvres them and, chagrined, they report seeing "another balloon".

Then, after Flame lands on his secret mission, something long and shiny comes hurtling towards her. It is *Ronnie Rocket*, glamorous and chock-full of double entendres. He had a gorgeous dorsal fin, and the rakish tilt of those windows made her magnet quiver.

The rocket coughed and fiddled with his

nudder.

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you. It might come off."
The rocket laughed again. "So it might. Awfully nice of you. Thanks a lot."
Then, plucking up his courage, he blurted out "I say, my name's *Ronnie Rocket*. What's yours?"
"I really don't think I should give my name to a strange rocket," said *Susie*, keeping her portholes fixed on the cloud.

True love

However, True Love has its way and soon the two machines are chasing each other in carefree fashion around the sky – until *Susie* crashes.

Unable to take off, she is examined by soldiers who try to open her up. *Ronnie* manages to attract the attention of some Martian saucers and in the fracas, *Susie* is rescued while *Ronnie* is captured by troops from a different nation, who replace his elegant nose with a warhead. It is *Susie's* turn to rescue *Ronnie* and take him back to Venus, where they settle down after their adventure. *Ronnie* even finds that his polluting jets turn into nice, safe magnets.

Behind this story, of course, not so lightly disguised, is the "saucer scare" of the late forties and fifties. What's unusual is that this "fairytale" seems to betray a greater knowledge of ufology than might be expected in a children's book of this type.

Amateur astronomer George Adamski worked near Mount Palomar observatory. In 1952 he made several journeys to desert areas where he had been told that saucers were landing,

and with several others observed a "gigantic cigar-shaped silvery ship" which he followed until it was lost to sight, apparently chased by a number of "our planes". Shortly afterwards a smaller craft appeared, and when that too vanished from view Adamski encountered a young man whom he became convinced was from Venus.

Shortly after Adamski's experiences, a 61-year old engineer named Truman Berthum was working in the Nevada desert when he woke after a siesta to find his truck surrounded by a group of small olive-skinned men. He was taken to their flying saucer to meet their captain, who turned out to be the beautiful, not to mention somewhat coquettish *Aura Flanes*.

Adamski and Berthum

Much of what we read in the books Adamski and Berthum subsequently published is echoed in *Susie Saucer*. Saucers come from Venus, where a superior race is guiding a vanguard upon Earth. *Susie* is pursued by the bombastic *Jeremy Jet* and *Donald Delta* who tell her that even if she is real, she's only a balloon (weather balloons are among the most common explanations of alleged UFOs).

Saucers are transported between planets by Great Ships (huge cigar-shaped objects) powered by "a wonderful magnetic force".

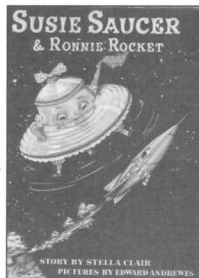
Venusians are physically beautiful, have been to Earth before, and are now trying to help us again. The planets are inhabited by different races who

live harmoniously with each other, though there are legends of a world where the Asteroid Belt now orbits which discovered how to make a terrible bomb and "grew so wicked that it destroyed itself."

Susie is also full of much UFO-literature's religiosity. In the term "Deep Heaven" there are echoes of C.S. Lewis, who used it a number of times in *That Hideous Strength*, the final volume of his "Cosmic Trilogy". The Earth *Susie* visits is like Lewis's *Thulcandra*, Fallen from the bliss of the natural heavenly experience. When scolded for having nearly let herself be captured, *Susie* is told that "if you fall from heaven into the mud of Earth, you will... forget your lovely home; forget you ever flew in Deep Heaven." One might suspect that the author of the *Narnia* series had tried his hand at another children's book were it not for the fact that the familiarity with astronomical engineering does not seem to come from the same pen which described *Ransom's* journey to Mars as "exploiting the less observed properties of solar radiation".

Saucer lore

"Stella Clair" was clearly familiar with saucer lore and – in a book that appeared to aim at young children – was quite capable of writing "My professors think that, with another couple of modifications and an improved fuel induction, I might be able to go to the Moon". The vocabulary here suggests a more accurate command of technological language than that possessed by Adamski or Berthum. Could it have been TV astronomer Patrick Moore? Intriguingly enough, ufologist Jenny Randles cites other writers as stating that Moore, a constant UFO-debunker, was behind the publication of *Flying Saucers From Mars* (1955) by Cedric Allingham, "the first true British rival to George Adamski". Alas, when questioned, Patrick Moore denied responsibility for *Susie*. Further research is necessary.



The Science Fiction Foundation Collection is the largest collection of English-language science fiction and material about it in Europe. Administered by the University of Liverpool, it is a resource for anyone with a research interest in it. It has been developed thanks to the generosity of publishers, writers, and fans who have donated books, magazines, and money to buy them. For new purchases, and for the preservation and conservation of the existing collection, it depends entirely on such generosity. If you would like to support the collection in any way, contact Andy Sawyer at The Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, P.O. Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA (a.sawyer@liverpool.ac.uk).
Science Fiction Foundation Collection: www.sff-foundation.org
We are grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Board for funding the "Science Fiction Hub" project, which will develop and enhance our catalogue.

Aussie rules?

Matrix's new magazine reviewer, **Roderick Gladwish**, takes a look at *Aurealis*, Australia's only professional SF magazine, and browses the web to look at *Rogue Worlds* and *Future Shocks*, two different takes on SF publishing on the Internet.

Feeling more like an almanac for the Aussie SF Fan than a straight magazine, *Aurealis* - Australian Fantasy and Science Fiction, comes out twice a year (April and October). Apart from short fiction, it carries the usual interviews, news and reviews, all standard fair. That almanac feel comes from extras such as a games section, market list and local convention news.

This issue (Number 30) saw the start of their computer games review section - they've declared it part of the SF world. Fair enough, considering the number of genre books and films that have become games and games that have become films.

However, I did wonder if there were no games magazines doing this better in Australia. (Gwyneth Jones offered a more serious examination of games and SF in *Vector* 227.) *Aurealis* also presents 'The Wordsmith's Bazaar' a market list covering publications across the globe, useful to web-based writers and magazine reviewers alike.

Best idea

Every SF mag should copy *Aurealis*'s best idea, which is the listing of their stockists (soon to be repeated on their website). This works well by encouraging sales and retailers to stock it for the free advertising. To make up for the biannual nature of the hardcopy, *aurealis*express is a regular email bulletin sent to subscribers. Included in this is 'flash fiction', 50 word stories covering the usual suspects of science, fantasy and horror fiction. The best flash fiction gets a longer lifetime on the magazine's website. These tales have a feel of poetry about them.

Issue 30 described itself as a Fiction Special, so what about the

fiction? It is an eclectic mix from the interpretation of a Japanese folk tale by Maxine McArthur to more conventional fantasy and science fiction. All competent stuff, though none stands out. A standalone Dune short story 'Hunting Harkonnens' by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson was entertaining, although it did suffer from the 'why didn't they just bomb from space?' chestnut. Virtually all the contributors are Australian, but they were picked for talent not nationality and this is the strength

of the magazine. Moving gingerly into ironing board/duck territory, thanks goes to...er, Skriblah Slooth of 'The Wordsmith's Bazaar' for the pointer to the following fiction websites. The cost benefits of web-based literature means a lot of the SF press is moving that way, so I'll cover these in this and future columns.

Unusual

Declaring it has 'Best SF, Fantasy and Horror' on the net, *Rogueworlds* is unusual because where most websites seem to cover everything possible, it is raw and stripped down. There is also no archive - so like a print magazine you have what is in that issue alone. There are stories, poetry, some background on the contributors, a brief editorial and that's it.

Poetry is well represented, however, I will skip judging poetry because I never could get a handle on the stuff. A quarterly Issue 7, the

Halloween edition, has stories fit for the theme.

'Teenage Reflections on the County Fair' by Forrest Aguirre and 'Secrets...Like Bones in Slippery Dirt' by Kurt Newton were conventional modern horror, whereas 'Teevles' by Tyree Campbell was subtle enough to be both SF and horror. Issue 8 contained 'When the Wind Dances' by Gary Allen, a fantasy tale that felt more part of something larger than a complete tale and 'Truthseeker' by Moira Allen, a werewolf tale with magic. I can't agree it's the best SF, Fantasy and Horror on the web with www.scifi.com/scifiiction out there, but it has potential.

Doubtful

Another quarterly, *Futureshocks* reached Issue 3, but its doubtful if it will survive much longer. Although *Rogueworlds* may or may not be a one-man band *Futureshocks* definitely is. There is no doubt of Rob Young's passion for SF, but producing any magazine is a struggle and he wears his woes on his editorial sleeve.

Apart from the fiction, there is a picture gallery (coming soon in December



Spielberg' with galleries covering the 1950s to 1980s. What about Mary Shelley? What happened to the nineties? If you can remember the 90s then you probably lived through them. Despite it's narrow range, it is incomplete. In fact it is barely started. Only the 1950s has active links and it is far from comprehensive.

Finance

Young admits he is buried in submissions and having finance problems. And I feel he should tighten his focus. The history concept is good, but should be a dedicated site. He is trying to do too much alone.

That leaves the stories. These are archived so previous issues can be read and are produced as PDFs to read offline. But the stories are weak, which is due to workload problems. Is it worth a visit? Give Young a year and his magazine will either be together or a memory. I hope the former.

Contact details

Aurealis

UK subscriptions contact: BBR
PO Box 625 Sheffield S1 3GY
Australian subscriptions: PO Box
2164, Mt Waverley, VIC 3149,
and Australia.

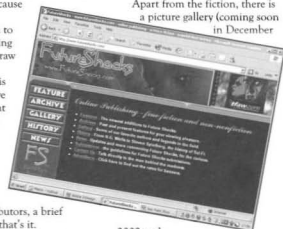
www.sf.org.au/aurealis

Rogueworlds

www.specificworld.com/rgworlds.html

Futureshocks

www.futureshocks.com



2002 and March 2003) and a SF History section that is described as 'From HG Wells to Steven

Martian orders

Stephen Baxter looks at the Beagle 2 mission to put a British-built lander on Mars in the search for signs of alien life. Get ready to feel a tingle of patriotic pride as Blur, Damien Hirst and some serious science travel from a former garage in Milton Keynes to the Red Planet. It's not NASA, but it could change the way we see the universe - and all for £25 million.

2003 has been a difficult year so far for advocates of space exploration. But there is a spark of hope in *Columbia's* gloomy shadow.

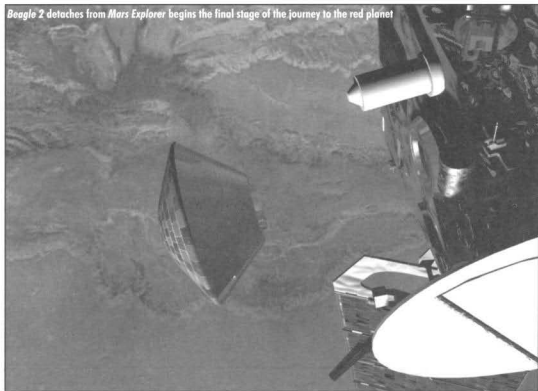
On 23rd May 2003 the European Space Agency's new deep space mission, the *Mars Express*, is due for launch from the Baikonur cosmodrome. ESA's Mars orbiter will carry a hitchhiker: the British-inspired lander *Beagle 2*, set for Marsfall, if all goes well, on Christmas Eve 2003. The second *Beagle* has been appropriately named, for it goes to Mars to explore the same basic scientific question that fascinated Darwin when he sailed on the first *Beagle*: the nature and origin of life.

Public lecture

My own small involvement in the *Beagle* project began in September 2000, when crusty lead scientist Colin Pillinger invited me to contribute to a public lecture on the project at the Royal Geographical Society in London. As a thunderstorm crackled spectacularly outside, I spoke briefly about Mars in sf. It was very cool to speak from the stage where Darwin himself once stood to announce his results from Galapagos, and I got to meet Alex James from Blur. Later I suggested PR outlets, gave Colin material for his project publications, dedicated a book to the project (*Icubones*, Gollancz 2001) and featured *Beagle* in my story 'Martian Autumn' (in *Mars Probes*, ed. Peter Crowther, Daw 2002) in which *Beagle* not only discovers life on Mars but also saves humanity, a bargain at £25m.

In November 2001 I visited the Open University's Planetary and Space Sciences Research Institute at Milton Keynes, where the *Beagle* has been designed and built. To anyone exposed to the heroic engineering of Cape Canaveral or Baikonur, it seems incongruous that in this unremarkable English countryside an interplanetary spaceship should be built, and yet it was so. We weren't so far from Bletchley Park where, during the Second

Beagle 2 detaches from Mars Explorer begins the final stage of the journey to the red planet



World War, a similarly remarkable intellectual development sprouted amid damp Buckinghamshire greenery.

At the time of that visit the bits of *Beagle* had still to converge on Milton Keynes from their various manufacturers, and the clean-room facilities where the probe would be assembled, adapted from an old garage through which we clambered, hard-hatted, had barely begun construction. As we walked around the OU's low-budget science labs, the whole thing had a charming cottage-industry feel, a sense reinforced as I was treated to a pub lunch by Colin and his heroic wife.

Meteorites

But Colin Pillinger has worked on Apollo 11 Moon rocks and meteorites from Mars. To test their ship's components Colin's team built a Mars environment simulation tank, about the size of a large oven. The clean room they eventually built rivalled anything NASA can show.

This is a serious business:

because of the vision, ingenuity and sheer dogged determination of the friendly people who bought me a soggy chicken baguette that day, a ship built in Milton Keynes really will one day sit on the burnt orange soil of Mars.

Baikonur

Beagle will be launched from Baikonur on a Soyuz rocket, the Russian workhorse that once launched Sputnik and Gagarin. Strapped to the side of *Mars Express*, *Beagle* will endure a seven-month journey through space. On 19th December 2003 it will be spun up and released from *Express*. After a five-day coast, it will slam into Mars' upper atmosphere at Mach 32. Discarding its heatshield, *Beagle* will parachute into the thickening air, and use air-bags to land gently on the Martian ground. That final descent will take about ten minutes.

Once landed, *Beagle* will call the Earth, sending a Blur jingle via *Mars Express*, or perhaps via the Americans' orbiting *Mars Odyssey*. *Beagle* can't speak directly to Earth,

so Colin and his team will be out of touch with *Beagle* for five days from separation from *Express* to the landing without knowing anything of the probe's fate. It will be an agonising wait!

During that November visit I got to play with a full-scale demonstration model of *Beagle* itself. When closed up its clam-shell carapace is about the size and shape of a Land Rover's spare tyre. But after landing this pie-dish will unfold and release flower-petal solar panels, and a robot arm will reach out bearing a 'PAW', a pod containing a camera, instruments and a 'mole' to burrow beneath the soil: it is like something from *Thunderbirds*. That robot arm hasn't yet lifted its PAW, though; designed for Mars' weak gravity, it could not lift the PAW on Earth.

Landing

The risk of the landing has been reduced as far as possible. The landing site is close to the Martian



equator, to ensure a mild range of temperature. *Beagle* will come down in a place and time – local spring – when dust storms are unlikely. The area chosen is reasonably flat. It doesn't matter if *Beagle* lands upside down, or even gets wedged between rocks; it should be able to right itself when it unfolds. (Fans of *Robot Wars* will thus be happy to know that *Beagle* incorporates a 'srmec', a self-righting mechanism.) Waste heat from *Beagle*'s internal mechanisms, and energy stored by solar panels, will keep the interior of the ship relatively warm: as *Beagle* will land during the local evening, its most difficult time after the landing may be its first ferocious Martian night.

Analysis

In the days that follow samples of Martian air and soil will be drawn into *Beagle* for analysis. I was shown an engineering test copy of *Beagle*'s onboard 'lab', where this analysis will be done. Its heart is a mass spectrometer, built at the OU, a thing that would usually cover a lab bench, but so miniaturised that it is an intricate toy-like gadget small enough to hold in your hand. To drive off gases from rock and soil samples, it has a ring of tiny furnaces the size of matchsticks. Lilliputian it may be, but this trinket is robust enough to stand being hurled from the Earth, subjected to months of hard vacuum and radiation, and dropped to the surface of another world, there to perform genuine science.

Beagle is looking for Martian life. It is targeted at what I called 'meteorite Mars' in these pages (Matrix Jan 2001). This is a Mars assumed to have been warm and wet long ago – the source of the meteorite which NASA famously claimed to have contained fossil traces of life – and a Mars where

even in today's chill aridity, and even though the surface soils are sterilised by intense solar ultraviolet, life may linger, somewhere. Martian life may resemble Earth's 'extremophiles', microorganisms capable of living deep underground in extremes of heat, pressure or toxicity. Some have argued that NASA's famous Antarctic meteorite carried traces of such life forms, but we may merely be observing the result of contamination on Earth. *Beagle*, on the other hand, will study rock and air samples in situ, on Mars itself.

Beagle is being given the best chance possible in its search for life. It will land in an area of sedimentary rock – laid down in water, a place where a river or ocean once lay. Its mole is capable

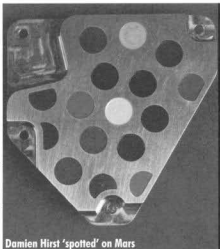
of digging a metre and a half into the soil, deep enough to find any microbes that might be huddled there, safe from the intense ultraviolet of the surface. Its mass spectrometer will test for the presence of a particular

carbon isotope that is a signature of life. And it will search for methane gas, since extremophiles fuel themselves by reducing carbon dioxide to methane.

Methane

The detection of methane would be especially significant. The chance of life in a planetary desert may seem small – but if methane, as an unstable gas, is present now, it has to have been injected into the air by some ongoing process, and living things would seem the most probable explanation. *Beagle* may not be able to say where its methane came from, or what kind of creature farted it into the air, but by seeking methane it is able to detect any of a wide range of possible life forms, if they live almost anywhere on Mars.

There are actually three Mars probes scheduled this year, including two Exploration Rovers



Damien Hirst 'spotted' on Mars

from NASA. These cute little American cars will roll around the surface taking pictures and analysing rocks, and no doubt will capture the imagination. But it is *Beagle* that promises a greater scientific return, for it is only *Beagle*

that is carrying a mass spectrometer. Like Darwin on Galapagos, *Beagle* will be landing with its eyes wide open, ready for anything that is there to be found.

And *Beagle* may not be the end. ESA has a new, quite visionary programme of solar system exploration called 'Aurora', which could lead up to sample-return missions, and even precursors to the final dream, a manned mission to Mars.

Milton Keynes

My most recent visit to Milton Keynes was in December 2002, when Colin mounted an event for the media and other friends of the project. Patrick Moore, Heather Couper and representatives of most major news organisations were there.

We were allowed to file past a window to view the clean room. We had to leave our mobile phones

behind, for they would have played havoc with *Beagle*'s sensitive systems. And there, through the glass, we saw the opened-up ship, and its robot arm and spectrometer. It really was quite beautiful, and my skin tingled at the thought that soon this little gadget would be closed up, not to be opened again until it rests on the fields of Mars.

Prophecy

Prophecy is an uncomfortable business. The Columbia tragedy had a peculiar impact on me, for in my 1997 novel *Titan I* predicted that a space shuttle, *Columbia*, would suffer a disaster, on reentry, in the year 2004. I take no great pride in my powers of prognostication: I simply picked the oldest orbiter, the second most dangerous section of any mission (after the launch), and a time when I knew the odds were a new shuttle catastrophe was due. It says a great deal for the courage of the astronauts that they understood such odds far better than I ever did, yet got aboard the old ship anyhow.

But I would be happy if another modest prophecy is fulfilled (made in 'Martian Autumn'): that by the 2060s *Beagle*, long exhausted, will be a treasured monument on Mars, having succeeded in its mission in finding traces of life.

I'm suspicious of patriotism: our nations are recently invented gods, and voracious ones. But I did feel proud when in May 2001 (researching my novel *Evolution*) I visited the Galapagos Islands, stopping-off point of the original *Beagle*. Darwin's theory of evolution is surely a high point in the Enlightenment tradition which shaped modern British history. Now the new *Beagle* continues in the same fine heritage.

Personally I'm delighted to have been involved with the *Beagle* project, however slightly – and to represent, if it's not presumptuous to say so, the BSFA and the rest of the UK sf community. And on Christmas Eve, when (if!) the new *Beagle* comes happily to rest on Isidis Planitia, with its tiny painted-on Union Flag and Blur jingle and Damien Hirst colour chart, I think we'll all be entitled to feel a little patriotic tingle.

More information

You can find more information about *Beagle* at www.beagle2.com.

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Damien Hirst painting photograph courtesy of Mike Levers.



Richer and stranger

James Lovegrove's *Untied Kingdom* is one of the first 'essential' SF novels of the year. A book born of war and of reaction against the failure of political leadership. A book that explores the nature of leadership. **Mark Greener** discusses this timely and compelling book with author James Lovegrove.

Almost any other year, James Lovegrove's *Untied Kingdom* would be a contender for one of the SF novels of the year. Indeed, it should, if there's any justice, make a strong showing in the awards short lists. However, this year, as the coalition aims to 'liberate' Iraq, it's especially apposite. Indeed, *Untied Kingdom* is the first 'essential' SF novel I've read this year.

Like many of us, SF captured James's imagination early. "Always, as a kid, genre stuff attracted me - Dr Who, Gerry Anderson, Marvel comics, science fiction movies, The Avengers, James Bond. It's just the way my head is wired, the default software I was born with," he told *Matrix*. "These things choose us, we don't choose them."

But James had a lucky break: an English teacher that respected SF rather than treating it with scorn. "What got me really interested in SF, interested in the possibility of SF as a medium I might want to work in, was when an English teacher at school - I was about ten or eleven at the time - read us a Ray Bradbury story in class 'The Veldt'. And I was thinking, in my startled young boy way, 'Hold on, wait a minute, this is SF but she's reading it to us in class! And she's treating it as if it's a proper story and everything, proper literature!'"

"Of course, Bradbury is proper literature, and so is a lot of SF, but I didn't know that at the time. Nothing I'd been exposed to yet had allowed me to make that deductive leap," he adds. "And God bless Mrs Daniels because she also got us to read *The Day of the Triffids* - again, 'acceptable' SF." Indeed, *Untied Kingdom* - as we'll see later - could be, in part, the fruits of Mrs Daniel's endeavours. But it didn't end there.

"At my next school, there was Mr Webb, who helped me write a thesis on Bradbury's work as part of the Oxbridge entrance examination - SF enabling me to get a place to read English Literature in higher education," James says. "So, while I'm naturally an SF nut, it helped a lot that I had teachers at my respectable schools reinforcing the notion in my head that SF could be

respectable. Otherwise, peer pressure being what it is, I'd probably not be a writer now, I'd probably be a lawyer or something. Mind you, I'm still not absolutely certain SF is respectable, but please let me keep my happy illusions."

As James began to write, he found that SF offered an effective narrative form allowing his fiction to step outside the world constrained by consensus reality. "In the interests of conserving the world's natural resources, I'd like to recycle here a metaphor I came up with when I was writing the introduction to Adam Roberts's novella *Jupiter Magnified* (due out soon from PS Publishing - read it, it's excellent).

There, I likened mainstream fiction to the visible spectrum of light and compared this with genre fiction, which allows its authors to explore the infrared and ultraviolet frequencies, to travel further and into richer and stranger territory, and so create stories and imagery



...genre fiction allows its authors to explore the infrared and ultraviolet frequencies, to travel further and into richer and stranger territory, and so create stories and imagery one would not, in the normal course of events, come across.

James Lovegrove

one would not, in the normal course of events, come across. There's more out there in the realm of pure imagination than can be found in just the realm of everyday life. Mainstream writers are constrained by rules, by the laws of consensus reality, the dictates of what we have all decided to agree is plausible. For me unreality, implausibility, is much more challenging, much more liberating, and much more interesting."

James's latest book *Untied Kingdom* enacts that philosophy. The International Community has imposed military action and sanctions on the UK. Society centres on isolated communities, while cities rest in the hands of rival gangs. One of these gangs kidnaps Moira, the wife of local teacher Fen Morris. Fen resolves to rescue his wife...

As this suggests *Untied Kingdom* is especially apposite given events in The Gulf. Indeed, the book arose as a response to the West's previous military adventures in Kosovo. "I

hope it's obvious but also so tightly woven into the storyline that it doesn't stick out and get in the way," he says. (It doesn't). James notes that the book examines "the Balkanisation of our country, the idea that what happened in Yugoslavia and that whole region could happen here, the idea that the civilisation we take for granted could easily be stripped away from us in an inkling."

"Basically, the politics of the book is straight-forward: I hate our leaders," James adds. "I hate almost all the leaders in the world today. I hate them for their venality, their cynicism, their overpowering self-interest, their arrogance, their vanity. I hate the fact that there are no true statesmen any more, only politicians, some of whom believe they're statesmen but aren't. I hate their lack of principles, their slavish subservience to big business, their lack of personal accountability for what they do. I hate their absolute sneering contempt for the people they've been elected to govern and their ability to think only in the short term, usually no further ahead than the next election. We the public vote them in, so we may be partly to blame, but it's not really our fault because the choice available to us is so poor. People with any common sense or vision or integrity don't go into politics because the way politics is nowadays, they wouldn't last a month. And in *Untied Kingdom* I wanted to explore what I think it means to be a leader, a good leader, what it takes to rule wisely and well. I also wanted to show a country without over-all leadership that has managed to get on pretty well regardless, thank you very much. That's at the core of the book: individuals without governing at a national level, thriving."

The sanctions and military action tear the façade of civilised life apart. Yet *Untied Kingdom* seems to deny the implicit social Darwinism that lies at the core of much post-apocalypse literature. The book presents an essentially optimistic vision. Even in the violent gangs struggling for survival in brutal urban centres a form of

decent humanity, albeit it warped, can prevail. "I wanted to avoid the standard tropes of apocalypse fiction and at the same time have fun with some of the conventions of the sub-genre," James comments. "I can't deny it, I love that *Mad Max* doom and gloom. I'm haunted by memories of *Threads*, *The Day After*, *The Survivors*, *Damnation Alley* and *Judge Dredd* in *The Cursed Earth*. I like all that scary wasteland stuff, but I didn't want to do simply another version of the same. And I don't see why apocalypse, or social collapse, has to be a bad thing necessarily, if it allows people freedom, a greater measure of self-determination, a chance to rediscover what is essential in life."

"What keeps the Englishers in *Untied Kingdom* going is, I admit, in part the belief that the country will have to get back on its feet sometime soon. The disaster is only short-term. Normal life will be resumed at some stage. But in the interim, why not celebrate rather than bemoan the overthrow of order and the arrival of chaos? Why not treat externally imposed devolution as a useful opportunity to regroup and recover? I'm not sure that, in reality, such a result would come about were England to find itself on the receiving end of the world's collective anger. But I just felt it would be interesting and different to make the case for the other side, to consider cataclysm and upheaval as to some extent beneficial rather than simply purely destructive."

Untied Kingdom also contains a strong element of humour, something James regards as "crucial" to his stories. "There's nothing worse than a po-faced author," he says. "A smile has to come through somehow, however strained, however through-gritted-teeth, otherwise a book or a poem or any work of creativity lacks that essential ingredient, basic humanity. I have to say that *Untied Kingdom* is one of my lighter novels, but that doesn't mean it isn't serious too. The humour makes palatable the book's many darker aspects. It would be an unremittingly bleak tale otherwise - there's a lot of death and suffering in it. And I don't feel humour and bleakness are incompatible at all. The best jokes, in one way or another, are cruel. We laugh at more often than we laugh with. We laugh to relieve the pressure of shame and embarrassment and guilt. We laugh because sometimes things are so bad that that's all we can do."

Finally, *Untied Kingdom* contains a hint of myth in the book, introducing the Green Man element. But it doesn't dominate the story: rather it's almost a colour on the story. So I asked why he

didn't make more of mythological element?

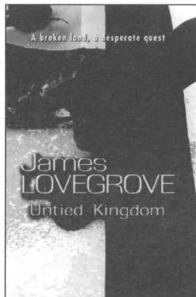
"Ah, did my editor bribe you to ask that question? He felt the same way. But the thing is, that's not really what the book is about, that's not where the meat of the story lies," James says. "To me, the myth aspect is a useful way of addressing the issue of how people might go about finding substitute leaders in a time of crisis, but I didn't want it to be the novel's be-all and end-all, the panacea to its every problem. I wanted it to be a thematic undercurrent running all the way through, just perceptible, present but not in your face."

The Green Man, Wickramasinghe's gods on the train, the literally mythical creations of the writer Jeremy Salter, King Cunt with his twisting of the legend of a famous early English monarch - a realistic rather than fantastical take on all these archetypes. People like Neil Gaiman do the 'mythic' stuff ten times better than I ever could. I leave it to them."

As all this might suggest *Untied Kingdom* is, in the final analysis, a very English book, even down to the choice of hero, for example. Zelazny uses a Hell's Angel in *Damnation Alley*. In common with, for example, the focus of Herbert's *Rats*, the book heroes around a teacher. And James remarks that this 'Englishness' is deliberate.

"I couldn't have been more determined to create a very English tale, to make it as uniquely English, as uniquely about the English, as I could," James comments.

"Meditative and eccentric, a state-of-the-nation address, a story about what I think this country means



"I couldn't have been more determined to create a very English tale, to make it as uniquely English, as uniquely about the English, as I could... a story about what I think this country means and what I feel it has lost or gained over the years."

James Lovegrove

whole notion of 'it couldn't happen here' on its head, as I said earlier."

Untied Kingdom follows in the tradition established by *Day of the Triffids*, John Christopher and so on. However, at first at least, James wasn't overtly writing in this style. "Funnily enough - and this goes to show how ridiculously underheaded I can sometimes be - it wasn't until I was about a third of the way in that I realised I was writing a Wyndham/Christopher type of novel. The homage was latent until that point. After it dawned on me, I just kept on going, feeling that even if the rest of the world wasn't ready for a resurgence in genteel-apocalypse fiction, I was. To acknowledge the connection, however, I did change a place name to "Wyndham Heath" (I can't remember what I'd called it before). A little official doff of the cap."

Inevitably, *Untied Kingdom* will be compared to that other British master of the journey: Ballard. And to a certain extent - although

and what I feel it has lost or gained over the years. Fen, to me, embodies everything that's good and bad about the English character - diffident, phlegmatic, wry, shy, polite, determined, courageous when need be, a little bit repressed and self-denying. Even his name: a combination of flat but dramatic geographical feature and absurd old-time-dancing tradition. (I don't just throw these things together, you know.) And the purpose of all this quint-essential Englishness was to bring home to people how it must feel to be bombarded, to suffer as Kosovo and Iraq and other such places have suffered.

To turn that whole notion of 'it couldn't happen here' on its head, as I said earlier."

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Inevitably, *Untied Kingdom* will be compared to that other British master of the journey: Ballard. And to a certain extent - although

much more limited than in Ballard - the internal world of Moira and Fendoes mirror the wider circumstances. Their marriage and country are destroyed. "That - the comparison of two different kinds of union falling apart - was planned from the outset. Each enhanced the other, gave the other a literary reason for being. That's how I work, in an often very schematic, motif-driven fashion. Sometimes it's as overt as the use of the number seven and the colour green in *Days*, recurring throughout the book. Sometimes it's deeper embedded, like that notion of internal/external parallels in *Untied Kingdom*. I do these things because they're fun, because they add an extra dimension, and because they have a novelty value that keeps me interested and amused and enthused during the writing process."

James next book may be something of a departure, however. "It's a big splashy fantasy novel set in a world where everyone has a superhuman power, or what we would regard as a superhuman power, although to them it's just natural. Conflict arises between people with different types of power. I think it's going to be a kind of broad metaphor for class, race, and other divisive distinctions. The book's about halfway done and I'm having great fun with it. I've never written a full-length fantasy tale before. But it's not elves-and-dragons fantasy, I hasten to add. More like Moorcock and Peake. That's called *Witchstorm* and should appear sometime in 2005. But also, I've a 'minor' work coming out at the end of 2003, Gig, a book told in two halves, consisting of a pair of back-to-back novellas, which tell opposite sides of the same story and can be read in either order. It's about a rock star and his number one fan, and there is a supernatural element to the plot. And it's filled with palindromes, too. That's that book's recurring motif, palindromes, mirror-image words and phrases, and I had a ball coming up with them and working them into the text."

For me, one of SF's greatest strength is its ability to step back from current events. To view, dissect and analyse current society with the strength born of a certain narrative distance. It's a truism, but worth restating, that the best SF isn't about the future. It's about now. And as the international collusion imposes its will on Iraq, *Untied Kingdom* isn't just recommended reading. It's essential.

You can find out more about James Lovegrove at his website www.jameslovegrove.com.

Books demand to be p

So many books, so little time...and yet, for all the quality of the current crop of SF writers there are older works out there that deserve to be in print and deserve the attention of modern readers. **Martin Sketchley** looks at *Ansible Editions*, Christopher Priest's and David Langford's new venture to bring some of those neglected classics back into print.

No matter how long you've been reading SF, or how much time you have, you can't get through all the books out there, and it can be particularly frustrating trying to find something of guaranteed high quality. OK, the BSFA and Clarke Award shortlists are a good guide. But the two often

feature the same books – this year's shortlists, for example, share four titles: M John Harrison's *Light*, China Miéville's *The Scar*, Christopher Priest's *The Separation*, and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt*. (The other players on the BSFA list are Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Effendi* and Gwyneth Jones's *Castles Made of Sand*, while the Clarke list also features David Brin's *Kil'n* People and Elizabeth Moon's *Speed of Dark*.) What's more, by their very nature, these lists feature current titles. If you're inter-

ested in older works or, like me, feel you need further education in respect of SF's rich heritage, then sources of classic works can be few and far between, with many older titles now out of print.

Well, you can rest easy, because a new website has just been launched that offers you the chance to buy selected classic titles in e-book format. Furthermore, two luminaries of the SF field who require no introduction choose the

titles on offer.

Ansible Editions is a new e-publishing venture by Christopher Priest and David Langford. At the moment, the site offers two titles: *The Caltraps of Time* (expanded edition) by David I. Masson, and *Wholly Smokes* by the late John Sladek. The aim is to expand the list on a regular basis, with the emphasis on classic works no longer available in book form, as well as lesser-known titles by leading writers, and new works by unjustly neglected authors. In the pipeline, for example, is Charles Platt's *Dream Makers* – a collection of interviews with SF authors.

In each case, the text will be revised, checked and wherever possible presented as the definitive version. Quality and uniqueness will be the predominant factors influencing the titles chosen for the list. The *Ansible* edition of Masson's book, for example, features seven short stories originally

published in *New Worlds SF* during the 1960s, and later collected in the now rare first edition of *The Caltraps of Time* (Faber & Faber) in 1968. It also features, however, three stories published in original SF anthologies early in the 1970s, and thus now contains all Masson's SF writing.

Sladek's *Wholly Smokes* was among the author's last book to be completed, with *Ansible*'s version the first edition of this startling novella – the fictionalised history of a tobacco

company that has apparently been present at or influenced many great historical moments.

So, what's involved in making such texts available? 'So far,' says Priest, 'each of the books has needed a different procedure. For *Wholly Smokes* we had John Sladek's original manuscript and word processor files, so the text was easy to get right. A few problems arose with the illustrations: some of them came from advertisements in old magazines we had no access to (and weren't good quality enough for us to re-scan), while others were similarly unobtainable choices of quirky clip-art. We had to try to find replacements for them, or make

the decision to leave them out. *Caltraps* had to be scanned from the original Faber edition, so again it was relatively straightforward. In this case, because we wanted our edition to be definitive, it meant adding the three extra Masson stories and working with David Masson himself to make the book a coherent whole.'

Priest says that the process for Platt's title is different again. 'With *Dream Makers*, we are having to work from a variety of sources: some computer files, some scannable photocopies and the original books (one of which has become the traditional brown smudge of pale typesetting on elderly acidic paper). Most of our work is involved with

combining the two original volumes into one, dropping some of the more uninteresting interviews, or the ones that the passage of time has made irrelevant, then adding a lot of new material, at present being written by Charles Platt. Again, we seek to make this edition the definitive one, a unique reference work.'

So, what else is forthcoming from *Ansible Editions*? 'All the titles we have lined up for the future are those mentioned on the website,' says Priest. 'After that: we have plans, but they keep changing. There's a lot of material available, so it's really a question of trying to choose the right stuff and putting it

out in a certain order, giving the list a kind of character of its own.' Priest and Langford are, however, keen to point out that under no circumstances are unsolicited manuscripts to be submitted.

Langford comments: 'It's all a little uncertain, although the famous Langford UFO hoax book is one possibility. We're in process of finalizing a co-publishing deal with John Betancourt at Wildside Press, whose *Cosmos* Books imprint will be doing a print-on-demand edition of *The Caltraps of Time*, which I will typeset.'

So what are the expectations for the site? 'At present,' says Langford, 'with the thing barely off the ground, we're still at the stage of wild huzzahs and



“...we have plans but they keep changing. There's a lot of material available, so it's really a question of trying to choose the right stuff and putting it out in a certain order, giving the list a kind of character of its own”

Chris Priest



“At present, with the thing barely off the ground, we're still at the stage of wild huzzahs and opening the champagne when we sell a copy. I'm looking forward no end to selling a second one.”

David Langford

rinted

AN IRONING BOARD
ON A DUCK POND

opening the champagne when we sell a copy. I'm looking forward no end to selling a second one..."

Titles from *Anible Editions* are currently available in screen-friendly PDF format, although alternative formats may be added as the list grows. Customers can receive their purchases as e-mail attachments or on CD-ROM. Alternatively, you can save a PDF document from your own copy of Acrobat Reader, or open a compressed zip file containing your PDF e-book, with a short-term password provided for use on the *Anible Editions* download page. (Extracts in identical format can be viewed on *Anible Editions'* free samples page - feedback is welcomed.)

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URLs of relevance

www.anible-editions.co.uk

www.anible.demon.co.uk

www.christopher-priest.co.uk

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

www.msketchley.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk

This edition of *Ironing Board* was written to the sound of Radio 4's *W2 Elizabethans*.

Spinnerets

Roderick Gladwish kindly sent me some suggestions for sites *Matrix* readers might find interesting. He says: "www.deepcold.com is a sort of alternative history of cold war going hot in space."

The site features illustrations of some of the projects that never came to fruition during the early years of the space race. What is most remarkable about the site is the ambition of the pioneers of the space age. On the Soviet side Deep Cold's originator Dan Roam provides computer rendered images of the Zvezda military space station, the Spiral orbital interceptor and the Lunii Korabi - the lander which was to have put a cosmonaut on the moon. The American section presents the "Dyna-Soar" X20 spaceplane, the Blue Gemini military orbiter and the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL).

It is a thought provoking site and the quality of the images produced by Dan Roam is exceptional.



Deep Cold's link page points to some other sites such as Romance to Reality (<http://members.aol.com/dsfortree/explore.htm>) and <http://www.host.ru> a Russian site that has 3D models of most Soviet space vehicles, including pictures of the Soviet moon lander.

For even more detail on the Soviet exploration of space www.russianspaceweb.com is unmissable. The site features so much detail that the technically minded amongst you might very well be able to build your own Soyuz from the plans provided. The site feels as authoritative as anything I've seen on the web.

From the sublime to the somewhat ridiculous, Deep Cold's links can also lead you to

The Dyna-soar flies again at Deep Cold



www.ninfinger.org/~sven/models/space_models.html - which is essentially a long list of plastic Airfix-style models of spacecraft produced throughout the years. Proof that the Internet really does have something for everyone, I suppose, but in its own way fascinating because many of the items on the list link to images of the packaging of these models.

A few minutes browsing filled me with a terrible, childish, lust. I wanted them all. There is something enormously appealing about the 1950s vision of spaceflight and the future. It might have been built on a paranoid militarism, but didn't they make the future look like fun?

Roderick also suggests a personal favourite, which is NASA's Warp drive, when? site - www.lerc.nasa.gov/WWW/PAO/warp.htm

Justina Robson - author of *Silver Screen*, *Mappa Mundi* and the forthcoming *Natural History* - has a superb new-look website at www.lulu.co.uk



Image provided by www.deepcold.com © 2003 Dan Roam

The strange business of con-running

Many of us harbour ambitions to run a con, usually after too many pints in the convention bar. But **Pádraig Ó Méalóid** put his ambitions into practice – and he admits he's not really sure why. Nevertheless, later this year, he's running the Phoenix Convention in Dublin. So we asked him to look at the strange business of con-running.

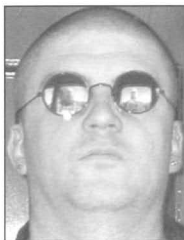
Conrunning is a strange business. I've been involved in it on and off for over a dozen years now. I'm involved in running one this year, the Phoenix Convention in Dublin on the 27th and 28th of September. And I'm still not entirely sure what drives me to do it. You spend a whole year working towards an event that rushes past in a two-day blur. You're too busy trying to keep everything running according to plan to see any of what's going on and before you know it you're seeing the Guest of Honour into a taxi to the airport and it's all over for another year. Perhaps a closer look at what's involved would help.

Logical approach

I've always said that a logical approach is a good start. Like any event, you need to know What, Where, When, Who and How Much. Why, as mentioned earlier, is a beyond the scope of this article. We presume we want to run a SF convention of some sort. Figuring out what you want at this point will help later on. Personally, I'm interested in running a broad-based science fiction and fantasy convention, particularly focused on the written end of the genre, rather than TV or movies, for instance. The Where and the When of a convention are more or less inextricably linked. I'm faced with particular problems here in Dublin because it's such a popular tourist destination. In England you can approach a hotel manager and negotiate favourable terms on the basis that you'll fill his hotel for the weekend. But if they can do that themselves anyway, you're more

or less stuck with the going rate. Not only that, but there constantly seems to be something going on in Dublin that you need to schedule yourself around. I had been attempting to negotiate favourable room rates with the hotel when an announcement was made that the All Ireland Football Finals will be held the same weekend, therefore flooding the city with our country cousins, and meaning any chance of a cheap rate on the rooms evaporated.

It's at this point that you try to figure out how much to charge people - the cost of the hotel is the single biggest cost in running a con. Ideally, you should divide the entire cost by the entire paying attendance, but as you only know both these figures long after the dust has settled, you more



“You spend a whole year working towards an event that rushes past in a two day blur. You're too busy trying to keep everything running to see any of what's going on and before you know it... its all over for another year.”

Pádraig Ó Méalóid

or less have to guess!

Not only that, in between trying not to clash with other cons both here and in Britain, as well as avoiding running an event on the same weekend as WorldCon, it's amazing how quickly you run out of available weekends. So organising as far in advance is absolutely vital. The more time you give yourself, the more choice you have. Anyway, it's always fun watching the hotel managers' faces when you say, "I'm interested in booking your hotel to run a science fiction convention". However, having said that, I'm very happy with the hotel we've got for P.CON, as I've had my

eye on it as a potential venue for some time now. It's directly across the river from Dublin's Guinness brewery, and only about fifteen minutes walk from the centre of Dublin city, if you take the newly erected Spire of Dublin as being the

exact centre of the city, which, for the sake of argument, we will!

Perhaps the area of conrunning most fraught with peril is that of guests, as they're human beings and, therefore, given to unpredictable behaviour. Generally speaking, a convention will have one guest of honour, who has all of his or her expenses paid for, and after that a number of people are asked if they would care to attend the convention as guests. They get a pair of free memberships, for which we expect that we can use their names on our publicity material, and also put them on a few panels. We can't afford to pay them in any other way, but we do try to buy them alcoholic drink over the course of the weekend.

Greatest asset

In a way, your guests are your greatest asset as a conrunner, and should be treated as well as is humanly possible. As far as I see it, they're our guests, and we are their hosts, and there is an obligation on both sides to look after the other. As far as the behaviour of guests goes, one rule seems to hold true, which is, and I'm going to try to be tactful here, that the more talented they are, the easier they are to deal with, and vice versa. I'm constantly delighted to have people like Kim Newman come to cons here as a guest, as he's not only a good speaker, and fabulously versatile, but seems willing to do any number of panels, and will do whatever he can to help out the convention. The vast majority of guests are like that, and are genuinely good and helpful people, and indeed I've struck up friendships with a number of con



Phoenix Convention

27 - 28 september 2003 ▶ ashling hotel dublin ▶ guest of honour: ken macleod

ness

Award we go again

guests over the years.

On the other hand, tales of people letting their ego get the better of them abound. One guest, who was not to have been asked back anyway, insisted that he should be given a favourable timeslot of his choosing, so that he could give the same presentation he gave the previous year, as he felt not enough people came to it the first time. A polite letter telling him we organised the convention timetable, not him, and he suddenly had enough sense to recall a previous engagement that weekend, and all was well. The same man was the author of a trilogy that sold so badly that the publishers simply didn't bother bringing out the third one, and the pound shops of Dublin were giving away copies of his first two books with any other book purchased.

No-show

There are any number of cases of authors simply not bothering to arrive for the con. One particular author managed to be a no-show three years in a row. More fool us for continuing to ask him, obviously. In the ends, a sort of Darwinian weeding process takes care of these things, with the ultimate sanction being not to ask them back, and to make sure other con runners know about them.

To answer my own question at the top of the article, though, the reason I do it is because I love it. You can't beat the feeling on a Sunday night after a successful con, although I still haven't quite figured out why it's necessary to go through a year's worth of pain to get to it.

Nevertheless, as I said, I'm involved in running a convention in Dublin this September: the Phoenix Convention (P:CON). Ken MacLeod is the guest of honour, with lots of other wonderful guests also in attendance. It's taking place over the weekend of Saturday and Sunday the 27th & 28th of September 2003 in the Ashling Hotel in Parkgate Street, which is just outside the centre of Dublin city. The cost for the weekend is £20 in advance or £22.50 on the door. You can find more details and an application form to sign up for P:CON at our website at www.slovobooks.com/phoenix.

As *Matrix* goes to press, votes are still being cast and the results of the 2002 BSFA Awards are still not known. Already, though, *Tanya Brown's* thoughts are turning to next year and the next set of nominations. The BSFA Awards never sleep you know, never.

By the time you read this the winners of the BSFA Awards for best Novel, Short Story, Artwork and Related Publication will have been announced at Eastercon – but at time of writing, the winners are not known and the award trophies are still being created!

Nevertheless, nominations for the 2003 Awards – which will be awarded next Easter, in 2004 – are already being received. *Varjak Paw*, by S. F. Siad (published by David Fickling Books) has been nominated for the short fiction award, and the cover (by Dave McKean) has been nominated for the art award.

With new novels out from Terry Pratchett, Anne McCaffrey, Richard Morgan, David Gemmell and Neal Asher – to name but a few – and a healthy variety of short fiction being published monthly, bimonthly or quarterly in magazines such as *Interzone*, *Spectrum SF* and *TTA*, there must be something that you've read and enjoyed enough to nominate! Remember, you can nominate as many items as you like in all categories – you won't 'use up' a nomination by submitting it now.

Up-to-date news on the nominations can be found on the BSFA web page (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 (awards@amranth.aviators.net).

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 for the 2003 Awards is 31st January 2004. The rules of eligibility are as follows:

Best Novel, for the best novel first published in the UK in the calendar year 2003. 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 2003. 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. Also note that Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* was shortlisted in this category, despite being published as a children's novel. At 30,000 words, *Coraline* was deemed to be short fiction.

Best Related Publication, for the best single piece, anthology or full-length critical work to appear in the UK in the calendar year 2003. 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 2003. 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.

See the world with SF

They say that, everywhere in the world, hotels and airports look the same. Is the same thing true of science fiction conventions? This is your chance to find out.

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

1-3 Aug 03 Finncon X Eurocon 2003

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

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 Glycer. Membership: C\$200. Info: Torcon 3, Box 3, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1A2, Canada, info@torcon3.on.ca



27-8 Sep 03 Phoenix Con (P-CON)

Ashling Hotel, Parkgate St, Dublin 8. Registration: £20 (€30), €35 at door; €10 supp. Contact: Yellow Brick Road, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland. Website: www.slovobooks.com/phoenix

4 October 03 NewCon2

Roadmender, 1 Ladys Lane, Northampton, NN1 3AH 11.00 am to 6.00 pm NewCon2 will have a single-track programme featuring a talk by Stephen Baxter, interviews with Dominic Harman and Ben Jeapes, panels, etc. Membership: £8 (or £5 students & unwaged) in advance; £9 (or £5) on the door. Cheques made payable to "Northampton SF Writers Group" to Ian Pursey, 16 Albany Road, Northampton, NN1 5LZ. igpursey@ipursey.freemove.co.uk. An art show featuring the work of Dominic Harman will be displayed in the Roadmender gallery for the month leading up to NewCon2. See news item for more details.

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.

24-6 Oct 03 They Came And Shaved Us

Fairways Hotel, Dundalk, Co. Louth, Ireland. £35/€55 Sterling to 13a Bridge Rd, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 2QW; punts/Euro to 123 Carnlough Rd, Cabra West, Dublin 7, Ireland. Master of ceremonies: Robert Rankin. Website: www.theycameandshavedus.com

30 Oct - 2 Nov 03 World Fantasy Con.

29th WFC takes place in Washington DC, Oct 30 - Nov 2 2003. Guests of Honor - Brian Lumley, Jack Williamson (in absentia, probably), W Paul Ganley, Allen Koszowski; master of ceremonies Doug Winter. Reg \$120 till July 31, then \$150. World Fantasy Convention 2003, 7113 Wayne Drive, Annandale, VA 22003-1734, USA; info@worldfantasy2003.org www.worldfantasy2003.org

31 Oct - 2 Nov Armadacon 15

Cophorne Hotel, Plymouth. Contact 88 Knighton Rd, St Judes, Plymouth. Phone 0780 1492114.

7-9 Nov 03 Novacon 33

Quality Hotel, Walsall. £35 Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Guest of Honour: Jon Courtney Grimwood. Email: x15@zoom.co.uk Website: www.novacon.org.uk/2003/index.htm

20-23 August 04 Discworld Convention IV

To be held at the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leicestershire. Guests to be confirmed. Website: www.dwcon.org

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

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



INTERACTION

The 63rd World Science Fiction Convention
4-8 August 2005, Glasgow

4-8 Aug 05 Interaction (63rd Worldcon)

Glasgow, UK. Guests of Honour: Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Shekley, Lars-Olov Strandberg, Jane Yolen. £75 attending, £30 supporting. Contact Interaction, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S2 5HQ, UK, www.intersection.worldcon.org.uk. info@interaction.worldcon.org.uk

Take note:

Are you attending a convention?

- 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 the details with the conference organisers. Never make a journey to a convention without confirming the details in advance.

Are you organising a convention?

- Please forward updates, corrections and any information on new events to:
martinmcgrath@ntlworld.com

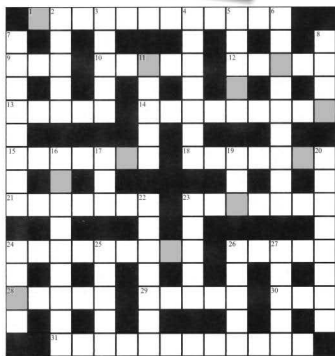
Anger management



Win *28 Days Later* on DVD **plus** the soundtrack album

Matrix said it was the film that proved that blockbuster science fiction didn't need to come from Hollywood. Now you can see for yourself if you are the lucky winner of *28 Days Later* on DVD, plus you get the atmospheric soundtrack so, thanks to Mayor Livingstone's traffic calming, you can now recreate the famous scenes of an empty London any time you like.

Simply complete the crossword below, which features characters and shows from Gerry Anderson's imagination. When completed the shaded squares will spell out a phrase. Send that phrase with your name and address to Martin at: matrix.competition@ntlworld.com by noon on Friday 6 June 2003. First name selected by the random number generator, wins the DVD and CD.



Congratulations to the winner of last issue's crossword competition, Peter Hammond from Newport in Shropshire. A copy of the *Sight and Sound* Science Fiction/Horror Reader is on the way.

The answer we were looking for was: **GRAND MASTER**

Crossword 160 Solution

Across: 1 Knight 4 Farmer 7 Omaha 9 Del Rey 11 Norton 13 Claim Jump 16 Pohl 18 Ride 21 Clement 22 Van Vogt 24 Edge 25 Disc 27 Repudiate 32 Leiber 34 Bester 35 Aisle 36 DeCamp 37 Trance

Down: 1 Kidnap 2 Isle 3 Toy 4 Farmer 5 Mate 6 Renege 8 Astrov 10 Eel 12 Ohm 13 Clamber 14 Agent 15 Provide 17 Oiled 19 Doges 20 Mafia 23 Aldiss 24 Euclid 26 Clarke 28 Eve 29 TIE 30 Zinc 31 Stun 33 Rap 34 Bet



Cover illustration

This issue's cover illustration shows a simulation of the Beagle spacecraft at work on the surface of Mars.

The illustration was provided by **Beagle 2**. All rights reserved.

Across

- 1 They are go! (12)
- 9 SHADO fought the bad guys (1,1,1)
- 10 Dismissive gesture (5)
- 12 Vacuum (2,3)
- 13 Try to do this short piece of writing (5)
- 14 May be love, but not for Cain (9)
- 15 and 23 He battled 24 across (7,7)
- 18 see 8 down
- 21 Attained (7)
- 24 Their voice was heard from Mars (9)
- 26 Mistake is one (5)
- 28 Fix code (5)
- 29 Local dignitary (5)
- 30 Joe 90 worked for them (3)
- 31 This power can be exciting (12)

Down

- 2 Bad guys, like those fought by 1 across! (5)
- 3 Not nice (5)
- 4 Mysterious ape, needs large shoes! (7)
- 5 American farm (5)
- 6 Steps (9)
- 7 Flown by Mike Mercury (8)
- 8 and 18 across Captain of Stingray (4,7)
- 11 Winter bird (5)
- 16 Believable (9)
- 17 Novel by Mary Gentle (3)
- 19 Extinct flightless bird (3)
- 20 Teaching (8)
- 22 Wipe your feet on this welcome (7)
- 23 Girlish (5)
- 24 Most common (4)
- 25 Spacecraft in *Space: 1999* (5)
- 26 Perhaps if 19 down had been this, it wouldn't be extinct (5)
- 27 Small tree with red berries (5)

Timewasters

Competition 161

Take the first and last letter of each answer and rearrange them to find a British Hugo winner.

- 1 Novel that won 1978 Hugo and Nebula.
- 2 The author's first name.
- 3 Both names of the author of the novel that won 1976 Hugo.
- 4 Edge Pangborn's first published story.
- 5 "Life-line" was his first published story (both names).
- 6 Author of *Ender stories* (full name).

Answers to John Ollis, 13 Bernshaw Close, Snatchill, Corby, NN18 8EJ by three weeks from receipt of *Matrix*.

Competition 159 result

- 1 Aldiss (*Helliconia Spring, Summer, Winter*)
- 2 Priest (*Inverted World, Fugue for a Darkening Island, An Infinite Summer*)
- 3 Sturgeon (*Sturgeon in Orbit, E Pluribus Unicorn, To Here and the Eisel*)
- 4 Clarke (*Tales of Ten Worlds, The Deep Range, Prelude to Space*)
- 5 Bradbury (*The Illustrated Man, I Sing the Body Electric, The Small Assassin*)
- 6 Pratchett (*Carpe Jugulum, Feet of Clay, Guards! Guards!*)
- 7 Dick (*Time Out of Joint, Second Variety, The Penultimate Truth*)
- 8 Clarke (*A Fall of Moondust, Imperial Earth, Rendezvous with Rama*)
- 9 Harrison (*Make Room! Make Room!, The Technicolour Time-machine, Prime Number*)

The winner is Theo Ross, who got eight of these correct.