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MATRIX

ILLUSTRATED

Inside:
Harry Harrison
Stephen Baxter
Martin Sketchley
Aliens in the
Science Museum
News, reviews & more

Short Fiction Special

Andy Sawyer rides
With the Night Mail

Roderick Gladwish's
short goodbye

Kari Maund:
"Saltus Lunae" original fiction

Nova Scotia:
The flower of Scotland

Farthing reviewed

matrix

DEADLINES

If you wish to contribute to future issues of Matrix, the deadlines are:
matrix 178 (Mar/Apr 2006) copy deadline: 6 February 2006
matrix 179 (May/Jun 2006) copy deadline: 3 April 2006

The news magazine of the British Science Fiction Association

Contents

Guest Editorial	3
Harry Harrison on toilets and early British conventions.	
News	4
Sci-Fiction to close, MIT studies fail hats and more...	
Fashion victims	7
Claire Weaver has some shocking news about the future of clothing.	
Resonances: Making an impact	8
Stephen Baxter on things that go crunch in the night.	
Pulpitations: Short Goodbye	10
Roderick Gladwin looks back at three years of magazine reviews.	
Original fiction: <i>Saltus Lunae</i> by Kari Maund	12
Winner of the NewCon3 short story competition.	
Foundation Favourites: <i>With the Night Mail</i>	14
Andy Sawyer on Roddy Doyle's classic speculative short story.	
New Blood: Neil Williamson & Andrew J Wilson	15
The editors of the acclaimed <i>New Science</i> collection talk to Tom Hunter.	
Martin Sketchley: Switching	16
Moving from PC to Mac has opened Martin Sketchley's eyes.	
Checkpoint: After Worldcon	18
Mark Plummer considers the longer term impact of the Glasgow Worldcon	
Reviews	19
Previews, news and reviews. Including <i>King Kong</i> , <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i> , <i>Harry Potter IV</i> and <i>Zathura</i> . Plus lots more...	
BSFA Awards	30
Claire Bristley on the progress of this year's nomination process.	
Subscriptions	31
Don't miss out on future issues, renew your BSFA subs now!	
Rage against: The Dark Side of SF	32
Andrew OD Booth calls for more funny sf.	

Words of wisdom

I love those ancient myths and I want to lovingly restore them, translate them in my own way for a new audience, to point back to those works of absolute fucking genius and say, look, they're still fucking relevant, they're still fucking true. To be honest, I'm not really sure where the obsession comes from; I just think these old stories have a lot of life left in them, but that the versions we tend to see them in often have that life sucked out. These aren't just nice wee adventure stories waiting to be made into a Hollywood schlockbuster with glossy gosh-wow special effects, or to be compiled in some dry academic tome, and discussed in dry academic tones. Those two approaches are cool, they're great, because on the one hand they keep the basic story alive as this exciting, sensual thing, and on the other they expand our critical understanding of it; but both of these approaches tend to render the story safe.

Hal Duncan

(From an extended version of his interview in *Matrix* 176. Now online at www.matrix-magazine.co.uk)

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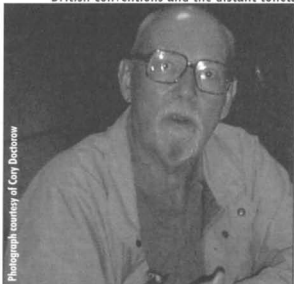
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Journeys down the hall

Harry Harrison on the early days of fandom, British conventions and the distant toilets



Photograph courtesy of Cory Doctorow



I was there when the world was young, very young.

I moved to Denmark in 1959 and lived there for seven years. Then, in the early Sixties I started to attend the British Eastercons every year. I used to stay with Brain Aldiss and we would attend the cons together. No one drove in those days – we couldn't afford to drive – so we'd take the train down to the Cons. Somewhere along the line I joined the BSFA as member number one five zero.

I think they lied. There couldn't have been that many members. They didn't have a hundred and fifty members, more like fifty. Or maybe they lied about that too, and I was member number five. Anyway there I was, living in Denmark coming over to England at Easter and at one convention, somewhere, I met a fan called Rog Peyton.

Some of you may know Rog, but you didn't know Rog then (thin, lean, handsome. A

head of red hair – not the Rog we know and love today). He was editor of *Vector*, the BSFA journal, then and I wrote book reviews for him.

I've been attending conventions for a very long time. I was at the first convention ever in 1938 in New York: The first ever "World Convention".

There were twenty-five people attending: The World was smaller in those days, I think. I came over to England in fifty-seven for the Worldcon, well you can call it the Worldcon. It really was the first 'almost' Worldcon because before that the Worldcons were all in the United States or Canada – which is a very small world.

So there I am living in Denmark and I get a letter from Rog Peyton, editor of *Vector*, which invites me to be Guest of Honour at a BrumCon. I remember thinking that this was the height of success: To

be a Guest of Honour at a Convention in England.

You won't remember the hotels then, so let me tell you something about English hotels. First off, all the rooms were about three feet by two feet, and these were old buildings. You'd go downstairs and there'd be open doors and of course there was no central heating. They had a heater for hot water and a gas fire where you'd put in a shilling or a sixpence and turn it on and, pop, it would go out, very fast.

Also, the bog was down the hall. Every room at every hotel I'd ever been in, in England, in those days, had little bedrooms with a sink in, which (and pardon me for being vulgar) is okay for chaps at three in the morning...

We drove from Denmark in a little Volkswagen bus, and in those days the speed limit – no forget 'limit', the maximum speed in Britain – was thirty-five miles an hour. That was

it. There was no direct road from Harwich to Birmingham where the ferry made port, and certainly no motorways anywhere in the country. (In fifty-seven they built the M1, the first motorway, and all the cars were blowing their engines when they went over thirty-eight miles an hour.

So we drove to Birmingham—No Bullring then: the view all chimney pots, smoke drifting up, a tiny little British hotel. I'm there with my wife, Joan, and two kids, and they show us to our room, open the door and there it was.

A bath. A room with a bath which I, as GoH, felt I deserved.

A tiny square bath fit for a midget.

But no toilet...

God forbid. Down the hall again...

And that was my first introduction to British hospitality, and I've never looked back since.

MIT says paranoids should disembeanie



Foiled again
MIT tested three types of foil helmet, the traditional "beanie" (top), the popular "centurian" (middle) and the trendy "hiz" (bottom).

As conspiracy theorists, *X-Files* fans and any journalist looking for a cheap punchline at the expense of genre fandom knows, the humble tinfoil hat has long been the headwear of choice for evading secret transmissions from origins unknown.

Now however the scientists are getting in on the act too, and a new piece of research entitled *On The Effectiveness of Aluminium Foil Helmets: An Empirical Study* has renewed interest in the paranoid's headwear of choice. This study, conducted by MIT, can be found at <http://people.csail.mit.edu/rahimi/helmet/>.

Setting out to debunk the theory the experimenters placed antennae on the heads of various volunteers and directed different frequencies of radio signal at them – with some benefiting from tinfoil protection while others went without.

The report did indeed discover that most frequencies were reduced by the addition of a foil helmet, but they also found that certain frequencies were unaffected or even amplified by the metal. And which frequencies were these? Well oddly enough they coincided with a number of

radio bands reserved for the use of the US government.

However, supporters of the tinfoil helmet have been quick to hit back. Lyle Zapato, promoter of the Aluminium (sic. he's American) Foil Deflector Beanie campaign (<http://zapatopi.net/afdb/>) says the MIT report has a number of serious flaws, "not the least of which is a complete mischaracterization of the process of psychotronic mind control. I theorize that the study is, in fact, NWO propaganda designed to spread FUD against deflector beanie technology, and aluminum shielding in general, in order to disembeanie paranoids, leaving them open to mind control." He also expresses concern that MIT Media Lab is funded by DARPA, the US military agency often linked to mind control research.

So is tinfoil even more out of fashion now? We don't know. Neither do we know if there's any benefit to be gained from fashioning a helmet of your own from this copy of *Matrix* (once you've finished reading it of course) but if anyone questions your decision to try it, just tell them the voices made you do it and we guarantee they'll never mention it again.

NEWSBITS



SF authors Justina Robson and Adam Roberts will be tutoring the 2006

Science Fiction residential writers course at the Arvon Foundation's Lumb Bank writer's retreat in August this year.

The week-long course runs from 28 August to 2 September 2006, and will include group discussions and specific workshops concentrating on the key features of SF genre writing, as well as the opportunity to write in the peace and quite of an 18th century mill house set in 20 acres of pastureland – not an SF setting exactly, but an inspirational one for all that.

Matrix's own Martin McGrath attended the previous Arvon SF course in 2004 and described the experience as "intense but highly rewarding."

Details all this and all other Arvon writers courses can be found at www.arvonfoundation.org or write to The Arvon Foundation, 42a Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0RE for a course brochure.



Following a recent period of uncertainty the organisers of the Arthur C Clarke

Award have entered into a new relationship with the SciFi London film festival. The 2006 awards ceremony will now be held at the Apollo Cinema near London Piccadilly and will open this year's events at the Sci-Fi London festival.

The shortlist for the 2006 award will be announced on Saturday 28th January, 2006.

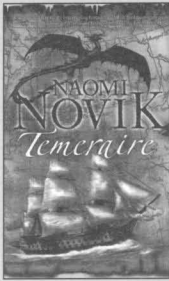


Sir Arthur C. Clarke has gained a new title from his adopted home. The title of Sri Lankabhimanya is the island of Sri Lanka's highest honour.



And Finally... Everyone at *Matrix* would like to say a big thank you to Roderick Gladwish, our regular fiction magazine reviewer, who is stepping down from the Pulpitations column after this issue. Roderick isn't leaving us entirely however, and he will remain as the writer for our regular World of Science news round-up.

Temeraire comes out fighting



Is *Temeraire* by Naomi Novik the biggest fantasy release of 2006? Publishers HarperCollins certainly think they've gotten hold of something special, and have been heavily promoting the book even before *Worldcon*, when they were giving away free samplers of the first chapter to anyone not quick enough to avoid being handed one.

Even if it's not the biggest Fantasy book of 2006 (in terms of genre impact rather than page count) it may well be the first, with a publishing date of January 3, 2006 the book will already be available by the time this issue of *Matrix* goes to print so readers can make up their own minds. At the time of writing however, all the advance

signs are there for this to be a hit of a similar level to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, with good word from such distinguished writers as Stephen King and Anne McCaffrey, and will hopefully enjoy some of the same crossover success.

Set during the Napoleonic wars the book features an air force of dragon riders alongside the more usual naval swashbuckling action and character drama.

Naturally the real news story here is that a dragon book has been published that may actually be worth reading, and given the high quality cover by BSFA award-winning artist Dominic Harman may even be something that can be read on the bus.

Fight for Sci-Fiction

In perhaps the saddest single piece of news in the issue, it was announced that *Sci-Fiction* would be shut down by its owners, the American Sci-Fi Channel at the end of 2005.

This follows after a fantastic year for the website and its editor Ellen Datlow, with multiple recognitions including a clutch of Hugo awards at the last Worldcon.

The Sci-Fi Channel posted a vague and disingenuous statement on the website announcing the closure while hinting at great new things to come and so presumably not realising that they had an amazing resource already available.

In an open statement posted on the site, Ellen Datlow said: 'Stories on *Sci-Fiction* have been nominated and won major genre awards: Linda Nagata's novella "Goddesses" won the first Nebula Award (given by the Science Fiction Writers of America) ever awarded for a piece of fiction originally published online. Lucius Shepard's novella "Over Yonder" won the first Theodore Sturgeon Award for short fiction ever won by a piece of fiction originally published online. *Sci-Fiction* itself won the Hugo Award in 2005 for Best Web site.



© Ellen Datlow



"I'd like to thank you all for reading the fiction and hope you'll continue to find it as long as it's archived on sci-fi.com."

Ellen Datlow's influence and positive effect on the SF world goes without saying, but we're going to say it anyway. We would also urge anyone who has enjoyed this site in the past to lend their voice in protest and send polite but

firm words to feedback@scifi.com (an email address that apparently is monitored) and register your protest. SF author Pat Cadigan, who is leading the charge, said: 'As I understand it, the SciFi people are downloading the messages, counting them, and reading them. So it can't hurt and it might help.'

Matix says: Well, it worked for *Firefly*, so definitely worth a shot.



Black Dust & Other Tales of Interrupted Childhood by Graham Joyce is the latest hot publication from Becon Publications and its guaranteed to be a fan pleaser, not least because the print run is strictly limited.

As well as three stories from Graham Joyce it also features interleaved contributions from Mark Chadbourn, Jeff VanderMeer and Jeffrey Ford, not to mention all the design work being done by Michael Marshall Smith, but that's not the reason you should head out and buy it.

The reason you should buy this book is because all the proceeds from sales are being directly donated towards establishing a bursary scheme for students at the Ngabakazulu school which is located near Durban, South Africa. You can buy the book in two formats, with the hardback being limited to 125 numbered copies, with each one signed by all the contributors. Meanwhile copies of the perfectbound softback edition have all been signed by the author, and there's 800 of those available, although who knows for how long.

Anyone wanting to own one of these handsome books right now should send money directly to Roger Robinson, Becon Publications, 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harlow Wood, Essex, RM3 0RG or email becon@dial.pipex.com.

Hardback editions cost £24.95 + £1.50 p&p while the perfectbound edition is available for £9.95 + £1.00 p&p.

Ryman wins with fresh Air



"A moving novel about change, tradition, information, power and transformation." Is how the 2005 Sunburst Award jury described Geoff Ryman's winning novel *Air*.

Set in a remote Asian village 'one heartbeat into the future' the novel follows Chung Mae, the village's only resident fashion expert, after her mind becomes meshed with that of a dying woman following the test of a new communications network that has superseded the internet. The novel combines the technological worldview of classic Cyberpunk with layers of mythological and historical richness reminiscent of Ryman's other more slipstreamish work into a work that is not only richly rewarding and highly literate, but also pleasingly optimistic.

As one review on Amazon said: The revolution won't be televised. But it will be Aired."

The 2005 shortlist also included books by Guy Gavriel Kay, Jeffrey Moore, Kenneth Oppel and Thomas Wharton.

Novel: Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (Bloomsbury)

Novella: Michael Shea, "The Growlumb" (*FS&SF*, 1/2004)

Short Fiction: Margo Lanagan, "Singing My Sister Down" (*Black Juice*, Allen & Unwin Australia)

Collection: Margo Lanagan, *Black*

Juice (Allen & Unwin Australia)

Anthology: *Acquainted With The Night* ed. Barbara & Christopher Roden (Ash Tree Press)

Special Award (Professional): S. T. Joshi (for scholarship)

Special Award (Non-professional): Robert Morgan (for Sarob Press)

Life Achievement: Tom Doherty and Carol Emshwiller

Artist: John Picacio

The judges were: Alis Rasmussen (Kate Elliot), Jeffrey Ford, Tim Lebbon, Patrick Nielsen Hayden and Jessica Amanda Salmonson.

2005 World Fantasy Awards

Make it zappy



Death rays have fascinated SF, the public and its military from the moment the name was invented. However, it is the less dramatic sounding 'Feeling so-uncomfortable-I-would-rather-not-fight-today Rays' that are likely to arrive on the battlefield first.

The US military have made public details of what they're calling the Personnel Halting and Stimulation Response, yes, PHASR. This is a rifle-sized low power laser capable of dazzling an enemy without blinding them.

Other directed-energy weapons are under

investigation for production within the decade. There is a microwave-energy blaster ('blaster' is their word not mine) that makes people feel as if their skin is on fire (think poodle plus microwave).

All these ideas are best summed up by George Gibbs, a systems engineer for the Marine Expeditionary Rifle Squad Programme, "What I'm looking for is a way to shoot everybody, and they're all OK." Apart from the trauma of temporary blindness and thinking their skin's on fire.

Sources: *New Scientist*, *Annanova.com*, *Associated Press*

See-through pottery

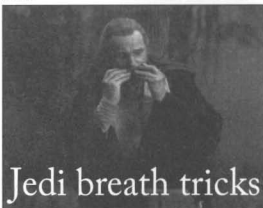


Transparent aluminium has not been invented, despite reports in several places of the arrival of the material "predicted" by *Star Trek*. What has been created is a new transparent ceramic armour that contains aluminium, just like bathroom and kitchen tiles do. Called ALON it is aluminium oxynitride and used in a laminate with glass and plastic it provides greater protection against small to medium calibre bullets.

Even an engineer like Scotty (actor James Doohan) would know the difference between a metal and a ceramic.

In another blow for Trekkies it has emerged that when Scotty's ashes do get to space (launch delayed at time of writing) they'll be coming back down again just like Gene Roddenberry's did because of the rules about littering space.

Source: *www.technovelgy.com*



Jedi breath tricks

An Israeli inventor, Alan Izhar-Bodner, has patented an underwater breathing system that extracts oxygen from the water itself and thus does away with bulky compressed air tanks. It uses a centrifuge to reduce the pressure of a volume of water taken into the device. When the pressure drops in a liquid the quantity of dissolved gas it is capable of holding is reduced hence air is released for the diver to breathe. Think of fizzy drink releasing gas when the lid is removed.

Currently the concept is in the prototype stage and fills a dining room table. It could take around two years for a viable test model to be produced. The prototype will be bulky, but of course there is no limitation on the diver's time under water.

Izhar-Bodner sees the final system being worn by the diver like a vest.

Apparently the idea came from Izhar-Bodner's seven-year old son after watching *Star Wars Episode One* - see, something good came out of that movie after all.

Source: *www.isracast.com*



atoms
Kim Stanley Robinson's latest novel, *Fifty Degrees Below*, features the dramatic

consequences of the shutting down of the North Atlantic currents due to the impact of global warming. So news that Southampton's National Oceanographic Centre has discovered that the ocean's circulatory system, which includes the essential Gulf Stream, is shifting 30% less water since 1992 is cause for some concern.

The last time this current system shut down was 12,000 years ago when European temperatures dropped between five and ten degrees centigrade. Some models predict that the system could fail again later this century.

Source: *New Scientist*

Fruit bats, which have previously been accused of harbouring the Marburg and SARS viruses, are now suspected of acting as the reservoir for the deadly Ebola virus.

Researchers in Gabon believe that they have found evidence of symptomless infection in specimens from three species captured during outbreaks between 2001 and 2003.

Ebola amongst humans was first recorded in 1976 but the disease has had a particularly devastating effect on great apes such as gorillas and chimpanzees.

Source: *Nature*

Findings from the Mars Express mission suggest that there may be reservoirs of ice kilometres below

the Martian surface. Two radar sweeps by the US/European mission have identified layered deposits near Mars's north pole. The Mars Express team say they believe the top deposit may be dominated by almost pure ice, with only 2% contamination by dust.

The Mars Advanced Radar for Subsurface and Ionosphere Sounding (Marsis) findings identified a circular structure 250km wide and around 2km deep which they believe is a buried impact crater on the Chryse Planitia - an area thought to have been shaped by massive outflows of flood water from the Martian northern highlands. It is thought that water trapped during flooding, frozen and buried could be preserved for billions of years.

Source: *Science*

Fashion victims

Claire Weaver, all dressed up, nowhere to go

What do you get when you cross fashion and violence? No, not another Naomi Campbell hissy-fit special, but the No-Contact Jacket.

According to the website (www.no-contact.com), "the No-Contact Jacket is a wearable defensive jacket created to aid women in their struggle for protection from violence. When activated by the wearer, 80,000 volts of low-amperage electric current pulses just below the surface shell of the jacket. If an assailant were to grab hold of the wearer, the high-voltage shock would interrupt the neurological impulses that control their voluntary muscle movement causing disorientation, loss of balance and, of course, pain. The pain experienced is non-lethal but is enough of a shock to effectively and immediately deter contact and provide a critical life-saving option for escape."

Impressive. And not only does it zap potential attackers, but when charged the jacket crackles loudly and electricity arcs in a slit in the outer lining – perfect for providing your own special effects to drunken impersonations of the Emperor in *Return of the Jedi*.

The No-Contact Jacket won Time Magazine's Coolest Invention Of The Year in 2003. It's stylish, cheap when you consider the £400 you'd otherwise have to fork out as protection money, and it runs off a single 9V alkaline battery.

But despite all this, the jacket is not readily available in A Shop Near You. So what's it missing?

I have a friend who's a total gadget boy – his pockets are awash with PDA's, mobile phones, iPods, and god knows what else. There are coats out there designed specifically for men like him – they have a multitude of pockets shaped to hold such gadgetry. But how about instead of just providing the pockets, they actually came with the tech? Imagine it – a mobile phone built into one cuff, MP3 player in the other. Dolby surround speakers in the collar. Wi-fi iBook in the left hand pocket so every time you walk into Starbucks your coat is already connected to the internet before you've even bought a coffee. The digital camera would be tucked away in the breast pocket, secure but quick to reach for those times when you simply *must* take a photo of your friend pulling a funny face and send it to everyone you know

or you might *die*. The PDA would connect to the GPS system sewn in the lining, so neither you nor your coat need ever be lost again. It could even charge the gadgets from solar panels on the back.

And it's not just coats. You could have a wallet that talks to the PDQ machines in shops via Bluetooth, so your credit card doesn't even need to see the light of day for you to quickly and conveniently rack up purchases all the way along Oxford Street. Your shoes could have built in weighing scales and give you advice on whether to have a slice of yummy chocolate cake or the gluten-free Atkins-approved low-salt low-calorie diet banana. Your scarf could house a QWERTY keyboard and your socks could exist in a VR world of their own.

Not only would you be a walking office, a bus-catching Data Assistant, but you'd be juiced up to the eyeballs with so much electricity no one would dare mug you for your gadgets. And just charge it up at a crowded gig to watch the crowd separate like the Red Sea, getting you all the way to the front without spilling your pint.

But what happens when the new models come out? You could be embarrassed about both your style and your tech at the same time, in ways you never even imagined: "Oh my god, is that *last winter's* coat? I hear it only has a 40GB MP3 player, how old school! And it's *blue*!"

Technology moves on so quickly you'd have to buy a new wardrobe every season, just to make sure you're compatible with the network. Of course, women are one step ahead of the game – we've been well practiced in that art for years.



Article inspired by *Fashioning The Future – Tomorrow's Wardrobe*, by Suzanne Lee. Published by Thames & Hudson.

Shocking coat (top)

The "No Contact" jacket, trendy but it packs a savage 80,000 volt zap.

Piping (middle)

Future clothing could have technology built in.

Techno-shirt (right)

MIT's prototype wearable technology test bed, MITril is already quite advanced.

Making an impact

Stephen Baxter on things that might go bump in the night



In an earlier column (*Matrix*, Sep-Oct 2005) I commented on the role of the sun in science fiction. The sun obviously dominates Earth and life upon it, and its misbehaviour is troubling.

But the sun isn't the only object in the sky. The astrologers would have us believe that the planets and stars have a profound influence on human affairs. Can such remote objects really shape our destinies – does the sky ever touch the Earth? This is so outside our common experience that it's hard to believe. HG Wells caught this feeling in his groundbreaking short story 'The Star' (1897). Few

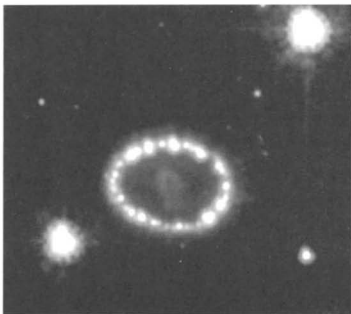
people take the approach of a blazing Neptune seriously, for stars and human affairs are in different categories of thought: 'Were it a star it could not possibly strike the Earth ... Common sense was sturdy everywhere.'

But it's well known that astronomical objects do come a-calling. There is a constant drizzle of debris from space, most of it burning up in the air – but not all. A multitude of books, including *Lucifer's Hammer* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (1977) and my own *Evolution* (2002), have lovingly described what happens when a comet or asteroid strikes

the Earth. There is what a computer programmer might call a domain error, a clash of orders of magnitudes, as astrophysical energies are unleashed on the fragile biosphere of Earth. Of course if you take a wider view such impacts can be creative rather than destructive. The vast mass extinction that followed the 'dinosaur-killer' impact 65 million years ago cleared the stage for the rise of the mammals, including us. Looking back further yet, it seems that our life-giving oceans were delivered to the Earth in frozen bundles by the comets.

But a clash with a comet is but a ghost of the mighty collisions of

the past. The young solar system was full of wandering protoplanets slamming into each other like dodgem cars. The relics of such tremendous blows as they landed on the face of the Moon are visible to the naked eye, from a quarter of a million miles away. Perhaps the most famous wandering-planet story in sf is *When Worlds Collide*, of which a fine movie was made in 1951 from the novel by Philip Wylie and Edwin Balmer (1933). In *Earthman Come Home* (1955), the keystone of James Blish's outrageously imaginative 'Cities in Flight' series, hero New York mayor John Amalfi purposefully flies a planet through



"Again, though you wouldn't want to live through a collision with a rogue world, such impacts have their creative sides."

In the stars (far left)

For centuries, astrologers have sought to persuade us that our lives are directed by the influence of distant objects.

Aftermath (above)

In *When Worlds Collide* a brush with a rogue planet drives mankind to seek a new home.

Touched by a star (left)

Remnants of supernova 1987a as seen by Hubble (P.Challis & R.Kirschner - Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics)

the solar system in order to take out an invading alien ship.

As is so often the case, HG Wells started it all, in that 1897 short story 'The Star'. A rogue world crosses the interstellar gulf, strikes Neptune and ignites it into a 'star', which plummets towards Earth, inflicting on us heat, floods, and immense tides. This brief story told in a cool journalistic style reads like a compressed, multiple-viewpoint disaster movie: what a pity Wells never developed the scenario.

Again, though you wouldn't want to live through a collision with a rogue world, such impacts have their creative sides. This was the way Earth was built, like a sculpture made by hurling lumps of mud at each other. The solar system is a museum of ancient violence, from tipped-over Uranus, to Mercury stripped of its mantle, to our Moon, split off from the young Earth.

These are all interferences from objects in (or at least passing through) the solar system, however. Can more remote objects interfere with life on Earth - can the distant stars touch us?

They certainly can if they explode. Olaf Stapledon's *Eighteenth Men* are troubled by the detonation of a nearby star, which causes instabilities in our own sun (*Last and First Men*, 1930).

And the dog star bites when Sirius explodes in *Supernova* by

Roger MacBride Allen and Eric Kotani (1991). The stellar eruption unleashes a pulse of gamma radiation at the Earth, knocking out high-tech equipment and pouring radiation and energy into the atmosphere. The technical detail is well worked out, as you'd expect; 'Eric Kotani' is a pseudonym of noted astrophysicist Yoichi Kondo. As Yoichi told me himself (in the course of kindly advising Sir Arthur C. Clarke and me on technical details of our novel *Sunstorm*), 'Sirius B is the nearest white dwarf, and I had to contrive a way to make it go (Type Ia) supernova ... The shock waves carrying the energetic particles from the supernova explosion would be travelling at some ten percent the speed of light. Although it might have been a logical thing to do, for various reasons I never wrote a sequel - to speculate what would happen in a century or so when those nasty high-energy particles hit Earth.'

This possibility was actually explored by the late lamented Charles Sheffield. In *Aftermath* (1998), it is Alpha Centauri that goes supernova - and apparently impossibly: it's not the right kind of star. In the sequel *Starfire* (2000), set some decades later, Yoichi's storm of slower-than-light heavy particles hits - but a massive global effort has resulted in the erection of a space shield to save Earth. In the end it

is revealed that the astrophysical anomaly of a well-behaved star going supernova is not the result of alien malevolence, as we had suspected, but a manifestation of a new order of life altogether, as one living star reaches out to another.

Again even supernovas have their constructive sides. It was a nearby supernova that collapsed the primordial cloud that eventually spawned our sun and its solar system. What is a disaster for one generation is an opportunity for the next, as I explored in my story 'Traces' (in the collection of the same name, 1998), in which relics of what was lost in that primordial explosion are discovered.

The cosmic intervention of *The Inferno* by Fred Hoyle and Geoffrey Hoyle (1973) is more spectacular yet. This time the centre of our Galaxy explodes, to become a quasar. The rather cramped story is told from the viewpoint of 'Cameron', a smartass Highlander particle physicist who has a chip on his shoulder about the English big enough to shield the Earth. Again the technical detail is well worked out, as you'd expect from a novel by one of Britain's greatest astrophysicists (complete with equations). After Earth is torched by the radiation from the Galaxy's core, Cameron retreats to the Highlands to become the 'Cameron', and the book closes as a kind of Scottish

survivalist novel, with the Cameron happily hanging sheep-stealers. The explosion *should* have destroyed 'all life on Earth, though; in a surprisingly moving revelation, it emerges that godlike aliens saved the Earth: 'It was as if a man should hold up a hand to shield a moth as it flew near a candle' (Chapter 12).

A Galaxy core explosion is of course a key inciting event in Larry Niven's 'Known Space' sequence, impelling the cautious Puppeteers to flee in a nest of worlds. In my own *Space* (2000) Reid Malenfant has to deal with a Galaxy-centre explosion caused by a collision of neutron stars. Earth is a mote adrift on a black ocean, and we are not immune from catastrophes occurring even a hundred thousand light years away.

Why are astrophysicists like Hoyle and Yoichi Kondo drawn to speculate on such interstellar destruction? Perhaps they share an underlying desire to make the heavens come alive in the imagination: after all, a supernova is a tremendous reality, more than their mathematical models. There must be an impulse to show an ignorant and uncaring world how their equations predict the real events of the heavens. Or perhaps by understanding we feel we gain some control. Wells (in 'The Star') has a 'master mathematician' looking at the infalling star 'as one might look into the eyes of a brave enemy. 'You might kill me ... But I can hold you ... in the grip of this little brain.'"

Perhaps the stars' most poignant intervention in human affairs comes in Clarke's Hugo-winning story 'The Star' (1955). In the Roman age a remote supernova lights the sky, and fills human minds with wonder. But the supernova once had worlds of its own, as a Jesuit astronaut-scientist discovers to his horror: 'What was the need to give these people to the fire, that the symbol of their passing might shine above Bethlehem?'

A short goodbye



Never volunteer is advice I have failed to live by. It is why I've been doing 'Pulpitations' for three years and also why this will be my last one. Someone else asked for help and off I go.

So I'm taking this chance to review the last three years of reviews. Fortunately this period has been blessed with new magazines, changes of ownership, electronic publications and startling news.

Intending to be a reviewer rather than a critic, I hoped to point the way, not tell you what is good and bad. To demonstrate why, my first review (*Matrix* 159) covered *Analog*. I described the weakness of a story which didn't get to the point in a timely fashion. 'Slow Life' by Michael Swanwick won that year's Hugo for best novelette. (Judge for yourself at www.analogsf.com/Hugos.slowlife.shtml.) *Gobshite* Quarterly lacked structure and focus. It still stands at the very fringes of SF three years on when yours truly thought it wouldn't last. *3SF* which had all the elements of a solid UK SF magazine folded with its publisher Big Engine while the positive review was half-written.

SF magazines concentrate ideas into bullets fired straight into the

brain. The best and worst make the reader pause to consider the world. It's why all SF fans should seek them out. Sadly, after spending so long reading so many I started to blank when reading the fiction, another reason to go. And another reason to be impressed with editors too, most of them doing it for love, facing the task of separating the wheat from the chaff.

Although some ideas are new, common themes keep cycling. The destruction of the world for one. If ever SF could have a story to claim its own it has to be the end of the world. Stephen Baxter alluded to it in *Matrix* 176. Poor old Earth takes a battering, though sometimes it's only humanity that buys the farm which isn't too bad. Then there's accidents. Accidents abound in SF; starships go off course, drive units do weird things, viruses are let out, genetic manipulation goes wrong or a pint gets spilt. Then there is

the three time loser, a favourite in many genres. Grotty bed-sit, failed relationship or money troubles and that last chance to make it all right. In SF's there is always more to lose not just money, happiness or life.

As I touched on in last issue's review of *Sifantatic* (*Matrix* 176), SF magazine founders/editors must be the most unremitting optimists. Not only having to work through piles of awful stories, but knowing the magazine doesn't make money and most people interested in it are using it to sweeten their CV for when approaching a publisher with their novel. If every would-be writer bought one issue every time they submitted to a magazine the market could only grow and more editors could actually pay for stories. Helping those self-same writers.

If anyone takes on my role, perhaps they can answer the question I didn't dare to ask – why do editors do it? They stand on the

barren trail looking at the bleached bones of those who tried before (*JSF*, *Spectrum* SF and others) yet head out into the wilderness anyway. Some like Tony Lee of Pigasus Press admit it is fun. Others claim to be charitable, hoping to find new talent. It needs further investigation.

The other question is why people are driven to start new magazines? Why not offer your services to help out on one already publishing? If, dear reader, you are considering launching a new magazine consider the alternative: help someone who needs it and learn from them. There was a magazine, *Angurios*, based 20 minutes bike ride from where I lived as a student. I never thought to offer my services and never bought it either. Long gone it has left me with regret for twenty years. Don't live with regret volunteer today!

The good points of writing

"Why do editors do it? They stand on the barren trail looking at the bleached bones of those who tried before yet head out into the wilderness anyway."

In his final magazine review column, Roderick Gladwish looks back and forward

'Pulpitations' should be highlighted, because the mantle needs to be taken on. Free magazines for a start, a chance to explore the world of the small press and slightly larger press. It will get your name known to editors, not as one of those pesky would-be writers but as someone useful – a marketing opportunity. This means later, as a pesky would-be writer the same editors may get to the second line in your work before chucking it in the bin rather than the first. You may make new friends too, I have. And you'll assuage my guilt at standing down.

In three years there have been a lot of magazines and yet many I conspicuously failed to review. *Asimov's* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* were the major omissions. Although non-UK productions have been included, British ones always trumped others for space if a choice had to be made, this is the British Science Fiction Association after all.

The Internet has no borders so excuses for the absence of popular webzines are different. *Holotales* from the very popular search engine *SFcrownsnest* (www.sfcrownsnest.com) was missed because it wasn't really a stand alone magazine. *Scifiction* (www.scifi.com/scifiction/) probably the highest quality website didn't need me to blow its trumpet. I was astounded to hear that the best example of web-based SF literature is to be closed. Now I

"If you are an editor, keep at it because what you're part of is something that is very special."

regret not reviewing it all the more. Now no longer duty bound to seek out new literature and explore new worlds, I shall return to reading my favourites.

First is *Analog*. Hard SF positive themes and sometimes a little too Ameri-can do. It's close to my tech-driven life: using science to make things work. Much fiction seems full of failure and death because 'that's real life'; no, it's the empty part of the glass. 'Real Life' is everything bad and good.

Next is *Jupiter SF*. A simple UK based quarterly that can be read in a day, is probably printed via a photocopier but grows on the reader. Into year three it gets the balance right, fantasy and science, positive and negative. Second would have been *Spectrum SF* but sadly it never made issue 10.

Third is *Schehenzade*. Romantic and hopeful; an antidote to boy's toys SF.

No webzines, not in the top three at least. *Quantumnoise* is fun and is getting there. *Strange Horizons* is an impressive production with its

weekly production cycle and serious intent to be professional. It's the physical intimacy that's missing and stops them being higher on the list.

Twin titans, *Interzone* and *Black Static* (nee *Third Alternative*) don't make it either. I subscribe to and like *IZ*. *Black Static* is too tough for me to enjoy. My final surprise was how few of the publications I read were bad in flavour or quality.

What has been learnt? If you're a three-time loser give up because there'll be an accident and if not the world will end. If you're an editor keep at it because what you're part of is something that is very special.

'Leave them wanting more' is another adage and this one I'm going to attempt to stick to. Not more of me, I've said everything I've got to say. Leave them wanting more magazines, that's been my goal. They are the birthplace of science fiction, they are the nursery for new writers but they are also great entertainment in their own right.

Buy a new magazine today you know it makes sense.



There is something satisfying about *Farthing*, the new quarterly magazine edited and published by Wendy Bradley. The matte cover with the oddly atmospheric image of rocks in a pool, the comfortable A5 size and the neat, clear pages all add up to an attractive physical package.

There's a distinctly quirky feel to the fiction – especially in the first half of this issue with stories featuring rocket-fuelled palm trees ('Good-bye Paradise' by Karen M Roberts) and a giant man-eating hat ('That Goddamn Hat' by Andrew J Wilson) and a general tendency towards whimsy.

Things darken up in the second half with two longer stories. The issue's most ominous tale is 'Owasa' by AH Jennings – a story of identity and desire in a rain-drenched Surinam. The story was intriguing but didn't do enough with its exotic setting – with no sense of place or indication of why the story was set in that particular location. In 'A Bump in the Road' by Kevin Anderson a group of friends have a car accident, hitting an unusual creature on a remote road. There is lots of potential in this set up, though it is hardly original, but I was disappointed by the rather predictable revelation of the creature's owner and the *deus ex machina* resolution.

Before closing *Farthing* returns to more whimsical things with Paul Renault's 'I Love Cheese' – with a last line that really made me laugh – and an afterword by Martin Lowe begging for a serious SF musical.

For a first issue, *Farthing* is off to a strong start with a pleasing form and a strong editorial lead. The spirit of the content reminded me somewhat of *Schehenzade*, but that is no bad thing, and there is certainly room for the magazine to develop and improve.

I understand that issue two has been delayed after the editor broke her arm – here's hoping that she gets well soon and that her bones and her magazine go from strength to strength. (MMCg)

Farthing (no. 1, July 2005)
£2.50 (£10 for four issues)
Farthing Magazine, c/o PO Box
134, Bangor, Wales, LL57 2ZQ
www.farthingmagazine.com



SALTUS

lunae

Short fiction by **Kari Maund**, winner of the NewCon3 short story competition 2005.

The antiquary journeyed from the West to the East, with the Great Swamp at his back and the Sourwind blowing. From the Seared Plain he came, from the Orthodox Lands, and everywhere he walked, he searched. He dug into the roots of the broken teeth of Big City and found only ash and slag and blisters. He crunched through the crust of the Dry Sea until his feet turned pale. He crossed the Thick Sea on the backs of the Lone Sailors, questioning them about their lore, and they sang and gave him no answers. He walked by the Gloom Hours, when yellow haze mantled the sky, and he hid by day from the glare of the bones of the Lost Ages. He walked by night, by skinlight, under the shade of the leaf-wrapped moon, and he came at last to the City of Vines. His feet sank into the layers of mulch and the broad plants sheltered him from the sun. The Sourwind chased him to the city boundary and turned back, baffled by the thick bright foliage. The antiquary came to the heart of the city and halted and looked and listened. In the branches overhead, the solemn children chewed and wove and paid him no heed. Between the branches, the adults

spread their wings and danced and never looked down.

Beneath the City of Vines lay the City of Glass. For a night and a day, the antiquary sat and watched and listened and rested. At dawn on the second day, he rose and started to dig. First he moved leaf and bark, then he moved soil and grit. As he dug, the winged adults danced overhead, but when he broke through to the ruins, they scattered. Down and down he dug, clearing his way, tunnelling past strong roots and old debris. He dug his hands raw and his body to sinew, all by the faint light of his skin. Finally, he broke into an ancient chamber. It was circular, this space, and thick with ashes, but to each part of the walls clung shelves and on each shelf were stacked the fragments of books. Under his coating of dirt and mulch, the antiquary exhaled and relaxed and smiled.

In the underground chamber, he read and read, gulping the words of the Lost Ages, tasting memory and forgotten science. Overhead, the vines grew and the leaves shaded and the Vine People continued to weave and to dance. A moon cycle passed, and another and two more before the antiquary dug himself

back to the surface, and stood once more at the heart of the City of Vines.

'Listen,' he said, to the air and the leaves, 'I have found it.' The leaves rustled and the Vine People made no answer. 'Listen,' he said, and his voice was louder. 'Have you not noticed that the seasons are out of place?' The adults danced and the children chewed or wove, and the antiquary sighed to himself. But he persisted. 'Time has started to slide in the Orthodox Lands. We count up the days and the months as our ancestors did, but the seasons do not obey us. We reach the first day of spring, but still the winter cold holds and the black snow falls. By the time the moulds begin to grow, spring is halfway through and they should be flowering. Midsummer comes, and we have rains, not searing heat. The harvest is ripening at the onset of winter. All this is wrong, but I have found the solution.' He lifted a hand and brandished a dirty orange book. 'We have forgotten the moon.' A new silence fell about him as the children ceased to chew. The antiquary said, 'The moon must leap, to bring the seasons back in line.'



Leaves shivered all around as one by one the adults landed. The antiquary said 'Your vines are the cause of this problem. You let them grow and grow and they have tethered the moon. You must sever the vines and let the moon leap forwards.' In the branches, the children began to move towards their parents. Again, the antiquary smiled. He grasped the lowest branch of the nearest vine and began to climb. Up and up he went, until his hands were stained green and his garments in rags. Always the Vine People were ahead of him, the adults spiralling, bearing their children on their backs. The air grew thin, and the antiquary struggled and panted and slowed. Yet still he climbed, and the Vine People rose. The vines grew thinner and one by one reached their full height, until only one remained, thick as the pipelines which crossed the Great Sea, green as the skins of the people of the Seared Plains. The antiquary huffed and battled his way and the Vine People flew, until a shadow fell over them all, and the antiquary lifted his head.

Above him hung the moon, dusty
and black under its shawl of vines.
Wide stems embraced it: wide

leaves spread their palms to the stars. The Vine People settled on the edges of the leaves, closing their wings, watching the antiquary with opaque eyes.

'We have to cut this,' he said, gesturing at the parent stem. 'You have to help me.' The Vine People sat motionless. Below them lay Homeworld, yellow-grey with ash. From the shreds of his sleeves the antiquary drew a set square, a pencil and a small saw. He measured the angle of the vine and the moon, marking out where to cut so that the vine-top, falling, would impel the moon forwards. With the saw, he began inch by inch to gnaw away at the great vine. Sap coated his hands, tingling at first, then stinging, then burning, but still he sawed on. The vine shook. On Homeworld below, the dust clouds shuddered. The vine twisted and the earth groaned and shifted. Great roots strained: rock lifted and began to tear. The moon rocked and the adults spread out their wings. Hands seared to tendon and bone, the antiquary sawed, cut strand by strand until but one great heart line remained. He looked up at the Vine People. 'The moon will leap and the seasons will return to order. We

have disciplined time.' The adults stood, gripped leaves in their claws and began to beat their wings. The saw bit into the heart line, deeper and deeper. The vine writhed. At last, with a small snap, it broke. The vine top hung overhead, unmoving, as the great lower stem began to topple. It tangled into its sibling vines, and they too swayed. It pulled them downwards, and they, too, began to fall, roots pulling free of the mulch and the soil. It groaned and tumbled and rattled its way down.

One last curled tendril whipped and hurled the antiquary outwards, out and down. No adult came flying to catch him. The vine dropped lower, lower. The dust clouds boiled as the roots burst upwards, pulling with them huge chunks of the plains. The mountains tilted, haved, and overturned. The seas spilled to explore the lands. To east and to west, volcanic eyes opened. Cliffs shattered, islands drowned, wide lands were sundered. The Orthodox Lands tilted, tipped and slid under the crust of the Dry Sea.

Slowly, slowly, supported by a thousand thousand beating wings, the moon sailed free.

Going postal

Andy Sawyer finds that Rudyard Kipling's short story is first class

If I was ever to be asked whether there was a short story which pointed to everything I like about science fiction I'd unhesitatingly cite Rudyard Kipling's "With the Night Mail". It's a story which I think is important in science fiction because it does a number of things which many sf readers think such a story *should* do. Yet it reads with a particular strangeness to modern eyes. The strangeness, I think, is intensified because the future society it portrays is *our own time* (give or take a few years) yet it is – on the surface at least – so far removed from our experience.

"With the Night Mail: a story of 2000 together with extracts from the magazine in which it appeared", is found in several anthologies – some of which, unfortunately, leave out what is so important about the story. Kipling himself published it in *Actions and Reactions* (1909), but it had previously appeared in 1905, in *McClure's Magazine* (USA, November) or the *Windsor Magazine* (UK, December). A separate version illustrated by Frank X. Leyendecker and H. Reuter Dahl was issued by Doubleday in 1909.

The years before the turn of the 19th century were marked by various attempts to suggest what life might be like a century hence. In "With the Night Mail" Kipling seems to be producing a technologically far more sophisticated version of these "anticipations" by giving, in as realistic a way as he possibly can, a picture of this future world; a world in which commerce and communications are dependant on air, not sea, and the administration of the planet is under the control of managerial technicians rather than nation-states: the "Aerial Board of Control", a "semi-elected, semi-nominated body of a few score persons of both sexes."

"Transportation is Civilization," our motto runs. Theoretically, we do what we please so long as we do not interfere with the traffic and all it implies" (Kipling's italics).

He had written this amazing prediction of a global network of airships and air traffic control in 1904, only a few years after Ferdinand von Zeppelin's first successful dirigible flight (1900) and well before the first heavier-than-air flight that lasted an hour (1908). It was also well before radio linked the world.

"Amazing prediction", however, is not really the point.

First, what we're reading is less



FOUNDATION
favourites
NUMBER EIGHTEEN: With the Night Mail by Rudyard Kipling



a story than a journalistic description of the London-Quebec mail airship: a Sunday-Supplement piece addressed to readers in the year 2000 (or thereabouts: in the magazine versions the date is either June 2025 or October 2147) and set in context with a background of advertisements, letters to the editor, book reviews and other material designed to give the illusion that this is a slice of life from the year 2000.

Kipling achieves this illusion in a number of ways. First, he's a master of narrative immediacy ("Time for us to be on the move," says Captain Purnall, and we are shot up by the passenger-lift to the top of the despatch-towers." He evokes a kind of inclusive informality by allowing Captains Purnall and Hodgson to be "Tim" and "George" by the story's end. By noting "the pictures of our racing professionals, from L.V. Rautsch to little Ada Warleigh," Kipling invites us to treat that world as "real – of course 'we' (the readers of the 21st century) have their posters on our bedroom walls! Throughout, there are two "readers" addressed: the future-reader who is part of Kipling's fiction, to whom the world of the mighty airships needs no introduction, and the "real" reader of the story, who need access into all aspects of this strange future. Many writers do this by the "As you know, Carruthers..." cliché, or the "infodump". Kipling more subtly drops information via the "journalist's" account, which is then elaborated through a comment by one of his interviewees. He gives us not only the

"how" of the technology but also an untold story behind the scenes.

"The eye detects no joint in her skin plating save the sweeping hair-crack of the bow rudder – Magniac's rudder that assured us the dominion of the unstable air and left its inventor penniless and half-blind."

Kipling also does technobabble.

"Here we find Fleury's Paradox of the Bulk-headed Vacuum – which we accept now without thought – literally in full blast. The three engines are H. T. & T. assisted-vacuo Fleury turbines running from 3000 to the Limit..."

Eat your heart out, *Star Trek!* But that's not it, either...

The most effective illusion is the "apparatus" of adverts, letters, and book reviews which come with the story. Here, Kipling gives us detailed, often amusing pictures of life in the year 2000. He also allows the history and political superstructure of this world to be deduced. We read some of the administrative regulations of the A.B.C.; we read a humorous report of how Crete, the only survivor of local self-government, has petitioned the A.B.C. to take it over. We see opinions given on legal squabbles, and answers to historical enquiries. (More of this is brilliantly expanded on Marcus Rowlands' "Forgotten Futures" website, www.forgottenfutures.com.)

Some have argued that this apparatus is superfluous, and it is sometimes dropped from anthologised versions. I'd argue that, by echoing and developing aspects of the journalist's

account and by setting this account in context, it is "the story". It is just as possible (if slightly perversely) to read the story as merely another addition to the overall concept of the imaginary "magazine", contextualising it rather than vice-versa.

Other writers, of course, produced "future-history" – but this is finer than most. Kipling's fiction achieves verisimilitude through links with the reality his readers in 1905, rather than "2000", know and feel. The mail is transported in containers still called "coaches". The A.B.C. may control the world of transportation, but there's still trade rivalry with the Germans. In a world of airships, we still catch the echoes of the steam-powered vessels that built the Empire. "Call yourself a sailor, Sir!" Captain Purnall bellows to the "ancient, aluminium-patched, twin-screw tramp" trespassing upon his air-space. And the local vicar still wants a "competent steady man" to drive his dirigible and double as gardener.

We, reading Kipling, can only dabble at a kind of steampunkish alternate history. For Kipling assumes that the airship will outlast the aeroplane and that the power of flight will dissolve the nation-state and prevent war. But Kipling also knows that whatever we think technology might do, we can only guess. Magniac thought he was improving war: he laid the foundations for peace. Sadly, the history of the twentieth century was the other way round. "I wonder if any of us ever know what we're really doing."

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Flower of Scotland

Tom Hunter talks to *Nova Scotia* editors
Neil Williamson and Andrew J Wilson

TH Over at *Matrix* we've been noticing an up surge in Scottish sf&f recently. Is there something afoot in Scotland, or were we just not paying attention?

AW I think a new generation were inspired by a variety of things way back in the 1980s — not least Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, Iain M. Banks and the late, lamented *Glasgow Herald* sf short story competition. A lot of writers began publishing short stories professionally at the turn of the 1990s and came together in an anthology called *Shipbuilding* that was published for the 1995 Glasgow Worldcon. Ten years later, people who have been plugging away at novels are rising stars. We may take our time, but we're relentless! Personally, I believe the rise of the devolution movement in Scotland empowered many writers here and made them think about the future, think about alternatives...

NW The 1995 Worldcon was a galvanising event for a lot of people. Not just for those involved in the Glasgow SF Writers Circle and the East Coast SF Writers Group of course, but I think being a member of one of those groups perhaps made it easier to keep focused on the goal of publication, and to continually raise the level of ambition in a sort of osmotic bootstrapping exercise. Andrew's point about devolution is a valid one too. There's much more of a 'can do' atmosphere in Scotland these days — in all sorts of spheres.

TH What prompted the decision to extend the reach of the anthology from Scotland itself to a wider definition of Scottishness?

NW There's a simple, and useful, political definition of what a Scot is that goes along the lines of 'a Scot is any person that contributes to the culture and economy of Scotland'. It's a deliberately inclusive definition, but if the alternative is 'a ginger-haired, kilted, drunkard with an obsession for celebrating sporting defeats', I'm happy to go with it. I don't think the brief was widened from Scotland to Scottishness as such, rather was widened from stories by Scottish-resident writers to stories about the nation itself. You've mentioned that there is a swell of Scots in the genres at the moment, but you'd be hard pushed to equate this to a literary

movement (thank goodness), because there is little common ground in their actual writing. We felt it would be more useful to focus our energies on the place where we all live. As Andrew says, the proof of that is in the book itself. I'd be interested to hear reader reaction on how successful it has been. How many readers say: 'Wow, I didn't expect Scotland to be like that? How many say: 'Change the dialect and that's just the same as where I live'? That's how you get to know a place isn't it, by identifying the differences and similarities to what you know?

TH So how did the idea for the book come about, and how did you move from idea to reality?

AW The *Shipbuilding* anthology from 1995 demanded a follow-up for the 2005 Worldcon. A group of us discussed this at the Hinkley Eastercon in 2003. I suggested "raising our game" and involving an established publisher. Neil agreed, and suddenly we found we'd been nominated to do the job by everyone else. We hammered out a proposal and got verbal commitments from some name authors, then started approaching publishers. Mercat Press proved to be the perfect imprint for us, and as soon as we got the go-ahead, we sent out the solicitations. The rest, to paraphrase Neal

Stephenson, was just editing.

TH Critical response has been very positive (surely further proof that the anthology form is still has something original to offer), not to mention the numerous copies we saw everyone clutching at Worldcon. Why do you think it has struck such a popular chord?

AW People still love short stories, but the form is not always marketed very well. We had a strong, cohesive theme, a golden opportunity to launch such a book, and some very well-known names from within and without the genre. These things drew people's attention to *Nova Scotia*. In terms of the book itself, it's beautifully produced and the contents are an eclectic mix of well-written stories that have strong narratives. How could we fail?

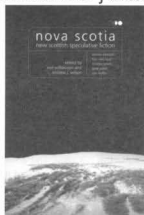
NW Yes, it mostly comes down to market opportunity: Worldcon/Scotland/New wave of Scottish-based writers. It would have been difficult to screw that one up.

But at the same time we've been very pleased with the reaction both in and out of the genre press — in fact the UK newspaper reaction has been amongst the best we've received — and I think that the key to that is the variety of stories *Nova Scotia* offers.

"Personally I believe the rise of devolution movement in Scotland empowered many writers here and made them think about the future, think about alternatives"



Och aye the new (left to right)
Andrew J Wilson,
Neil Williamson and
Nova Scotia



TH Did you have an initial brief when sending out the call for stories, or did you just sit back and wait to see what came in?

AW Let me quote from the solicitation... "The theme is a loose one. Basically, we want the stories to reflect some aspect of Scots, Scotland or simply even the abstract quality of 'Scottishness'. Suitable pieces might have a Scottish setting, a central character who is a Scot, or they might just feel Scottish in their telling or attitude. It's highly subjective, but we'll know it when we read it. And yes, stories written in the Scots tongue are welcome."

TH What prompted you to opt for the speculative fiction label rather than any other?

AW There were two reasons. First, the "speculative fiction" label allowed us to include the broadest range of imaginative stories, which is only right and proper. Secondly, it was a deliberate ploy to get the maximum amount of mainstream coverage — it worked.

NW Although we did have one commentator quibbling about our definition of 'speculative' — you just can't please everyone, can you?

TH Finally, any plans for a follow up, Scottish or not?

AW Yes, Mercat have been talking to us about another project, but I don't want to jinx it by saying anything more. Anyway, Neil has to finish his novel, *The Moon King*, first.

NW Yes, *Nova Scotia* has been a lot of fun, and I'm keen to repeat the experience, but there are personal projects to attend to first. Which is exactly the way it should be.

Switch on, tune in turn over to Mac

All right, pop kids? Do you want to know a secret? I've discovered something wonderful. It's small and it's beautiful and it's perfect and it's sort of squareish with rounded corners. It's the Mac Mini from Apple...

During the summer of 2005 I decided I needed a new computer. I'd bought an IBM ThinkPad T22 laptop earlier in the year, but although this was great for several months I became frustrated with the cantankerous Windows 2000 operating system installed on the machine. It also occurred to me that it was a bit stupid using a small – albeit very high quality – laptop keyboard and a 14-inch TFT screen when I'd got a wireless Logitech MX input combination and a 19-inch Mitsubishi Diamondtron CRT monitor upstairs. The other thing was that ThinkPads don't use touchpads like other laptops, oh no; instead IBM prefers this little red nipple thing that sits in the middle of the keyboard. It wasn't that I didn't get use to using this nipple device, but it did make my poor finger ache something rotten. I mean, you try twiddling a rock hard nipple for hours on end and see how you feel...

Anyway, the problem was that with the desktop system several years old and somewhat the worse for wear, I didn't really want to go back to it. It was as I started looking into the possible replacements for the old desktop and the ThinkPad that I came across the recently-launched Mac mini.

Apple bills the mini as "the most affordable Mac ever" (carefully avoiding anything remotely sounding like the word "cheap"). If you haven't seen one this is a tiny box (16.5cm square by 5cm tall) in a tasteful combination of brushed aluminium and gloss white, with the Apple logo in grey on the top. The idea behind this

machine is that it's for people who aren't particularly interested in dismantling their computer every five minutes to change something inside, or aren't that bothered about playing games on their computer – there are fewer available for Mac than for PC, although the biggest titles do get converted.

The machine is squarely aimed at first-time buyers, or those like me, who've been interested by what the Mac has to offer, but put off by the fact that Macs tend to be more expensive than generic IBM compatible PCs (from hereon I'll refer to IBM compatibles as "PCs", although strictly speaking any personal computing device is a "PC" – but you know what I mean).

I was immediately drawn to the mini for several reasons. For example, I'd owned an iPod for a year or so and been impressed by its usability, simplicity and design. Also, the Mac is something different, and I've always been one to go against the grain. In addition, instead of buying the whole kit and caboodle, I could use my existing mouse, keyboard and monitor – this brings down the price point in Mac terms to something approaching that of your low-end PC. As I already had the Logitech kit and the CRT monitor, this was a very interesting proposition.

The final factor was that I'd heard great things about Apple's OS X operating system, its stability, and the fact that there are – as yet – no viruses that will run on OS X (although macro viruses can be passed on to Windows

users should you be unfortunate enough to receive one). It's absolutely beautiful to look at and is incredibly intuitive and user-friendly (yes, I know Gates said that about Windows, but it's really true of OS X). If Windows XP is a businessman in a suit and tie with a briefcase and mobile, Mac OS X is an intelligent, hip skater dude in combats listening to Nick Cave and PJ Harvey.

As well as OS X, new Macs come preinstalled with a host of other software which comprises the iLife suite. This includes applications such as iTunes, iPhoto, iDVD, iMovie and iCal. The best among the freebies as far as I'm concerned, however, is GarageBand. This enables you to make music tracks using instrument loops and effects, which you can chop about to suit your own purposes, or you can create your own loops. Once you've created these tracks you can export them to iTunes and then load them on to your iPod. I've created a couple myself and will upload them to my website some time soon. The updated iMac now also includes Front Row software, which allows you to use a range of entertainment facilities, such as playing DVDs, by remote control.

And then there's the widgets! Heavens to Betsy, don't forget the widgets! Revealed by hitting F12, these small applications perform a whole host of functions, with new ones added daily. The screenshots taken for the purposes of this article were taken using

a widget downloaded from the Apple website. Some are included with OS X, but you can download whatever takes your fancy, ranging from weather forecasters to horoscopes.

"But, hey, Martin," I hear you cry, "PC software doesn't run on a Mac. What about all your files?" Well that's what I thought, too, but it turns out not to be the case at all. I needed to make sure that Microsoft Office for Mac is compatible with Office for Windows, as in the course of my work I share files with Windows users on a daily basis, and to this end, I did some research. A lot of research, in fact. For example, I e-mailed one or two people I know who use Macs, such as artist Dominic Harman, to ask if they knew whether Mac and Windows files were compatible. (Dominic, bless his little cotton socks, didn't have a clue, but knew a man who did.) Most people weren't too sure, but in the end I discovered that Office 2004 for Mac is 100% compatible with Windows users of Office with no conversion required. Mac versions of most popular programmes are available, and if you really must use some PC-only applications, these can be run under a program called Virtual PC, although this does seem to defeat the object somewhat.

When I received my Mac I had to undertake the actual process of "switching", that is, moving all my stuff from my PC to the mini. There are several ways this can be done, but I opted to use my iPod to transfer files to the new computer. My iPod had to be changed from PC to Mac format, but I can't recall there being any problems with this process, and everything was moved in an hour or so. I also bought an Iiyama ProLite E431s – a great 17-inch flat panel – off eBay. While this added to the cost of my new system it still meant that I could switch to a Mac for almost half the



Martin Sketchley is the author of *The Affinity Trap* and its sequel, *The Destiny Mask*. He would like to point out that he is not affiliated with Apple in any way, but if they would like to send him a new iMac he'd be forced to accept it just out of politeness.

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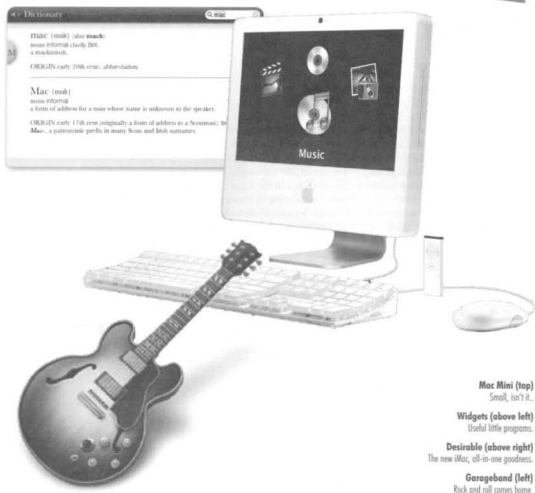
price of buying a new iMac.

For a Windows user switching to a Mac there will be some new things you have to get used to. For example, I still sometimes get muddled up between the control and command keys and the things they do on the Mac that they didn't on the PC, and so on. The most obvious thing is that the close/minimise/maximise buttons, which are top-right on a PC, are top-left on a Mac. This, oddly enough, is something I got used to within hours.

Most people comment on is the noise the mini makes – or rather the lack of it. Shhh – listen... Quiet isn't it? There are limitations to the mini, though – for example the unit has only two USB sockets (I have my wireless keyboard and mouse base station plugged into one, while to the other I connect my iPod, to which automatic backups are made on a daily basis). I find it ample for my current needs, but some people have criticised the fact that there are only two USB sockets. If you need more, there are aftermarket accessories available that increase the number, and there is also a FireWire socket.

In all honesty, if you're tempted by a Mac and can afford it, jump right in and go for the new, just updated iMac, with integrated webcam, remote control and new Front Row software, all of which starts at just £900. This machine comes with a whole host of high-spec features, details of which I won't bore you with now – simply look at the picture. Isn't it beautiful? If you don't want to spend that much, brand new Mac minis can be had for £300.

As far as I'm concerned the Mac has been a revelation to me. It's open, friendly, easy to use and does just what it's supposed to, very, very quietly. I am, officially, a switcher. Now if only I could remember where I left my skateboard...



Mac Mini (top)
Small, isn't it...

Widgets (above left)
Useful little programs.

Desirable (above right)
The new iMac, all-in-one goodness.

Garageband (left)
Rock and roll comes home.

Life went on

**CHECK
POINT**
News on fans and fandom

Mark Plummer on a British Worldcon year, other things happened too



© Selma Verrit



© Anna Ferrigato Dal Dan



© Jette Goldie

This was a British Worldcon year. You may have noticed this, but I mention it up-front because while it's only five days of convention – with maybe another day or two tacked on before and after for the hardcore – it does rather tend to dominate any look at 2005 in fandom. As for the other 360 days of the year, the period before the convention was given over to preparation, and in its aftermath we all collapsed in a heap while variously swearing that we'd never do that again, or hatching plans for a rerun a decade or so hence. (Curiously, while interaction seems to have been one of Britain's more successful Worldcons, there wasn't an immediate concerted move to do it all again. Perhaps the fact that it was successful by most standards obviates the desire.)

But, despite impressions to the contrary, there have been other things happening. The convention scene was perhaps less active than usual, the traditional view being that the Worldcon drains members from other events because financial, family or other commitments means that many people can only do one convention a year.

It's true that the Eastercon – Paragon 2 – was a little smaller than in recent years, although personally I'd say the jury's still out on whether that is entirely The Worldcon Effect or part of a general trend. Those people who did attend to see guests such as former BSFA stalwarts Eve and John Harvey plus writers Ben Jeapes, Ken MacLeod, Richard

Morgan and Robert Rankin have collectively identified Paragon as the best of cons and the worst of cons, a further move away from the old model for such events which was variously welcomed and derided.

At the other end of the year and the other end of the scale, Novacon was pretty much what it always is. Novacon seems to have something of an identity crisis these days. It's Britain's second convention, an annual event for thirty-five years now and a waystation between one Eastercon and the next. Handy if you like to see all your friends more than once a year. But it's also the convention of the Brum Group, the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, which was once a mighty fannish force in the Land although now – according to Novacon's critics – it's an ever-reducing bunch of tired semi-gafiaters who want nothing more challenging than a weekend away somewhere in the greater Birmingham area with a limitless supply of real ale.

Novacon saw the distribution of the year's third set of fan publishing awards. The Hugos, FAAs and Novas all have slightly different eligibility and almost entirely different constituencies so I guess it's no surprise that there wasn't a great deal of consistency. The FAAs – presented at the American convention Conflu in February – went to *Chungu* (fanzine), Claire Brialey (writer), and Steve Stiles (artist), as well as Lloyd Penney (correspondent) with *Chungu* picking up a second award for

design; Hugos awarded at the Worldcon went to *Plotka*, Dave Langford and Sue Mason; and the Novas – unlike the previous awards, for British/Irish work only – went to *Banana Wings*, Claire Brialey and Alison Scott. Traditional print still dominates – although *Chungu* and *Plotka* are both available in paper and electronic editions – but the particularly interesting result is Alison Scott's (well-deserved) Nova for fan art given that Alison works entirely in the digital medium, the first Nova-winning artist to do so.

Still, it's not all shock of the new. London fandom, within a few months of the sixtieth anniversary of its regular 'First Thursday' pub meeting, has chosen to celebrate with a forced relocation after the current venue, Walkers of Holborn, was closed for redevelopment. This kind of move is fast becoming a new fannish tradition and I suppose it should have been seen as inevitable, given that Walkers is the first venue in quite some time to have attracted almost universal approval – as well as being a return to the site of the original venue, The White Horse (fictionalised as Arthur C Clarke's *Tales from the White Hart*).

Another tradition that lives on is the fan travel funds. Both TAFF (North America/Europe) and GUFF (Australasia/Europe) were importing this year, as you might expect given the Worldcon. TAFF brought Suzanne Tompkins (Suzle) over from Seattle, while GUFF delivered Damien Warman and Juliette Woods from Adelaide.

So, where are we going? Well, an interesting facet of Paragon 2 is that no bid emerged for the 2007 Eastercon, the first time this has happened in recent years. Perhaps not that remarkable: it is in many ways only slightly removed from 2001 and 2004 where scratch bids only formed at the conventions themselves. A 2007 bid did in fact emerge in the closing stages of the Eastercon, although it can't be formally ratified until Easter 2006, and a bid has already entered the lists for 2008. But it does raise questions about the ageing demographic of fandom and where will the young fans come from – all that kind of thing that people have been banging on about, well, forever.

At the moment I wonder whether we'll see a move away from the big bureaucracy-heavy events – of which the Worldcon is the ultimate manifestation – towards smaller, more focussed events. Several such conventions seem to be currently at the planning stage for 2007. One event from this year that I didn't mention earlier – because I wasn't there and so have no first hand experience – was Newcon 3 which seems to be fast developing its own small but loyal following.

So, it was a British Worldcon year and everybody seemed to come out of it pretty well. A year of innovation and tradition, a new wave and an old guard. Which means it was much like any other year really, only with a bloody great Worldcon in the middle of it.

meditations

While watching *Zathura* (reviewed page 25) my mind began to wander and I found myself thinking: Why is American popular culture so obsessed with troubled relationships between children and their parents? No post-sixties American film is complete without some half-baked drama between a whiny kid and his distant dad.

Perhaps it stems from their national obsession with "therapy" – a hobby more popular than baseball, their putative national sport. This is, after all, a country with one psychiatrist for every 5,000 people – by a mile the lowest ratio in the world. And, as we all know, the head shrinking arts have a knack for blaming our ills on our parents' shortcomings.

I, however, have come to believe that the explanation has a more complex, historical root. I believe it is a symptom of a trauma in the childhood not of any individuals but of the whole nation. The creation of America in the violent separation of the then "infant" states from "parent" Great Britain echoes down the ages in American art and, in particular, in its popular cinema.

I know this will be controversial, but a moment of thought should reveal how all those pouting teenagers, rebels without a cause and neurotic Woody Allens are really a reflection of huffy protestors chucking tea into some harbour.

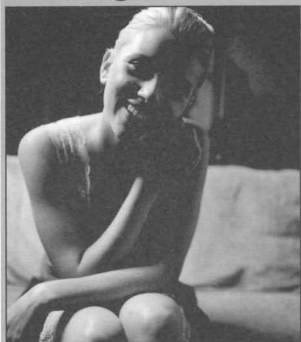
This is more than a simple cliché, it is a national obsession. Sometimes, it works. From Indiana Jones to *Field of Dreams*, it can be affecting. But more often – in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, *The Day After Tomorrow* and thousands of lesser films (like *Zathura*) – half-baked characters repeat over-rehearsed theatrics until all is solved by a final hug.

It must be history. The only alternative is so horrific I can barely bring myself to consider it. Could an entire industry be engaged in a conspiracy of laziness and stupidity against its audience? Do writers, producers, actors and directors consent to deliver this same drivel over and over again because it adds a quick layer of ersatz "humanity" to tatty, half thought out stories?

Say it ain't so, Hollywood! Say it ain't so.



Prestige's Scarlett woman



The key casting decisions for Chris Nolan's adaptation of Christopher Priest's *The Prestige* appear to be complete – and it is all looking pretty tasty. Christian Bale (*Batman Begins*) will play Alfred Borden and Hugh Jackman (*X-Men's* Wolverine) will play his professional and personal rival Rupert Angier. David Bowie (*The Man Who Fell To Earth*) will appear as Nikola Tesla and Michael Caine (*Zulu*) is also in the cast – presumably as Borden's assistant – so the latest recruit, Scarlett Johansson (*The Island*) as Olivia Svenson, the double-dealing magician's assistant, should mean that casting is now complete ahead of the start of production early in 2006. It would also appear to confirm reports that the modern-day framing device in the original novel has been dropped.

The cast is exciting, the director has yet to make anything that even approaches a bad movie and everyone who has seen it is raving about the quality of the draft script. I guess that makes Flickers officially excited.

Abduct them! Festival return



The only other British genre movie confirmed for release next year is nowhere near as promising as *The Prestige*. *Alien Autopsy* will arrive in April "starring" diminutive television double-act Ant McPartin and Declan Donnelly (*I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*). Ant and Decl will star in this science fiction comedy written by Will Davies (*Johnny English*) and directed by first time feature director Jonny Campbell (*Shameless*).

There will almost certainly be something interesting to watch at the fifth annual London International Festival of Science Fiction and Fantastic Film (Sci-Fi-London to its friends). The festival will take place between 26-30 April 2006 and this year it has a new venue, the Apollo West End. This plush new cinema complex on Regent Street has five screens and is the first new purpose built cinema in London for a decade. The new site will eliminate the need for fans to frantically scuttle across the West End only to arrive five minutes late for that Canadian monster movie you really wanted to see.

There are few details yet about the festival's programme but one film they hope to give a UK premiere to is *Pervy Na Lune* (*The First on the Moon*), the Russian-made mockumentary about the Soviet's attempts to get to the Moon in the 1930s. *Pervy Na Lune* won this year's jury prize at Utopiales, the French SF festival.

SCI-FI-LONDON

THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASTIC FILM



Vincenzo Natali has directed three effective genre films – *Cube*, *Cypher* and

Nothing – all smart, well-made and entertaining. So the gods of Hollywood have demanded that he pay by forcing him to direct *Necropolis*, a script by dumbest-guy-in-Hollywood, Paul WS Anderson (AVP). Flicker hopes he gets paid enough to allow him

to make his adaptation of JG Ballard's *High Rise*.



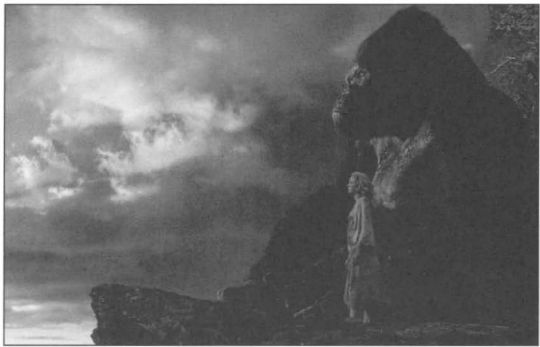
Can Tonight, He Comes really be the planned name for Jonathon Mostow (T3) and Will Smith's (*Independence Day*) superhero-in-midlife-crisis? And when did the Fresh Prince get old enough to have a midlife crisis, suddenly I feel old...



Looking dodgy... Underworld: Evolution, a sequel rumoured to make the original look like the work of Shakespeare... A Sound of Thunder straight to DVD without a whisper... Liberty, foreigners disable America's high-tech military so the plucky survivors fight back with 1940s/50s technology. Like Red Dawn without the charm, then...

Feeling Konged

Kong is not a cuddly toy, insists Martin McGrath



It was beauty that killed the beast" is one of the greatest lines in cinema and one of the greatest lies. Oh, beauty made the beast vulnerable but it was greed, Karl Denham's greed for money and fame, which got the beast killed. It has always been one of the great injustices that in *King Kong* the Hollywood producer gets the last word to rewrite history for his own ends.

So, one of the very few things I'm grateful to Director Jackson for in this overblown remake of one of the greatest science fiction films of all time is that he at least got Denham's character right. The guy is a scheming, sneaky, lying creep and Black – in a performance of twitchy insincerity – is almost perfect. Of course the iconic line is still there, and Denham still gets to say it, but it feels even more like an unconvincing, tacked on afterthought – another bit of Denham's bullshit – than it did in the original.

There are a few other positives in Jackson's remake. There are some nice running jokes – especially Chandler's vain Bruce Baxter and his unerring ability to know when to run for his life. The return to New York, with the characters fractured and scattered, is particularly nicely handled and the car chase through New York is

exceptionally well done.

The special effects are spectacular and the action sequences enormous. There is no denying that this Kong is as great a technical wonder as Willis's stop motion version in the original, and the whole of Skull Island vibrates with tremendous energy. The recreation of depression-era New York is perhaps even more successful. But *King Kong* suffer from the same problem that afflict Jackson's earlier *Lord of the Rings* films – he is a director who has no concept of when less is more.

The original film had one dinosaur fighting Kong? Fine, we'll have three! And we'll tangle them all up in a ridiculously over-extended mid-air battle. Why? Because more must be better!

Nor can Jackson pick a single dramatic shot to make his point. Instead he batters the viewer into submission by showing you the same fantastic thing over and over again from every conceivable angle. You can almost hear him screaming "Feel awe! Feel awe!" from behind the camera in every money shot.

And there are times in *King Kong* when this approach simply fails. Jackson's inability to resist flashy, twitchy editing entirely ruins Kong's first appearance. The stampeede scene, however expensive the effects, does not convince as the actors and the scrambling dinosaurs fail to

mesh on the screen. And though, as a long-standing Kong fan, I have often dreamed of seeing the spider-pit sequence I thought this version bordered on the senseless.

But my biggest problem with Jackson's *King Kong* is the way he sentimentalises the great beast. From the ludicrous, misconceived and frankly embarrassing comedy routine with which Darrow (Watts – no Fay Wray she, not even Jessica Lange) "entertains" Kong to the cringe-inducing "ice-skating" sequence Kong is made cuddly and cute and sympathetic. I half expected to see Jackson put a silly hat on his "monkey" and get it to do tricks – perhaps it's on the DVD and the inevitable "directors cut" – as if he'd cut anything.

It is entirely wrong that Darrow should laugh and play with Kong. Kong should be a wild and dangerous animal – the king of his domain – not some franchise-friendly, cartoon gorilla or circus chimp. Darrow certainly shouldn't be wandering the streets of New York seeking the beast, or cuddling up to him like a love sick teenager. Its ridiculous and it is wrong.

Of course Kong should end up as the object of our concern. Through the telling of this story we should come to admire, respect and even empathise with this great, alien beast – his fate is caused not

by his own failings but by those of greedy men. But Jackson can't resist wanting to make us like Kong, sympathise with him and even pity him. It's a terrible mistake. It diminishes Kong, making him predictable and shows no respect for his animal nature. It also cheapens the iconic final scenes. At the point when our hearts should be pounding with the injustice of it all, Jackson turns the moment into a weird love scene, like the ending of *Titanic* but with less ice and more fur. It's a farago and I couldn't stop myself laughing.

I love the original *King Kong* and there are certainly moments of Jackson's version which I admire. But Jackson's conception of his central character, Kong, is fundamentally flawed and the spectacular set-pieces that pad out the inflated three hour running time fail to disguise the dramatic flaws at the core of what, in the end, is a silly and overly sentimental film.

King Kong

Director: Peter Jackson
 Writers: Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens & Peter Jackson
 Cinematographer: Andrew Lesnie
 Cast: Naomi Watts, Jack Black, Adrien Brody, Thomas Kretschmann, Colin Hanks, Andy Serkis, Kyle Chandler
 187 mins

Good bothering

Yes, it does have some religion in it. No, that doesn't make it a bad film.

Before the release of *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* liberals and conservatives were busy attacking/praising the film because of its Christian content. From the left every mention of the film began with the assumption that the allegorical elements were somehow inherently dogmatic, as if any concession that Christianity might not always and in every instance be "wrong" was the first crack in the defences against the hordes of Darwin-bashing, bible-thumping, god-bothering lunatics waiting at the gates to tear down secularist civilisation. While, on the other side, there was no shortage of Darwin-thumping, bible-bothering, god-bashing lunatics determined to use any crack in the public debate to shove their variously intolerant visions of faith on the rest of us in a concerted effort to tear down secularist civilisation.

Everywhere there were fundamentalists rushing to get their fundamentals in first. A depressing sign of the increasingly fractured times in which we live.

All this was made more annoying by the fact that the author, the book and, thankfully, the film offer no comfort to fundamentalists of any kind.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe sets out one of Christianity's more appealing tenets – that everyone can, if they wish, find forgiveness and acceptance – wraps it in a parable and leaves the viewer to judge its worth. In a Hollywood-funded, Disney-made film I expected to be beaten over the head with American-style "faith" – the heavy-handed form of Christianity that sees every sportsman thanking God for giving him the ability to humiliate his opponent and treats "Old Glory" as a religious icon alongside the crucifix.

But this isn't that sort of film at all. *Narnia* retains the relative subtlety of the original novels' symbolism and ends up being a better advert for Christianity because of it. I wonder how many people in a modern audience will even understand the significance of Aslan's sacrifice, washing away Edmund's sin through the spilling of his own blood before rising again. My guess is that most children, and many parents, won't even spot the biblical parallels.

But those who do needn't feel that they are being berated by the message. Unusually for a relatively late convert to any cause, Lewis wasn't doctrinaire. In almost everything he wrote it is apparent that his faith is much more about the ethics of treating others well than it is about accepting the dogma of institutionalised religion. Rereading Lewis's book I was struck by the fact that the good rule of his monarchs in Cair Paravel was defined by their willingness to "live and let live" and the conduct of friendly visits to other nations.

On the whole director Adamson is careful

to be faithful to the source material – relatively easy given the concise nature of the original novel. Of the changes that he makes, the decision to emphasise the final battle as a dramatic action sequence (Lewis skips it almost entirely) is surely the most significant and understandable in terms of selling the film to a modern audience. The battle has moments of peril but it makes no attempt to horrify or to glorify warfare, both of which would have been inappropriate given the nature of this story. However, the decision to show Aslan chomping on the White Witch's head was probably a wrong one – it went just a little too far, for me.

Other changes are welcome. The roles of the girls are beefed up somewhat, with Susan benefiting from extra dialogue and a more punky approach and even getting to use her bow. The film is also notably gentler on Edmund, playing down his greed for Turkish Delight and justifying some of his reasons for feeling unhappy at his treatment by the others, making him easier to forgive.

The cast are uniformly excellent. The children, on whom the whole movie rests, do a good job – particularly Lucy (Henley) and Susan (Popplewell). Swinton stands out as the White Witch, especially in the battle sequence for which she demonstrates an apparent relish. Broadbent has a nice supporting role and the voice acting is superb – with Neeson's sonorous Aslan convincingly regal and Winstone and French excellent as the beavers.

In terms of special effects, all of the talking animals and magical creatures are beautifully and convincingly realised and Aslan himself is enormously impressive. From the opening in war-torn London to the discovery of wintry Narnia the film looks superb – Spring in Narnia comes as a little bit of a disappointment, revealing a film that looks somewhat sparse to eyes used to Jackson's Rings trilogy. But the comparison is unfair, given the differences in material and the quality that is on screen.

The Chronicles of Narnia is a better, more restrained, film than I was expecting. It treats its source material sensitively and leaves the audience free to take what lessons they want from its story. It is a good-looking, entertaining film that carries its baggage lightly and is certainly recommended. (MMcG)

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe

Director: Andrew Adamson

Writers: Ann Peacock, Andrew Adamson,

Christopher Markus, Stephen McFeely

Cinematographer: Donald McAlpine

Cast: Georgie Henley, Skandar Keynes, William

Moseley, Anna Popplewell, Tilda Swinton, James

McAvoy, Jim Broadbent, Liam Neeson, Ray

Winstone, Dawn French, Rupert Everett

140 mins



Just wizard

Johann Carlisle comes to terms with
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire



The *Goblet of Fire* is the darkest of the Harry Potter stories to be filmed so far, and probably the most difficult to turn into a movie. After the tight and incredibly tense *Prisoner of Azkaban* – in which Cuarón set a good example by directing an abbreviated version, very unlike the first two, slavishly faithful, films made by Columbus. With *Goblet of Fire* Rowling wrote a novel nearly twice the length of her previous stories, with an ambitious plot but reams of unnecessary side-story and detail – most notoriously the hundred superfluous pages of the Quidditch World Cup (*superfluous? Ireland won!* – Ed.). Newell has wisely recognised that the book and the film are different forms and attempted to follow Cuarón's example rather than make a Peter Jackson-esque epic travesty, but the film still sprawls at over two-and-a-half hours.

Harry and his friends are now fourth-years at Hogwarts school for wizards, and they find that their school is to host the Tri-Wizard Tournament, a contest to be held between a champion from amongst their own number, and one each from Durmstrangs – a sinister school whose staff and

students have Eastern European names – and Beauxbatons, which seems to be populated by sylph-like, simpering femmes fatales. (These stereotypes are bad enough in the book; in the film they are exaggerated to insulting proportions.) Harry of course ends up in the thick of the action, and in the background are the political machinations of the Ministry for Magic and the evil schemes of the Dark Lord Voldemort.

The film succeeds at evoking the dark atmosphere of the novel: traps and murders are genuinely frightening, and Voldemort – Fiennes borrowing the make-up effects from *The English Patient* – sends a real chill up the spine when he appears with his Klan-hooded death eaters. There is not so much thrilling magic as in earlier films, with more emphasis on flashes of fire and action or combat spells; costumes have also been played down, it seems, with children wearing jeans and t-shirts rather than wizardly robes.

The most obviously disproportionate element in *Goblet of Fire* is the amount of screen time devoted to the Christmas ball and the adolescents' attempts to find a date. This teen angst is

overplayed and slightly distracting – although on its own terms it is competently handled – and one becomes conscious of how long the film already is. For the younger audience, I suppose, it might seem more essential to the story.

This disjunction between the desire to include such teenage elements, and the need to abbreviate the monster novel it is based on, leads to a film that feels bitty in places, that rushes from one luxurious scene to the next with insufficient transition. This can make the film hard to follow and, in addition, important details are omitted. There is very little character introduction and development before the action begins. For example, the audience is expected to know Harry, Ron, Hermione, and everyone else already. The villainous bully Draco Malfoy has only one significant appearance in the film (although his father – Jason Isaacs on excellent form – appears rather more). Some of the best tricks in the book, such as the confusion between the identities of Barty Crouch and his son, are absent altogether. There are details omitted from the last scenes of the film that I imagine will cause serious difficulties of explanation

for the next instalment – although that will probably not be Newell's problem.

The producers seem to have decided, no doubt correctly, that they do not need to take pains to win new fans with this film, since an overwhelming proportion of the audience will already be familiar with the books and/or the earlier films. This assumption, however, runs the risk of alienating a newcomer to the franchise: while such newcomers may be rare, there was at least one in my company as I saw the film, and I can attest that he found some aspects of the story hard-going. Other than this, there is very little to fault this dark, atmospheric, and creepy – for family entertainment – movie.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Director: Mike Newell
Writers: Steven Kloves
Cinematographer: Roger Pratt
Cast: Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint, Jason Isaacs, Katie Leung, Matthew Lewis, Robbie Coltrane, Michael Gambon, Brendan Gleeson, Alfred Enoch, Miranda Richardson, Gary Oldman, Ralph Fiennes, Eric Sykes, Timothy Spall, David Tennant, Mark Williams
157 mins

Devilish

Every Rose has its deep voice demon,
Martin McGrath discovers



As a horror film, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* hardly breaks new ground owing a huge debt to William Friedkin's superior *The Exorcist* for pretty much every chill or thrill that it offers. What makes it interesting, though hardly enjoyable, is the way in which it reflects the conflict between faith and science that currently dominates American politics on issues such as abortion, stem cell research and the teaching of evolution.

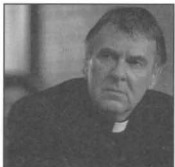
The Exorcism of Emily Rose is the story of the eponymous young girl (Carpenter) who dies under the care of her priest, Father Moore (Wilkinson), who believes he is helping her overcome possession. The story of Emily's possession is told in flashback as the priest stands trial for causing Emily's death through negligent homicide. He is defended by the agnostic, high-flying, lawyer Erin Bruner (Linney) who is under instruction from the priest's superiors to prevent him from testifying and to minimise embarrassment to the church.

The Exorcism of Emily Rose has pretensions to ask "profound" questions. It pretends, as a courtroom drama, to take a neutral position about the relationship between science and faith – allowing each side to present their case. The prosecution lawyer (Scott) is carefully presented as a man of

faith simply upholding the division between church and state and arguing for the medical explanation behind Emily Rose's condition.

But the real sympathies of the film are plain to see. In the courtroom the scientific witnesses are portrayed as arrogant to the point of incompetence. The defence lawyer's supposedly impartial, agnostic, viewpoint is almost immediately abandoned as she becomes convinced (without apparent evidence, but then evidence denies faith) of Father Moore's sincerity. Finally, and most crucially, the audience is shown that Emily Rose's possession is "real" – we are shown the supernatural nature of her experiences and so are never in doubt that the rationalist arguments employed by the priest's accusers fail to appreciate the true nature of reality constructed by the filmmaker.

It is the final address of the priest's lawyer to the jury that infuriates the most. The requirements of a legal system to judge beyond reasonable doubt and the scientific method's unwillingness to offer definitive answers are twisted to allow the possibility that any explanation, however preposterous, is valid so long as a person's actions are driven by genuine faith. In an intellectually unsustainable but nonetheless



impressively cheeky inversion, the tools of postmodernism become the inappropriate and unstable foundations for an attempt to reconstruct a faith-based society. It is precisely the same sort of dishonest argument being used to try and lever Darwinism out of American schools, and it is shoddy and corrupt.

A poor horror film, lacking both menace and tension, if *Emily Rose* is to be remembered for anything it will be the pernicious way it attempts to justify the abandonment of critical or rational modes of thinking in favour of reliance on faith. "This isn't a trial about facts, this is a trial about possibilities" says the Bruner character in her closing remarks. It is nonsense, but it is dangerous nonsense for it implies that faith and understanding are equivalents. It is a statement that precisely defines the moment when the Enlightenment finally crashes to a close and the inexorable march of a new Dark Ages begins.

The Exorcism of Emily Rose

Director: Scott Derrickson

Writers: Paul Harris Boardman & Scott Derrickson

Cinematographer: Tom Stern

Cast: Laura Linney, Tom Wilkinson,

Campbell Scott, Jennifer Carpenter,

Colm Feore, Joshua Close

119 mins

Seen it



When I reviewed the original *Saw* (*Matrix* 169) I liked it a lot – an entertaining, low-budget, high-concept horror that put a nice twist on the serial killer theme and earned its shocks through smart plotting.

Saw II is inferior to the original. The widening out of the original's claustrophobic setting reduces the sense of tension and drama that carried the first film over plot holes and dodgy acting. The larger cast leads to a shallowness in characterisation that frequently fails to avoid tumbling into the stereotypical. The attempt to mix the police drama and horror elements of the story are unconvincing, with neither story feeling fully realised or entirely believable.

Saw II chooses to bring to the fore those elements that the killer, Jigsaw (Bell), gets to talk (and talk and talk...) about his motivation. The first film left the audience with interesting questions and asked them to do their own thinking, the sequel spells everything out in painful detail. Unforgivably it even closes the door on some of the questions left open by the ending of the first movie.

Saw II isn't a total disaster. The predicament of Jigsaw's trapped "subjects" is nicely handled and there's no shortage of imagination invested in the killing machines and traps. *Saw II* may not match the original but it retains enough of that film's energy to ensure that it is superior to the vast majority of American horror films. (MMCG)

Saw II

Director: Darren Lynn Bousman

Writers: Darren Lynn Bousman &

Leigh Whannell

Cinematographer: David Armstrong

Cast: Donnie Wahlberg, Shawnee

Smith, Tobin Bell, Franky G, Glenn

Plummer, Dina Meyer, Emmanuelle

Vaugier, Beverley Mitchell

93 mins

Fluxy time

Charlize Theron brings MTV's animated and deadly heroine to life



Aeon Flux is based on an animated series that was first shown on MTV in the mid and late 1990s. The stories featured the adventures of the lithe and deadly Aeon as she battled the forces of an oppressive government. Not that this was always clear – the early adventures, each just a few minutes long, tended to have no dialogue, abstract sex and violence and end in the death of the eponymous heroine. Aeon's television incarnation was frequently impressive to look at but cold and hard to love.

In the film, set four hundred years from now, mankind is reduced to a rump by a terrible plague. They huddle together in the, apparently utopian, city of Bregna under the care of Doctor Goodchild (Csokas), the man who devised the treatment that saved the remnants of mankind. But all is not as it seems, people are disappearing, the government is covering things up and a resistance movement, the Monicans, are preparing to move against the ruling dictatorship.

Aeon Flux (Theron) is the Monicans' most accomplished operative and she is sent to kill Goodchild as the signal to start a revolution. Aeon discovers that things are not as she believed and that she has a mysterious connection with the dictator. Together they must face down both the Monicans and the forces of

Goodchild's government led by his traitorous brother Oren (Lee Miller) to save humanity.

Reincarnated in this live action outing, the big screen *Aeon Flux* is no easier to love than the television version. Director Kusama and cinematographer Dryburgh have conspired to create a cold world – full of concrete and blue lighting – that borders on the clinical. Theron, though impressively convincing in the action sequences, is a distant figure. The attempts to humanise her, through a relationship with her sister and her history with Goodchild seem, perversely, to have the opposite effect. Her responses are so mechanical and muted that these human elements serve only to make her seem more distant. Whether this is an artefact of Theron's performance – while physically committed she always seems staring longingly off screen as if she wished to be somewhere else – or is an intentional result of Kusama's vision of the character is unclear.

The result, however, is that at the centre of the film is a character that is so smooth and slippery and icy that she is impossible to embrace. It seems to me that a film does not, necessarily, need to have characters we like or sympathise with to succeed but it must have characters the viewer can understand if it is to engage the audience. *Aeon Flux* as a film, and as a character, builds no

such relationship with the viewer.

There are impressive elements to the film. Two early action sequences are fluid, slick and dramatically impressive – Theron really shines in these scenes and fans of the original could hardly hope for more from a live-action adaptation. The set design and the city of Bregna are impressively realised and, while this is not an all-out action film in the style of *The Matrix*, the fight sequences are well handled – though I confess I found the final shootout both too long and annoyingly stupid – when bullets fly, why doesn't anyone ever dive for cover in *sf* movie fights?

Aeon Flux's attempts at adding intellectual weight to its confection, a half-hearted attempt to address ideas of "freedom" and "humanity" are undermined by some hokum about clones retaining the memories of their original incarnations and never really amount to much. In any case the film really isn't interested in devoting too much time to establishing what its concepts mean or how they might be employed in this context. There is no indication of why Aeon might consider clones inferior to normally born babies, we just have to accept that they are. Nor does the film explain why Aeon is justified in destroying a stable society, putting everyone at risk, because she doesn't consider it sufficiently free – although there is no clear explanation about

how (following Oren's defeat) its population might be enslaved. Instead we are asked to accept that her grand gestures are "right" because they are visually impressive.

A little like *The Island*, with which it shares some themes and a cinematic palette if not the same sense of kinetic energy, *Aeon Flux* falls between two stools. It simply isn't substantial enough to qualify as really good science fiction but it isn't outrageous enough to qualify as a really good action movie. In fact, in its own way, *Aeon Flux* is even more superficial than Bay's traditionally overblown action films. *Aeon Flux* has good looks and pretensions to intellectual depth but, like a po-faced teenager writing poetry about their miserable life and how no one else understands them, Kusama's film has confused self absorption with profundity.

Aeon Flux is worth watching, if for no other reason than that the early part of 2006 is virtually devoid of other *sf* movies, but this is by no means a great movie. (MMcG)

Aeon Flux

Director: Karyn Kusama

Writers: Phil Hay & Matt Manfredi

Cinematographer: Stuart Dryburgh

Cast: Charlize Theron, Morton

Csokas, Jonny Lee Miller, Sophie

Okonedo, Frances McDormand,

Pete Postlethwaite, Amelia Warner,

Caroline Chikezie

90 mins

Boys' toys



Set in the same universe as the much less successful *Jumanji*, *Zathura* features two boys who have a troubled relationship with their father and each other. They discover a board game that throws them into an outer space adventure, forcing them to come to terms with each other while battling large reptilian aliens, dodging meteor showers and working out how to defeat a murderous robot.

Director Favreau has made much of his decision to stick with practical effects as much as possible in *Zathura* and to eschew CGI. To an extent the decision pays off, but only insofar as the special effects do their job largely unnoticed. That's not to say that they aren't good, it's just that they don't call attention to themselves in the way that bad CGI does. The robot is, however, an impressive creation.

Despite a time-travel twist that I really couldn't get to make sense,

Zathura. Ssssh! Don't tell anyone it's a sequel to *Jumanji*.

Zathura is a reasonably likeable but largely unremarkable science fiction family drama.

Once it gets past the rather too lengthy opening set-up of the children's domestic setting, everything zips along at a nice pace. The cast is fine, the kids' casual violence towards each other undercutting a tendency towards the saccharine in places, and there's some nice direction. *Zathura* has moments of excitement and adventure but it's hard to imagine any part of it staying with the viewer, young or old, a moment after the lights go up.

Zathura

Directors: Jon Favreau

Writers: David Koepp & John Kamps

Cinematographer: Guillermo Navarro

Starring: Jonah Bobo, Josh Hutcherson,

Dax Shepard, Kirsten Steward, Tim

Robbins, Frank Oz

113 mins



Yesterday's Target (1995) has a bloke from *Star Trek* in it... and that's about the only interesting thing in the entire movie, Martin McGrath discovers.

I wonder when the makers of *Yesterday's Target* realised that they were on to a loser? I don't understand.

Did they know it would stink when they gave a casting call and Daniel Baldwin turned up. Danny gives the other Baldwin brothers a bad name.

Who casts Daniel Baldwin? He's made sixty feature films in fifteen years.

And they're all appalling. It has been statistically proven that the higher the billing of Daniel Baldwin the worse that film will be. It's a law of physics. I knew that.

Is he high up here?

Right at the top.

Oh. Who is that? Is it the googly-eyed one from *Star Trek*? LeVar Burton.

Geordie?

That's him.

He's nice. Everyone loves

Geordie. Is he the hero?

He's a bad guy.

Geordie's a Starfleet officer he can't - Oh my god! Geordie shot that man! Someone call Worf! He's LeVar and he's playing a bad guy, really badly.

He said: "From now on we're going to do things my way." So?

I've got an idea.

Don't let it die of loneliness.

Well, you know when Picard asks Geordie how long it will take to fix the Enterprise? Yes.

And Geordie says "I'll need at least six hours to give you impulse power?" Yes.

And Picard says "You have five minutes, make it so visor boy?" Yes.

And Geordie says, "Ye cannae change the laws of physics!"? That was the other one.

Right, sorry. And Data saves the day, like in ninety-nine percent of all *Star Trek*: TNG episodes? Yes

Well wouldn't it be better if one day Geordie walked onto the bridge, screamed: "I said six hours, baldy!" blasted Picard with a phaser, turned to camera and said: "From now on, we're doing things my way?"

You're definitely onto something. Should we talk about this film? Yes, we should, but it's very dull.

How dull is it?

Well there are people in it called "masks", they're psychics who stand around staring at candles projecting psychic visions that the secret base of the psychic society battling an oppressive government's evil agents is actually a deserted ruin.

Do you have a point?

Well, imagine how dull that is. They stare at a candle all day every day thinking "We're standing in a ruin... We're standing in a ruin..." They don't even get to hum or anything. They don't even get fancy clothes - they look like refugees from Primark.

I suppose that sounds pretty dull. Well, they had twice as much fun in this movie as the audience.

Coming soon

Many years from now our children will look back on the next few months and wonder how we survived the "Great SF Movie Drought of 2006". Between January and April just nine genre films will be released in UK cinemas.

Two we've seen and they are awful (*The Fog* and *Underworld: Evolution*), two we've reviewed this issue (*Zathura* and *Aeon Flux*), Two more (*Final Destination 3* and *Scary Movie 4*) are mid-budget teen horror franchises.

That leaves *Alien* and *Dec in Alien Autopsy*, independent horror *Slither* and the only really interesting one (*V for Vendetta*) may not be available to review for next issue.

But fear not, we have plans to score you some alternative fixes.

There will be reviews of Neil Gaiman's *Mirror Mask*, and *A Saimon of Thunder*, amongst others, and features on the burgeoning fan film sector, a look at sci-fi films from around the world and we'll have reports from the Sci-Fi London.

Just hang on, we will make it to May, I promise.

LOVING THE



Tom Hunter visits The Science Museum and gets totally alienated.

As any real SF fan or conspiracy theorist knows, the only real way to display your alien collection is in a secret basement somewhere. The kind of place where you should lock all of your exhibits away into rows of dusty filing cabinets before turning out the lights, welding shut the doors and signing yourself up for a government-sponsored mind-wiping experiment.

In contrast *The Science of Aliens* exhibition at London's Science Museum has done everything it can to alert you to its presence. From a witty advertising campaign featuring neat variations of everyday travel items (two-stemmed toothbrushes, three-eyed swimming goggles etc) asking what the modern alien visitor would pack for a trip to Earth, through to its own tie-in show, *Alien Worlds* on Channel 4, the

museum is doing everything it can to thrust the unknown and alien into the public eye.

The exhibition itself is very much in the modern tradition of museum attractions in that it emphasises education, asking questions and promoting interaction with the material on show, rather than simply placing a collection on display and waiting to see what the public make of it.

In many ways I miss this older style of museum exhibition. When I was younger a trip to London wasn't complete without a visit to the neighbouring Natural History and Science Museum's, and it's the memory of the permanent collections (ok, especially the dinosaurs) that have brought me back as an adult. But the Science Museum has always been amongst the most forward thinking museums in communicating its

messages, and so it's hardly surprising that this exhibition opts for a flashy mix of media in delivering its content. After all, after deciding the theme for this exhibition, the first question they must have asked themselves is 'what do we put on show when we don't really have any aliens?'

The exhibition opens with that most alien concept of all: popular culture. The idea of aliens, or the alien, is intrinsically woven through our collective subconscious, and it has always been so – only the names have changed over the years – so we're faced with replica's of James Cameron's Alien queen and a Vogon from the recent *Hitchhiker's* film alongside projections of instantly recognisable movie footage and a B-movie parade of the most iconic monsters Hollywood can muster. If there's one thing this opener

tells us, it's that proper aliens are meant to be monstrous. I suspect that if we discovered signs of cute and fluffy life on Mars tomorrow the shared disappointment would be enough to cancel the space exploration programme for good.

Warming to its theme, the exhibition makes efforts to link the modern day fascination with aliens to the wider concept of 'the other' in the human mind, and so we also see parallels being drawn between vampire myths and faerieland (abductions, time-loss, incomprehensible motives etc – sound familiar anyone?) as well as our continuing Mulder-like need to believe and our fascination with crop-circles and "alien" autopsy footage featuring the cutting up of unconvincing rubber suits. We're even treated to examples of religious paintings, on loan from other collections, that show flying

ALIEN



circles of light in the sky projecting mysterious energy rays down on the usual pious tableaux. These last come with a sniffy disclaimer stating that the loaners in no way endorse the view that these objects might be UFO's; which if you ask me only proves they've bought into the idea as well. What else is a big something in the sky that flies and we don't know what it is except an unidentified flying object, in the proper meaning of the term at least. What is it these people don't want us to know?

And so we move on, only to discover that the alien has been around us all the time, and if we want to marvel in the diversity of that crazy little thing called Life all we need do is look to the edges of our own planet. You could call this section the menagerie, as the exhibition treats us to examples of the weird and wonderful that we

already know exists. From bizarre deep trench-living eels that can turn inside out through to bacteria that can survive in space for up to six months. There's no proof here that the design of life is intelligent (at least in the fundamentalist sense) but there is an inspiring sense of wonder that the evolutionary engine of nature can be quite so phenomenally creative. The bizarre selection of creatures on display here are wonderful.

And so the exhibition takes its cues from our own planet and sets out to extrapolate the types of life that might occur on other worlds. To do this they've taken two different types of planet and imagined the type of creature that might evolve there. With creatures like Cloud-Whales, Mudhops and swarming insectoid Hysterias on show, I imagine that for fans of space opera at least this will be

more like coming home than a radical scientific extrapolation, but the science is there, even if it is a popular breed. In using the differing conditions of their planets as a starting point – one is a moon circling a gas giant while the other is locked into a stationary orbit around a red giant, keeping one side permanently in night – the exhibition is able to highlight the different paths that evolution might take to arrive at something we might have a chance of recognising as life, or may miss altogether.

In the end this exhibition successfully delivers a fun, informative and above all open-minded exploration of the idea of aliens, that while never pandering to the 'I want to believe' tendency, does go a long way towards reclaiming the science of aliens as a subject worth studying.



2 for 1

The Science of Aliens exhibition is open at the Science Museum until the end of February 2006. Entrance costs £8.95 for adults and £6.25 for children and concessions.

Thanks to The Science Museum, BSFA members can take advantage of a special "two for the price of one" offer and enjoy the exhibition for half price.

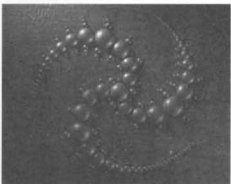
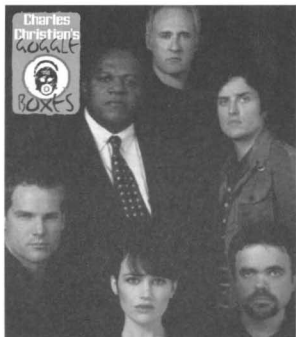
Simply bring a copy of this issue of *Matrix* along with you when you go to buy your tickets.

This offer is valid until Friday, February 16, 2006.

OFFER

Over the edge

Matrix's new television critic, Charles Christian, takes a look at *Threshold*.



Blast off!



Hyperdrive will take off in January. The new BBC space-set comedy will be broadcast on BBC2 from Wednesday 11 January, 2006. Set aboard the *HMS Camden Lock* it features Nick Frost, Kevin Eldon and Miranda Hart.



ITV has responded to the success of *Doctor Who* by commissioning its own tale of a time travelling gent. *Primaevae*, a six-part, £6 million budget, adventure tells the story of Professor Cutter as he travels back in time to find out what has happened to his wife who disappeared into a black hole – we're guessing she hasn't been squished. The commercial network plans to air the show on a weekend evening slot.



ITV have also picked up the rights to *Surface*, one of the slew of alien invasion shows clogging up US networks. Unlike *Threshold* (opposite), *Surface* has been greenlit for the whole of its first season by producers NBC. The story deals with the emergence of a mysterious form of sea life from beneath the oceans. *Surface* is scheduled to be broadcast on ITV's new 'male-skewed' digital channel, ITV4 (available on Freeview, cable and Sky).



Alan Ball, creator of the hit HBO show *Six Feet Under* will return to that network to create a vampire story based on Charlaine Harris's *Southern Vampire* novel series. Harris's novels feature a world in which the creation of synthetic blood allows humanity and the vampires to live side-by-side. Ball also wrote the Oscar-winning script for *American Beauty*.

To say this autumn's choice of SF viewing on TV was lame, is an understatement of galactic proportions. One 5 minute taster of David Tennant as the new *Doctor Who* on the *Children in Need* telethon – this column is being written before the Christmas Day special airs. A bit more rumour and gossip surrounding the upcoming *Doctor Who* spin-off *Torchwood* – Rachel Stevens, the cute one out of *S Club 7* whose solo career ground to a halt after a couple of hits, has been back for a third round of auditions for the role of Captain Jack's assistant. And, er, as far as the UK terrestrial channels are concerned, that's it, thank-you and don't forget to switch off the set before you go to bed.

But what about the new *Threshold* series on Sky One? The pre-show hype was enormous – according to one preview 'think *The X-Files* but faster and with humour', while the heroine Dr Molley Caffrey (actress Carla Gugino whose previous credits include *Spin City* and *Spy Kids*) is described as 'radiating so much TV starpower it just might be visible from outer space'. Get outta here. The series is dull, dull, dull. Think every permutation of alien invaders stories you have seen in the past,

from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to *Men in Black* and you have the basic idea. Beautiful scientist with troubled private life heads brilliant but oddball team (including Brent Spiner, aka Data from *Star Trek Next Generation*) working for super-secret government agency while the main manifestation of alien infection is to turn victims into homicidal zombies with super-powers. I lost the will to live half way through the double-length starter episode and I don't think I'm alone. Thirteen episodes were produced but its American network, CBS, cancelled the show after just ten, citing low ratings.

That leaves us with the second season of *Stargate Atlantis* once more battling the Wraith, yawn, and the ninth season of *Stargate SG-1*. Here we actually do have something interesting – and we'll gloss over the fact this season's new enemy, the Orii, appear to be fanatical religious zealots threatening democracy and the American way of life, where have we heard that before? As part of the season 8/9 cast change, we have Ben Browder (aka John Crichton from *Farscape*) with a lead role and the always-excellent Claudia Black (aka John Crichton's love interest Officer Aeryn Sun) making an

occasional appearance. Now here's the rub because in every episode that features Black, who plays the her role in the same sarcastic, sassy way she did in *Farscape*, the show positively zips along. But when she's gone, its back to the same wooden characters and plodding plots that filled the previous 8 seasons. So, here's a thought for SF programme makers: how about giving us shows where the protagonists are sufficiently interesting that we really do care whether they live or die. That's why *Farscape* had such a strong following and why *Threshold* came to a premature end.

As for the New Year? Well there is some hope as the second series of *Battlestar Galactica* kicks off on Sky One in January – at the time of writing, this is scheduled for 9:00pm on Tuesday 9th. And, looking further into the future, according to press reports Sky is in talks to bring back Patrick McGoochan's cult classic *The Prisoner* however this will not be a re-run of the original series but an 8-part 'radical reinvention' of the series that will take 'liberties with the original'.

It won't be set in Portmeirion either – well I did say only that there was 'some' hope.

SEDUCTION of the Innocent

COMIC REVIEWS BY JAMES BACON ESQ.



Welcome to the first instalment of "Seduction of the Innocent", *Matrix's* new comic review column.

First, I suppose a word of explanation is necessary about the title. *Seduction of the Innocent* was published in 1954 by Dr Fredric Wertham – a psychiatrist who made a name for himself by attacking comic books for their violence and sexual content. His work led to a US Congressional inquiry, the establishment of the Comics Code Authority and a long era of censorship in comics. The Phantom Lady, the fearsome woman in this column's logo, was used as part of Wertham's evidence.

So "Seduction of the Innocent" seemed a perfect title for a column that will review the current state of comics. This column will have two parts, I'll look ahead to comics and graphic novels due to be published soon and also review recent releases.

Releases to look forward to in January include:

Jingle Belle: The Fight Before Christmas (Dark Horse)

Paul Dini with stylised cartoon art by Jose Garibaldi and Stephanie Gladden. Santa's rebellious daughter is back. Mad fun and wonderful art from Dark Horse.

SGT. Rock: The Prophecy #1 (DC)

DC's most famous soldier in a six part mini series. With story and art by Joe Kubert, it has potential.

The Stories Of Alan Moore TP (DC)

304 pages of brilliance, a collection of all Alan Moore's DC work, except for *Swamp Thing*, *V for Vendetta* and *The Watchmen*. If you bought DC's earlier *Across the Universe of Alan Moore*, you'll find a lot of repetition across the two volumes. Moore is unhappy about the continuous repackaging of his DC work, but this is still an excellent selection.



Ares #1 (Marvel)

Marvel brings Michael Avon Oeming from *Powers*, with art by Travel Foreman. Ares, The God of War is Zeus's nuclear option, sent in when total annihilation is required. But what happens when Ares attempts to turn his back on his violent past and raise a family? Find out in this is a five part mini-series with Greek legends meeting the Marvel Universe.



The New Avengers: Breakout

Writer: Brian Michael Bendis Artist: David Finch
Publisher: Marvel, 2005 £12.99, Hardcover 160pp

The Avengers have been around since 1963 but have just been through a shake-up. Brian Michael Bendis took the opportunity to bring the series to an end. They were "disassembled", it was meant to "rock the marvel universe" but all it really did was kill off a few of the lesser characters and pave the way for a relaunch with a clean slate.

The New Avengers are Spiderman, as lippy as ever, Captain America, Iron Man, Wolverine, Daredevil, Sentry, all big characters and quite popular right now, and then there is the token girl and black bloke: Spiderwoman and Luke Cage. Is that cynical? She looks great in PVC,

er... spandex or whatever superheroes wear, and Luke is moody.

Breakout collects the first six issues of *The New Avengers*. When someone masterminds a mass breakout of supervillains the superhero response is well-intentioned but poorly co-ordinated. Captain America sets about recreating the Avengers to deal with "big events". The New Avengers hunt down the mastermind behind the breakout but things quickly get complicated and, within a few pages, there is political intrigue and underhanded betrayal, which is nice and intelligent.

Bendis has a knack for storytelling – the pacing is just right with enough action for young and old and the dialogue is a winner and often very funny. This is a good outing for Marvel's finest, and the draughtsmanship is just perfect, with a good mix of mild accentuation and realism. It compliments the story totally and is overall a very enjoyable quick read and, being hardback, looks respectable too. Volume 2 is available in January.



Hard Time, 50 to life.

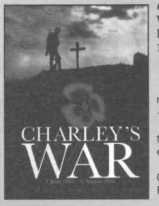
Writer: Steve Gerber Artist Brian Hurtt
Publisher: DC, 2005 £5.99, paperback 140pp

In his brilliant little story, the protagonist – high school student Ethan Harrow – is unwittingly involved in a Columbine style school shot up with his friend. What he expects will be a prank becomes very real as many people die. Ethan, although not firing a shot is sentenced to 50 years to life.

Hard Time is soft core Oz meets a young smart arsed teenager with an unknown power. The prison politics, cruelty, savagery and unpleasantness are all there. Not everything is explicit, but enough is implied.

Gerber, best known for the acclaimed *Howard the Duck* (forget about the movie, please), is

in his element and the dialogue here is also great. Hurtt's artwork is basic but sufficient. At less than a £1 per comic, this is definitely a good read. A sequel begins in the New Year. One to watch for.



Charley's War: 2 June – 1 August 1916

Writer Pat Mills Artist Joe Colquhoun
Publisher: Titan Books, 2004 £14.99, hardback 112pp

Forget nostalgia. Forget that my Dad bought *Battle* for me with this story in it in 1979.

Forget that for about six years, every week I read *Battle* and it was always this story I read last – saving the best, and all that. Forget all that!

This is the finest war comic there is. It brings the true horror of war to life, and did so for children every week for years.

Our hero, if one can use the word, is the naive Charley Bourne. He lies to join up and is sent to France just in time for the Battle of the Somme.

This graphic novel brings

us the first seven months worth of stories from *Battle*, and is beautifully told and harrowingly drawn. The attention to detail is incredible, brought to life in gruesome and intricate vividness by Colquhoun's artwork. This anti-war classic is a well-paced and addictive read.

Check out Neil Emery's website (charleyswar.tripod.com), which was involved in the re-issue of these stories. The next in the series should be available as *Matrix* goes to press. Hopefully the complete ten volumes will be printed.



Deadline looming

For the most up-to-date list of works nominated for the 2005 BSFA Awards go to www.bsfa.co.uk/awards.html

SEVEN awards season is now upon us in the UK, with the shortlists for the BSFA awards being announced at around the time this issue of *Matrix* is due to arrive with you in January 2006. Thanks to everyone who nominated this year: we've had a bumper run of nominations for short fiction in particular, and a very interesting and varied range of sources for short fiction, artwork and non-fiction.

Of course, magazine schedules being what they are, I'm writing this on the other side of Christmas 2005, which is why I'm not going on to tell you what's on the shortlists. Indeed, at this stage I wouldn't even like to guess; but you'll be able to find out from the BSFA website if you can't wait until the next issue of *Matrix*.

Meanwhile, I'm sitting here in November writing to you in January wondering if any of you are actually reading this at any point in the foreseeable future. I know there are lots of you out there; a fair few of you have sent me nominations for the awards. But this column doesn't draw much other feedback, and I realise you might think I only want you for your nominations. In fact I want as many opinions as you're willing to give me (even ones that have nothing to do with the awards; surprise me, why don't you?). But, in particular, I'd be interested to know what you think about a number of issues that people nominating for the awards this year have asked me about.

Firstly, should people be able to nominate their own work? At the moment there's nothing to stop anyone doing so, but it doesn't happen very often. My approach is that there's no reason to change this: no one is going to get onto any of the shortlists with a single nomination, and so other people would have to like the work in question for it to have any chance of success. Obviously there's no bar on someone nominating the work of a family member or friend either; who am I to say that people shouldn't enjoy the work of their friends or family? To me, there isn't a sensible place to draw a line so there should be no specific restriction; anyone nominating has to be a BSFA member and they can nominate what they like.

Secondly, should the eligibility

criteria for the novel category be broadened? The other categories are open to any works published anywhere in the world, whether in hard copy or online, in the eligible year; but the novel category is open only to works that are being published in the UK (in hard copy) for the first time. This has come about because a large number of the short fiction, artwork, and non-fiction made available in any one year are published in a way that means they will not have a separate 'British' existence at any stage in the future, so having such a restriction would cut down the field in a way that isn't meaningful and doesn't reflect what people are reading. In addition, many of the sources for works in these categories are online, in a way that makes any nationality criteria relatively meaningless.

But a few people this year had read and wanted to nominate novels which are currently only available online (of which some are scheduled to have a British print edition next year, but at least one was from an author without a current British publisher). As things stand I had to decline those

nominations, so I'd be interested in views about whether novels published online should be eligible in the year they become available in this way. My view at the moment is that this would diminish such novels' chances of reaching the shortlist, since most BSFA members still prefer to read novels in paper format and thus won't have read them to nominate them in that year they're available electronically, but I'd like to know whether I'm just displaying twentieth century thinking here.

Setting that issue aside, should we be opening the novel award to any novel on its first publication – in hard copy, in this case – anywhere in the world? Our thinking has been that most BSFA members are living in Britain and thus most have easier access to (and may well prefer to buy) the British editions of novels, but again if this doesn't reflect what most of you are doing then it would be useful to know that. It would also be helpful to know if there are any other reasons why you think we should keep this category focused on the British editions of novels, or not.

Oh, and for anyone who's

stuck for a New Year resolution, why not start thinking about the 2006 awards? You're reading this in January or later, so there's already science fiction being published that's eligible, and you have approximately a year to find novels, short fiction, artwork and non-fiction that you like and tell me all about it. That includes all those of you who didn't nominate anything for the 2005 awards – especially, of course, if you're disappointed by your favourites not being on the shortlists. Why not make this the year that you take control of the awards from the opinionated minority who nominated this time...?

And, of course, don't forget to vote for the 2005 awards. They'll be presented on Saturday 15 April 2006 at Concession, the British national science fiction convention (Eastercon); any votes I receive by post or email by Tuesday 10 April and any votes I receive at the convention before 6 pm on 15 April, from BSFA members and/or people with an attending membership of the Eastercon, will be counted. Ballot forms will be sent out to BSFA members later.

BSFA Award Nominations 2005

You can give your nominations directly to Claire Brialey or send them to the address below. All nominations for the 2005 BSFA Awards must be received by 21 January 2006

Name

BSFA Membership No.

Contact phone number or email (in case of query)

Please note, nominations cannot be accepted without the name of the person making the nominating.

Award category

Author or artist

Title

Source (e.g. publisher or magazine)

Claire Brialey, BSFA Awards Administrator, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7ES
or awards@fishlifter.demon.co.uk



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RAGE AGAINST... ...THE DARK SIDE OF SF

Comedy science fiction – now there's a contradiction. Like "military intelligence" and *Star Wars* (stars don't fight each other). Or is it?

It's not that I'm actually against the masses of serious, shadowy SF that holds the majority market share, so you can't really call this a *Rage Against the dark side* per se. It's more of a *passion for the radiance of comic wit*.

SF that's not just dark and sinister must exist, but where the heck is it? Where are all the true comic SF books? Where are the planets

that look like Auntie Mable's face, the aliens who get space-sick, the rockets that run on custard?

So in true SF style I set off on a quest. I didn't pack my magic ring, my staff of light or my all-seeing eye. I guess I should have taken a blast-o-zap, portable transmat beam, and an e-custardpie. But none of these actually exist, and my quest was supposedly in the real world, or at least to my local Waterboardsmiths.

My aim: to find out if SF still had anything funny about it.

But first I had to define "Sci Fi". And here's where I knew could

really upset the apple hovercart. So for the purposes of my quest I decided to define SF as all those books in the SF section at Waterboardsmiths. It had to be at least moderately funny, and have at least two of the themes of technology, future, or space. But absolutely no Elves. Or magic rings.

So, what did I find? So much serious doom and gloom, space opera, Elves in Wonderland, Cyberpunk, more Elves. And then a whole shelf full of Douglas Adams: *H2G2*, Dirk Gently and biographies of the grandfather of true comedy SF. But, very sadly, Douglas is no longer with us.

Scouring the shelves I find Grant Naylor – I like a bit of Red Dwarf, but I don't think they're writing SF anymore. Tom Holt's *Snow White and the Seven Samurai* is sock-loosingly funny, but not SF. I discovered several acres of rib-braking Pratchett, but Rincewind and Nanny Ogg live in a fantasy world. And then Robert Rankin with his sprouts and hollow chocolate bunnies. Cross-genre at best. *Slapstick* was the only Kurt Vonnegut in the SF section (and many people say he's not SF?) and there was no Robert Shekley.

So here we have it. There is no living true comedy SF author

actually writing in the world today.

Unless you look in Australia.

In Oz they have two things: *Andromeda Spaceways*, a poor cricket team and Simon Hayes. Three things. And a sense of humour. Four. Four things they have in Australia. I guess they need the sense of humour to get over the cricket, and *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* to cater for those who crave planets made of wobbly desserts and aliens needing anti-emetics. Simon Hayes's recently released *Hal Spacejock* seems to fit the bill: Humour: yes. Technology: yup. Space: well it's in the title.

And then editor of *Scifantastic* magazine Sarah Dodds pointed me in the direction of Sue Lange's *Tritheon Hash*, which is now on its way to me from Amazon. If only Waterboardsmiths would stock either of these.

So do I take it all back? Has the tide of titillation turned? Can we breathe a sigh of comic relief? Well two funny writers do not a genre make. Is there a truly funny SF book I've missed? Please let me know and I'll send you a signed copy of my own hilarious Hugo nomination (ahem). Now all I need to do is find a comedy SF agent.

Andrew OD Booth

COVER ARTIST: Mike Fyles

Mike Fyles produces magazine covers so good that it seems a crime that no one will ever read the stories he illustrates – because they never existed. Using modern digital techniques, Mike's art harks back to the genre's pulp roots. I asked him how this series of images came about. "I have always liked illustration and tend to produce it either as cover art or sequential imagery. Stylistically, I'm keen on the commercial illustration of the mid 20th Century that was made to promote 'fringe' magazines and comics. My current preoccupation has been described aptly as 'nostalgic sci fi and pulp'."

I like the way your images blend modern 3D images with pulp ideas, how did you come up with that combination? "It is only fairly recently that I have started to use, and like, digital

media, but tend to use it always as a means to an end. My working methods are a little too intuitive, tending to reflect my previous use of traditional media, but I also like to learn by studying the work of others."

What's next then? "I am enjoying making imagery more than ever and would like to explore the possibilities of illustrating written stories."

Mike's website is currently under construction, but you can see more of his work and contact him as 'Mikeall' at www.renderosity.com.

Matrix would like to thank Mike for allowing us to use his work on the cover of this issue. If you're an artist who'd like to contribute to the magazine, please contact Martin McGrath (martinmcgrath@ntlworld.com).

