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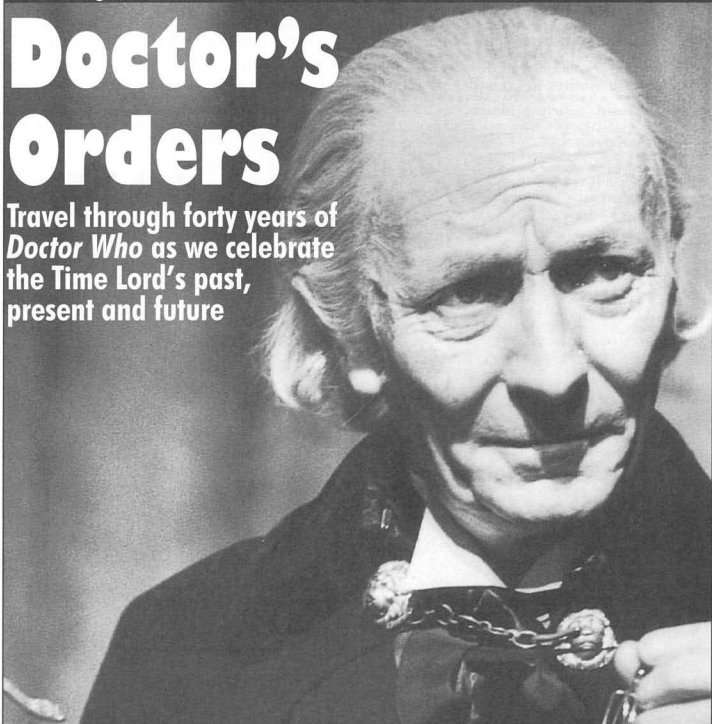
Nov/Dec 2003

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

40th ANNIVERSARY
**DOCTOR
WHO**
CELEBRATION ISSUE
No. 164 £2.25

Doctor's Orders

Travel through forty years of
Doctor Who as we celebrate
the Time Lord's past,
present and future



PLUS

Brian Aldiss on anger, contentment and *SuperState*
Stephen Baxter on the fall of the Roman Empire
Jeff Gardiner rages against literature
Finding Nemo reviewed
and much more...



matrix

Welcome,

You can, sometimes, judge a book's quality by its cover. It's about 1974 or 5. Mark – inspired in part by *Doctor Who* – is something of a science geek, just beginning to add sf and fantasy to an interminable pile of non-fiction tomes. And he picks up a book with just about the coolest cover he's ever seen: an impressive, almost frightening, robot emerging from a volcano. He doesn't even read the blurb. The cover's hooked him. That book was Aldiss' *Earthworks*.

So for more than a quarter of a century, Mark's avidly read Aldiss' work. His latest – *SuperState* – for Mark's money, if not Vector's – is one of his strongest recent books: the type of challenging, intelligent novel that holds its own against the literary mainstream and exemplifies SF and fantasy's impressive heritage. Mark realised a long-standing ambition when he interviewed Aldiss about *SuperState* and his plans for this issue.

DEADLINES

If you wish to contribute to future issues of Matrix, the deadlines are:

matrix 166 (Jan/Feb 2004) copy deadline: 29 November, 2003

matrix 166 (Mar/Apr 2004) copy deadline: 7 February, 2004

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

This November is, of course, the 40th birthday of another part of sf's rich heritage – *Doctor Who*. The news that the good Doctor is set to return was greeted with disturbingly loud cheers in at least one part of Northern Cambridge. So – with *Doctor Who* and Brian Aldiss – this issue of Matrix celebrates parts of our heritage of which we can be justifiably proud. However, as this issue's Rage notes, we sometimes lose sight of some of the earlier masters – and that's our loss, personally and as a genre. (Mark, for example, found William Morris' fantasies and *News from Nowhere* surprisingly impressive.) We hope that this issue's Rage will inspire some Matrix readers to look at some of the forgotten gems hidden in sf and fantasy's rich and deep literary history.

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BSFA

RAGE against the... ...prejudice in literature

Great books by "old masters" are going unappreciated, argues **Jeff Gardiner**, because of the prejudice against works of the fantastic in the literary establishment. Dismissed as pulp by critics, and excluded from the literary canon by scholars, it is time these authors were brought back to their rightful place at the heart of the mainstream.

In the arcane discipline of English Literature, there exists something called the 'literary canon', designated by scholars and critics as those texts deemed worthy of serious study. The preference is still for realistic literature and the snobbery against fantasy and sf prevails, except on those heroic courses in places like Liverpool University. F.R. Leavis was a particularly guilty culprit, condemning the entire Romantic Movement, and unfortunately a trace of this prejudice has stayed with us.

What some critics seem to forget, or ignore, is that a considerable proportion of our classic literature is fantasy, such as that by Homer, Malory, Chaucer, Rabelais and much of Shakespeare. What tends to happen is that fantasy texts by recognised 'realistic' authors are considered 'slight' or explained as being aimed at a younger audience, which is nonsense. Authors who suffer thus include Samuel Johnson, Charles Dickens, George Meredith, Gustav Flaubert, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, G.K. Chesterton and Oscar Wilde.

Phantastes

Then even within sf criticism it seems that the old masters are sometimes forgotten, particularly the early fantasists. George MacDonald and William Morris are acknowledged by many as the grandfathers of modern fantasy, just as H.G. Wells is the grandfather of sf. MacDonald wrote *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), which inspired such luminaries as C.S. Lewis and Tolkien. Both novels are dream romances: *Phantastes* is a fairy-tale quest with adult psychological symbolism exploring the theme of self-discovery, whilst *Lilith* is a more complex and philosophical text, in which Mr Vane confronts his greatest fears in an allegorical landscape. MacDonald employs poetic language and rich metaphors within fabulous settings that developed the template for fantasy as we recognise it today.

William Morris was not just an artist, socialist, furniture-maker and Arthurian bard who turned down the offer to be poet laureate; Lin



H. Rider Haggard: "a key author in the development of the modern novel."

Carter considered Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World* (1895) to be "the first great fantasy novel ever written" and if you can get beyond the archaic language it works very well as a utopian fantasy full of adventure and romance. Of much greater interest is *The Well at the World's End* (1896), a long quest for water with magical properties, and an evil tyrant called Gandalf, if you want proof that Morris influenced Tolkien. It is fair to say that William Morris was a visionary and a genius.

Denigrated

Other old masters who are wrongly denigrated as 'pulp' writers include Sir Walter Scott, Jules Verne and H. Rider Haggard who wrote the brilliant masterpiece *She* (1887), which explores power, gender, sexuality, reincarnation, revenge and fate. The story of two women and one man is played out on a vast scope that reaches beyond time and life itself into an eternal cycle of a search for salvation and spiritual redemption. Ayesha is the perfect example of Jung's 'anima'. Haggard was considered a

progenitor of both sword and sorcery and horror, going on to inspire Edgar Rice Burroughs, Arthur Conan Doyle, Abraham Merrit, Clark Ashton Smith et al. I, for one, would like to see Haggard taken much more seriously by literary scholars and acknowledged in his rightful place as a key author in the development of the modern novel.

The science fiction revolution began with H.G. Wells' groundbreaking scientific romance novels, beginning with *The Time Machine* (1895). Professor Malcolm Bradbury states that Wells "virtually invented science fiction in its modern form, and in its modern variety – as futuristic exploration, as satirical fable, as scientific prophecy, as grim warning" and Brian Aldiss called him "the Shakespeare of science fiction".

Teacher

As a school teacher himself, he would be thrilled to see that his name now graces the National Curriculum for GCSE English Literature as an acceptable author for pre-1914 prose coursework. His

novels are rightly regarded by sf readers as great works of literature and his short stories are also worth perusal. Fans of *The Matrix*-style slow-mo effects might like to read 'The New Accelerator' (1902). His acceptance in to the canon shows how schools of literature are more accepting of sf than of fantasy. Although there is something patronising in the idea that Wells' books are 'okay for the children'.

I haven't even mentioned Jonathan Swift, Samuel Butler, Arthur Machen, Rudyard Kipling, M.P. Shiel, George Griffith, William Hope Hodgson or Algernon Blackwood, as there are uncountable old masters to cite here, and I think the point has been made. It is interesting, however, that Gothic Romance is widely studied, perhaps because it is most easily categorised and labelled, although it is still regarded as 'pulp fiction' with a couple of exceptions.

Status

I hope that sf fans will continue to regard the masters with the status they deserve. And whilst I agree that literature, like all arts, must continue to move forwards and even continue to change, the heritage of sf and fantasy is an awesome one that goes right back to myths, legends and heroic romance, and one that must continue to be celebrated. My real concern is with mainstream literary criticism, where these texts get sidelined unless being examined on a specific sf or utopian course. These novels should be part of our mainstream heritage, showing all literature students how fantasy and sf are an integral part of our British and world literary history; something of which we should be incredibly proud.

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.

Look Who's back

40th ANNIVERSARY
DOCTOR WHO
CELEBRATION ISSUE

As you've probably heard, Doctor Who is returning to TV, 14 years after the end of the regular series. It'll be written by Russell T Davies – a fan of the show – who also wrote *Bob and Rose*, *Queer as Folk*, *The Second Coming*, *Touching Evil* and *The Grand*. On the BBC News website he said: "Doctor Who is one of the BBC's most exciting and original characters. He's had a good rest and now it's time to bring him back!" BBC Wales is producing the series and it'll be a couple of years before it reaches the screen. The BBC says it is far too early to discuss possible storylines, characters, villains or who might play Doctor Who – but that hasn't stopped the speculations (See: Who's who?)

The news has, predictably, been greeted with delight by fans and by some curious coverage in the press. The fact that the new writer is best known for *Queer as Folk* led Radio Four's *Today* programme and a number of newspapers to reassess the Doctor as a gay icon. Meanwhile *Deadliners*, famous for John Culshaw's Tom Baker impersonation, welcomed the announcement by imagining the programme relaunched as a "make-over" show.

Davies has said that: "The

Bookies: no odds on the return of Sylvester McCoy



new series will be fun, exciting, contemporary and scary. Although I'm only in the early stages of development, I'm aiming to write a full-blooded drama which embraces the Doctor Who heritage, at the same time as introducing the character to a modern audience." Those looking for an advance preview of what a Russell T Davies Doctor might be like could always check out his earlier foray into the world of the Time Lords. Davies wrote the Doctor Who: The New Adventures novel *Damaged Goods* set

on a 1980s doctor estate being torn apart by drugs.

It is not clear what format the new show will take. Rumours suggest that the traditional half hour episodes might be replaced with fifty minute shows and that either six or eight of these programmes (depending on who you believe) have been commissioned.

The BBC has said that the programme will take a minimum of two years to reach our screens, so there will be plenty of time for speculation before broadcast in 2005 or 2006.

Who's Who?

It took only seconds from the moment the BBC announced the return of Doctor Who for speculation to begin about who would play the Doctor.

Early frontrunners, at least in the eyes of fans, include Paul McGann who, for many, was short-changed in 1996's *Doctor Who – The Movie* and who has a considerable following as The Eighth Doctor in books and in Big Finish's audio productions. Most recently he played the Doctor in "Shada" – a remake of the 'lost' Doctor Who episode by Douglas Adams – broadcast on the BBC Cult website earlier this year.

McGann, however, seems to have counted himself out as a possibility, telling *The Telegraph* that he thought the role should be given to a woman, somebody "really scary, Amazonian, highly intelligent and gorgeous," or a black actor. He feared, however, that it would go to someone safe, who could guarantee ratings, like James Nesbitt of *Cold Feet*. Another possibility, and

another actor who has recently played the Doctor, is Richard E. Grant. Grant is something of a fan favourite and plays the voice of the Ninth Doctor in "The Scream of Shalka", a BBCi animated adventure to be broadcast from mid-November.

Two outsiders are both comedians. Alan Davies, the floppy haired comic best known for his work on *Jonathan Creek* has often been put forward for the job (and is Mark's bet). A more

Don't bet on it!

Bookmaker's William Hill believe Alan Davies will be the new Doctor, making him clear favourite. Some of the prices for potential Doctors include:

- 8/1 Alan Davies
- 12/1 Richard E Grant
- 16/1 Sean Pertwee and Patrick Stewart
- 20/1 James Nesbitt and Jonathan Price
- 25/1 Hugh Grant
- 33/1 Lenny Henry

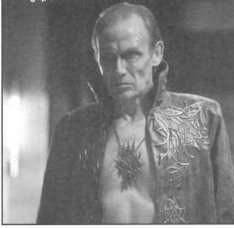
radical choice might be Eddie Izzard, whose name Tom Baker has been touting loudly since the announcement of the re-launch.

Baker also suggested Melinda Messenger as the Doctor's companion and himself as The Master.

However, it seems that new Who's writer/producer Russell T Davies might have other ideas for the role. On Radio Four's *Today* programme, Clayton Hickman (editor of *Doctor Who Magazine*) suggested that character actor Bill Nighy (*Still Crazy*, *Underworld*) was Davies favourite for the part.

Davies himself has said it is too early to think about casting but the long-term fan must have his own ideas.

Bill Nighy, as seen in *Underworld*



Not Finished

Big Finish have extended their deal to produce Doctor Who audio dramas until at least 2007. With fifty adventures already under their belt, this further four-year deal could see the company double that number if they maintain current production rates. The next big launch from Big Finish is "Zagreus", a three-CD special production featuring four of the Doctor's incarnations. Paul McGann, Sylvester McCoy, Peter Davison and Colin Baker star along with a host of other Who regulars.

Toymakers

If toys are your thing, then scificallector.co.uk will cater to your needs. In addition to their range of multi-coloured Daleks they have commissioned two exclusive Corgi die cast toys to celebrate (profit from) the 40th Anniversary. A model Cyberleader and a Tardis giftset might just be the perfect Christmas present for the Whovian in your life.

A Doctor's story

The BBC will celebrate the Doctor's anniversary with a special documentary this Christmas. Bringing together a host of familiar actors and those who worked behind the camera, *The Story of Doctor Who* will feature all-new interviews and a wealth of archive footage. Production began on the documentary in late September.

Telos awarded

In other Doctor Who news [well it is a special issue] Telos Publishing won a 2003 Balcon Design Award for the presentation of its book *Shell Shock...*. Reeltime Pictures announced their first Doctor Who spin-off drama for four years. *Daemons Rising* is a sequel to both the third Doctor adventure *The Daemons* and to *DownTime*, an earlier Reeltime drama featuring the Yeil. *Daemons Rising* stars Miles Richardson as ex-UNIT operative Douglas Cavendish, and Beverly Cressman as Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart's daughter Kate. Trapped in an isolated cottage, Cavendish thinks he is seeing ghosts. The only person who might understand and help is Kate Lethbridge-Stewart... but when she arrives, she realises that Cavendish is key in a plot to summon the Daemons back to the Earth.

And the winner is...

Hugo winners

The 2003 Hugo Awards were presented at Torcon 3, the 61st World Science Fiction Convention in Toronto. **Novels:** *Hominids*, Robert J Sawyer (Analog Jan-Apr 2002); **Tor:** *Novella: Conline*, Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins); **Novellette:** "Slow Life", Michael Swanwick (Analog Dec 2002); **Short Story:** "Falling Onto Mars",

Geoffrey A Landis (Analog Jul/Aug 2002); **Related Books:** *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merril*, Judith Merril & Emily Pohl-Weary (Between the Lines); **Dramatic Presentation, Short Form:** *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, "Conversations With Dead People" (20th Century

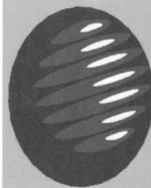
Fox Television/Mutant Enemy Inc.; Directed by Nick Marck; Teleplay by Jane Espenson & Drew Goddard); **Dramatic Presentation, Long Form:** *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (New Line Cinema; Directed by Peter Jackson; Screenplay by Peter Jackson; based on the novel by JRR Tolkien); **Professional Editor:** Gardner Dozois; **Professional Artist:** Bob Eggleton; **Semiproazine:** *Locust*, Charles N Brown, Jennifer A Hall & Kirsten Gong-Wong, eds. **Fanzine:** *Mimosas*, Rich & Nicki Lynch; **Fan Writers:** Dave Langford; **Fan Artist:** Sue Mason; **John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer:** [Not a Hugo] Wen Spencer



And the rest...

In other award news: First Fandom Hall of Fame Award posthumously to Philip Francis Nowlan, and to Philip Jose Farmer ... First Fandom Moskowitz Archive Award for excellence in collecting, to Rusty Hevelin ... E Everett Esau's "Big Heart" Award to John Hertz ... Seiun Awards in translated categories Greg Egan's "Luminous" and to Robert J Sawyer's *Illegal Alien* ... Sidewise Awards for Alternate History: *Ruled Britannia*, Martin J Gidron (Livingston Press) *Ruled Britannia*, Harry Turtledove (Roc) and "Empire", William Sanders (*Alternate Generals II* Harry Turtledove, ed.; Baen) ... The 2003 Prometheus Awards for Libertarian science fiction and fantasy: *Night Watch*, Terry Pratchett (HarperCollins) and in the Hall of Fame "Requiem", Robert A Heinlein ... The 2003 Gaylactic Spectrum Awards, recognizing outstanding genre works with positive gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender content: *Fine Logic*, Laurie Marks (Tor), "Three Letters from the Queen of Elfland", Sarah Monette (*Lady Churchill's Rosebud Whisker* #11), *Queer Fear II*, Michael Rowe, ed. (Arsenal Pulp) (anthology) and in the Hall of Fame *The Tale of the Five*, Diane Duane, *Shadow Man*, Melissa Scott, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Holdfast Chronicles*, Suzy McKee Charnas.

Source: Locust



RODERICK GLADWISZ'S WORLD OF SCIENCE Europe is SMART

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory announced a record-breaking test firing for one of their ion engines. Last year the attitude control ones aboard the Artemis communication satellite saved it after a poor launch. SMART-1, the European Space Agency's first Luna mission, uses one as a main engine. The firing lasted for 30,352 hours (3.5 years) and was stopped only to allow it to be examined to help designers improve the current generation of engine. Little wear was observed and so the potential for longer firings is possible.

Reliability is everything in space and this counts double for ion engines because their low thrust force them to fire for extended periods and for interplanetary journeys this would mean years; for example SMART-1 will take 15 months to reach the moon. This test has proven the engine's capability and one of its next uses is mission Dawn, in 2006, to visit asteroids Vesta and Ceres. **Source:** JPL



SMART-1: Slow but sure.

Apples computing?

Although DNA computing still has more potential than substance, advances are being made. Milan Strajanovic and a colleague from Columbia University have recently published a paper in the journal *Nature* describing their biological computer, which plays noughts-and-crosses. This is a small step towards overcoming the problems of controlling the biological changes to permit accurate calculations. NASA are funding their work to create self-supporting biological machines for astronaut health maintenance. **Source:** St Petersburg Times

Blind drunk!

A new portable machine, called an Eye Check Pupilometer, can instantly identify whether a person is under the influence of drink, drugs or fatigue. Using flashing lights it can measure the response of the eye and thus the person's state of

health. A follow up swab or urine test would then confirm these findings.

It is estimated that approximately two million people in the UK take ecstasy each weekend and more companies want to know if their employees indulge. They claim it is for health and safety reasons, but other groups have raised concerns over employees' rights. So far one large UK company and two police forces have bought the device.

Welcome to space

The number of nations with their own space programme increased this month when Nigeria launched its first satellite from Russia's Plesetsk Cosmodrome. The £13 million project is controversial in a country with 30 per cent illiteracy and limited resources. Meanwhile China became the third country to put a man in space. Yuhangyuan (astronaut) Yang Liwei, a 38-year-old lieutenant, orbited the earth 14 times on 15 October.

2000AD at Dreddcon 4

The annual con devoted to all things 2000AD will take place on 6 December 2003 at the Oxford Union Building in Oxford. For more details, check out the listing on the conventions page.

Dan Dare's in Manchester

Dan Dare and his crew will be landing at Manchester's Museum of Science and Industry in 2003. It is a return to base for Dan Dare who, in the comic strip, was born in Manchester in 1967. A cosmic double bill will be showing from 27 September 2003–8 January 2004 with *Dan Dare: Pilot of the Future* and an exhibition on *Destination Mars* giving a closer than ever view of the Red Planet.

David Britton from the Eagle Society said "This will be the largest exhibition of Dan Dare yet – it will feature artwork, memorabilia and merchandise never displayed before and a wide range of artefacts and items used in a mock-up of the original artists' studio in Epsom".

Conceived by Southport Clergyman Marcus Morris and created by Frank Hampson, born in Audenshaw, Eagle magazine and the cartoon strip adventures of Dan Dare became an instant success, and Dan Dare captured the imaginations of young and old. Dan Dare 'got there first' with many scientific advances – the idea of the shuttle and the details of how a space suit worked were years ahead of their time.

The story of the British Space Programme 1955–1971 provides a link between the science fiction of Dan Dare and modern day explorations of Mars. This leads visitors to *Destination Mars*, an exhibition about the past, present and future of the Red Planet.

Immanian in a Storm

Storm Constantine has set up their own publishing company – Immanian Press – to publish horror, fantasy and science fiction novels by new and established authors. She says



Matrix Missives

We want your letters and comments.

Send them to:
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markgreener1@aol.com

Dear Mark & Martin

Mini Rage against USA comic books. Need is a word that is often heard, but comic books get you even stranger looks.

Pratchett job

Jessica Yates reports from this years Clarecraft Discworld Event 2003.

Having attended my first, fabulous, Discworld Convention in 2002 at Hinckley, I was intrigued to see what these camping weekends were like. Held from 1-3 August, the cheap rate of £5 a ticket, with free camping. It is obviously attractive to fans with children, if they have tents or a camper van. There are family activities such as "paint your own" Clarecraft model, Kiddies Corner, and masquerades. The site was also civilised, with a food bar, drinks area and toilet. If you didn't bring a tent you had to find your own accommodation. I stayed in Stowmarket, one stop away by train. But the trains were infrequent and, as I didn't want to walk from the camp to the station in the dark, I ended up using taxis. Next time, as

a Londoner, I could go just for the Saturday, though I was glad this time not to miss Sunday's auction.

The event's theme was 'Pyramids'. So many of the

Maskerade entrants dressed accordingly. There was Offer the Crocodile God, several Teppics, a Ptiraci and a camel. There were also Cohen the Barbarian and his horde as well as Tiffany and the Nac Mac Feebles from *The Wee Free Men*. On a more intellectual level, Terry gave a Q&A session ranging widely over topics

like: "Who are you going to kill off next?" (no plans); the Big Read; his favourite books; his next book, *Monstrous Regiment*; *Iterary*

If you have something suitable, send submissions (marked Fantastic Fiss Submissions) to Tony Earnshaw, Film Dept, National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford, BD1 1NQ. www.nmsi.ac.uk

New UK SF magazine

PS Publishing plans to launch a new UK genre magazine in Spring 2004, called *Postscripts*. Digest-sized, the magazine will feature SF, fantasy, horror and crime/suspense stories, a guest editorial, book reviews, and occasional nonfiction in each issue. The magazine will sell for £5 (\$8).

A limited edition of 100 numbered hardcover copies of the first issue will also be produced, signed by all contributors and costing £50 (\$80). More details from the PS Publishing website www.pspublishing.co.uk

reviewers who don't review his books; the JK Rowling effect; and how he used to write books on a typewriter. The audience was invited to vote on whether the Discworld books were getting better after *Men at Arms*. The vote was 100 per cent for the more recent books.

The convention was supported by dealers in the Djbeybi Bazaar and you could also bid for Pratchett rare editions, proof copies of his next book *Monstrous Regiment* and other paraphernalia at the Charity Auction. This included the chance to be a Discworld character in a future book: three intrepid blokes bid £1000 each for the privilege and all were accepted.

The usual suspects plan to reunite at the Hanover Hotel for the next Discworld Convention, 20-23 August 2004, and have already enrolled around 400 members. But there is still plenty of space. Details from PO Box 102, Royston, Herts, SG8 7JL and www.dswan.org.

Matrix editors quit

This is the final Matrix under the editorship of Martin McGrath & Mark Greener. Mounting work pressures (Mark to earn a living, Martin to finish his PhD) have forced them to quit.

"I have enjoyed working on Matrix," Martin said. "I think we delivered some good issues and I'm pleased with what we've achieved. I'd like to have continued but it isn't possible and rather than let things slip, it is time to go."

"You'll still see our names in the magazine as we will continue as contributors," Mark Greener added. "I wish the new editors luck and I hope they enjoy the job as much as I did. I'd also like to thank all our contributors, it has been a pleasure working with you guys."

dialect of Kumasi for Good Bye.

Mike Brain, Flintshire

Martin writes: I won't bother defending comic books, just point out that uniformed people make the same criticism of the genre of science fiction. The comic book medium stretches from Maus to Mickey Mouse and to tar them all with the same brush seems silly. What the recent run of Hollywood adaptations has proven is that the average Hollywood film can't manage the same depth as a 22 page comic book, how do you expect them to deal with anything more complex?

For more news on Pitch Black, sequels see my link ahead to next year's films (opposite).

We also heard from R1 Barycz.

that the press is a response to authors who are squeezed out of the business by 'A list' authors with the backing of big promotional budgets, including TV and radio airtime and tie-ins with movies. Immanian also plans to reissue long out of press classics. www.immanianpress.wat.org/

Fantastic Films

Next year's Fantastic Films Weekend (National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford, 22&23 May 2004) plans to feature a celebration of the centenary of Hammer director Terence Fisher (1904–1980) plus previews and premieres of the latest films, classics from the TV Heaven archive and a selection of IMAX films.

The organisers are looking for 10 short "fantastic" films to showcase.

Why is Hollywood so obsessed with filming comic books, manga, anime, and graphic novels? In my 'umble opinion, they are for children and anally retentive adults who are childlike in their need for pictures. There are shed loads of good, even excellent F&S SF novels to read, but so little gets made into a decent movie. Why don't they option something by Juliet McKenna or China Miéville?

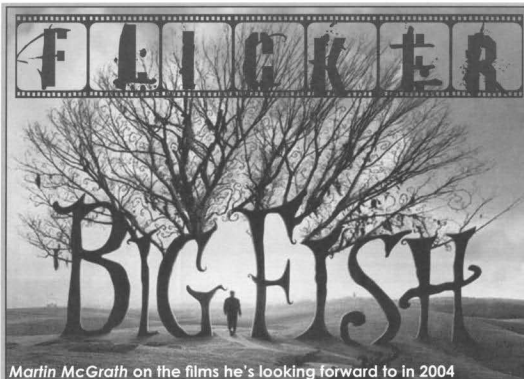
I finally got to see *Pitch Black* on TV recently – what a great return to the grittiness and simple storyline of 'Alien', with non-cardboard characters, and a nice change to see Arab Muslims used (instead of the usual pc African-American) and portrayed sympathetically. The monsters were great; extremely vicious BEMs, red in tooth and

claw. I would be happy to see *Pitch Black 2*, maybe where a rescue ship lands just before the eclipse ends, and we get to see where the BEMs hibernate – payback time, or a dog-dog conservationist brings one back to Cambridge or St Albans!

By all means bring back Doctor Who, but not McGann, and purlease dump those clunking Daleks. I also (saddo) look forward to *Blake's 7*, but not written by Terry (Police State plot) Nation, but by the co-writer of most of the original, Chris Boucher.

Thanks to the review, I have bought *Muezzinland* by Stephen Palmer and am enjoying its resonances with some of the stories by Paul J McAuley. Will this be a new 'aphrica-cyber' genre?

Nante yie ol That's Ghanaian Twi



Martin McGrath on the films he's looking forward to in 2004

At the very top of my wish list for next year is *Megalopolis*. Francis Ford Coppola has been working on this project, on and off, for over a decade. It is the story of the struggle to rebuild a New York after a massive tragedy and deals with the problem of trying to create a utopia. Coppola himself describes it as the story of a good man becoming evil crossed with an evil man who becomes good. Whether the film will ever actually see the light of day remains doubtful but in terms of potential, scale and intellectual ambition, there doesn't seem to be anything else on this year's production slate to touch it.

Likely to be less cerebral but more action-packed is *The Chronicles of Riddick*, the first sequel to David Twohy's cracking sci-fi monster movie *Pitch Black*. Riddick finds himself in jail on the planet Helion, once an idyll where cultures co-existed happily but now a battlezone following an invasion by the Lord Marshal (Colm Feore, *Pearl Harbour*). If successful it may be the first in a trilogy of what writer/director Twohy calls *Star Wars'* evil twin.

A Sound of Thunder is based on the classic Ray Bradbury short story about time-travelling hunters changing the course of history by stepping on a butterfly. The only surprise is that it has taken Hollywood forty years to recognise that a concept this high would make a perfect film. Veteran genre director

Peter Hyams has made some underrated moves (2010, *Outland*, *Capricorn One*) but his recent record is less inspiring (*The Relic*, *End of Days*). Still, with a strong cast including Edward Burns (*Saving Private Ryan*) and Ben Kingsley (*Sexy Beast*) and a brilliant concept, I have high hopes for *A Sound of Thunder*.

Tim Burton blotted his copybook pretty badly with the dismal *Planet of the Apes* remake but the director of *Beetlejuice*, *Batman* and *Sleepy Hollow* still has a soft spot reserved for him in my heart. New movie *Big Fish* has a stellar cast (McGregor, Finney, Crudup, Lange, Bonham Carter, DeVito) and a reportedly spectacular script telling a story that sounds tailor made for Burton's quirky take on the world – a son attempts to understand his dying father by piecing together the tall tales his dad has told him during his life. This has the potential to be brilliant.

The World of Tomorrow could hardly have been better designed to appeal to the geek in us all. Not only is 30-year-old Kerry Conran a first time director who has written his own script, he has also written the software that will allow him to create the 1930s-retro science fiction world in which the story is set. Snapped up by Paramount and placed as their main summer release, the independent production has attracted Jude Law (*AI*), Angelina Jolie (*Tomb Raider*), Casey Affleck (*Ocean's*

Eleven) and Gwyneth Paltrow (*Shakespeare in Love*).

The bubble around superhero productions may have deflated slightly with the modest underperformance of *Hulk* at the box office, but there are plenty more movies based on superheroes and comic books on their way.

Almost guaranteed to be great is Pixar's *The Incredibles*. The animation studio has yet to produce anything close to a bad film and this tale of a superhero family will, at the very least, be a technical marvel. Another superhero family heading for the big screen are *The Fantastic Four*, though at present the film lacks a director, a script and a cast.

More interesting comic book productions include horror director Guillermo del Toro's take on Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*. Production artwork and early stills show that del Toro has done a remarkable job of mimicking Mignola's artwork. Purists were horrified to hear that Keanu Reeves had been cast to play the very British John Constantine from the comic *Hellblazer* in the movie *Constantine*, but there remains enormous potential in this story of magic and mystery in Los Angeles.

Van Helsing, from the team behind *The Mummy*, features the wolfman, Frankenstein's monster and Dracula. If the disappointment of *Underworld* hadn't made me cautious, I'd have said this couldn't fail to be fun.

Foundation films

It is at once the most interesting and the most terrifying movie news for a long time. Twentieth Century Fox appear determined to press ahead with at least two films based on Asimov's Foundation stories.

The directorial choice is unusual. Shekhar Kapur's (*Elizabeth*, *The Four Feathers*) only previous connection with SF is an unfinished Indian version of *The Time Machine*. But it is the writer who causes most concern. Fox have hired Jeff Vintar – responsible for the dire script for *Final Fantasy* and a worse one for the forthcoming Asimov "adaptation" *I, Robot*.

Can *Foundation* be turned into a movie? Can it be done faithfully? And if it is, could it be any good? A project to watch with interest.

Titans clash

New Line, the studio behind *Lord of the Rings*, has bought the rights to make *Titans* based on an idea by Hulk-writer Michael France. Described as *The Breakfast Club* meets *Lord of the Rings* (hobbits in detention!) the story is set in Ancient Greece and features the teenage gods of Olympus learning to use their powers to defeat the Titans, including Kronos.

'Sauring away

Jurassic Park 4 will reunite most of the big names from the original. Stephen Spielberg will direct Sam Neill, Jeff Goldblum and Sir Richard Attenborough. Stan Winston Studio will return to create the monsters. The script, though, will be written by newcomer William Monahan (also writing *Trippi* for Ridley Scott) and will not, apparently, feature a jungle setting – T-Rex in New York, anyone?

Grimm news

Defying all expectation, Terry Gilliam appears set to actually finish a film. Following a series of stop-start-stop projects, *Brothers Grimm* looks set to actually see the light of day. Starring Matt Damon (*Good Will Hunting*) and Heath Ledger (*The Sinner*) as medieval con artists tricking yokels into believing they are monster hunters. Their bluff is called in a town plagued by Monica Bellucci's (*The Matrix*) blood-sucking sorceress.

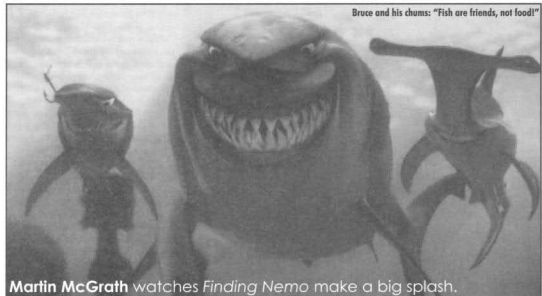
Burning books

Frank Darabont (*The Shawshank Redemption*) is working on a remake of the Ray Bradbury novel *Fahrenheit 451*. The film is currently listed as in production but no cast details have been announced. The film is scheduled for release in 2005.

Looking very dodgy

Casusman – a publicity still of Halle Berry in her costume is risible... *Alien vs Predator*, again, Lance Henriksen will return to the Alien universe, but not as Bishop. Huh?... *Timeline* – the trailer is terrible.

Hooked



Bruce and his chums: "Fish are friends, not food!"

Martin McGrath watches *Finding Nemo* make a big splash.

There is, I think, a strong case to be made for the idea that we are living in a golden age of animation.

In the last issue of *Matrix* I had the pleasure to review the beautiful *Spirited Away* by the Japanese director Hideo Miyazaki. His body of work (I am now discovering) is extraordinary in its range and sophistication. From France, *Belleville Rendez-Vous* by Sylvain Chomet is superb. In Britain Nick Park has delivered clever, funny and uniquely British shorts and one very good feature film. The Wallace and Gromit movie, due in 2005, cannot come soon enough.

From Hollywood, Disney's traditional animation arm recovered from the slump of the 1970s and 80s and now turns out a regular stream of good and sometimes very good cinema releases, such as *Lilo and Stitch* and *The Emperor's New Groove*. Dreamworks' traditional animation has been less inspiring but in *Antz* and *Shrek* the studio delivered a genuinely funny and technically impressive films.

But it is Pixar, the computer animation outfit "adopted" by Disney, who have done most to redefine and reposition animation since their debut with *Toy Story* in 1995.

Each subsequent release has

pushed the bar for technical achievement higher. But, while there is no doubt that Pixar produce stunningly beautiful animation, discussions of their technical prowess can sometimes divert attention from the way they craft their stories and create characters which engage the viewer as real people. If Disney's films can sometimes talk down to their young audience, Pixar aim high, treating everyone as grown-ups in their world.

Pixar movies may lack the spiritual element of Miyazaki or the European eccentricity of Chomet or Parks, but they surpass their rivals in the (often underestimated) ability to tell a story that grips at the heart. From the *Toy Story* films through the much under-rated *A Bug's Life* to *Monsters' Inc*, each Pixar movie has been built on classic storytelling. That is why, I believe, these films will be cherished long after their technical wizardry has been far surpassed.

Which, by a somewhat circuitous route, brings me to Pixar's latest release, *Finding Nemo* – a film that goes some way to proving the assertion that we are, indeed, living in animation's golden era.

This is a film that is by turns funny, touching and even a little scary (for the very young) with a

great cast of characters, some brilliant performances and a very high quality script. And, almost as an aside, the quality of the animation once again pushes back the boundaries of technical and artistic achievement. Indeed the visuals are so lush, so distractingly, amazingly clever, that you could find yourself lost in admiration.

Don't be. There is too much else here that is good.

Enjoy the story.
Enjoy the witty characters.
Dory the fish with no short-term memory, Marlin the clown fish who isn't funny, Crush the one hundred and fifty year old sea turtle ("And still young!") with the Californian surf-vibe.

Enjoy the cute references to other films (Bruce the shark – *Jaws*; the seagulls – *The Birds*).

Enjoy the performance of Ellen DeGeneres, who, as Dory, managed to make me laugh with almost every line.

Enjoy the sharks in their twelve-step programme to cure their addiction to fish. ("Intervention!")

Just enjoy the film. It is as pure a movie-going experience as your likely to find this year.

No, it isn't profound. Yes, it is for kids. But it is also clearly the work of a team who enjoy telling stories and who, with every film, are proving themselves masters of the art. Recommended.

Martin McGrath rounds up



I can't remember the last time I was scared by a new Hollywood film. Not "boo!" scared, but disturbed or even concerned about the fate of a character. I can think of older films still scare me (*The Exorcist*, *The Shining* and *Alien*) but I can't think of a recent movie from America that comes close. American horror seems bereft of new ideas.

I blame Tobe Hooper and Wes Craven. Some of their early films are great. *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Last House on the Left*, even the original *Nightmare on Elm Street*, grab you and shake you hard. But they are too influential. They have so totally embedded themselves in the imagination of the filmmakers that followed that everything they do seems reduced to pastiche.

Take *House of 1000 Corpses*, rock musician Rob Zombie's directorial debut. There are flashes of interesting things here. Some nice camera work, some interesting shots, but the story – such as it is – is entirely derivative. There is nothing to surprise anyone who has seen the older (and better) entrants in this genre. And the characters – if that isn't too grand a word – are so bland that the viewer can't possibly care whether they live or die. Worse still, the whole thing is so one note in its nastiness that there is never any real sense of excitement. The end result is a tedious film that leaves only the unpleasant suspicion that Mr Zombie has "issues" with women that would be better addressed on the psychiatrist's couch than on the big screen. Depressingly, a sequel is already on the way.

Still, *House of 1000 Corpses* looks like a masterpiece when placed next to *The Sin Eater*. This glossy, rapid, tale of rogue priests battling demons in the shadow of the Vatican is a waste of celluloid. Produced by the team behind the occasionally amusing *A Knight's Tale*, this film stars Heath Ledger and proves that, while the young Australian may be

...recent horror releases.

don't
me

handsome, he has a long way to go before he can claim to be an actor. Yet, bad though he is, Ledger is not the worst thing in this film. The script and direction vie for that honour.

The *Sin Eater* is abysmally written, vast chunks of the story make no sense, while the director seems to have subscribed to the "point the camera and pray" approach. How a film set in Rome can fail to be atmospheric is beyond me. Perhaps Brian Helgeland deserves recognition for achieving the near-impossible.

Then there was *Freddie Vs Jason*. Jesus wept! Freddie has been forgotten so he sends Jason to Elm Street to scare people into remembering him. He was better off in limbo. The finale of this film, a long fight between the two teen-murdering psychopaths is perhaps the most arse-numbingly boring half an hour I have ever spent in a cinema. There are one or two nice moments: the faces on a wall of "missing" posters turn to watch one of the female characters walk by; Jason, ablaze in a field of corn, reaping teenagers. But these are brief respites. The human characters are the same stereotypes that always inhabit these films. The script is prone to long passages of exposition filmed with a static camera, by director Ronnie Yu, making them even more dull.

Finally, *Cabin Fever*, which might have been a good film, if writer/director Eli Roth had possessed even the slightest idea about what he was trying to do. Instead it slides from homage to pastiche on the way to farce. My reactions moved from genuine shock (the body in the reservoir) to incomprehension (what is going on in the shop?) until finally I gave up and surrendered to boredom as the same old characters run around a wood behaving stupidly things until they die.

The only thing frightening about any of these films is that they got made at all.

Undeadly dull

Kate Beckinsale to "undeniably bitchy"



Martin McGrath wanted to leave early, but he watched it all for you.

Having forced myself to sit through the whole of *Underworld* (for the sake of you, the reader) it is very difficult not to be harsh on this weak-minded, wasted opportunity of a movie.

Like the spoilt brat who spills away the family fortune on frippery and fast living, *Underworld* begins life with every possible advantage but wastes it all. By the end the wretched thing has thrown away the goodwill of its friends and hardened the hearts of its enemies.

This is the kind of film that gives big-budget science fiction and fantasy a bad name. It is silly, stupid and incoherent. The characters, such as they are, are paper thin and their motivations are opaque at best. The plot staggers from one unbelievable setpiece to the next and the relationship that should be at the heart of the film is entirely missing.

Underworld's greatest asset is its concept. Putting werewolves and vampires in the same film immediately appeals to the geek mentality, echoing great Universal pictures of the past but also promising fantastic action in a modern setting. Imagine the possibility for the fight scenes!

Sadly, when you leave the cinema, you'll still have to imagine those possibilities. There are two problems with the action sequences in this film. The first, and most fundamental, is that they've given the vampires and the werewolves guns and swords.

What is the point of a movie pitting vampires against werewolves if the vast majority of the fighting takes place between distinctly human-looking men with automatic weapons? I don't care if they're firing special bullets, I wanted to see hairy dog-like beasts

ripping strips off the unstoppable undead. What I got was a series of fights that could have been lifted from almost any action movie made in the last ten years. The other problem is that even when we do get a decent fight, the editing is so unremittingly flashy that it is impossible to tell what is happening anyway. This is not a shortcoming unique to *Underworld* but it is particularly evident here.

Underworld is also undermined by poor special effects. This is especially true of the computer generated werewolves. They never seem to fit comfortably onto the screen and, on the few occasions when they are clearly seen, look wholly unconvincing.

Kate Beckinsale (*Pearl Harbour*) does a creditable job in the lead role of Selene, a crack werewolf hunter. Bill Nighy (*State of Play*) is good as Viktor, leader of the vampires, and a host of British actors provide strong support in smaller roles. I particularly liked Sophie Myles (*From Hell*) as the scheming Erika.

But the actors' efforts are undermined by a lazy script and hugely derivative production design. The film steals from *Blade*, but cannot match that film's flair and wit. It steals from *X-men*, but lacks that film's style and stellar cast. It steals from *The Matrix* but cannot compete with the inventiveness of that film's stunts or the quality of the fight direction.

Most damningly of all, however, is the way in which the film makes a faltering attempt to echo *Romeo and Juliet* without displaying any real understanding of what that play was about or, for that matter, bothering to give us any reason to believe that the two protagonists are in love. We barely see them together, we get no

sense whatsoever that these characters connect and yet we are expected to believe that they will give up their lives for each other without bating an eyelid.

No doubt the writers, director and producers feared that romantic or talky scenes would slow down the movie. What they failed to appreciate was that, no matter how fast the plot moves or how flashy the editing, the audience won't care about what is happening unless the believe in the characters on the screen.

Underworld seems desperately determined to be unoriginal. The vampires are glamorously wasted, living dissolutely in a vast mansion. The werewolves live in grubby packs.

Towards the end, as though desperately trying to justify its existence, the film introduces a cack-handed racism subplot that is at once so stupidly obvious and at the same time handled so unconvincingly that it adds only confusion to the plot.

I'm afraid the failings of *Underworld* must be placed squarely at the feet of the writers (Danny McBride and Kevin Greivoux) and the director (Len Wiseman). It was the first time for all of them in these roles on a major film and nothing in what they have done suggests that they should ever be trusted with such an undertaking again. The words are leaden and the visuals are clichéd.

Underworld might appeal to a very small group of teenage boys who can put aside any critical faculty they might possess to lust over the undeniably pretty Kate Beckinsale. (Though I expect that, despite their hormones, even they will find it derivative and boring.) Everyone else should avoid this waste of time.

Television memories

Two classic miniseries from the past: do they live up to **Martin McGrath's** memories of them?

I have very vivid memories of both *V* and *Quatermass*. Whilst older readers will remember Nigel Kneale's hero from the BBC serials or the Hammer movies, the 1979 incarnation with John Mills was this then ten-year-old's first introduction to the Professor. I remember it being a big deal, even in a household where SF television was frowned upon ("You're not watching that rubbish!").

But the story of a country falling, hippies wandering through the countryside and the iconic image of those great radio telescopes all stayed with me for many years. As did that rhyme: "Huffity, puffity, Ringstone Round." It was around this time I made a shift from reading juvenile *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* novels to plundering the adult section of Gungahannon library for "grown-up" science fiction. For me *Quatermass* is tied to growing up and had acquired an almost mystical quality. The question was, watching it again, could it withstand the burden of my expectation. Sadly the answer is yes and no.

It is still an

extraordinary piece of science fiction, of a kind that hasn't really been made in Britain since. It is intelligent and insightful and full of interesting characters telling an interesting story.

It is also distressingly reactionary. Kneale's *Quatermass* lives in a world that is falling apart. The young are dangerous. Everything new is either a miserable failure or a disgusting travesty. The only way to save the world is by putting the old back in charge. *Quatermass* kills himself, his friend, his granddaughter, the hippies and, as an aside, the monster in a final, nihilistic explosion.

Of course in the year of the "Winter of Discontent", the old *Quatermass*, a product of a time when

British exploration and expansion into space still seemed possible, would have been an anachronism. I found that fact, I suppose this *Quatermass's* pessimism disappointing.

V came from America four years after *Quatermass*. In the days before satellite and digital televisions,

miniseries like this were community events and I remember everyone watching *V*.

However, in the middle of the final episode, there was an electricity black out and the televisions went off in every house on the housing estate where I grew up. Video recorders were still relatively rare in those days, but our next-door neighbour had one. He borrowed a recording of the show from a friend but his daughter made the mistake of boasting about it. In the end he saw the end of *V* crouched on the edge of his sofa with dozens of people crowded into his front room.

V is glossy where *Quatermass* is dark. It is optimistic where *Quatermass* has given up hope. And, from the opening moments, in which the reporter runs around a rebel camp as they struggle against government oppression in some Central American dictatorship, its heart is firmly in the right place – on its sleeve.

V remains entertaining, has better special effects and a more uplifting message, but as drama it has

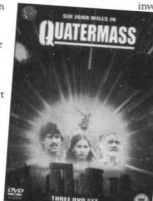
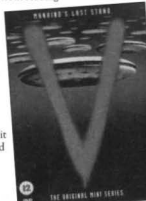
weathered less well than *Quatermass*.

Part of the problem is the overwhelming earnestness of the piece. This is not a story with a message, it is a message with a plot bolted on. Yes, I will concede, the Nazis were very bad and dictatorship should be condemned, but I have a suspicion that no one who thinks otherwise is going to be convinced by slick sci-fi programmes. With simplistic action and paper-thin characters, even the optimism and the "right on" political message of *V* can't disguise the fact that *Quatermass* is a better and more intelligent piece of television. *V's* great weakness is the second half – originally broadcast separately in America and without the

involvement of the original

writer/director Kenneth Johnson. The first half ends on a hopeful rather than a victorious note. The *Final Battle* though, reaching for a big finish, flounders in a disappointing sea of mumbo-jumbo.

Both are worth owning but, despite its grim view of the world, *Quatermass* is much the superior programme.



Hello?

.....

Hello! Are you there?

.....

Oh Wake up! There's a column to write here. Mm? Who?

The column. We have to write the column. Oh yeah.

So, did you watch it? Watch what?

The film, *Crossworlds*. Did you watch it? Yes. Well, I mean, I tried to watch it.

You tried to watch it? I saw the first half an hour three times, but then I fell asleep.

You lazy sod! Go back and watch the film. Only if you come with me, maybe if we try and watch it together we'll be able to stay awake.

Oh, all right then. Look, I've seen this bit. Josh Charles –

He was in *Dead Poets Society*! – is at a party. And there's Jack Black –

He was in *High Fidelity*! Are you going to do that all the way through?

Well, I have to say something, don't I? No. Look! Josh is a loser – he hasn't got a girlfriend, and he can't get one. Hahah!

Just because he doesn't have a girlfriend doesn't make him a loser. Have you got a girlfriend?

No. Loser. And now there's Andrea Roth –

She was in... No, wait, never heard of her.

No, me either. She does, however, have long legs and a short skirt. She's interested in Josh but just when he thinks he's got lucky she disappears and Josh goes home alone and frustrated.

I know that feeling. Of course you do, loser.

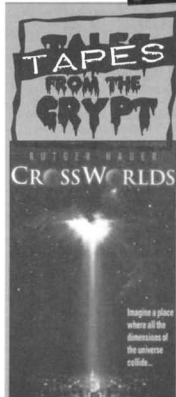
People are shooting. Where did they come from? Dunno. So Andrea does the "come with me if you want to live" speech from *Terminator* and takes Josh to meet Rutger Hauer.

He was in... *Blade Runner*, *The Hitcher*, some Dutch films, more direct-to-video stinkers than anyone except Dolph Lundgren, and that stupid one where he played the blind, swordfighting, Vietnam vet.

Blind Rage. Please, leave this to a professional. I've had years of training in the art of seamlessly slipping film titles into magazine columns. Have you ever thought of getting out more? It might make you less of a loser. The film is starting properly now. There's the bad guy, English character actor Stuart Wilson –

He was the bad guy in *Lethal Weapon 3*. Really? I didn't see that one. So the bad guy wants the necklace Josh got from his mysteriously dead dad, and he's really powerful in a low-budget Emperor from *Star Wars* kind of way and Rutger is his old enemy and they fight and...

.....
.....



Martin McGrath fails to review *Crossworlds* (1996) starring Rutger Hauer and some other people he's already forgotten.

Pray for Dark

Martin McGrath asks if *Near Dark* can survive the hype?

Near Dark is one of those films from the 1980s that only got recognition on video. Released just weeks after the similarly themed, bigger budgeted *The Lost Boys* by a studio already on the verge of bankruptcy, *Near Dark* had disappeared from American cinemas within a fortnight of opening.

Its gradual reappraisal was led, in part, by its discovery by the sort of people who trawl through video stores for low budget horror flicks and found themselves surprised by something with a coherent plot, strong visual imagery and a decent cast. The other aspect of the rediscovery of *Near Dark* has been the emergence of director Katherine Bigelow as the only female director of big budget action movies in Hollywood with films like *Point Break* and, most recently, *K-11 Widowmaker*.

From being ignored on its original release, the pendulum has swung the other way for *Near Dark* and it is now generally regarded as something of a classic, albeit a minor one.

So the release of an almost obligatory two-disc special edition seems a good time to judge just how good this film really is.

The first point to make is that, despite the vampires (not that this word is ever used), *Near Dark* plays more like a western than a horror movie. Replace the fangs with six-guns and the film would work just as well.

The next thing you'll notice is that the acting, style and direction of the film have aged remarkably well. Strong plotting and a good script mean it still feels like a fast-moving action movie rather than an historical curio.

Near Dark remains a refreshingly cliché-free interpretation of the vampire myth compared with, to take a recent example, *Underworld* (reviewed on page 9). But, though the film remains entertaining fun, even the best effort of the particularly obsequious booklet that accompanies the DVD failed to convince me that *Near Dark* deserves all of the praise heaped upon it.

Don't expect too much of *Near Dark*. It isn't particularly complex or clever. It is the kind of film best treated as a surprise, the kind of film best discovered when looking through racks of videos with titles like *Squirm* and *The Boogymen*. In that context it is a jewel to be cherished.

Si-moan

Simone, Andrew Niccol's follow up to *Gattaca*, is a shambles, says Martin McGrath.

It must have sounded like a brilliant idea. Take Andrew Niccol, the writer/director responsible for one of the best science fiction movies of the 1990s (*Gattaca*) and scriptwriter of one of the most successful (*The Truman Show*) and team him up with Al Pacino, one of the greatest screen actors of his generation.

What could go wrong? Judging by *Simone*, just about everything. Niccol's previous films have had real matters of substance at their

heart, issues of identity and what it means to be human. *Simone* is about Hollywood and fame and can't help feeling as shallow and meaningless as its subject matter.

Niccol's ability to create striking images remains unquestioned. An early image of Pacino under the gaze of an enormous eye lingers in the memory. But there are serious problems with *Simone*'s plot – not enough happens – and with the script which is stiff and, for a film marketed as a comedy,

almost entirely chuckle free.

Pacino plays Viktor, a director whose masterwork has been abandoned by his leading lady and the studio. When all seems hopeless, he is bequeathed an artificial actress ("Sim One" – *Simone*) by an Igor-like programmer. The arty (and phenomenally tedious-looking) work is finished and becomes a huge hit thanks to the charisma of the leading lady. Viktor chooses not to reveal that she is a mass of pixels and her fame rockets beyond her creator's control.

It is, of course, a retelling of *Frankenstein*, but this Viktor is no "modern Prometheus."

Any potential critique of Hollywood or the shallowness of fame is abandoned early on and the film wanders through an

aimless love story and a pointless murder mystery and emerges with nothing important or interesting to say.

I had hoped for much more from Niccol's third screen outing. He is capable of better than this.

Even more disappointing is Al Pacino. Since *The Scent of a Woman* there have been two Pacinos.

In *Carlito's Way*, *Heat* and *Donnie Brasco* he proves he is still a great screen actor. But too often he "hoo-has" his way through parts and seems content to let his hair do the hard work. Is his hair standing straight up? Then Mr. Pacino is angry and shouting. Is his hair neat and tidy? Then Mr. Pacino is happy. In *Simone*, Al Pacino has a very bad hair day.



PRESENTED BY AMALGAM XT

End of empire

Stephen Baxter speculates about the fall of the Roman empire and wonders could it have been avoided. Were individual mistakes or Hadrian's Wall really to blame?

My latest novel *Coalescent* (Gollancz, October 2003) features the fall of Roman Britain. Maybe my interest stems from growing up during the Cold War, when nuclear war and the collapse of civilisation seemed about to happen to us.

Britain was left with one of the most remarkable monuments of antiquity: Hadrian's Wall. But I want to suggest that without the Wall the western Empire might have survived ... and Latin would have been spoken with a Scottish accent.

Did Rome have to fall? Of course in the genre this speculation has a long tradition, dating back to L Sprague de Camp's *Lost Darkness Fall* (1941), in which a time traveller tries to fend off the Dark Ages. See Robert Schunk's remarkable *Uchronia* website (www.uchronia.net) for more examples.

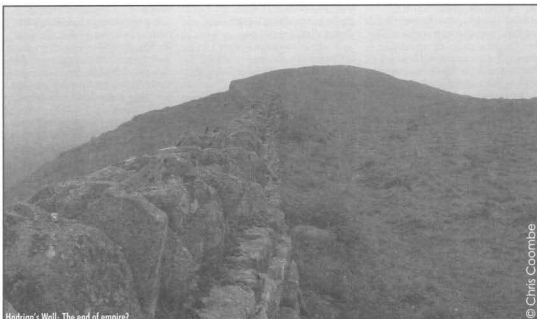
The most recent is Robert Silverberg's fascinating *Roma Eterna* (Gollancz, 2003), in which the turning point is Moses's failure to lead the Jews out of Egypt. Christ is never born. And it never happens that 'the basic structure of Roman society is weakened by superstition, until the Empire ... is toppled by the barbarians who forever lurk at its borders' (p4). Silverberg's scenario resonates with an essay by historian Carlos Eire (in *More What If?*, ed. Robert Cowley, Putnam's, 2001), who imagines Pilate sparing Jesus thanks to his wife's bad dream. A new kind of Judaism, with Jesus a prophet, not a Messiah, becomes the state religion, and helps the Empire endure.

Turning points

Historians identify many apparent turning points. For example (see the essay by Lewis Lapham in *What If?*, ed. Robert Cowley, Putnam's, 1999), during Augustus's reign the legions pushed beyond the Rhine. The Germans were ferocious but primitive: the Romans should have won. But in AD 9 Augustus put his forces in the hands of Publius Quinctilius Varus, a palace functionary who married into the imperial family. A Germanic man called Arminius, or Hermann, betrayed Varus. Three legions were lured into a trap in the forest. Augustus never really recovered and from that day the Rhine became the Empire's 'natural' northern border.

But the defeat needn't have happened. Perhaps the legions could have reached the Baltic – even the Vistula, even Moscow – civilisation as they went. Later, without barbarian pressure from the north, the western Empire might have endured. And Hermann would never have become a mythic hero, to inspire, among others, Hitler.

Here's another possibility (see Barry Strauss's essay in *What If?*). Three hundred years after Augustus, the Visigoths, fleeing the Huns, asked for leave to cross the Danube and settle



Hadrian's Wall: The end of empire?

© Chris Coombe

inside the Empire. Emperor Valens, needing troops to fight the Persians, agreed. But local officials fled to the Visigoths and they rebelled. Valens responded weakly and, at Adrianople, barbarians killed an emperor. There was no way back; within fifty years the Visigoths would sack Rome. But again it was all down to individual weaknesses. If only Valens had been a slightly better general or a wiser administrator...

Perhaps our focus on Roman counterfactuals is a parochial prejudice. In AD 100, Rome was just one of four immense Old World empires; perhaps the Han, Kushan or Parthian realms could have won. But Rome did have one unique political invention: like *Star Trek*'s Borg, it assimilated the conquered, turning them into citizens. A tolerant, polytheistic religion helped. In Silverberg, though, this flexibility is seen as an eventual weakness: the Empire, morally vacuous, simply endures.

Survived

And if Rome had survived, a route through the centuries can be espied. A united Empire might have fought off Islam where Byzantium, its eastern rump, failed. Rome's armies would have handled the Mongols better than its medieval successors. In the Americas they surely wouldn't have practiced genocide; assimilation was the Roman way – but diseases would still have passed from Old World to New (Matrix January 2002). In Europe there would have been no feudalism, no chivalry – no parliaments – and no England. Might this have been a 'better' outcome?

But is this wishful thinking – was Rome's fall actually inevitable? I've

argued myself against 'great men' theories (Matrix January 2002). On long timescales, the likes of Valens and Varus are irrelevant. Instead, geography and economics exert profound influences.

This is where we come back to Hadrian's Wall. After Augustus, many emperors, including Hadrian, tried to establish 'natural boundaries' for the Empire. But those 'boundaries' were porous; in the fifth century the Rhine froze over and the Vandals and others just walked into Gaul.

Boundaries

Worse – and here's my own theory – the 'boundaries' halted Rome's military expansion, which created most of its wealth. Still worse, barbarians left unmolested beyond those boundaries grew stronger. In Scotland, the Picts became a formidable foe; it would have been better for Hadrian to have cleaned out the glens.

So there was no net wealth creation. Yet the army was getting larger to fend off the increased barbarian threat. It couldn't be sustained ... But maybe even here there are counterfactual possibilities. Perhaps with a bit more time a more mature economy would have emerged, based on exploration, trade, even industrialisation, rather than endless military expansion.

When Rome did fall, the cost was particularly heavy in Britain. On the continent, the victorious barbarians tried to keep up the former political structures, though with themselves on top. In Britain we got the Saxons, who would, for instance, throw building stone down wells, thus killing the towns forever. Here, it was more than just a fall; it was an erasing. It really must have

been like living through a nuclear war: no wonder it resonates.

I suspect I'm expressing a controversial view here. Many historians argue that western freedoms were rooted in the post-Roman chaos. But the waste was dreadful, especially in Britain. It's an oddity that most counterfactual hypotheses predict worlds that are worse than our own (see the *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* (Orbit 1993)). But in this case I find it hard to believe: surely somewhere in the tree of possibilities there was a better route to the present.

And anyhow the collapse of Roman Britain surely needn't have happened. In the early fifth century adventurous generals burned up Britain's last resources trying for the imperial purple. What if they had been more farseeing?

Counterfactual

Here's my own contribution to the counterfactual catalogue. Even after the fifth century calamities, the emperors might have won Britain back, as remained their official policy. Britain, protected by the ocean, wasn't just some border outpost; for centuries it was a key source of wheat and metal for the armies in Gaul and Germany. So Britain, a rich safe province supporting a reserve of troops, might have stabilised the western Empire. And what if Hadrian had pushed on rather than build the Wall? A Roman Scotland would have been an especially formidable fortress...

By stabilising Roman Britain, and so stabilising Western Europe, could Scotland have saved Rome? And would it have been a good thing if it had? The debate may last longer than Rome itself. *Aw, atque uale, and och aye!*

Doctor Who and the concept of dread

Mark Greener kicks off our special coverage of the Doctor's fortieth anniversary by considering the philosophical implications of a life lived through so many divergent personalities. The Doctor, he concludes, remains inspirational because he embodies Kierkegaard's aphorism that "it is impossible to exist without passion."

I am, almost, the same age as Doctor Who. I was born four months and one day before the programme first aired. My earliest memory that I can date accurately is Doctor Who. The programme offered a mental and emotional port in a somewhat stormy childhood and adolescence. The Doctor inspired me to follow a career in science and sf/fantasy as a hobby. My attempts at emulating my genre heroes led, eventually and via a circular route, to my living as a freelance bioscience writer. The Doctor Who Appreciation Society endured my first forays into fandom and one of their newsletters mentioned the BSFA. And here I am editing the aptly named *Matrix*. Doctor Who has been – probably and perhaps somewhat worryingly – a major influence on my life.

But there comes a time when I should have put away childish things. Surely at 40 I should have grown out of my obsession with a TV programme – and a supposedly children's one at that. After all, I don't watch much TV now. Doctor Who aside, it's unusual if I watch more than half-an-hour a day – and that's *Newsnight*.

Youth

I still enjoy the sf programmes of my youth – *UFO*, *Space 1999*, *Blakes 7*. And I've bought the odd video off Ebay. But I don't get withdrawal symptoms if I don't watch them for more than a week. And I certainly wouldn't buy a full price DVD – not when there's a book unread instead. For this – and many other reasons I won't bore you with – my Doctor Who obsession (and I make no bones about it, it's an obsession) is markedly incongruous.

So why has the Doctor remained important when my other childhood heroes fell by the wayside? Why do I still find him an inspiration, even today? For me, the secret of Doctor Who's success is in the Doctor's character.

Unlike the classic Doctor Who fan, I never hid from the Daleks, never cowered from the Cybermen. Rather I became fixated with the second Doctor as a character. Here was a bumbling, seeming fool that everyone underestimated – until he used his intellect to save the day. Then there was Pertwee, banished to earth by the duplicitous Time Lords. But rather than lament his

What is it that makes the Doctor unique, despite his changing personalities?



fate and bemoan the loss of his freedom, he struggled on to fix the Tardis, while battling the autons, daemons and mutated maggots. Then Tom Baker: his infectious childlike enthusiasm and naivety; his sense of wonder in everything; the unfailing sense of humour. The Doctor's characterisation is compelling – and far more inspirational for me than any number of sporting heroes or cinema characters.

But while the various incarnations seem different, a common thread runs through the manifestations of the Doctor, from Hartnell to the eighth Doctor. (The latter is more evident in the Big Finish audio adventures and the books, rather than the film.) We poor humans define ourselves, in part at least, in terms of our personality traits and our appearance. But for a Time Lord these can change dramatically in a moment. Indeed, there's a running joke in the series and spin-offs about the Doctor not liking one or

more of his other incarnations.

So what remains when you strip away the personality traits and the clothes? What is the core of the persona that makes the Doctor, the Doctor? By elimination, it must be the subjective and the personal: the first person perspective. As the Doctor says somewhere "a Time Lord is nothing without his memories". This means that the Doctor – whatever his appearance, a cosmic clown, an old man, a fog – is always deeper than he seems. It's these depths that I suspect make the Doctor such a compelling character. From the first, the Doctor was a man of mystery – the Time Lords didn't come on to the stage for a few years.

That depth in his character can make him seem difficult: Hartnell's sullen grumpiness, the 7th Doctor's cantankerous character, and the relationship with Ace, for example. But the Doctor always acts with the best of intentions, aiming to restore justice; even in places

– such as the Caves of Androzzi – when the inhabitants aren't sure they want justice. He's politically committed and holds convention and institutions in contempt – "The Trial of a Time Lord" highlights this perfectly.

The key to the Doctor's character is that he acts whatever the odds, however hopeless the problem may seem. He's almost never passive. Thrown by fate, the Time Lords or design into a situation, he is always compelled to move forward. Perhaps the regenerations mean that the Doctor's sense of identity is fickle. So action helps him keep grip on his subjective perspective. Peel back the layers of character and appearance and that may be the irreducible core of the Doctor.

Shades

You might recognise shades of Kierkegaard in that comment. And Kierkegaard said that "it is impossible to exist without passion". He also believed that we need to engage with our fate to gain a sense of identity – passivity isn't enough. We need to forge our will and identity – the iron in our soul – against the anvil of life. And I think the Doctor shows this perfectly.

On occasion – Adric's death in "Earthshock", for example – it hurts. But despite such setbacks, we need to act to become ourselves – to live as an individual, to realise our potential. As Kierkegaard argued, to live as an individual is the way to make sense of your life. (As an aside, Kierkegaard also believed that to find our identity means making a leap of faith: in other words committing yourself to a certain life. That occurred, perhaps, when the doctor left Gallifrey.)

I suspect – at the risk of someone sending this in to Pseud's Corner – that Doctor Who appeals to me for the same reason as I become engrossed in Sartre, Genet or Kierkegaard. It's the depth and subtlety of the psychological underpinnings in the Doctor's character that, for me, transcend constraints of budget and content. It's why it remains an inspiration after all these years – enough to shake me from psychological reverie. It's why I still watch it. For me, Doctor Who is an eloquent testament to existentialism. Not bad for a kid's TV programme.

Not (just) for geeks

Mark Greener makes the case for Doctor Who books as good science fiction for everyone, not just for geeks like him.

The Doctor Who novels are modern pulps. And I mean that as a compliment. The same characters recur – à la Doc Savage or the Shadow. The emphasis is on action, rather than philosophical speculation or literary merit. Yet they are often surprisingly well written.

In this article, I'll take a brief look at three recent Doctor Who novels. Now don't turn the page if you're not a Doctor Who fanatic. I suspect that most Matrix readers will enjoy at least one of these novels – honest.

Timeless (Stephen Cole) is part of an ongoing story arc for the 8th doctor (Paul McCann) – which means that it's not a good place to dip into the series. The barriers that keep the parallel universes apart have broken down. So the doctor tries to restore our universe to its "closed, predictable system". Meanwhile, on Earth civil servant Guy is attacked by his boss, his girlfriend and even his nephew. It seems the world is against him. And sometimes just because you're paranoid doesn't mean people aren't out to get you. The Doctor and his companions need to protect Guy while they uncover his relevance to the shockwaves reverberating around the multiverse...

In *Wolfbane* (Jacqueline Rayner), the fourth doctor (Tom Baker) abandons Harry Sullivan in 1936. By the time the Doctor and Sarah Jane return to rescue him, Harry seems to have died. But mystery surrounds his death – and that of several others from the same village. They discover that Harry might have stumbled on the last resting place of the Holy Grail – and there may be a werewolf on the prowl. Meanwhile, nature suddenly seems to go awry. And how does the 8th doctor fit into all this?

Colony of Lies (Colin Brake) begins with the seventh Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) and Ace visiting a museum. The exhibits trigger a memory from long ago and, back in the Tardis, the Doctor opens his 500-year diary. The narrative switches to the second Doctor, Zoë and Jamie, who materialise in a crashed



spaceship. The craft brought 'back to basics' colonists to a planet to live a simple, non-technological life. But the colony is barely surviving and a resistance want to create a new high-tech lifestyle. Meanwhile, aliens – the planet's first inhabitants – are waking from a long slumber...

The books are markedly different. *Timeless* is hard SF – all dark energy and metaphysical speculations about the universe's origins. There are a couple of slightly clichéd elements – not least the spooky, disturbing child. But there is also humour and a genuine tension. Although Cole is clearly familiar with some core ideas in modern cosmology, it doesn't overwhelm the story and he deftly avoids info-dumps. *Wolfbane* is Doctor Who in fantasy mode. The

story weaves elements of pagan nature myths, the Arthurian legends and the werewolf tradition into a compelling story. *Colony of Lies* is, perhaps, in style and substance, the closest to the television series. You can imagine the frontier town drawn from the prop department, the dark corridors and the well-known character actors playing the colonists. The book is even structured into episodes with cliffhanger endings.

Colony of Lies is my favourite – simply because Troughton is the first Doctor I can (just) remember and is closest to the series. Blake captures the second incarnation's "cosmic clown" personality perfectly. It's also a good old-fashioned sf adventure story: simple, without being simplistic. As the series matured and became more complex, Doctor Who, on occasion, lost some of that naïve charm.

But all three books are very well written – real page-turners. And the characterisation is excellent. The Doctor's character is so well known that with the exception of the eighth incarnation, the writers don't need to work very hard. The companions, on the other hand, can be more difficult. Yet they succeed. Rayner, for instance, captures Sarah Jane's constant and endearing battle between courageous curiosity and fear perfectly.

And Harry? Well, I never really liked Harry much. He always seemed too much of a 'nice but dim'. Rather like Watson in many of the Holmes dramatisations, I could never understand why the Doctor would put up with someone who seemed such a plonker. The Doctor was never one to tolerate fools. (I think I'm right in saying that Harry was drafted in as they didn't know how much of an action hero Tom Baker would be.) But *Wolfbane* takes you inside Harry's mind and goes some way to rehabilitating the character – in much the same way that the Big Finish stories have for some in regard to the sixth Doctor (not me, I always liked the characterisation) and Mel.

These Doctor Who novels aren't just for geeks like me. They're not just good for continuing the memory of a sadly missed programme. They're actually really quite good SF. Try one. You might just like it!

Omega

Mark Greener listens to Big Finish's *Omega* with Peter Davison, a fitting tribute to the Doctor's anniversary.



Of the four or five Big Finish audio adventures I've listened to over the last few months, *Omega* stands out.

The fifth Doctor receives a telepathic message to return to the galactic area where *Omega* detonated a star some thousand years ago and vanished in the attempt. The Doctor materialises on a historical cruise, with a difference. Rather than taking you to the history, Jolly Chronolids bring the history to you. And one of the tour's highlights is a retelling of the *Omega* legend, although a down-at-heel actor plays the Time Lord. But this trip is spoilt when one of the Chronolids employees goes mad. Then it emerges that the real *Omega* is abroad – and that he's got marriage in his mind...

Omega is Big Finish at its best: tense, imaginative and able to evoke some strong images. Indeed, Big Finish can, at times, improve upon television – after all the limitation is your imagination rather than the BBC's budget. Davison, as ever, is excellent and the supporting cast – including Caroline Munro, ex-Bond girl and star of numerous 70s and 80s sf movies – play their role well. Ian Collier's return as *Omega* is suitably nefarious and calculating.

But there is a serious side to *Omega* as well. Writer Nev Fountain counterpoints the similarities between the Doctor and *Omega*. Indeed, the Doctor admits that *Omega* inspired his wanderings. There's also some thought-provoking comments on the nature of myth and the fallibility of history. *Omega* is Doctor Who at its best: brilliantly written, well acting and intelligent. *Omega* is a fitting tribute to the Doctor's 40th year.



Who at the movies

The film incarnations of Doctor Who look good but fundamentally misunderstand the appeal of the Doctor. The makers of the new BBC show should learn from them, says **Martin McGrath**.

The Doctor Who movies, whether the 1960s Daleks films or the 1996 TV movie have two things in common.

First, the influx of money from America makes them the best designed and most visually striking incarnations of Doctor Who ever seen.

The Rosenberg/Subotsky-produced Daleks movies, released in 1965 and 1966 stand up remarkably well, even today, especially if one's expectations are set for the BBC's rickety production standards. This is especially true of the first movie, *Doctor Who and the Daleks*, which features enormous and beautifully designed sets, those gorgeous movie Daleks in glorious Technicolor, and a horde of scantily clad Thals. The 1996 TV movie is less inventively designed but, even so, the inside of the Tardis is both a revelation and a joy to behold. The old girl never looked better.

Sadly the second thing all the movie versions of the Doctor have in common is that they are not really "our" Doctor. While American money may have made him look gorgeous, the quality of storytelling seems to decline in direct proportion to the amount of money spent on the sets.

In part this failure must be due to the truncated running time available to tell the stories. None of the film versions are over 85 minutes long

— making them less than three episodes worth of "real" Doctor Who

— and each of them is forced to reintroduce the world of the Doctor to an (American) audience unfamiliar with the television show. So, they try and pack an awful lot into a very small space, and inevitably the quality of the story suffers. But this is only part of the problem.

The overriding reason why the movie incarnations fail is that they lack conviction in the basic concept that has kept the Doctor popular for forty years: that a hero does not have to be lovable to be engaging.

My favourites — Hartnell, Pertwee, Tom Baker — kept a coldness and an



The Eighth Doctor, "infamous" for kissing.

oddness in their performances that distanced them from the audience and at crucial moments highlighted their alien nature. There were moments when it might not be clear whose side these Doctors were on or what logic might drive them to reach their conclusions.

This is missing in the movies.

Peter Cushing is, unarguably,

the most talented actor ever to play Doctor Who, but his portrayal of the Doctor as a kindly old grandfather is, for me, even more annoying than the Doctors of Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy. Paul McGann is also a good actor, but the determination that his Doctor must have a "love interest", leading to the infamous kiss, reveals how little anyone involved understood the appeal

of the character they were reviving.

The Doctor is at his most interesting when he is at his most alien. He is at his best when he is most difficult to love. There is something autocratic about the Doctor: he tolerates the companions, they may give advice, but it is the Doctor who makes the decisions. The Tardis is rarely a democracy. He is odd, unlikable even. Such a hero goes against all the received wisdom, especially in US films. Here the advice is always to create sympathetic characters, characters with whom the viewer can empathise.

That "our" Doctor refuses to fit neatly into that straitjacket explains why he has never made it, unmolested, into the movies. His continued popularity also proves that the received wisdom is bullshit. If a character is charismatic then it doesn't matter if the viewer empathises with them. Such a character carries us along by the force of their personality(ies).

This then, if I can be so presumptuous, is my advice to those preparing the new series of Doctor Who. Learn a lesson from the movies. By all means make the sets sturdier and the special effects more spectacular but make sure you bring back "our" Doctor. Make him alien. Make him odd. Make him charismatic.



Lessons learned

Roderick Gladwish remembers his favourite moments from *Doctor Who*: the best monsters, his soft spot for companions who could kick alien butt, and the bits that made him think.

Louise Jameson as Leela: "No more janis thornst!"



My favourite story was "Robots of Death" because it had everything I dreamt of in SF. A huge machine populated by robots with strange blank masks reminiscent of 18th century servants turning on their masters. My first head-exploding scene was in the final episode too.

Ray-guns are fine, but the "cybersnake" tops the weapons. Big monsters aren't scary because they can't creep up on you, can never move fast and under the bed is no place for them. Small, quick and slithering into tight places ready to leap for the throat at unexpected moments, the

snakes were the scariest too. I wanted one.

My top assistant was Leela, the warrior woman. As a ten year-old boy, I didn't appreciate the skimpy costume, but thought it great that the Doctor finally had an assistant who wasn't a screaming, wimpy girl. Not until Ace, my second favourite assistant, did the Doctor get another character who could kick alien butt.

What lingers in the mind was unexpected violence from a man of science and peace. The incident that shocked me most was in "Face of Evil," where the Doctor had to pass a test with a crossbow. He was challenged to shoot a line to save himself

from falling into a pit of insectoids with vicious jaws. Someone demonstrates the creatures' danger by prodding them with a stick to which one clamps on to. When taking the stick, the Doctor flicks it so that the creature bites into the leg of one of his testers, who runs off screaming.

As with all fiction it's best when it makes you think. At the end of "Genesis of Daleks" the Doc says even the Daleks can bring good, uniting peoples through their threat. At the same time a teacher reminded me that the Russians loved their country too. An enemy suddenly became more than cardboard cut-out bad guys.

The search for my Doctor

40th ANNIVERSARY
DOCTOR WHO
CELEBRATION ISSUE

"I don't know why you ended up such a fan. As a kid you'd run screaming from the room as soon as the music came on." **Stuart Maddison's** mum missed the point, the monsters were the initial appeal. But who was *his* Doctor? What really hooked him to *Who*?

My first *Doctor Who* memory is very vivid – as clear as my baby sister's arrival when I was almost three. For many years, though, I didn't know it was *Doctor Who* I was remembering. And in finding out, I feel I proved an old dictum about the programme. Let me explain...

There are so many clichés surrounding *Doctor Who*: 'The Children's Programme that Adults Adore' – and that one's true. I began watching aged 11, after Tom Baker fell to his death and changed... Oh yes, Peter Davison was my Doctor. And as far as I was concerned, this was adult viewing. I knew I'd seen it before, but I'd never watched that *children's* programme. Now, I could appreciate the clever sci-fi and the wit. And, obviously, the Doctor's friends Teagan and Nyssa.

"I don't know why you ended up such a fan", my Mum said not long ago. 'As a kid, you'd run screaming from the room as soon as the music came on.' It's another cliché, but when I was very young, I remember literally hiding behind my Nan's sofa. We used to arrive every Saturday in time for Grandstand Final Score. *Doctor Who* was on as Nan handed round corned-beef sandwiches and ice-cream. To this day, old-fashioned ice-cream blocks in cardboard still conjure up visions of Zygons or Krynoids... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Scared

Mum missed the point; kids love being scared. And that's the programme's appeal, initially: monsters! You like the Doctor... you listen – somewhat impatiently – to what he's saying... but it's the peril he gets himself into that you adore. Look out, Doctor! Mummies! Giant rats! Yet, approaching my teens, I'd conveniently forgotten all that.

I've now been watching *Who* all my 'adult' life. Sadly not recently at Saturday tea time, since the series finished with its whimper in 1989 – followed, thankfully, by the bang of 1996's TV film. No, the real revelation for me was home video; Dad purchased our first VHS circa 1987. That was when I became a fan, rather than just a paperback collector and increasingly less

satisfied viewer.

It's hard to believe now, but in 1980 it was unthinkable that people might want to own old telly in a format for repeated home viewing. We now know the BBC had even been assiduously exterminating many of the Doctor's 'now worthless' b/w adventures. Suddenly, along came a new attitude entirely. It was realised that people were still interested – i.e. there was more money to be made after all.

Video

So, in 1983, the Beeb tentatively offered the first *Doctor Who* video: *Revenge of the Cybermen*. Two decades on and the entire series has been made available; the last few surviving b/w episodes have just come out for

the anniversary. And now it's all to be released again – digitally remastered, with bells and whistles – on DVD. But again I digress; back to teenage me, a VCR the size of a bungalow and lots of *Doctor Who* I'd never seen before. Happy days.

Distorted

Obviously, even before then, I'd known of earlier Doctors. In fact I'd seen, at a local club, a distorted copy of *The Curse of Peladon* starring one Jon Pertwee – who'd immediately become my favourite previous Doctor. Not any more, of course. For years, though, it was always his stories' video releases I looked forward to most. And still I had no idea the terror and delight my collection would soon awaken in me...

It was while I was watching *The*

Brain of Morbius that the magic happened. An early release, cut to secure U certification, had been left in WHSmith in disgust. Then, in 1990, it was reissued in full. I was twenty and... what? I'd seen this before! As demented surgeon Solon connected electric current to the severed head and it twitched, I remembered! With mounting excitement, I realised I knew what was coming... I began to be afraid as only a five-year-old can. Though I'd somehow forgotten, I must have seen episode one originally, in 1976; no doubt at Nan's, my ice-cream abandoned in the scramble for upholstered cover. Sure enough, the cliffhanger saw Sarah-Jane, blinded and blundering, at the mercy of the headless horror in the lab!

Five years later and such revelations had become a regular treat. Now Tom Baker was my Doctor; the best frisson of all was probably *The Stones of Blood*. Standing stones, aglow and pulsing, leaving their ancient circle, smashing doors as they relentlessly seek to crush you and feast – how could I ever have forgotten that nightmare! And now I'm thirty-three and the magic period is over. I've watched and re-watched everything; no more surprises. Yet my love of the programme remains. These days I appreciate it on different levels again, enjoying all the cultural references and in-jokes, knowing performances and sheer fun. Frankly, *Doctor Who* is hilarious.

Memory

So, what was that very first *Doctor Who* memory I said was so vivid? This was revealed to me by UK Gold. For years I'd had a clear, terrifying vision of a tyrannosaur bursting through a brick wall. Convinced I'd been exposed very young to a horror film, I'd never identified the source. It hadn't occurred to me it might be *Doctor Who*.

Suddenly, there it was: *Invasion of the Dinosaurs* episode three. Infinitely less effective than my memory had it, but undoubtedly the moment in question. What a thrill to connect with my – blimey! – with my not-quite-four-year-old self. That makes *Doctor Who* one of my earliest memories of all.

And it means that my Doctor was Jon Pertwee after all.



Read all about Who

40th ANNIVERSARY
DOCTOR WHO
CELEBRATION ISSUE

Roderick Gladwish continues this month's Who theme with a look at the *Doctor Who* Magazine and he takes a look at the final issue of *Roadworks*.

If, through over exposure, you are now developing a rash every time *Doctor Who* is mentioned, skip halfway down this article to where *Roadworks* is reviewed with no mention at all of you know Who, but first...

Doctor Who Magazine (DWM) fits the category of 'Newsagent SF', that is, you can go into almost any newsagent and pick one off the shelf. The following conversation never happens with DWM: 'Interzone, that's that new specialist magazine on traffic intersections, probably coming in next Thursday. Schehenzade, you say? Top-shelf, if I'm any judge of a title. Why are you banging your head on the counter?'

As an obvious portal into SF the only adverts it carries are for *Doctor Who* memorabilia. Surely it's a great way to draw young *Doctor Who* fans deeper into SF, so where are the ads for the BSFA or other magazines?

A slick, professional production, it is foremost a fanzine. The contributors know their stuff and cross-references to episodes and appearances are littered through every article. Among my researches were two specials, one on the eighth doctor (Paul McGann) and the other on *Blue Peter*. These go into DNA level detail. [And I love it - Mark; voice muffled by anonk.]

The 'eighth doctor' special covered the TV movie, every single step of its production, the doctor's activities afterwards and what happened during the 'Wilderness Years', after the last Sylvester McCoy episode. Potential actors, scripts, directors and backers were listed. All events in the shooting schedule were described. It'll even tell the reader who carried Sylvester McCoy to the morgue bench so the makeup on his feet wouldn't get ruined for the 'toe-tag' shot. Timelines for the Wilderness Years and filming give you all you want to know and more. Whatever you thought of the end results, *The Complete Eighth Doctor* reveals how fortunate viewers were. What we got was far better than the neutering the creatives battled against. Some of the possibilities would have made getting David Hasselhoff as the Doctor an improvement.

If you, like me, thought Paul McGann did the TV movie and that was that, you'd be wrong. McGann has acted in eleven audio adventures with more on the way. [And they are bloody good! - Mark. Think I'll shut up now.] The seventy 'eighth doctor'

books and twenty-plus comic strip adventures are also summarised.

At one point it actually explained what *Eutendras* was; I thought it was because dedicated *Doctor Who* fans would never know it existed (lucky them), but of course it was for foreign readers.

Issue 334 examined the symbiotic relationship between the Doctor and *Blue Peter*. Once more the detail is truly complete. Learn about the crossovers: Peter Purves, Sarah Greene and Janet Ellis have appeared in both. How the sometimes confused interviews with doctors and actors and actors being doctors and the unintentional links such as BP came from the Doctor's lab during his UNIT days.

This is not nostalgia, it doesn't look back fondly blind to faults, that would mean failing to be complete.

When it's not being 'special', there is news on the latest productions and releases of old episodes, with Issue 335 looking at the making of 'Invasion of the Dinosaurs' recently released on VHS. There is fiction in the form of a serialised comic strip. *The Curious Tale of Spring-Heeled Jack* started in Issue 334, the chapter ending in classic cliffhanger style.

I doubt DWM would appeal to the non-*Doctor Who* fan. Although I enjoyed its light style, the detail began to dull the pleasure. Do I need to know when Steven Spielberg was rumoured to be involved in the TV movie or that the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust

asked for a donation to maintain four police boxes?



Roadworks is an A5 magazine produced three times a year and has a lot in common with *The Third Alternative* (TTA) as it leans toward horror, dark fantasy and slipstream. TTA has more non-fiction elements whereas *Roadworks* carries poetry. Many authors who have appeared in TTA did so in issue 16 and for a small press production all the writing is good, though I have the same tough time with the dark themes.

Contacts

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www.roadworks-legend.co.uk
www.bbr-online.com

one as witness. SF risks being out of date faster than any other genre and "Dollface" uses chatrooms, which may be gone by the time you read this.

Gary Couzens's 'Subject Matter' explored what happens when real people become the basis of characters and where reality lies. 'A Matter of Avoiding Crows' by Tony Richards developed into a sinister game of Mornington Crescent. 'The Passing of Guests' by Jay Lake mixed theology, the end of the universe and non-human relationships into a hard SF tale. 'Crash-Test' by Ken Goldman was a return to using cadavers as dummies. Michael O'Connor's 'The Tear' is funny and an antidote to the 'sad man' theme that seems to fill this fiction style.

In 'Soapbox: Behind the Sock Drawer' AJ Jones examines why she got into the genre. It's amazing she got out of childhood alive, but not why she's a fan.

'The Golden Age of the Small Press' is a new section and the editor, Trevor Denyer, would like to hear experiences from editors of small press magazines long gone. In the first section were articles, by DF Lewis and Sharon Marie Bidwel on the importance and evolution of the small press. Often I have watched magazines die or slip into comas never to be roused again. Money and publicity is what they need. You can do more. A subscription to any magazine is cheaper than a packet of cigarettes a week. If you don't smoke, you've got the money spare. If you do, isn't that a good way to stop? Spend the money on mags not fags. Publicity is even cheaper. I bet every reader has a pile of magazines littering the house. Doctors and dentists need fresh publications; their patients need them more. They have to settle for two-year old *Homes and Antiques*, *Practical Boat Owner* and *Woman's* whatever. Copies of *Interzone*, *Third Alternative*, *Roadworks* etc. might just reach some SF reader who didn't know they were out there.

Last time I stated the hard time I have with the reality horror of TTA and now *Roadworks*. Having watched the cheery happy murder show *Rosemary & Thyme*, where the pain and loss don't last to the next ad-break, discomfort is better than true insensitivity.

Late news: Issue 16 will be the last for *Roadworks*, with it being replaced by *Midnight Street* to be published early in 2004.

Still Angry

Brian Aldiss may now be one of the genre's elder statesmen, but, as **Mark Greener** discovers in this exclusive interview, Aldiss remains politically astute and fiercely opinionated. And, as his recent novel *SuperState* demonstrates, he still writes with the passion of an angry young man.

Brian Aldiss' *SuperState* is a masterpiece. It's a sophisticated, overtly political SF book in the tradition of 1984, *Brave New World* and *A Clockwork Orange*. It's uncompromising, intelligent and provocative. It's a timely and thought-provoking analysis of the current political zeitgeist. And it contains sufficient literary merit to ensure that - like 1984, *Brave New World* and *A Clockwork Orange* - it won't date.

SuperState bites and, with pit bull tenacity, holds on to your intellect. Indeed the strength of that bite, frankly, surprised me. Aldiss is one of SF's elder statesmen. Yet the book carries a punch - to mix my metaphors - you'd normally attribute to angry young writers at the start of their careers. But Brian told me that he's still "as mild as mother's milk with saccharine additives. I've not become angry with age. I am more judgmental."

And Aldiss makes that judgement tell. In one of several plot strands in *SuperState*, the West invades a little Eastern nation and gets a bloody nose. As the West sinks deeper into the Iraq quagmire, *SuperState* holds a message that we need to heed. "Sure, *SuperState* is political. Sure, it has teeth," Brian says. "Think how much sharper those teeth would have been had I written it now, post-Iraq invasion." Maybe. But it is still a poignant examination of asymmetrical warfare.

Integration

Meanwhile, the debate about European integration and expansion still splits parties and countries. *SuperState* presents a somewhat ambiguous view of a united Europe: neither a dystopia nor a utopia. Rather Aldiss portrays the future EU as a flawed actualisation of honourable intent. "Considering how the nations of Europe were spilling their neighbours' blood everywhere for the last many centuries, I regard the idea of the European Community



as visionary and brilliant," Brian says. "I do not understand how or why the Tory Party opposes the idea. I hope the EU will be established and flourish in our perilous times; but I'll lay ten to one there will be a massive cock-up, just as we saw one threatening with the recent disagreements between Britain and France and Germany over invading Iraq. Plenty of good people throw through *Super-State* - the Strohmeiers, the mixed-race lovers who drown, the brave amaroli lady

and so on. But they are somewhat helpless under the cloven hoof of history."

The anger - or judgement - Aldiss displays in *SuperState* typified some of his best work over the past decades: *The Dark Light Years* being one example. Brian admits that the *Dark Light Years* was written in anger. "It took only a month to write; I secluded myself to live off pork pies, whisky and coffee. The typescript took much longer to correct, not to mention

correcting my diet. The guy who proposed that dolphins were as intelligent as humans, having the same brain/body ratio, was the same guy who hauled them out of their natural element, tied them to a lab bench and proceeded to sink electrodes into their brains. My god! What kind of a sensibility was that? There was no general outcry. People thought it was a great idea."

And like much of Aldiss' work, *SuperState* is an emotionally moving book - one reason why it won't become a historical curiosity once the political imperative wanes. There are scenes that are as emotionally powerful and as moving as the remainder of the book is intellectually provocative. Aldiss draws these in a vivid detail that allows you to share the experience, rather than just being a passive reader. "The vivid scenes in my novels to which you refer - and you will find them too in *Somewhere East of Life*, which marked a turning point for me - are intensely lived: more drawn from imagination than from life in many cases. But I have had a tremendously varied life."

Mainstream

The strong 'literary' element in *SuperState* made me wonder whether Brian considered writing a more mainstream book - after all he's had some critical successes in the mainstream. Indeed, I believe that had *SuperState* been published outside the SF ghetto it would have attracted considerably more attention - and perhaps even a major prize or two.

"You raise the question of writing a more mainstream kind of book," Brian says. "SF made me; SF has been my lifeblood. But as the blood grows thinner I feel the SF label for me is an impediment. To give an instance: the review of *SuperState* in a recent *Vector* was so slowly and uncomprehending that it reflected little credit on either its author or the editor who passed it. Nothing new there, for one must always hope for perception from the

“I’ve not become angry with age.
I am more judgmental.”

Brian Aldiss

“My writing was designed for the underdog. I chose to write SF for a number of reasons, and some unreason, one being that it was an Outsider’s literature and I saw myself as a Steppenwolf. So I still am.”

Brian Aldiss

Clutes, not the brutes, of this world. But to advance to something fresh has never been popular. To many SF readers, ‘SF’ means something formulaic; they stick with what is tried and trusted, as flies stick to flypaper. So the kind of story I am trying to develop may disappoint them. To many other readers (those who might like *SuperState*, let’s say) the mere label ‘SF’ is a deterrent, poor prejudiced creatures. Because of the kind of novels I am now developing, I am forced to repackage myself as a Surrealist or something-or-other.”

Hubris

For the time being at least, Aldiss remains a writer of SF, which he defines as ‘Hubris clobbered by Nemesis’. ‘SF is always at its most characteristic when things go wrong,’ he says. Ruined hopes and cities predominate; like the rosebay willowherb, SF flourishes on bomb craters. When reading SF most intensively, I was appalled by the idea, emanating

mainly from the USA, of a galactic empire; okay for the chaps at the top, I thought, hell for the poor buggers underneath – even on the so-called winning side. One inch of cutting edge requires a mile of blunt steel beneath. I was in the British Army fighting the Japs when the British Empire was still intact; I’ve lived

these truisms! And when something went wrong, as it frequently did, the good-natured guys I was with would grin and say, ‘What do you expect?’ Rhetorical question expecting the answer, Now! Our expectations

were extremely low. Life was less painful that way. Until the end of WW2 and the advent of the Atlee government, most of us were underdogs. The UK was a veritable kennel of underdogs! My writing was designed for the underdog. I chose to write SF for a number of reasons, and some unreason, one being that it was an Outsider’s literature and I saw myself as a Steppenwolf. So I still am.”

Schopenhauer

That worldview could almost be a summary of some aspects of Schopenhauer’s – namechecked on a couple of occasions in *SuperState* – philosophy. The empirical evidence of the world’s nastiness; and the wretched state of human nature, for example. But in *SuperState*, people don’t escape their wretchedness through transient aesthetic experiences or a persistent nihilistic denial of the value of existence, rather by coming to terms with their paradoxes and uncertainty of their

lives and then acting and accepting the consequences: the hostage falling in love with her captive for example, aiding a falsely accused immigrant and the amaroli lady’s bravery, for example.

Brian says he came on Schopenhauer recently by reading Thomas Hardy. “More direct an influence was this

wonderful book *Madkind: The Origin and Development of the Mind*, by Charles Berg. I reviewed it for the ‘Oxford Mail’ when I was literary editor, back in 1962. All of mankind’s follies are there

Aldiss Unbound

In a column I posted on The Alien Online (www.thealienonline.net/columns/aldiss_jun03.asp?id=7&cid=55&lid=1701) I looked at the contrast between *Frankenstein Unbound* and

Dracula Unbound.

Frankenstein is one of a number of books I’ve re-read since I was about 14. And when I re-read *Frankenstein Unbound* recently, I still managed to see Shelley’s novels in a new light. It’s as illuminating about

Frankenstein as, for example, Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Mr WH in Shakespeare’s sonnets*, but without the latter’s protracted literary criticism. Aldiss illuminates the complexities and subtleties of Shelley’s novel and the tempestuous relationships that formed the zeitgeist from which it emerged. Aldiss’s Mary comes over as intelligent and attractive as well as intellectually, politically and socially rebellious – a daughter who carries the intellectual and political memes of her parents as much as their genes.

Frankenstein Unbound works

on numerous levels. Like its inspiration, it’s a powerful warning against scientific hubris. It’s also a page-turning thriller and is psychologically complex. For instance, Victor’s fiancée Elizabeth – far from being a paragon of virtue – comes over as a manipulative, cold shrew. And Aldiss makes you feel for the Baron’s madness. When I last read Shelley’s original, it struck me that Victor seems to portray many of the signs and symptoms of addiction. He seems to be a step beyond simple obsession. Aldiss highlights the awful compulsion that drives Victor. And this transmutes *Frankenstein* from the obsessive, intellectual, morally naïve ‘mad scientist’ in many of the movies (although not the original book)

into a deeply sympathetic character. On yet another level, you could make a case that Bodanland’s time travel is no more than a fantasy – a hallucination.

Dracula Unbound seems to lack

the depth, intellect and subtlety of its predecessor. *Dracula Unbound* is more of a conventional – albeit clever – SF yarn. There’s numerous McGuffins and the entire tone is lighter, less intense, less intellectual. For example, there’s none of the consideration of the dangers in inherent in humanity’s borderline activities – such as our Promethean tendency explored in *Frankenstein Unbound*. There’s none

of the moving emotional interplay. Most importantly, it doesn’t tell you anything new about the source novel. *Dracula* just becomes the archetype for evil that’s familiar from television, films and comics.

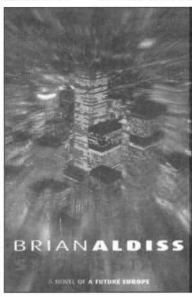
When I published the column, a correspondent (sorry, I misplaced your e-mail, but thanks) pointed out that the two books had very different origins, which accounted for the differences. So I asked Brian to explain.

“Certainly, as you say, *Dracula Unbound* is inferior to *Frankenstein Unbound*. That is because it was written purely from commercial considerations: not

the way I usually work. Roger Corman was a sociable and pleasant director. He came with his producer to dine with my family on Boars Hill. Towards the end of the meal, I told him that when he had filmed *Frankenstein Unbound*, he would have to film its sequel. ‘What’s that?’, he asked. “*Dracula Unbound*”.

Roger said, “You write it, I’ll film it. I did write it as a

screenplay, but the *Frankenstein* movie was not a great success. I turned the screenplay into a novel. That’s why the novel reads like a screenplay. It followed two non-commercial ventures: *Billion Year Spree*, written for the hell of it, and then, because of my intimate relationship with Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein Unbound*. It’s best not to think of money when you are writing. Think of the gray – sex and the end of all things”.



anatomised. It's a suitable subject for a writer, particularly a writer who does not actually get his rocks off on popularity. Here's one of Berg's conclusions: "The world of man, dramatising its anxiety-aggression, remains largely impoverished with regard to the vast amenities of life which would otherwise be available for it to enjoy." Ow! Touche! Certainly, in *SuperState* Aldiss offers a salient reminder of the problems arising from anxiety and aggression both in the lives of individual people and on a world scale.

Wild horses

"Against the natural will to happiness, particularly when tied to ostentation, come disaster and a stampeding herd of wild horses! Thus, too, the androids shut in the cupboard like some awful thing hidden in the subconscious, asking idiot Bergian questions. Is that fair play? you ask. Writers, unlike the BBC, can't have to be fair. My books may chance to serve as counterbalance to all the optimistic gung-ho tales around, and the



bloodthirsty stories of wars by chaps who have never been to war. Either you like chillies or you don't. *De gustibus...* there's always dispute. When I was last in Turkmenistan, I saw how slender and fair the women were, on their gold sandals. It was because they were near starvation. In a country afloat on oil."

I felt that there was a similarity between *SuperState* and *Report on Probability A* – at least in the style and manner of his analysis of the nature of the human condition. *Probability A* highlights the insipid tedium of existence. The ambiguity of life and the uncertainty of our future. And then there's the novel's portrayal of the observer-dependent nature of empirical 'truth'. All these elements, I felt, were there to a greater or lesser extent in *SuperState*.

On the other hand, *SuperState* is a more optimistic book. As I alluded to above, many of the characters find some form of self-actualisation.

Brian, however, disagrees: "I don't see much similarity between *SuperState* and *Probability A*. The latter was written in emulation of the French anti-novel. I had moved

My life has been overtaken by contentment, although I am aware I'm living on the uplands where cold winds can blow. Perhaps that threat adds to the zest of life, like ice to pink gin.

Brian Aldiss

on by the time of *SuperState*; thirty years makes a difference. Looked at through the binoculars of evolution, the human race seems rather accidental. Which does not preclude modest happiness for individual lives. My life has been overtaken by contentment, although I am aware I'm living on the uplands where cold winds can blow. Perhaps that threat adds to the zest of life, like ice to pink gin. There's little point in worrying about what may befall tomorrow. Today holds enjoyment enough."

Worldview

Apart from the changes in Aldiss' worldview there's been a marked change in the SF over the time Brian's been writing. "Time was when SF's two central subjects were space travel and nuclear warfare," he remarks. "Now it has rather to cast about for a topic. The pictorial

has overtaken it; SF movies form a significant part of the universal box office take. You can't help being pleased. In the nineteen-fifties, there was a bookshop in Cecil Court, London, where the porn was in the front room and the dirty-mac brigade had to sneak into the back room for the SF. At least we

have graduated to the front room! – Along with the porn."

So what of the future? In common with SF as a genre, Brian sees himself as "an inheritor of both Enlightenment and Romantic thought; Voltaire and Percy Shelley struggle for supremacy." And these themes, he says, lie at the heart of his latest work. "From them and from experience come my themes of endurance, endings, exogamy and entropy. These metaphysical themes I am exercising in the novels already mentioned, with which I am currently involved: *Affairs in Hampden Feners*, due from Warner Little Brown in February, then *Jocasta*, *Sanity and the Lady* and *The Walcot Novel*, with which I am now fiddling about."

Wide Canvas

"*SuperState* aimed for a wide canvas," he says. "The next novel, operating the same strategy of short scenes which subsume narrative, is set in a fictitious Oxfordshire village. The third novel brings down the focus still further, concentrating largely on one woman in trouble. This is

Sanity and the Lady, which, thanks to the numerous hesitations of publishers, is yet to appear. In this sequence, I attempt to confront the domestic and everyday life with grave eschatological problems, humour being the grease on the slippery".

And Brian's got a very full agenda elsewhere. "Last Christmas, I gave public readings of a story with a local background, and raised £550 for the maintenance of the fabric of the local church; not bad for an atheist! I've just written a panto for the local community, *The Mock-Tempest*, while music for my opera *Oedipus on Mars* is currently being composed. Not here but in Santa Monica. I'm thinking of remarrying.

My grandfather remarried in his seventies."

Familiar

However, Brian no longer reads SF. "I have served my term; I am too familiar with its strategies. Nor do I read many other novels, apart from Tolstoy. I read non-fiction, books on history, geology, cosmology, evolution, biography. Currently I'm enjoying William Dalrymple's *White Moghuls* – in part because

I was once familiar with the splendid city of Hyderabad, depicted in Dalrymple's book. The partial abandonment of others' novels may be an indication of a threatened anaemia of the imagination, in a way. My favourite SF writers were and remain Aldous Huxley, Phil Dick, CS Lewis, Anthony Burgess and William Tenn. All these I have met, except Tenn, the only one still alive. The greatest SF writers include some of the above, plus Mary Shelley, Stapledon, Robida, Wells, Borges... you know the list as well as I do."

I'd certainly agree with that list. But I'd add Aldiss. Indeed, *SuperState* is one of the books that I suspect with the benefit of hindsight will further cement his reputation as one of Britain's supreme writers (not just of SF) in the 20th century.

Acknowledgement

The photograph of Brian Aldiss on page 18 is courtesy of Beth Gwinn, co-author of *Dark Dreamers: Meeting the Masters of Fear* published by Cemetery Dance Publications.

Vector responds

Since *Mr Aldiss criticises our sister publication, Vector, we thought it only right to give the editors a chance to respond.*

"It is understandable – given the effort needed to complete and publish any novel – that Brian is disappointed with a less than favourable review. Vector, however, has a policy of publishing the opinions of its reviewers, whether they are positive or negative. Having only recently taken over as Reviews Editor I should make it clear that all reviews must be honest and well argued; whether favourable or not. I would like to assure Brian and all readers that, as has been the case in the past, we will continue to try and cover as wide a range of genre fiction as possible; both the obvious science fiction/fantasy titles and the less apparent 'slip-stream' works such as those that Brian is developing." Paul N Billinger, Reviews Editor, Vector

Journey into nostalgia

Foundation favourites
Number five: *Journey into Space* by Charles Chilton

Andy Sawyer takes us back to a future in which Britain was beating America to the moon and the working class knew their place. Introducing *Journey into Space*, Charles Chilton's radio serial that became a novel to remember.

Get British sf fans of a Certain Age together, lubricate our zimmer frames with a pint or two of good beer and start us reminiscing about the sf of our youth. Ten to one the words "Journey into Space" will be spoken within the first minute.

Journey into Space was a radio serial broadcast by the BBC Home Service from 1953–55. There were three stories in all, but it was the first – also known as "Operation Luna" – which introduced Jet Morgan and his crew and launched thousands of young listeners into an imaginary world of wonder. In 1954, writer Charles Chilton published the first novel based on his radio scripts for the serial, to be followed by its sequels *The Red Planet* and *The World in Peril*, continuing the story of the intrepid crew of Rocketship Luna. The original publisher was Herbert Jenkins: the SF Foundation Library holds copies of the Pan paperbacks of 1958, 1960 and 1962 respectively.

Assumption

The serial is redolent of that long-gone assumption that of course there would be a major British presence in space, so colourfully presented by Dan Dare in the *Eagle* (for which Chilton also wrote) from 1950 and early novels by Arthur C. Clarke such as *Prelude to Space* (1951). In the early 1960s "Doc" Matthews, working on a space programme mothballed by Washington, receives a call from his friend "Jet" Morgan. An Australian engineer has been working on atomic motors for the British navy and his latest creation is a rocket motor – does Doc want to join the crew? And only a couple of years later, in November 1965, Rocketship Luna takes off for the moon with its crew of Jet, Doc, the engineer Mitch and colourful cockney Lemmy Barnett as radio operator.

What followed was the most exciting radio I ever heard. Admittedly, at the age of 8 or so, listening to a repeat of the serial by Forces Broadcasting Radio, I had heard very little radio drama, but subsequent re-hearings have confirmed my opinion. Reader, I became a science fiction fan. Soon

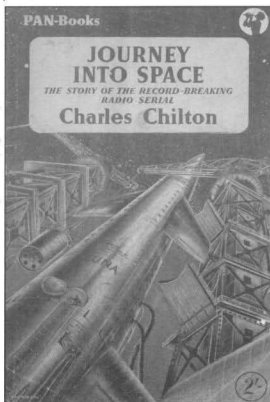
afterwards, I found a copy of Chilton's book, which, even today, still stands up as an example of a fast-moving space adventure.

Almost immediately after take-off the radio goes dead. When Lemmy finally repairs it, weird swooping "music" is heard, which returns – to Lemmy's ears only – when Luna lands on the moon.

When it is time to return from the mission all power on Luna fails, leaving the crew to swelter in the darkness through a lunar night, apart from one brief episode when the power returns to reveal a large doughnut-shaped craft on the television. Fortunately, dawn brings a return of power, and the same spaceship is seen in a nearby crater. While investigating, Mitch's mind is taken over by an alien force that issues cryptic warnings. Shortly after takeoff, when on the far side of the moon, Luna is followed by a number of spaceships and a mysterious force sends Luna and its crew spinning through space to land on an unidentified world. Finally, they discover that they have travelled through time, rather than space, and it is only a final confrontation with – and appeal to – the aliens which have been dogging their path that sends Jet Morgan and his crew back to their own era.

Storytelling

Chilton's storytelling ability takes us at breakneck speed through the events of Luna's expedition. True, it's a story which has appeared, in



its essentials, throughout the history of sf, and will no doubt appear in some form again, but rarely has it been told so well. It has that old sf standby, the sense of wonder, in spades. Chilton cleverly links with the founding father of such stories by making Jet Morgan bring, as the one "personal" item each crew member is allowed, a copy of H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon*, which is read from during the long lunar night. (Doc's item is his journal, which is part of the narrative; Mitch brings a treatise on atomic power while Lemmy plays sentimental Jewish ballads on his harmonica.)

Awe and terror

The awe and terror of alien encounter allows for tension, as do the scenes of the bickering crew, trapped on the moon with no apparent possibility of escape. We have a neat balance here between stiff-upper-lip Britishness and complete desolation. It's interesting

to see, considering how much a concern for environmental issues is seen as something particularly contemporary, passages like

"Already you're tearing your own planet to pieces, destroying it, and now you mean to do the same here."

and

"You mean you don't kill each other any more? You no longer destroy the things that can give you life and comfort, as the forest men burn our crops which they could eat if they knew how?" still have force. In the end, there is something poignant about the aliens, searching for a new world after the destruction of their own but ethically prevented from the easy solution of just marching in and taking over. They are both far advanced from twentieth-century humanity and physically repulsive to it – a contradiction which Chilton uses to significant effect in his final confrontation as both the Luna crew and the aliens have to decide what they wish to do.

Of its time

Journey into Space is very much of its time. There are no women at all in the story, although Lemmy plays the screaming panic and emotionally unstable roles adequately enough. And working-class people like Lemmy are caricatures of themselves, like Dan Dare's Lancastrian sidekick Digby. But the story is fast-moving, the implications are thought-provoking, and the prose never falls into that wooden caricature that popular science fiction often shows.

While it would be untrue to describe the characters as three-dimensional, they are then even rarer and much more difficult trick to pull off, stock characters who live rather than who are there to perform a function. When all's said and done, this is a story that goes beyond the simple appeal of nostalgia to become a novel that can still be read today for enjoyment even as it provides a thorough and accurate taste of what our science fictional future was like in the 1950s.

When you really could almost believe that a British spaceship would land on the moon in 1965...

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 sf. 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 (asawyer@liv.ac.uk).

Science Fiction Foundation Collection: www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/sffhome.html

Science Fiction Foundation: <http://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.

Dalek takeaway

Martin Sketchley talks to Ian Clarke of *this planet earth* about his first Dalek, the Tardis and plans to colonise the worlds of Gerry Anderson with their unique brand of irresistible, precision-crafted memorabilia. Prepare to want one of those and one of those and two of those.

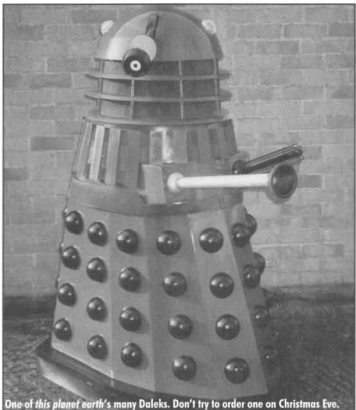
Regular ironing board surfers may recall that in an earlier edition I pointed you in the direction of thisplanetearth.co.uk, a website offering faithful reproductions of Daleks, Cybermen, K9, and even the Tardis. In this *Doctor Who*-themed edition of *Matrix*, I thought it might be interesting to talk to Ian Clarke, Managing Director and founder of the company, to ask him how it all got started.

What's the history behind this planet earth, I asked? "The idea came about as a passing thought around nine years ago," says Clarke. "For many years I'd occasionally thought it'd be good fun to have a full-size Dalek at home. Every now and then the bug would get me, and I'd get on the phone and make enquiries to see if I could get one." Did he have any luck? "Well, eventually I found that there were a couple of people who made them, but they weren't officially licensed and took something like six months to make. I wasn't sure I was willing to risk handing over a large amount of money to someone who might well have made the Dalek in the shed at the weekend out of whatever happened to be on the shelves of the local DIY store."

Mouldings

So you decided to make one yourself? "That's right. A friend of mine made fibreglass mouldings for the truck industry. We talked about the feasibility of producing Daleks and it looked good." But entering into it as a commercial venture's a big step; how did you know there was sufficient demand? "I had a conversation with Chrissie Buttery at the Longleat *Doctor Who* shop - everyone there's been such a great help. She told me there were plenty of people like me who wanted a good quality Dalek reproduction, so we decided to give it a go. It was then that I contacted BBC Worldwide." Were there any problems getting the licensing, I wondered. "Not really," says Clarke. "We had a few meetings, and luckily the BBC Visual Effects department had some original Dalek mouldings left, which we bought, so we didn't have to start entirely from scratch. When they saw the quality of the Daleks they were very impressed."

I asked him what's involved in



One of *this planet earth*'s many Daleks. Don't try to order one on Christmas Eve.

producing a reproduction Dalek. "The process is quite lengthy," Clarke says. "In short, the main body panels are moulded in fibreglass GRP. These are removed from the moulds and the edges trimmed and shaped, with 56 half-spheres cut out. At the same time the eyes, 'arms' and other bits and pieces are manufactured. The body mouldings are then taken elsewhere for spraying for a really professional finish. The painted mouldings are returned in batches - normally around half a dozen at a time - then carefully assembled." Which of the Dalek types has proved most popular, I asked. "The most popular by far is the Genesis TV Daleks and the Movie Worker Daleks."

I asked him there had been any particular problems when developing the Daleks? "We had some fun in the early days," Clarke replies, "when trying to source a suitable black

sink plunger for use on the Dalek. I got some very strange reactions from suppliers, being so fussy about the thickness and shape of the rubber! We never have a blocked sink at home now, though!"

As well as a whole range of Daleks this planet earth still offers K9 models and Cybermen items, ranging from full outfits and heads to individual Cyberman parts. I asked Clarke which of his products he was most proud of, and why. "I think the Daleks, both the Movie and TV styles," he replies. "Keeping it going for nine years with many satisfied customers is a good achievement."

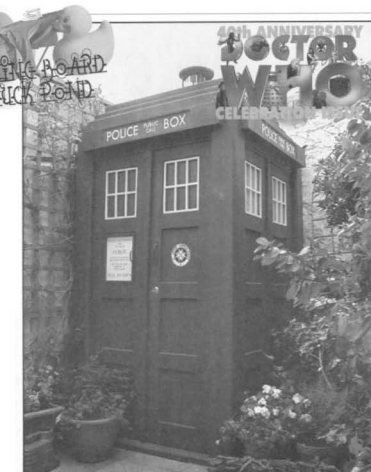
I set out to treat people as I would like to be treated. At times it's admittedly difficult for me to give every order my personal attention when we're busy, but I try to give it the personal and prompt touch people appreciate whenever I can."

I wondered what kind of people buy this planet earth's reproductions. Has the company had any famous customers? "A wide range of people buy our products, from the dedicated *Doctor Who* fan, to collectors of memorabilia with a passing interest in *Doctor Who*, who want an unusual 'ornament' for their home. We do have some famous customers, but most of them ask for anonymity, which of course we respect. Of those who don't mind being mentioned, I was particularly pleased when Liam Howlett of Prodigy ordered one of our Daleks. I admire the Prodigy's work, which made it quite special."

Fan

Assuming Clarke was a *Doctor Who* fan himself, I wondered which was his *Doctor*. It turns out we are of the same generation of *Doctor Who* viewers... "Yep, I'm a fan," he asserts. "As for which *Doctor*... it's tough choosing between Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker. They were both great." Has he ever met his heroes? "I was fortunate enough to spend an evening with Jon at a private party a few weeks before he passed away," says Clarke. "After working in this industry for almost nine years I've met quite a few celebrities. Most shatter illusions, and I regret meeting them most of the time. Jon was different, though, and we had a particularly good evening. He's sadly missed."

Looking at the practical side of the business, I wondered if this planet earth is purely a web-based enterprise. "It is largely internet-based," says Clarke. "We had a site for a long time, but in the last two years we've noticed a large increase in the amount of visitors we get each week - our site is very busy. But although people can view the products on the website and can get all the information they need, they still like to speak to us on the telephone, so it's not entirely 'automated.'" I asked if business was brisk. "Yes, thankfully in the nine years we've been operating we've always been busy. At times, we go from just busy to very busy, especially in the run up to Christmas, which begins in September. And every year someone phones us the day before Christmas Eve to say 'I've just found your website and would love to order a Dalek for Christmas!' We'll almost be



this planet earth's TARDIS: "It was the only shed they had left in Homebase, I swear."

disappointed if one year this doesn't happen."

Ian goes on to tell me that the staff of this planet earth expect to become even busier in the near future... "Our latest project – licensed by Carlton International Media – is to reproduce some of the popular puppet characters used in some of Gerry Anderson's TV series. Steve Zodiac, Troy Tempest, Scott Tracy and Captain Scarlet will be first. These are taken from the original studio props, and are about two feet tall."

Ian says the Gerry Anderson productions are particularly close to his heart, as he grew up with the characters. "I never lost interest in the merchandise or the programmes themselves," he says. "I can vividly remember the toys, too – the fantastic range Dinky produced in the 60s and early-70s."

Original

"Many of these are now very collectible items. Original Anderson puppets sell for huge sums – we're talking tens of thousands of pounds."

URLs of relevance

this planet earth;
<http://www.thisplanetearth.co.uk/>
 BBC's Doctor Who site:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/dawho/>
 Longleat Doctor Who exhibition:
<http://www.drwhoexhibitions.co.uk/longleat.htm>

As a result the average collector or fan has no chance of buying these classics. We're aiming to sell our puppet characters at around £850 each, making them much more affordable alternatives. Our team consists of some of the UK's leading model- and puppet-makers, with a proven track record in the field," says Clarke. "Each character is handmade to exacting specifications, and we use many of the materials used in the production of the original characters, so we're confident people are going to be pleased."

Want

As with all of the items this planet earth produces, Clarke says he has to want one himself before going through lengthy licensing and product development process. What makes the Anderson project particularly exciting is the fact that reproductions of the puppet characters have never been officially available before. "When word got out that we were working on these earlier this year," says Clarke, "we soon had a large amount of enquiries. It seems we've got to stand-by for action!"



Thisplanetearth's new range of Gerry Anderson puppets. FAB!

Spinnerets

There is certainly no shortage of Doctor Who sites on the Internet – not surprisingly. The best place to start is the BBC's official site (www.bbc.co.uk/cult/dawho/) it features a comprehensive episode guide, trivia, games, pictures and video. Most crucially, though, if you simply cannot wait for the new series to arrive, the site offers ebooks, photonovel recreations of lost episodes, and animated audio adventures. Currently online is the remake of "Shada" featuring Paul McGann.

If Whovians have felt shortchanged by BBC television over the past decade, the corporation's website goes some way to making up for it.

Of the many hundreds of unofficial sites out there the best I've found is Outpost Gallifrey (www.gallifreyone.com). Stylishly produced and full of high quality content, this is how all fan sites should look. Outpost Gallifrey is regularly updated and features a wealth of news and reviews. They're promising a "massive" celebration of the fortieth anniversary, which should be worth checking out.

Another excellent Who website is The Doctor Who Image Archive (DWIA). Featuring a huge number of pictures of every doctor and images from dozens of adventures.

DWIA is an invaluable resource as well as a great place to surf on a boring Wednesday afternoon (www.shillpages.com/dw/dwia.html).

The prize for the most misleadingly named Who website goes to A Brief History of Time Travel (www.physic.mun.ca/~spz/dwho.html), which is anything but brief. Offering a vast amount of detail on every Doctor Who story from television and film. There is a page allowing readers to rate Doctor Who novelisations and presenting the results. For the absolute beginner they even have a "frequently asked questions" column. Comprehensive is not a big enough word.

These Doctor Who sites are a tremendous example of the dedication and creativity of fandom.

Neal Asher's website has changed host, and can now be found at <http://thespace.virgin.net/a.asher>. The site contains a number of unpublished stories by Neal, links, pictures and even some of his artwork.

The references to Gerry Anderson's TV series bring something to mind: if ever you pass through New Street Station in Birmingham, listen to the announcer, and imagine him saying the words: "Sighting confirmed. Yewto, bearing zero decimal eight, green. Speed, SOL." Or something like that...

The cover of issue 28 of the Hugo winning fanzine *Mimosa*.

The first Torcon (1948) was the first Worldcon held outside the United States. It took the city of Toronto 25 years to get around to holding Torcon 2 and now, 30 years on from that, Torcon 3 has just taken place. The 1948 event drew some 200 people – about par for the course at the time – but by 1973 the numbers had increased nearly fifteenfold to 2,900. The rate of increase slowed somewhat in the intervening years and Canada (and Toronto in particular) has had a run of bad luck in the past few months, which might have deterred potential attendees. Nevertheless, around 3,800 people were at the sixty-first Worldcon over the weekend of 28 August to 1 September.

A detailed critique appears in the latest issue of *Emerald City* (#97, see: www.emc2.com) and Cheryl Morgan identifies a fair number of organisational failures. But, as she notes, 'a good time was had by most people on site.' A number of factors conspired to reduce the pre-printed programme to the status of historical curiosity and attendees were forced to rely on daily sheets. This may have been annoying for programme participants, but it wasn't too much of a hardship and in a sense breaks down the vast sprawling mass of a Worldcon programme into chunks that are easier to assimilate.

Full results of the fifteenth Hugo presentation are doubtless available elsewhere within Matrix but I will note that the fan winners were Nicki and Richard Lynch's *Mimosa* (fanzine), Dave Langford (fan writer), and Sue Mason (fan artist).

Mimosa, which has just published its final issue, has been a regular fixture on Hugo shortlists for a number of years, winning on five previous occasions. It combines high production values with an impressive roster of contributions from writers and artists, usually with a focus on fan history. This isn't to everybody's taste; some people find *Mimosa* overly serious, dwelling on the trivial minutiae of the doings of fans gone by. Personally, I find it fascinating. The final issue was published just before the Worldcon, but much of the material that's appeared in *Mimosa* over the last 20 years is available on-line at <http://poppon.org/mimosa/>.

Dave Langford's dominance of the fan writer category covers almost the entire life-span of *Mimosa*: after wins in 1985 and 1987, he's won every fan writer Hugo since 1989, although this year was the first time he was able to collect the Award in person at a North American Worldcon. Dave's fanzine *Anisile* is a pretty much essential source of fanish news. It is available on the web (www.anisile.co.uk), by email or (in return for SAs) from Dave at 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5AU. The web site has other examples of his fanish writings.

Without wishing to diminish this latest win, it isn't hardly a surprise; Dave was easily the best

writer on the ballot. Sue Mason seemed entirely unprepared for her win in the fan artist category, and, according to reports, didn't realise she'd won as she was under the impression that the results were to be announced on Sunday rather than Saturday. Sue, the first British winner since the category was introduced at NyCon III in 1967, has been the house artist of the fanzine *Plokie* – short-listed in the fanzine category (www.plokie.com/plokie/) – and her work has appeared in many other fan publications. She is one of the guests at next year's Easterncon, Concourse, in Blackpool (<http://homepage.nflworld.com/concourse2004/eastercon/index.htm>).

Elsewhere at Torcon, the Business Meeting passed a significant change to the constitution governing Worldcons. Since the 1980s, Worldcons have been chosen

on a three year lead time; this the members of this year's Worldcon selected the venue for the 2006 event with Anaheim in California beating Kansas City. A resolution was passed at Torcon to reduce this to two years. If it's ratified at next year's Worldcon in Boston there will be no site selection at Interaction in 2005 and LA con IV in 2006 will select the venue for 2008. This may seem a peculiar decision, the assumption has always been that the three year lead time was required to secure facilities and make arrangements, but the experts say that this isn't the case any more and the first of the three years is effectively lost as it's too early to do much and may even be counter-productive. On the face of it, it makes little difference to the regular attendee except that the organisational benefits should actually make for a better convention.

Closer to home, by the time this see print Novacon 33 (www.novacon.org.uk) – currently a month or so in the future – will have been and gone. Setting aside one-day events and those devoted primarily to film or TV shows, it is only the second UK of convention in 2003. A few British fans have remarked that this year they've attended more conventions in North America than in the UK and while that's perhaps an extreme position there do seem to have been increasing numbers of people going to conventions in Ireland (Poon and the bizarrely-named They Came And Shaved Us) and the European mainland as well as America.

In some respects this is healthy – there have always been more foreign fans travelling to British conventions such as the Easterncon than vice versa – but British cons haven't been this thin on the ground since the mid-1970s. Are this year's events (or lack thereof) indicative of a trend? If so, does it indicate that conventions are no longer delivering what fans want – presumably not, as they're clearly willing to travel further afield – or that there's a shortage of people willing to run the things? A cue for yet more discussion on the greying of fandom...

The eligibi

Claire Brialey with a further update on

Thanks very much for all the nominations you've been sending – and particular thanks to those who responded to my prompting to nominate all the good short fiction you've been reading. Keep 'em coming: that deadline of 31 January's getting closer...

In my first column as the BSFA's awards administrator, I asked for any opinions you had about the various categories in which we make awards, about the eligibility for each one, and about what the BSFA awards should really be celebrating. Opinions are still welcome, but in the meantime there may be a few points of clarification that might make you think about the questions I asked and help you to work out what you can nominate.

- The **Best Novel** award is open to any novel-length work of science fiction or fantasy first published in the UK in 2003. (Serialized novels are eligible provided that the publication date of the concluding part is in 2003.) If a novel has been previously published elsewhere, but it hasn't been published in the UK until 2003, it will be eligible.

- The **Best Short Fiction** award is open to any shorter work of science fiction or fantasy, up to and including novellas, first published in 2003 (in a magazine, book, or online). This includes books and magazines published outside the UK.

- The **Best Artwork** award is open to any single image of science fiction or fantasy artwork that first appeared in 2003. Whether or not an image is science fictional or fantastic is perhaps the most subjective judgement call within these awards (but the more information you can give me about it, the better). Again, provided the artwork hasn't been published before 2003 it doesn't matter where it appears.

- The **Best Non-fiction** award is open to any single piece of critical writing about science fiction or fantasy that was first published in 2003. This would include a review or an article in a magazine or journal, on paper or online, an essay included in an anthology or collection, or a book-length work – but not a whole collection.

And it's the non-fiction where I really want to know what you're all reading and what you think is good. For instance, look at the list of magazines from which people have nominated short stories or artwork. Do you read the non-fiction pieces too? Do you think they're good? What about the other magazines and fanzines and web sites that have been featured in *Matrix*, like *Back Brain Recluse*, *Emerald City*, *Quantum Muse* and all the other sources they refer to? Articles or reviews from those, and those now collected in book form (from Becon Publications, The SF Foundation and Wildside Press, among others), could be eligible too, so long as the relevant pieces were first published this year. What do you like in non-fiction? What sort of pieces should be recognised by this award? Get reading. Get thinking. Get nominating.

Those of you who haven't sent in all (or any of) your nominations yet should remember that the inclusion of something in the listing here is no guarantee that it will make the shortlist. So if you agree with a nomination, send me yours too. And if something you think is really good doesn't yet appear on the list, you know why and I hope by now you know what to do. You can nominate as many pieces as you like in any category (but only one nomination per BSFA member will be counted for any particular piece; if you're not sure whether you've already nominated something, get in touch to check).

If you're still confused about eligibility, let me know and I'll try to help. One final reminder: anything published by the BSFA (whether in book form or in one of the magazines) is not generally eligible for the awards. Works by members (including Council and committee members) of the BSFA are eligible provided they appeared elsewhere.

Best wishes for the forthcoming season of festivities and reading lots of eligible SF...

Orbit exhibition

the progress of this year's BSFA Awards.

Nominations so far for the 2003 BSFA Awards:

Novel:

- The Reliquary Ring – Cherith Baldry (Pan)
- Alva & Iva – Edward Carey (Picador)
- The Iron Chain – Steve Cockayne (Orbit)
- *The Portrait of Mrs Charbuque – Jeffrey Ford (Tor Books)
- Pattern Recognition – William Gibson (Viking)
- Singing the Dogstar Blues – Alison Goodman (Collins Voyager)
- Finding Helen – Colin Greenland (Black Swan)
- Felaheen – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight)
- *The Merlin Conspiracy – Diana Wynne Jones (Collins)
- Dark Heavens – Roger Levy (Gollancz)
- United Kingdom – James Lovegrove (Gollancz)
- The Light Ages – Ian R MacLeod (Earthlight)
- *Lancel – Garth Nix (Collins)
- *Predator's Gold – Philip Reeve (Scholastic)
- Natural History – Justina Robson (Macmillan)
- *Unto Leviathan – Richard Paul Russo (Orbit)
- *Maul – Tricia Sullivan (Orbit)
- Varjak Paw – S F Said (David Fickling Books)
- *Empire of Bones – Liz Williams (Tor Books)
- *The Poison Master – Liz Williams (Tor Books)

Short fiction:

- *Almost Home – Terry Bisson (F&SF, October/November)
- *Zoster Searches – Glen Dennis (ITA #35)
- *The Nature of Stone – Alexander Glass (ITA #35)
- *Breakfast at the Fir Tree Diner – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Interzone #188)
- *With Acknowledgements to Sun Tzu – Brian Hodge (ITA #33)
- *Coyote Goes Hollywood – Ernest Hogan (Winkpunk)
- *Reformation – Alex Irvine (Live Without a Net)
- *Bokus Ground – Fred Johnston (Albedo One #27)
- *Fights – Daniel Koyen (Interzone #188)
- *All Our Heroes are Bastards – Jay Lake (ITA #35)
- *Entangled Eyes are Smiling – John Meany (Interzone #190)
- *Swastika Bomb – John Meany (Live Without a Net)
- *The Chambered Fruit – M Rickett (F&SF, August)
- *Red Leather Tassels – Benjamin Rosenbaum (F&SF, August)
- *Birth Days – Geoff Ryman (Interzone #188)
- *Finistere – Patrick Samphire (ITA #34)
- *Love in the Age of Spyware – William Shunn (www.salon.com)
- *Nightfall – Charles Stross (Asimov's, April)
- *A Better World's in Birth – Howard Waldrop (Golden Gryphon Press)
- *The Butterflies of Memory – Ian Watson (ITA #35)

Artwork:

- *Cover of US edition of Pattern Recognition by William Gibson – Archie Ferguson
- *Cover of Predator's Gold by Philip Reeve – David Frankland
- *Cover of Maul by Tricia Sullivan – Lee Gibbons
- *Cover of Wonderland by Mark Chadbourn – Dominic Harman
- *Something to Believe In (cover of ITA #35) – David Ho
- *Cover of The Fix #7 – Joachim Luekte
- *Slipstream (cover of ITA #34) – Richard Marchard
- *Cover of Varjak Paw by S F Said – Dave McKean
- *Cover of Cities, edited by Peter Crowther – Edward Miller
- *Cover of The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod – Colin Odell (SF Foundation)
- *Cover of Astro City: Local Heroes #3 – Alex Ross
- *Cover of Polystorm by Adam Roberts – Sonar
- *Cover of Natural History by Justina Robson – Steve Stone
- *Cover of Felaheen by Jon Courtenay Grimwood – The Whole Hog
- *Cover of Orbit #171 (artist unknown)

Non-fiction:

- Review of Poets by Chris Wooding – Maureen Kilpatrick (Foundation #88)
- *Why Science Fiction Doesn't Get Any Respect? – Gary Westfahl (Interzone #190)

(Those new since the previous Matrix listing are marked with an asterisk.)



BSFA workshops for writers

What is an Orbit? Gillian Rooke tells us, and (most importantly) she tells us how to maintain one.

I am getting so many requests for information that I thought it might be a good idea to explain how Orbits work. Basically they are postal workshops, where your work is circulated and commented on by people in the same way that it would be in a weekly writer's class, except that the comments are written down, not spoken.

One Orbit gives less cover than a weekly class, but three good Orbits would involve more work and almost certainly higher, standards of criticism.

The 'parcel' is circulated around five members, this being the size that works best. Each member keeps it for two weeks during which time they read and criticise the others' work. Their own story or chapter should already have been written, ready to include in the parcel. Fifteen or sixteen pages (printed single spaced or double side or both) tends to be the length included, although if it is a complete story it could go a bit longer. The best way is to judge by the weight of the work the others include, and try not to exceed this. There is no lower limit. Just doing the crits for a round or two is perfectly acceptable.

Maintaining a happy, productive Orbit

Firstly, the postal service ain't what it used to be. It isn't their fault. The problems are down to the enormous quantities of junk mail. But what it means is that if there is anything wrong with the parcel, untidy, incorrectly addressed or underpaid, it will almost certainly be lost without trace. I don't know how many Orbits go recorded delivery... not many, but first class is safer than second, and it is of course the responsibility of each Orbiter to post a ship-shape parcel at their own expense.

But another and perhaps the most important factor is that when a parcel arrives at its destination it has then to be delivered. Most people are not in when the postman comes, and Orbiters must make provision for the delivery of an A4 or larger jiffy bag, either by enlarging their letter boxes or having the parcel sent to someone who has a giant-sized post box. Sometimes a pigeon hole at work is a good idea... if it is large enough. Failing all these you could ask the post office to hold the parcel for collection, but I think you may have to pay for this service, especially if you cannot guarantee to collect it within three (I think) days. After an alarmingly short time the post office dump any undelivered mail that is not collected.

Now is the end of the holiday season and I am keeping my fingers well crossed that all the Orbits are still up and running after this most dangerous time. Ken Orbiters try not to send the

parcel to someone who is about to go on holiday. In fact, I think there is a need for a new Orbit protocol: each Orbiter should be responsible for ensuring that the person they are sending the parcel on to knows it is coming. They should phone, or text or email, and make sure that they get a reply before they send.

Even a large postbox can get thoroughly clogged with junk mail in a fortnight or three weeks, and while important letters may be squeezed in, enormous jiffy bags can not. So it is essential for Orbiters, as soon as they know when they will be going away for more than a week to tell their coordinator and the person who sends the parcel on to them, so that schedules can be altered in time. Remember, it takes a lot of work and organisation to restart a parcel that has foundered, and the first round of a new parcel is a 'thin' one and of less interest to members.

If your lifestyle is such that you are away for much longer than a fortnight, two or three times a year, and you can't guarantee to let your coordinator know the dates well in advance, then this 'hard copy' Orbiting is not for you. Fortunately, we now have electronic Orbiting where you can go at a pace which suits you, and it doesn't affect the other members if you leave out a round. The danger here is of a different sort. No Orbiter would deliberately send a virus, but any email nowadays can contain one so make sure you have good protection.

Doing a crit

Having covered the logistics of Orbiting, now comes the interaction aspect. Write your piece before the parcel comes.

It takes eight or more hours in that fortnight to critically read, enjoy, and comment on the other stories. Do proof corrections (spelling and punctuation) on the text itself, but anything you consider an error that needs an explanation, put in your crit stating the page on which you found it.

A crit should be a full workshop response to the piece sent. As well as syntax errors, it should cover the way they handled their subject, the characterization, the pace, and the subject matter itself. Continuity faults... x has yellow hair on one page and blue on the next, or was standing on one page and sitting on the next for instance, are very useful to point out, and you will get many thanks for this. Also, for instance, glaring data faults, or inappropriate terms for instance. Many Orbiters have a good science background, and those that don't can receive a lot of useful help.

But the most valuable part of a crit is saying what you liked most, what you want to see more of.

Here today, con tomorrow

Geneva. Now *that* was a convention. They really knew how to treat their "guests". I was never so keen on Fairport, I always thought that convention was a bit fiddly. Here are some other conventions you'd probably rather go to.

14-16 Nov Alternate Universe

Thistle London Heathrow Hotel. Jr Bourne (SG-1), Peter Stebbings (Jeremiah), Andrea Thompson (Babylon 5) Sarah Douglas (SG-1, Superman). Brian Aldiss (running a writers workshop). £125 'VIP' class, £85 weekend, £40 Friday only. Contact Level 3 Conventions, 71 Virginia Way, Reading, Berks, RG30 3QR. 0118 967 5739. Email: info@l3conventions.co.uk Website: www.l3conventions.co.uk

21-23 November 2003 Fantasycon 2003

The British Fantasy Society presents FANTASYCON 2003 at the Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford (www.tillingtonhall.co.uk) Registration: £45 for BFS members and students, or £50 for non-members to 31st August 2003, £55 for BFS members and students, or £60 for non-members thereafter. Cheques to be made payable to Fantasycon. Guests of Honour Christopher Fowler and Catherine Fisher (more to be announced). Further details and booking forms can be obtained by sending an SAE to Fantasycon 2003, Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire CW9 8PQ or email fcon@britishfantasyociety.org.uk

6 December 03 Dreddcon 4

The Oxford Union Society, St Michael's Street, Oxford from 10am until 5:30pm, entrance fee £2.50 per person. Panels featuring 2000AD editors and creators, signing and sketching sessions, dealer room, official merchandising stand, artists sketching and selling original artwork. Plus for aspiring writers and artist the con runs Tharg's Pitchfest and portfolio sessions. Videos and music after the main event in the Union Bar (open until 11pm and serving food all day, selected drinks £1 per pint!) For further information, please call Mark Chapman on 01865 200 606 or 07931 371 299, email markc@rebellion.co.uk, or visit www.2000ADonline.com.

9-12 Apr 04 Concourse (Eastercon 2004)

Winter Gardens, Blackpool. £45 adult, £25 children and unwaged. Contact: Concourse, 63 Providence Way, Waterbeach, Cambridge, CB5 9QH. Guests of Honour include Philip Pullman and Christopher Priest. Email: concourse@eastercon.com Website: www.eastercon.com/concourse



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: matrixmag@ntlworld.com

5-8 Aug 04 EUROCON 04

Plovdiv, Bulgaria. No further information as we go to press. Website: www.bgcon.org

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.

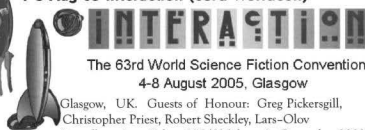
16-17 Oct 04 Octocon 2004

Irish national convention, Chief O'Neill's Hotel, Smithfield Village, Dublin 7. Guests TBA. €20/€15 reg until 1 November; €10/€7 supp to 'freeze' total price at €25/€20. Contact Basement Flat, 26 Longford Terrace, Monkstown, Co. Dublin, Ireland.

13-14 Nov 04 P-CON 2

Ashling Hotel, Parkgate St, Dublin. Rates TBA. Contact: Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland. www.slovobooks.com/phoenix/p2.html

4-8 Aug 05 Interaction (63rd Worldcon)



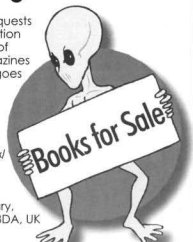
The 63rd World Science Fiction Convention
4-8 August 2005, Glasgow

Glasgow, UK. Guests of Honour: Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Sheekley, Lars-Olov Strandberg, Jane Yolen. £85 (£95 from 1st December 2003) attending, £30 supporting, children £32. Contact Interaction, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S2 5HQ, UK. Email: info@interaction.worldcon.org.uk Web: www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk

Books and magazines for sale

Recent donations and bequests mean that the Science Fiction Foundation has hundreds of sf/fantasybooks and magazines for sale. Income from this goes to support the work of the Foundation, including its sf library at Liverpool.

For further details look at the website at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/sale.html> or contact Andy Sawyer, Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA, UK (email asawyer@liv.ac.uk).



Reading SF Group: After Worldcon

"As close as I'll get." Pete Young with Sue Mason's Best Artist Hugo.



On Monday 15 September, I went to the weekly Reading SF Group, knowing part of the evening's conversation would be a post-mortem on Torcon 3, as a couple of us had been in Toronto. What I wasn't expecting was to find Paul Oldroyd there. Paul had come from Swindon to discuss the plans for the 2004 UK Worldcon with Reading local Andrew Adams.

General opinion on the Canadian Worldcon among those who went seemed to be that it was enjoyable despite various organisational problems, of which the programme was the most egregious. Future Worldcons take note.

Andrew kindly brought Sue Mason's Best Artist Hugo back from Toronto, and handed it over to her fellow *Plotka* cabal members Steve Davies and Giulia de Cesare. Fan editor and artist Pete Young cradled the award, saying that it was the closest he was likely to get to a Best Artist Hugo.

Doug Spencer also joined us from Basingstoke, and to use a favourite phrase of his, much "old toot" was talked, which is another way of saying we had a good night of drink and conversation.

I'm still looking for stories for this page. If you have meeting reports, anecdotes, upcoming special events, or photos, I want to hear about it.

Del Cotter, matrix@bronto.demon.co.uk



Eddie Cochrane and Mark Young: "Old tooting."

Basingstoke

Genesis SF Club
Meets every four weeks on Thursday, starts 7:30pm.
The Hop Leaf, Church Street, Basingstoke RG21 7QQ
Contact: Mark Sinclair
genesis@rovanion.demon.co.uk
Web: www.genesis-sf.org.uk

Belfast

Belfast Science Fiction Group
Meets alternate Thursdays, starting at 8:00pm.
The Monaco Bar, Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB
Contact: Eugene Doherty finman@technologist.com
Web: members.fortunacy.co.uk/finman/monica.htm

Birmingham

Birmingham Science Fiction Group
Meets 2nd Friday, starting at 7:45pm. 2nd Floor,
Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham
Contact: Vernon Brown
Web: http://bdsf.freeusers.com

Birmingham

The Black Lodge
Meets 2nd Tuesday, 8:30pm. The Hugshead, Newhall
Street, Birmingham B3 3PU
Contact: Steve Green ghostwards@yahoo.co.uk

Bridge

Cambridge SF Group
Meets 2nd Monday, starting at 7:00pm. The
Cambridge Blue, Gwydder Street, Cambridge CB1 2LG
Contact: Austin Benson austin@cam.org

Colchester

Colchester SF/F/Horror Group
Meets 3rd Saturday, starting at 12:30pm. The
Playhouse pub, St. John's Street, Colchester CO2 7AA
Contact: Des Lewis 01255 812119

Croydon

Croydon SF Group
Meets 2nd Tuesday, at 8:00pm.
The Dog and Bull, Surrey Street, Croydon CR0 1RG
Contact: Robert Newman 020 8686 6800

Didcot

Meets 2nd Wednesday, starting at 7:30pm.
The Lashgrove, Cow Lane, Didcot OX11 7SZ
Contact: Nigel and Sabine Furlong furlong2@aol.com

Dublin

Dublin Sci-Fi Club
Meets 1st Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm.
Upstairs bar in Bower Pub, Fleet Street, Dublin 2
Contact: Frank Darcy ddub@lastarpark.com
Web: www.lastarpark.com/fdub/

Edinburgh

Funk
Meets every Tuesday, at 9:00pm.
The Doric Tavern, Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DE
Contact: Jim Darroch jd_dar@btinternet.net

Edinburgh

Meeting in K Jackson's
Meets every Thursday, starting at 8:30pm. K Jackson's
pub, Lady Lawson Street, Edinburgh EH3 9DW
Contact: Charlie Strass charlie@antipope.org

Hull

Hull SF Group
Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 8:00pm.
The New Clarence, Charles Street, Hull HU1 8DE
Contact: Mike Cross mike@mjcksh.demon.co.uk
Web: www.mjcksh.demon.co.uk/hull.htm

Leicester

The Outlanders: The Leicester Science Fiction, Fantasy and
Horror Group
Meets 1st Friday, starting at 8:00pm.
The Globe, Silver Street, Leicester LE1 5EU
Contact: Mark E. Cottrell
thefans@outlanders@hotmail.com
Web: www.outlanders.fsnet.co.uk

London

229 Floral 2 Alpha - the Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the
Galaxy Appreciation Society
Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:00pm.
Penderel's Oak, High Holborn, London WC1V 7HP
Contact: Robert Newman meetings@zsf.org
Web: www.zsf.org

London

London BSFA meeting
Meets 4th Wednesday, starting at 7:00pm. The Rising
Sun, Cloth Fair, Smithfield, City of London EC1A 9EJ
Contact: Paul Hood elaine-hood@nirworld.com
Web: www.bsfa.co.uk

London

East London fans
Meets Tuesday after the first Thursday, starting at
7:00pm. The Walnut Tree, Leytonstone High Road,
Leytonstone, London E11 1HH
Contact: Alex McLintock
elene@yaho.com

London

The City Illuminati
Meets every Friday, starting at 6:30pm.
The Red Lion, King's Street, off Regent Street,
Westminster W1B 5PR

London

The Ten
Meets 1st Thursday, starts at 7:00pm.
The Barley Mow, Long Lane, Smithfield, City of
London EC1A 9EJ
Contact: Ian Brown red4uk@yahoo.co.uk

Manchester

FONT
Meets 2nd and 4th Thursday from 8:30pm.
The Crown and Anchor, Hilton Street, Manchester
M1 2EE. When there are five Thursdays in the month,
also meets 5th Thursday, starting at 8:30pm Fab Cafe,
Portland Street, Manchester M1 4RJ
Contact: Arthur Chappell
arthurchappell@clara.net
Web: www.arthurchappell.clara.net/font.html
www.gammon.demon.co.uk/font/font.html

Norwich

Norwich Science Fiction Group
Meets every fortnight on Wednesday, starts 8:00pm.
(The web site says 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, this is
apparently wrong.) The Cellar Bar, Ribs of Beef, Fye
Bridge, Norwich NR3 1HY
Contact: NSFG@com.net
Web: www.nsfsg.org.uk

Norfolk

Oxford
Meets 1st Thursday of the month, starting at 7:00pm.
The Plough, Wolvercot, Oxford OX2 8BD
Contact: Steve Jeffery jpeverell@aol.com

Peterborough

Peterborough Science Fiction Club
Meets 1st Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm.
The Blue Bell Inn, St. Paul's Road, Dogsthorpe,
Peterborough PE1 3RZ
Meets 3rd Wednesday, starting at 8:00pm.
Goodmans Yard, St. John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD
Contact: Pete d'secretary@btinternet.net
Web: www.psdubli.btiternet.co.uk/pst.htm

Portsmouth

South Hants Science Fiction Group
Meets first Tuesday, starting at 8:00pm.
The Maggie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth PO1 5BX
Contact: Mike Cheater mike.cheater@nirworld.com
Web: www.pompey.demon.co.uk/hsfsg.htm

Preston

Preston SF Group
Meets every Tuesday, starting at 8:30pm.
The Grey Friar, Friargate, Preston PR1 2EE
Contact: David Young psdg@hairy1.demon.co.uk
Web: www.hairy1.demon.co.uk/psdg/

Reading

Reading SF Group
Meets 3rd Monday, starting at 7:30pm.
The Corn Stores, Forbury Road, Reading RG1 1AX
Contact: Mark Young enquiry@rsfg.org.uk
Web: www.rsfg.org.uk

Sheffield

Meets Every Wednesday, starting at 9:00pm.
The Red Lion, Charles Street, Sheffield S1 2ND
Contact: Frank Dowd frank@dowd.demon.co.uk

St. Albans

Polaris: The St. Albans SF Group
Meets 1st Tuesday, 8:00pm. The Plough, Tyttenhanger
Green, St. Albans AL4 0RW
Contact: Martin Stewart polaris@pobox.com
Web: www.polaris.org

Classic Who

Win three great Doctor Who stories

This issue we're offering you the chance to win three classic Doctor Who stories. We start at the very beginning with the video of the story that started it all, "An Unearthly Child" then, on DVD, we also have "The Talons of Weng-Chiang" – a story Mark Greener described as "about as close to perfection as you can get." Also on DVD, made to celebrate the Doctor's twentieth anniversary, we have "The Five Doctors," bringing together all of the Doctor's early incarnations.

Complete the crossword, write down the phrase (a lost Doctor Who story) in the shaded squares and send it to with your name and address to Martin McGrath at: matrix.competition@ntlworld.com by noon on 27 November 2003. First name selected by the random number generator, wins.

Across

1. Monsters in "Spearhead from Space" (6)
- 5 Creator of the Daleks (6)
- 10, 19 and 26 TARDIS (4,3,8,9,2,5)
- 11 Planet in "The Android Invasion" (5)
- 13 Immature insect (5)
- 14 Blot out, surpass (7)
- 16 Star Trek Commander (4)
- 18 ____ Kournikova, "tennis star" (4)
- 19 see 10 across
- 21 Alien blood, it burns (4)
- 23 Promote, sell tickets (4)
- 26 see 10 across
- 28 Reach maturity (5)
- 29 Put off (5)
- 32 The original (7,8)
- 33 Atlantean Chronovore from "The Time Monster" (6)
- 34 "The bath's overflowing" or something like that, in Greek (6)

Down

- 2 Accidental (7)
- 3 Villain in "Underworld", Greek soothsayer (6)
- 4 Dark or light, for example (4)
- 5 Spielberg film (4)
- 6 Sustainable (7)
- 7 15th letter of Greek alphabet (7)
- 8 How 22 down might be finished off (7)
- 9 Villain in "Marco Polo" (7)
- 12 Abducts (7)
- 15 Yoghurt brand goes downhill! (3)
- 17 A lot of this about not much (3)
- 18 Them's big insect (3)
- 20 They were in black (3)
- 21 Missiles of outrageous fortune (6)
- 22 Vlad's nickname (7)
- 24 Not the busiest time (3,4)
- 25 Excitement (6)
- 26 Sioux, for example (6)
- 27 My decision is final (6)
- 30 Cheeky little devils
- 31 Sheep (4)

Crossword 163 Solution

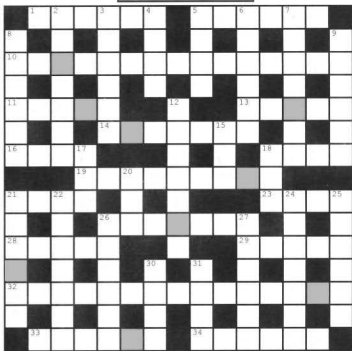
Congratulations to the winner of last issue's crossword competition, Abizer Nasir from London. A copy of the HG Wells based films, *First Men in the Moon*, *The Time Machine*, and *War of the Worlds* are on the way to him. The answers we were looking for were: *Fantastic Voyage* and *The Twilight Zone*



Dark Dreamers

Facing the Masters of Fear

Dark Dreamers, by Beth Gwinn & Stanley Wiater, is a unique collection of exclusive photographs and commentary, showcasing the very best talents in the field of horror, suspense, and dark fantasy. The collection covers not only celebrated authors, but artists, actors, producers, special effects makeup men, and film directors. *Dark Dreamers* is published by Cemetery Dance Publications, 132-B Industry Lane, Unit 7, Forest Hill, Maryland, USA. priced \$40



Timewasters

Competition 164

I have a paperback copy of Algis Budrys' novel *Who?*, where I know from the text that Martina has a false left arm, but the cover shows the right arm as artificial. In the 1992 hardback edited edition of the collection *A Work of Art* by James Blish, the editor Francis Lyall's name is spelt Frances in two places on the jacket, though correctly in the book. Any further cock-ups 'twixt text and cover will be gratefully received, with a £10 book token to the winner.

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

Competition 162 Result

The answer, as everybody knew, was Saruman, and first out of the hat is **Rosie Oliver**.

Contributors

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News: Mark Greener and Martin McGrath.

Flicker, Goggle Boxes, and Crossword: Martin McGrath

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Picture of Hadrian's Wall (p12) courtesy of Chris Coombe (http://chris.croomie.net/photos/2002/North_Pennines_June/Walk_along_Hadrians_Wall/38_Hadrians_Wall.jpg)