

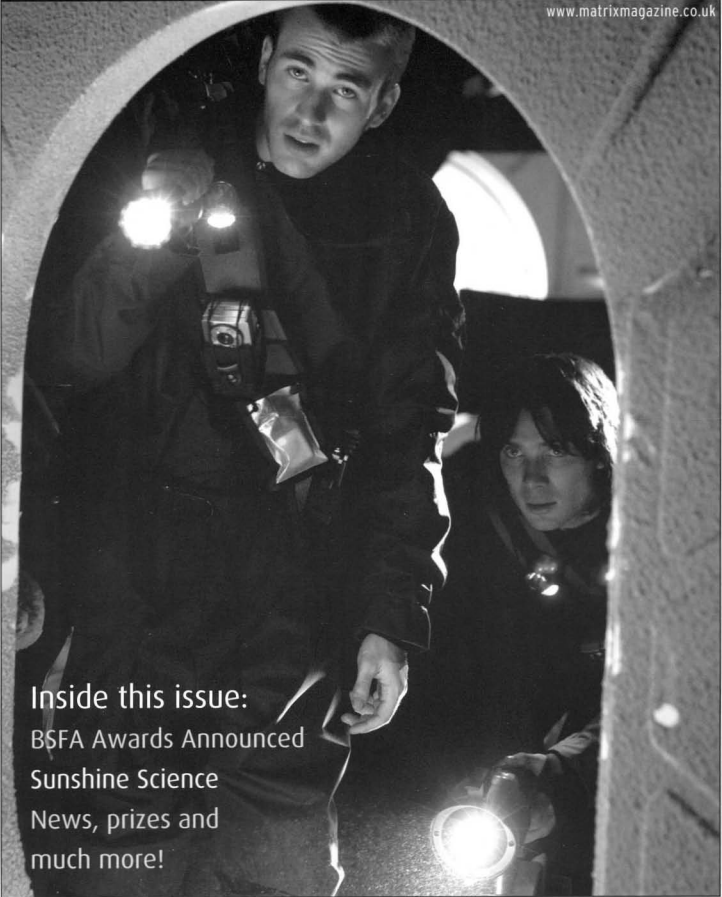
# matrix

the media magazine of the british science fiction association

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183

[www.matrixmagazine.co.uk](http://www.matrixmagazine.co.uk)



Inside this issue:  
BSFA Awards Announced  
Sunshine Science  
News, prizes and  
much more!

# matrix

## In this issue

Five Card Trick  
The BSFA Awards shortlist in full

Page 8



Hot Topic  
Dr. Brian Cox on the making  
of *Sunshine*

Page 14

Guest Editorial 3  
*Matrix* Editor Tom Hunter wants a word

News, Fanzines and Competition Spot 4

Mars Unlocked 6  
Stephen Baxter joins the British Interplanetary Society

Rage Against... SF Mags 10  
Charles Christain takes the gloves off

Media Section 11

Goggle Boxes 22  
It's more than just telly, you know

Seduction of the Innocent 24  
Comic timing from James Bacon

Roderick Gladwish's World of Science 25

Foundation Favourites 26  
Oldies but Goodies

Contribute! Join! 27  
Membership form and current opportunities at *Matrix*

## matrix

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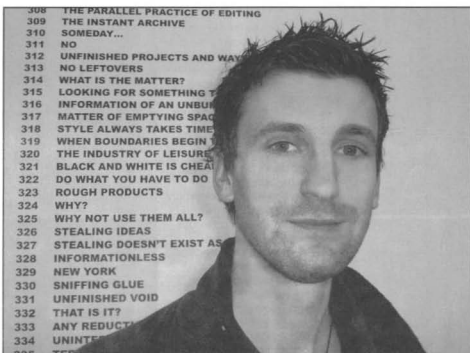
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## Words of wisdom

"Was a bit perturbed to see that this year's Clarke Award shortlist omitted two pretty important titles from 2006, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Thomas Pynchon's exuberant and exorbitant *Against the Day*. I gather both were left off because their publishers either refused or failed to deliver reading copies in time for the judges to make their decisions easily, and that each book was deemed ineligible because of this refusal or failure. One's sympathy for the plight of the Clarke and its judges notwithstanding, it does seem odd that books that (on the basis of very extensive review coverage) would seem to be plausible candidates for shortlisting were in fact not considered for reasons extrinsic to their merit. What the Clarke must be about - what importantly it is seen by most of us to be about - is the book itself. Nothing else. Really, nothing else."

John Clute on this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist  
Source: [ansible.co.uk](http://ansible.co.uk)



# Word of (Big) Mouth

Matrix Editor Tom Hunter on  
channelling our potential

**A**s this is an article on the power of recommendations, I thought I should start with one of my own: in my humble opinion, there is nothing better in the world than being Editor of this magazine.

Through the BSFA's main membership, distribution at sci-fi conventions and, of course, our online presence at [www.matrixmagazine.co.uk](http://www.matrixmagazine.co.uk) and the kind folk who link to us, we can legitimately claim a readership that spans the globe – and if you don't believe me I have emails to prove it.

More importantly, we're a magazine of the snafu grassroots, developed by fans for fans, even if many of the people reading us have never really thought of themselves as fans before or engaged in anything more overtly fannish than buying books or going to the cinema. In other words just like the so-called normal people hanging out on the other side of the cultural divide.

That's not the best bit about being Editor though, because at the end of the day if you know me well you'll know I'm really all about the free stuff; and oh boy do I get a lot of that.

If it's not publishers deluging me with advance copies of new books by my favourite authors so I can read them first and then tell you all about them, it's movie companies plugging their latest release or simply somebody wanting to invite me to a swanky lunch party so they can buy me lots of wine, generate some 'buzz' and justify their vast hospitality budget for another financial quarter.

The moral here isn't that it's a hard life being me, even if you might pity me the endless glamorous parties or worry I'm getting too fashionably thin on my all-cannapé diet, and rather that pretty much everything I've just said above is bollocks.

Don't get me wrong, I think being the Editor of *Matrix* is great. However if I wanted you to think it was super-spiffing-great too, my Idiots Guide to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Selling Techniques (note: made up book) would tell me I needed to get busy selling you on the benefits of the job rather than detailing the endless nights stuck in

front of the computer hacking copy into shape or figuring out why our layout software has spontaneously reset itself on deadline night.

If I was really sneaky I'd recommend all the above plus points to your best friend as well, that way when they told you about it you'd be more likely to trust them and I could hand the job over to you and retire in peace.

There're a few good reasons I'm writing about recommendations this issue, and as the idea first came about through one of those synchronous convergence type things, I'm going to tell you about those now.

First off, of course, was the announcement of the BSFA Award shortlist, which along with a whole bunch of fantastic fiction and artwork also features a recommended reading list of non-fiction work that we think you should read absolutely all of right now if you ever want to be even a tiny bit as well informed as the editors and writers of *Matrix* are.

Then there was one of those fancy launch party type things (just like the kind I subtly dropped into the article a couple of paragraphs back).

This one was a Penguin bash to celebrate the UK publication of *The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters* by G.W. Dahlquist. The thing is they first published *Glass Books* last year in a sneaky limited edition serial format, ten issues mailed out over ten weeks that you could only buy online and that they rather artfully forgot to mention to most people. The idea here is that those in the know will go off and tell all their friends about this cool new book they're reading (before anyone else) and prime them for the release of the hardback version. By the time of the main launch party the main marketing folk were already tired of this neat little trick, and the talk was entirely centred around the social networking opportunities available on *MySpace* and *Second Life*. Word is there may be a few of the limited editions leftover though, and anyone fancying a set should check out [www.glassbooks.co.uk](http://www.glassbooks.co.uk) immediately.

Naturally *Matrix* has its own stash under the

desk already, and so we'll be floating those out on to eBay in the coming months as a gesture to those who missed the boat first time round.

Finally, I was invited along to a Future Foundation presentation ([www.futurefoundation.net](http://www.futurefoundation.net)) that was looking at the way people are increasingly classifying themselves by their preferred channels of communication rather than the more traditional models of community, workspace or socio-economic background. Cue lots of jargon about the intellectual digerati, cyber tourists and nu-tech novices, and also a very telling point that we are increasingly relying on our own extended networks of friends and contacts for trustworthy information over more defined sources such as the big news networks, advertising or government bodies.

With reliable recommendations comes reputation (or *wuffie* for all those fans of Cory Doctorow out there) not to mention added status for being the first to spot cool new stuff.

That this should hardly be news for the fast blogging, tech-literate masses of ifandom is kind of my point. In a very real way the mass migration of fandom and its community psyche on to the internet has been one of the driving forces of the social networking phenomenon, and the marketing departments of the world are starting to wake up to this fact.

This is great news for us fans, by the way, as it substantially increases our own reputational stock within those same dusty departments, and this will hopefully lead to a more two-way level of communication in the future: something that will hopefully position us as a driving force for the continuing development of science fiction and its literature.

Right now though you should stop listening to me wuffie on and check out the BSFA recommended reading list right away, and don't forget to tell all your friends about it too.

They'll thank you for it, and so will I.

To see all of Tom's top recommendations this month check out pages 1 – 28 of this magazine.

## Give Me Fanzines

### Ansible

Ed: Dave Langford  
The monthly indispensable guide to what's going on in fan circles.  
Address: 94 London Rd, Reading, Berks, R1 5AU  
www.news.ansible.co.uk  
Print version is available for SAE.

### Plokta

Eds: Mike Scott, Alison Scott, Mike Davies.  
Address: 24 St. Mary Rd., Walthamstow, London E17 9RG.

### Head

Eds: Christina Lake and Doug Bell  
Address: 35 Gyllyng Street, Falmouth, Cornwall, TR11 3EL

### iShoes

Ed: Yvonne Rowse  
Address: Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpey, Worcs, DY12 1NP

### Snapshot

Ed: Ian Sorensen  
Con report, photos, personal reportage.  
Address: 3 Portia Place, Motherwell, ML1 1EL

### Banana Wings

Eds: Claire Briley, Mark Plummer  
Fannish memorials, convention reportage, fanzine discussion, letter column and the latest issue has an article on New SF for Old People.  
Address: 59 Shirley Rd Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7ES

### Prolapse

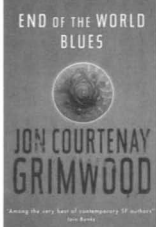
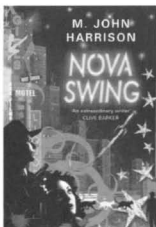
Ed: Peter Weston  
A follow up to Prolapse 2, from 1983. Includes letters from the likes of Bob Shaw.  
Address: 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS, UK.

### Zarjaz

Ed: Butler Droid  
£2.50 + 75p payable to Underfire comics  
Address: 57A Langley Rd, Eastbourne, BN21 2QD

Most fanzines can be made available in return if you send a letter of comment, a fanzine for trade, the cost of postage or an appropriate contribution, unless otherwise mentioned.

Thanks to James Bacon and Digital Duplicator for this round up.



- A) Claire Weaver  
B) Pat Cadigan  
C) Niall Harrison

Email your answer with your name and address to [matrix\\_editors@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk) by April 30th for a chance to win.

## Six of the Best

The shortlist for this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award prize for the best science fiction novel published in the UK was announced on January 20th at an exclusive(ish) private bash in London, Soho.

The night was organised as a thank you to supporters and friends of the Award.

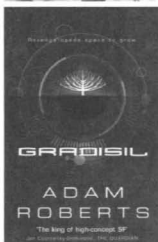
The shortlist announcement was made by Chairman of the Judges, and previous BSFA Co-Chair, Paul Billinger and was preceded by a short speech from new Award Administrator Tom Hunter.

The judging panel and members of the Serendip Foundation (the Award's administrative body) were joined by a guestlist of supporters, journalists, former judges, authors and friends of the Award.

Although the announcement of the winner has traditionally had its own ceremony night, this was the first time that a similar, though smaller-scale, event had been planned for the shortlist; and taking place in the usually sf-barren month of January this proved a popular addition to the genre calendar.

The winner of this year's award will be announced on Wednesday May 2nd on the opening night of the Sci-Fi-London Film Festival.

See [www.clarkeaward.com](http://www.clarkeaward.com) and [www.sci-fi-london.com](http://www.sci-fi-london.com)



## Competition Time!

To celebrate the announcement this year's Clarke Award shortlist, the kind folk at Gollancz have offered five lucky readers a copy of last year's winning novel by answering the following question: which Clarke Award judge sealed this year's shortlist envelope with a loving kiss?



"It's a wonderful and frightening combination of old and new and survival on the razor's edge between." GREG EGBER

GEOFF RYMAN



## The Multiple Lives of Warren Ellis

Cult comic book writer, journalist and blogger Warren Ellis has joined the legion of Second Lifers to produce an ongoing series of articles for news company Reuters. His *Second Life Sketches* are a weekly exploration of the trends, tribes and tribulations of the virtual community, and perhaps the best single guide to the Second Life phenomenon outside of donning an avatar and teleporting in for yourself.

Unsurprisingly the creator of ultimate future joumo Spider Jerusalem has applied a fully gonzo sensibility in his approach to seeking out stories ranging from virtual property prices to being door-stopped by the virtual church of Elvis. *Second Life Sketches* can be found via <http://secondlife.reuters.com> and linked to via [www.warrenellis.com](http://www.warrenellis.com). Warren's first novel *Crooked Little Vein* will be published in Summer 2007.

## Fire, Ice and HBO

Following previous reports in *Matrix* that TV channel HBO were planning an adaptation of the *Preacher* graphic novels, there's now more good news for genre fans with the announcement of a planned series of adaptations of George R.R. Martin's classic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Current plans are for each novel in the series to be adapted into a full season's worth of episodes, with seven seasons planned in total (although Martin is currently up to book five and won't finish the sequence until 2011).

"They tried for fifty years to film *Lord of the Rings* as one movie," said Martin. "My books are bigger and more complicated, and would require 18 movies. Otherwise you'd have to choose one or two characters."

Writers David Benioff (*Troy*) and D.B. Weiss (*Halo*) will script. Weiss has also recently completed work on a script of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*.

## New Weird 2.0

The *New Weird* from Tachyon Publications is the first collection devoted to a "moment in time" and a "movement" that has quickly become a clear subgenre within fantasy, and one that has received the lion's share of critical and often reader acclaim and attention since 2001.

In addition to the main reprint fiction section, the anthology will also include



## Rogue Charity

As a further kick in the teeth to shortsighted TV and Studio execs, the good ship *Serenity* continues to rake in the green stuff, this time as part of a series of charity events taking place in over 50 cities across the world, and aiming to raise over \$100,000 in donations.

The energy, passion and event-organising chutzpah of science fiction and fantasy fans has been employed to raise funds for women's rights advocacy group Equality Now by organising screenings of the film *Serenity*.

Organsier Devin Pike said: "In most cases, when you see a fan-based event centering on a particular show, it's almost always out of a sense of self-gratification... With *Can't Stop The Serenity* it's a bit different. People across the planet are gathering resources to benefit a great charitable organisation, by screening a film they know has a fervent fanbase."

[www.cantstoptheserenity.com](http://www.cantstoptheserenity.com)

## Stardust Glitters

Film fans are also getting excited about the imminent release of Neil Gaiman's *Stardust*, with sneak peeks on the internet hinting at a fantasy adaptation to rival both Harry P and those pesky Hobbits.



## BSFA Recommended Reading List

### Non Fiction Books Published in 2006

The non-fiction category of the BSFA Awards includes any written work about science fiction and/or fantasy which appeared in its current form in 2006. There will not be an individual award for this category; instead the shortlist below is recognised as the BSFA Recommended Reading List.

### *The Arthur C. Clarke Award: A Critical Anthology*

Edited by Paul Kincaid with

Andrew M. Butler

Published by Serendip Foundation

### *Daughters of Earth: Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*

By Justine Larbalestier

Published by Wesleyan University Press

### *Great British Comics*

By Paul Gravett

Published by Aurum Press Ltd

### *James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon*

By Julie Phillips

Published by St Martin's Press

### *Polder: A Festschrift for John Clute and Judith Clute*

Edited by Farah Mendlesohn

Published by Old Earth Books



such added highlights as critical writings about *New Weird*, excerpts from the original, often heated online discussion about the term "New Weird", and an exciting "Laboratory" section featuring some of the most interesting writers in fantasy fiction.

The book is being edited by Jeff and Ann VanderMeer and is scheduled for publication in Spring 2008.

# Mars Unlocked

Stephen Baxter imagines five years on Mars...

One of my many hats, in this case a space-cadet peaked cap, is that of a Fellow of the venerable British Interplanetary Society. Since June 2004 I've been working with the BIS on a design study for a manned base at the Martian north pole. This is in a long tradition of similar studies by the BIS, which produced a design for a lunar lander as early as 1939, and for an interstellar probe in 1978. It is a weighty study; project leader Charles Cockell is a professor of astrobiology at the Open University.

For definiteness we imagined a five (Earth) year stay, from 2037 to 2042. I worked on historical and science aspects, particularly how to extract and interpret a core from the Martian ice cap. It did me good, I think, to work in a team for a change, and to do something resembling real science. The results of our work have been published as *Project Boreas: A Station for the Martian Geographic North Pole*, ed. Charles S. Cockell (British Interplanetary Society, 2006) (and Arthur C. Clarke and I are planning some scenes set at the pole of Mars in our next *Time Odyssey* collaboration (*Fireborn*, Gollancz, autumn 2007)).

What sort of place is the Martian north pole? Cold and dark: Mars has the same sort of axial tilt as Earth, so just as on Earth the north pole enjoys half a Martian year of perpetual daylight, and then half a year of darkness – that is, about a full Earth year of night.

As for the weather, Mars is a bit like high-altitude terrestrial deserts: when the sun goes down, it gets cold fast. At the pole, as soon as the sun disappears at the autumn equinox, a 'snow' of carbon dioxide ice nucleated on dust and water-ice crystals starts to fall. But Mars's atmosphere is mostly cee-oh-two: thus on Mars, in the winter, the air snows out. Ultimately you get a dry ice layer 1–2 metres thick, and throughout the winter there is a steady low-speed wind into the polar regions to replenish the lost air. In the spring the sun's heat sublimates away the carbon dioxide, leaving behind a residue of water ice with dust and other contaminants, thus adding a layer to a permanent water-ice cap.

The permanent cap has features unlike anything on Earth. From space it looks like a weather system, with the ice cut through by 'spiral canyons', thought to be formed by a combination of ice flow and wind effects. And through steady sublimation and deposition the canyons migrate with time. The polar cap is a self-organising system a thousand kilometres, a frozen storm which spirals with the centuries and breathes with the millennia.

In Project Boreas we explored the challenges of living at the Martian pole. Although Dan Dare (in a 1951 *Eagle* story) once holidayed at the Hotel Mars-Astoria, 'one of the glass-domed airtight winter-sports hotels at the North

There are some things we can see. A brown stripe a few centimetres wide would be a trace of the ice cap that Mariner 9 found. Ten centimetres would be relics of the radiation that has been over the planet by the Cro-Magnon men a thousand years ago. And the scale of the striping in the core would be to a nodding of Mars's polar tilt every hundred thousand years.

Pole of Mars', sadly we found it would be a sort of multiplication of the usual difficulties of life on another world, the confinement, the limited resources, with the unique challenges of polar exploration on Earth. You would face months of darkness stuck in a dome on a featureless white surface, an environment like a sensory deprivation tank.

So why would you go there? Perhaps for the resources. In the first realistic study of how to send humans to Mars, the *Mars Project* of 1953, Wernher von Braun proposed landing winged ships on one of the polar ice caps, chosen for their smoothness: the 125-tonne 'landing boats' needed runways. In the 1990s NASA scientist and sci-fi writer Geoff Landis proposed a first landing at a Martian pole for ease of access to water in the surface ice; temperate-zone landings would have followed later, because there you would have to drill for your water.

And, aside from the sheer challenge, there's good science to be done. You can't understand the Martian climate without studying the poles, where fully one-third of the atmosphere freezes out each winter. And then there is the prospect of extracting an ice core from the permanent cap, which might contain a climate record and much else besides: Chinese and American astronauts drilled in search of life at the Martian north pole in *The Secret of Life* by Paul McAuley (2001).

On Mars as on Earth, ice caps are built up year by year, each layer trapping a 'snapshot' of climate conditions. Terrestrial ice cores have yielded climatic records with an accuracy of a year reaching back some 100,000 years into

the past. The principle is just the same on Mars. Some scientists have already sought a correlation between changes in Mars's axial tilting and ice layers visible to the Mars Global Surveyor orbiter.

Extracting ice cores on Mars is going to be a bit of a challenge, however. The Martian ice cap is three kilometres deep. Over 1989–1993 a programme sponsored by the US National Science Foundation drilled to a similar depth through the Greenland ice cap summit, in a five-year project involving 50 people, with heavy lifting provided by the US 109<sup>th</sup> Air National Guard. On Boreas we'll have just ten astronauts with plenty of other things to do, and the usual spacecraft restraints on mass and power.

In the end we concluded sadly that with this generation of technology we were restricted to much smaller gear – drill rigs you could disassemble and cart around on a rover trailer – and could only anticipate reaching depths of a few hundred metres. We'll be more like Lonnie Thompson, who since 1983 has been taking ice cores from tropical glaciers (see Mark Bowen's *Thin Ice: Unlocking the Secrets of Climate in the World's Highest Mountains*, 2005). Thompson operates at altitudes too high for heavy-lift support; he carries his gear and ice core sections on the backs of graduate students and other draft animals.

Anyway, on Mars, being restricted to a few hundred metres isn't the end of the world. Deeper strata are exposed in the walls of the spiral canyons, and you could sample them that way. And the ice layers on Mars are a lot thinner than on Earth. In Greenland, say, you get an

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b supernova  
a big metre-  
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t that occurs  
ousand years

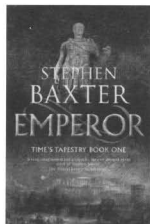
annual snowfall tens of centimetres thick. On Mars the residual water-ice layer is less than a seventh of a millimetre, annually. So you can reach deep time in just a few metres of core.

How could you interpret a Martian ice core? There's a lot we don't know, such as how to date the layers absolutely, or how to read temperatures from features of the ice such as through isotope content. But there are some things we can anticipate. Global dust storms occur every few decades. A brown stripe a few centimetres down would be a trace of the brown-out Mariner 9 found when it arrived in orbit in 1971. Ten centimetres down would be relics of the radiation washed over the planet by the Crab supernova a thousand years ago. Every metre or so there would be a layer of micrometeorites; every ten or a hundred thousand years Mars is hit by an object massive enough to spread debris even to the poles. And a big metre-scale striping in the core would correspond to a nodding of Mars's polar tilt that occurs every hundred thousand years.

Our report is pretty comprehensive, I think, covering base design (inflatable modules on stilts, to keep out of the dry ice snow), life support, local resource usage, IT and comms aspects (you can't see synchronous satellites from the poles), science goals, psychology – and, most fascinating, exploration objectives, including jaunts down those spiral canyons. We were cautious in our technical projections, and there's something of

a paradox here. The purpose of a study like this is to show that a Mars polar base is feasible with (more or less) present-day technology, but of course by 2037 technological advances may have rendered our assumptions invalid. In particular you could imagine smart robots capable of running their own science programmes making it unnecessary to send humans at all.

In the end, I suspect, people will go to the Martian poles for exploration and wonder. Project leader Charles Cockell is considering a Ranulph Feinnes-style *unsupported* assault on the Martian north pole: no domes, no robots, just one human being with spacesuit and sled. But that's another story.



Stephen Baxter's latest novel, *Emperor*, is on sale now.

## END OF THE WORLD BLUES



JON COURTENAY  
GRIMWOOD

Among the very best of contemporary SF authors  
— *Sain Books*

## End of the World Blues

Jon Courtenay Grimwood

Nije has stolen fifteen million dollars, she's on the run, she's just killed a man and she has a cat who knows more than it should. It's a lot to deal with when you haven't even left school.

But Nije is really Lady Neku. And it is time for her to stop mewling in the darkness. And suddenly, the girl who became Lady Neku understands she's never really been anyone else.

And in a sentient castle at the end of world Lady Neku realizes that a man called Kit has stolen some of her memories.

"A slick, exciting contemporary thriller... littered with dark humour and superb characters, Grimwood writes authoritatively on Japan and evocatively recreates London and the differences in cultures." **STARBURST**

Japanese Cos-Play

Biker Bars

Far Future Society

Sense of Wonder

Publisher

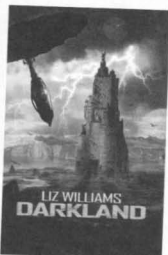
Gollancz

7

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10



## Darkland

Liz Williams

In the far-distant future Vali Hallsdottir, assassin of an organisation known as the Skald, is sent on a mission to the world of Nhem. Her assignment is to eliminate the destructive patriarchal regime of the Hierolath. But shortly after her arrival, Vali finds herself betrayed by her mission partner, who is not the man he seems. Frey, once Vali's lover, has undergone a genetic transformation and has his own agenda for travelling to Nhem. Vali goes in search of Frey in order to discover the reasons for his betrayal. Her journey takes Vali to Darkland, where sinister forces known as the vitki wreak havoc...

"Williams's prose is unfussy and compelling... this is adventurous, thought-provoking science fiction..." **The Times**

"British SF finding an instantly recognizable voice" **Guardian**

Gothic Planets

Big Beasties

Nasty Ex's

Sense of Wonder

Publisher

9

7

6

10

Tor

# BSFA Award 2006

The BSFA Award shortlists have been selected by members of the British Science Fiction Association and will be for by members of the BSFA and Contemplation, the Eastercon. Visit [www.bsfa.co.uk](http://www.bsfa.co.uk) to place your vote.

The Award will be presented at Eastercon in a ceremony on the evening of Saturday 7th April. Don't miss out to <http://contemplation.conventions.org.uk> to book your place at Contemplation.



## Nova Swing

M. John Harris

It is some time after Earth has been destroyed and humanity has fled into the Kefahuchi Trai.

We are in a city, perhaps Venusport or Motel Sp. The city is the event site out of which pour new artefacts, organisms, living algorithm - the virus loose in the universe, plague and change.

And now a new class of artefact is finding its way to the site, and this may be the end.

"The lives touched by the novel's inchoate enigmas are disorienting and Harrison's vision of the longing of failed lives disturbing." **Gary K Wolfe**

SF Signifiers

Neon Nostalgia

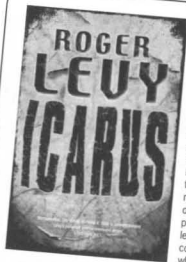
Cats

Sense of Wonder

Publisher

Gollancz





## Icarus

Roger Levy

Mankind has reached deep space.

Separated from earth and each other by unimaginable reaches of space, forced to adapt to various diverse planetary environments the colonies have become isolated and inward looking, forgetting their pasts, losing touch with their humanity. Until a mysterious ship found locked in the deep rock by a mining team on a planet whose surface is drenched in lethal radiation sparks off a deadly conspiracy that threatens man - wherever he is.

"This is a good, propulsive tale that owes much to Philip K Dick's underground paranoia fable 'The Penultimate Truth' and is at times really sadistic (Levy is a dentist)." **Andrew McKie, THE TELEGRAPH**

Alien Tech	8
Claustrophobic Paranoia	7
UnFacts	7
Sense of Wonder	10
Publisher	Gollancz

James Morrow



## The Last Witchfinder

James Morrow

Jennet is the daughter of the Witchfinder of Mercia and East Anglia.

This is a huge rollercoaster of a novel as Jennet travels to America and witnesses the Salem witch trials; is abducted by Indians; begins an affair with Benjamin Franklin; travels back to England and finally meets the real Newton; is shipwrecked; then ends up back in America where her brother is now the Witchfinder Royal. In a great final showdown between old superstition and new science, Jennet decides to have herself accused of witchcraft in order to disprove its existence.

"The sheer exuberance of the plot and the determination of the protagonist to reach her goal carries the reader along. A thoroughly entertaining novel."

**WATERSTONE'S BOOKS QUARTERLY**

Salem Witch Trials	10
Newtonian Physics	8
Warty Noses	4
Sense of Wonder	10
Publisher	Weidenfeld & Nicolson

## BSFA Award 2006

Shortlists for Short Fiction and Artwork Categories

### Short Fiction

#### *The Djinn's Wife*

By Ian McDonald  
Published in Asimov's Science Fiction, June 06

#### *The Highway Men*

By Ken MacLeod  
Published by Sandstone Press Ltd

#### *The House Beyond Your Sky*

By Benjamin Rosenbaum  
Published in Strange Horizons

#### *The Point of Roses*

By Margo Lanagan  
Published in Black Juice  
Published by Gollancz

#### *Signal to Noise*

By Alastair Reynolds  
Published in Zima Blue and Other Stories  
Published by Nightshade Books

#### *Sounding*

By Elizabeth Bear  
Published in Strange Horizons

### Artwork

#### *Angelbot*

By Fangorn  
Cover of Time Pieces  
Published by NewCon Press

#### *Cover of Farthing magazine,*

*issue 2, Spring 2006*  
Credited to 'Vertebrate Graphics'

#### *Droid*

By Fahrija Velic  
Cover for Interzone 206

#### *The Return to Abalakin*

By Alexander Preuss

#### *Ring of the Gods*

By William Li  
Cover of Holland SF 226

Please see [www.bsfa.co.uk](http://www.bsfa.co.uk) for images of nominated artwork.



## Charles Christian vents his anger over the "professionalism" of sf&f publications

**A**s there are a lot of magazine editors out there who will now probably never look at my work again, this may turn out to be one of the longest career suicide notes in history. But, as Rhett Butler once remarked "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn". What's my grouse? It's the science fiction and fantasy magazine publishing fraternity, that's what. Or, to be more precise, the sheer unprofessional yet simultaneously pretentious behaviour of a lot of editors operating in this market.

For example, out in the real world newspapers and magazines (trust me, in my day job I've been a journalist, editor and publisher for nearly 30 years) there is a fundamental concept called deadlines. This holds that if you publish a monthly magazine, your subscribers can expect to receive 12 issues a year, and that if you say the next issue is due on the third Thursday of the month, you will move heaven and earth to ensure the next issue is in your subscribers' hands by that date.

Now let's consider the world of science fiction and fantasy magazines. You pay your money and with a lot of luck you might receive every issue you paid for, but it's unlikely to be within the timeframe you anticipated. Months may elapse between the appearance of each issue leaving you wondering just how many weeks and months there are on some publishers' calendars. (Yes, someone should tell the BFA that 'every two months' means about once every 8 weeks – not every 10 weeks, 12 weeks, or sometimes never. Although, to be fair, titles like *Matrix* are dependent upon the services of volunteers.)

Then again, if you are really unfortunate the magazine may just give up the ghost and stop publishing altogether – usually pending some mythical restructuring or relaunch – although not before they've cashed your cheque.

And if you think it's tough being a reader, spare a thought for would-be contributors.

The number of publications that still do not accept digital submissions! Hello? This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the rest of the magazine publishing world has been using email and file attachments for the best part of 20 years. Does anyone else think it is just slightly oxymoronic that a genre which focuses so heavily on the future and science still defaults to a communications medium (snail mail and print) dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Actually that's not correct, the number of daily postal collections and deliveries has been falling consistently since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Then we have response times for submissions – two to three months is normal and it can frequently be much, much longer, particularly if you are dealing with one of those publications whose editors are so up their own backsides that they only condescend to receive and consider submissions during limited reading periods. Reading periods – as Miss Piggy once commented "Prentious! Moi?" What are these people doing the rest of their time – sitting around in wine bars trying to relive the heyday of literary salon, Dorothy Parker and the Algonquin round table? That went out in the 1930s.

There again, looking at the content of some magazines, you wonder why they even bother

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to invite outside submissions as clearly they only ever publish the works of the editor and his or her circle of friends. It would be nice to think this was all down to networking or the high calibre of this close – and closed – circle, but in reality it's just another form of vanity publishing but with an important difference. With traditional vanity publishing (and I am not talking about self-publishing here) the author pays someone to publish his work because he cannot find a 'real' publisher. With vanity magazines, the authors try to get you to pay the cost of getting their work into print by taking out subscriptions to their rags.

And if you think that is an unfair comment, just ask yourself how come some magazines keep publishing the same second-rate stories by the same second-rate authors. Who are the audience they are catering for? It's certainly not their readers.

The truth is running a modern magazine – or even a newsletter – is all about hard work and meeting deadlines. It is not glamorous. You have to spend far too much time weeding through irrelevant email messages and, as press day approaches, your evenings are taken up proof reading pages for errors. But, you owe it to your contributors and subscribers to do this.

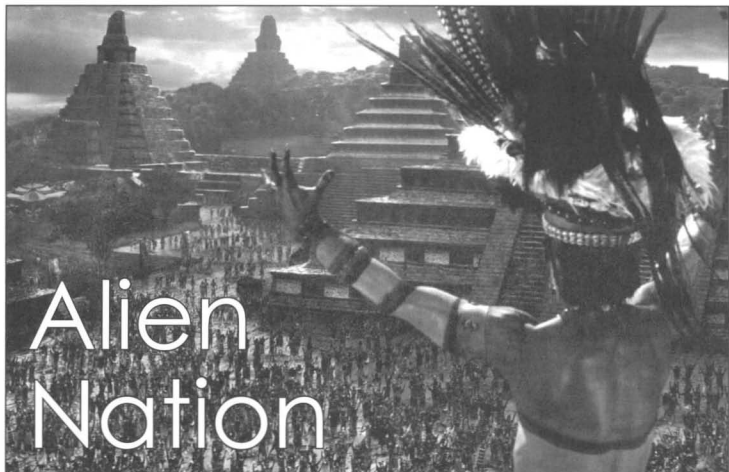
We're always being told that niche publishing markets such as SF&F are struggling to survive but the truth seems to be far too many of these magazines are being run by muppets who shouldn't be let loose with a John Bull printing set. Their audiences deserve better.

Charles Christian



in the media section

apocalypto / lord of the  
rings musical / dr brian  
cox / the dana centre /  
sunshine / on 2006 / best  
of 2000s / multitplatform,  
multimedia / goggle boxes



# Alien Nation

**I** have a feeling that if I knew anything at all about the Mayan people that I would probably be deeply, deeply annoyed by Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto*.

It has the feeling of authenticity – from the idyllic jungle village to the fantastically realised city through to the subtitled language, there has been a great deal of effort expended in making the viewer believe this version of Mayan history.

Yet, even without being informed by historians who have studied these people that *Apocalypto* conflates and confuses two thousand years of history into one moment, it is obvious that there are large parts of this film that don't ring true. Most glaringly, perhaps, is the fact that there could exist a people who live and hunt and are part of a jungle ecosystem who appear entirely unaware that a vast, throbbing, noisy, dirty and all-consuming city is no more than three days walk from their village. The villager's life is also just a little too idyllic – a village full of happy children, loving parents, unity and joy present a people without any hint of conflict, ambition or genuine human relationships. And there is the problem of that city. It is, of course, intended to be going through an epoch-ending crisis, but there's no sense that this kind of place could ever have been stable – the descent into brutality and desperation lacks any sense of counterpoint. *Apocalypto*'s Mayan rulers are not good people brought low but cruel tyrants revelling in blood.

But, outside the field of Mayan historians, does it matter that this film misrepresents the "true nature" of the Mayan people and their history?

The answer is, probably not.

Because the civilisation in *Apocalypto* was never meant to represent the "true" Mayan culture – whatever that might have looked like. The Mayans are used here in the same way science fiction and

fantasy authors have used "alien" races to cast a light on the modern era. Gibson's Mayans are no more a real people – and no more subtly drawn creations – than Swift's Lilliputians or Plato's Atlanteans.

Gibson calls his aliens Mayan, but the sights and sounds of their world are used to inspire awe and show us that familiar "sense of wonder" that is at the intimate core of science fiction. As the hero Jaguar Paw and his friends are dragged from their peaceful home and forced, wide-eyed and terrified, through the wild and blood-soaked city we are introduced to a people as distant and unlike us as the vast majority of those created by genre writers. *Apocalypto*'s Mayan world is a violent and gory big-dumb-object designed to separate us from our understanding of the ordinary.

The process of constructing the alien, at least in decent science fiction, should not stop at battering our senses with amazing images. The experience of the alien should reflect on some aspects of our human nature – it should teach us something about ourselves. So it is that, when we look a little deeper behind the impressive visuals, the dramatic chases and strong emotional sympathy that Gibson creates for his protagonist, we see revealed the essentially conservative "moral" of this story.

The villain in *Apocalypto* is not Zero Wolf (Raoul Trujillo – who is fantastic) or the hateful Snake Ink (Rodolfo Palacios) but the idea of civilisation itself.

Everything evil and truly dangerous in *Apocalypto* comes from attempts to civilise man. The Mayan world is in crisis because of a plague – smallpox brought to the "New World" by Europeans – which, in turn, has caused the civilisation built in their city to collapse, the decadent rulers to turn on their people and revealed the very vilest in human nature. Then, having escaped all that, defeated his

**Apocalypto's Mayan world is a gory big-dumb-object designed to separate us from our understanding of the ordinary**

foes and returned to his village, Jaguar Paw is one final time offered the opportunity to embrace civilisation. His response is to turn to the jungle in search of a new beginning.

Ultimately, then, *Apocalypto* claims that happiness, security and decency can only be found by turning our back on the advanced world and returning to nature, or rather, more specifically, returning to an agrarian idyll where everyone knows their place and authority is not questioned.

Philosophical qualms should not, however, stop you seeing this film. It is, by some considerable margin, Gibson's most stunning outing as a director and though viewers will need a strong stomach (the full-frontal nature of the violence really cannot be overstated) it is a truly epic piece of film making with extraordinary set-pieces and moments of eye-popping spectacle.

**Martin McGrath**

# One Ring Breaches Fourth Wall

Theatre luvvie and live art fan R. M. Graham takes a peek under the curtain at *The Lord of the Rings: The Musical*

**T**here's going to be a lot of people who are sceptical", says *Lord of the Rings* producer Kevin Wallace. "How can you put over one thousand pages of text on to the stage in one evening?"

It's a good question, and one the production team behind the stage version of Tolkien's famous trilogy have made sure to take their time in answering.

The simple answer is, of course, they couldn't possibly hope to stage the entire saga in a single theatrical setting, but with Peter Jackson proving it was possible to please both long standing fans and draw in legions of new ones, and all while stamping your own auteurist vision all over the place, the climate seems good for any production that seeks to invest itself in the spirit of the material.

"What you can do with theatre is take the audience into Middle Earth so they're physically present," says director Matthew Warchus. "It's an environmental production, breaking the proscenium arch. People will be able to say 'I was there during the battle of Helm's Deep. I was there when it happened.'"

Throughout the scripting and rehearsal process, Warchus strove to take this production beyond the traditional musical format and to push at the boundaries of the theatrical medium, molding Tolkien's original vision into an archetypal story shape suitable for stage. This was never going to be a production about simply staging climax after climax or flying by all the moments of the book

so that audiences could tick them off on their programmes and feel they'd got their money's worth.

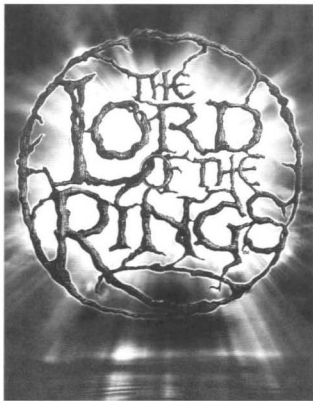
The epic nature of *The Lord of the Rings* itself, with its fascination with language, oral storytelling and song, helped shaped this vision.

For those who still saw the literal reproductions of Peter Jackson and crew as the definitive version, it helped to remember that were they to recreate this saga in the Shire, for instance, it would be done as a theatrical production rather than an outdoor screening, and whereas the films offered a truth that matched the pictures in our heads, this production would seek to engage with the heart of the story and a good old fashioned sense of theatrical wonderment.

Following its initial opening in Canada, it was soon clear that this vision had succeeded in pleasing fans of every colour – from those who loved the book above all else, through to those who liked the film versions fine but would never see themselves spending three hours in a theatre, right up to the theatre critics who may well have turned their noses up at a mere 'fantasy' appearing on their precious stages.

For many it was the truthfulness of the vision that most impressed, with the material proving readily adaptable to a stage production – and what a production at that.

The version coming to London's West End employs over seventy actors appearing on stage along with a host of fine-tuned theatrical effects to recreate everything from acrobatic Orcish hordes through to the sinisterly silent Black Riders and the massively towering Ents. Subtler moments aimed to recreate the peaceful idyll of the Shire by taking



its friendly inhabitants off the stage and through the fourth wall into the audience, and the production made equal efforts to focus on the relationships within the story arc, offering some of its most powerful theatricality in the simple intimacy between Frodo and Sam trapped in the mountains of Mordor.

As anyone who's read the books will tell you, there's a lot of singing along the way to the crack of doom, so the opportunity to create this as musical theatre was also going to be hard to resist.

Fortunately the producers did manage to resist the urge to turn out a pop-tinged crowd-pleaser, and aimed instead to fuse a sense of 'brittle' Northern European sounds with a more magical and luxurious Indian texture, choosing Bollywood composer A.R. Rahman to collaborate with Finnish group Varttina to produce the soundtrack.

In the end there are still those who will say no adaptation will ever fully capture the world-building detail of the original books, but for a night out at the theatre that truly promises an epic performance this should be a hot ticket for 2007, and UK audiences would be well advised to take full advantage of this production finally coming home.

*The Lord of the Rings*, based on the books by J.R.R. Tolkien, takes to the stage at the legendary Theatre Royal, Drury Lane from 9<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Tickets are available now through all recognised agents.



# Hot Topic

Matrix film snoop John Hunter goes behind the scenes of *Sunshine* to talk movie science, future Earth and shit sf with physicist and film advisor Dr Brian Cox...

**John Hunter:** At what point did you get involved with the making of *'Sunshine'*?

Brian Cox: Andrew MacDonald, who's the producer, years ago saw an episode of *Horizon* about Einstein during Einstein year. They'd been worried about the lead character in *Sunshine* - who's a physicist played by Cillian Murphy - but he's a young physicist and he's our last hope to save the planet, so he's the best physicist in the world. And they were worried that the best physicist in the world would be 80 years old, you know? Like Einstein. So they saw this episode of *Horizon* and thought 'Well, at least there's one physicist who looks like he knows what he's talking about and could actually survive a space mission, on some level.

So they rang up, actually they e-mailed. They tried to e-mail me but they e-mailed another guy who was on the program who's a mate of mine called Robin Marshall who is actually 65 years old. So for a while they'd hired him as scientific advisor and to help Cillian play this young, dynamic physicist and it dawned on him that actually it probably wasn't what they meant, it was me.

**JH:** Aww.

BC: So he had to hand it over to me with deep regret. But he got to come on the set and everything and everyone was really nice to him. So it was a bit of a convoluted process, but the initial reason they asked me was because they thought I looked a bit like Cillian's character, in their minds - Although I'm not even sure they'd cast Cillian at the time, maybe they'd just cast him. Anyway, I was young enough and I looked like I knew what I was talking about on *Horizon* so they thought I'd

be a good role model for Cillian to sort of bounce off. And also to get the science... it's not really a question of getting the science right, just more making sure it's not completely wrong.

**JH:** Were there clashes between getting the human drama to mix with hard science then?

BC: Well there's a plot there which, as everybody knows, is that the Sun is beginning to fail and it's only 60 years in the future and we're going to try and do something about it. And that's difficult because it's unlikely that the Sun's going to fail in that time scale as, as far as we know, it's going to last another four and a half billion years, and even if it did fail, it's highly unlikely that there'd be sod all we could do about it.

So one of the tasks was to try and find some kind of plausible back-story for any way in - not necessarily any kind of science fact - but any way that's remotely plausible through wild speculation that that could happen. Although it's not actually in the script, that. There's no real attempted explanation of what might be going on with the Sun or really what we're going to do to try and fix it. In a sense, it's kind of irrelevant because I don't think the film's really about that. It uses that as a device to explore wider issues.

But the key thing was to not have someone say something in the script that's complete toss. Like on *Star Trek* where they 'use a Graviton beam' to do something - just making sure no one said anything like that. And actually, there was very little in the script that, to me, stood out as being completely nonsensical because Alex (Garland - writer) is quite careful.

**JH:** So it was more a case of just checking the script rather than being involved in the plotting stages then?

BC: Yeah, the plot was established by the time I came on board and the script was in its final drafts. A lot of the sets had already been designed although a lot of the cast hadn't been cast yet. So it was really a case of thinking up plausible ways of these things happening. Some things were changed - at one point there's this bomb that's this kind of stellar bomb that Cillian's character, the physicist, is in charge of. This is a good example actually - in the script it

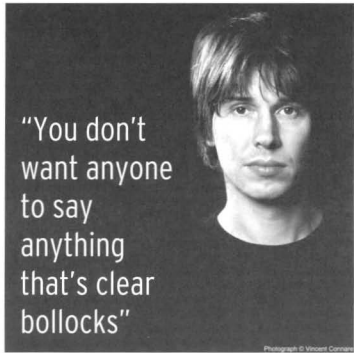
said it had the mass of the Moon. So I said well, if it had the mass of the moon, you would have needed something at least as big as the moon to make it. You're not going to be able to make something as heavy as the Moon without using something as heavy as the Moon as an ingredient. So, in the script now, it has the mass of Manhattan - whatever that may be! And the other problem would have been accelerating something with the mass of the Moon towards the Sun. I'd have said you might as well actually attach a rocket on the back of the moon. I said it's not going to work is it and they said 'no'.

So that got changed. But it's just things like that in the script - and it's just a throwaway line where they wanted to say 'this is really heavy' and I said 'Yeah, but it's too heavy'.

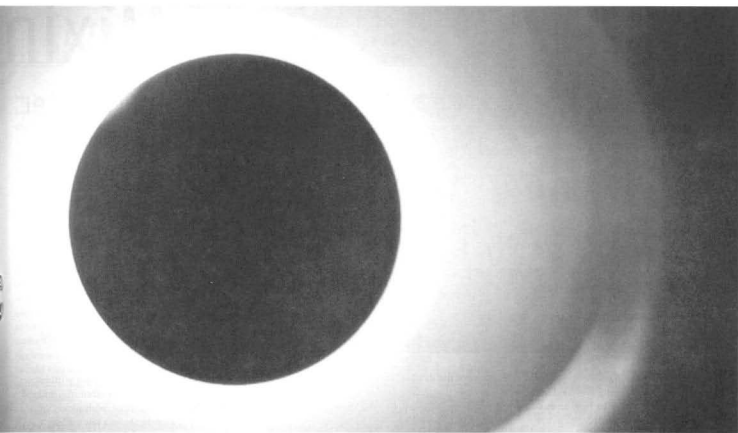
**JH:** Was there anything in particular that made you want to get involved as a science consultant beyond Danny Boyle saying 'Hey, come and work on my film'?

BC: Well, obviously that's good! (Laughs) You're not going to say 'no'. But, the thing is, the thought that had gone into it was fantastic and philosophy behind it. One thing Alex often says that's probably true is that he'd read about it is that ultimately, in the future, the Universe is going to expand forever and die in a heat death. If the Universe continues to expand at its current rate - which happens to be accelerating, actually - then eventually, there's no hope for civilisation at all and, in a sense, the film is about that. That's the kind of underlying thread underneath the film and the death of the Sun is a metaphor for that. That kind of idea that nothing is going to persist into the future - how do you react to that? Not how do you react to your own death but how do you react to the death of the Sun and death of the human race and the eventual death of anything meaningful in the Universe at all? It's a great film in that sense. It's got a really nice... dismal (laughs) apocalyptic narrative right behind it. I think that really comes across. I've seen

"You don't want anyone to say anything that's clear bollocks"



Photograph © Vincent Connors



the finished film now and I said to Danny before I saw it when I saw him the day before that I hope it's all in there and he said 'Yeah, I hope it's all in there', everything we talked about. And I think it is, as far as I can tell, because you're watching very closely and you pick up all the references. But if all the references are obvious to the viewer who hasn't read the script six times then I think it's going to work. Or, at least, I hope.

**JH: Were you involved across the whole production or was it focussed more toward the beginning?**

BC: Really, all the way through. The initial involvement was just to look at the script and talk through things like that and talk to Alex. Some of the biggest involvement, particularly with Cillian, was with the rest of the cast. I gave a talk to the rest of the cast about the Sun because they actually have to act. A lot of the film is about what you see when you're looking at the Sun, and at the power of nature represented by the Sun as you get closer and closer to it, how do you feel? What would you do? And people on the spaceship act in very different ways to that. So I had to talk to them and say that the Sun burns six million tons of hydrogen a second – and that one kilogram of hydrogen is enough to run six hundred Americas for a year, for example. And just other things like being able to get a million Earths into the thing. So when you're looking with that, you're going to freak out probably! (Laughs) And some of them do.

Then I spent about probably a week in total with Cillian. I took him to CERN in Geneva, for example, so he could watch physicists and the mannerisms of physicists so he could get into character. I think that's a Danny Boyle thing but also for Cillian. So there was a lot of that, a lot of time talking with Cillian about the underpinnings of the film.

And now I'm giving talks to the press. The first one I did was before the screening for the press to talk about these sort of issues. To say that these sorts

of things are in the film and these are the things that you should look out for and that's why. And I think the film's open to interpretation on some level, which is also very good. But I gave a twenty minute speech on the physics behind *Sunshine*. Almost the philosophy as well but the main point's that the Sun will die one day, albeit 4.5 billion years into the future, but there are threats to our civilisation and we're in a very fragile place. In the future, we're going to have to face something like this. So that kind of stuff that you wouldn't normally get from just watching the film.

**JH: How do you feel about the science in Science Fiction generally at the moment? Anything that has particularly impressed you or pissed you off by getting it wrong?**

BC: Actually, through this process, I've learnt to be a little more tolerant because there's certain little things you could pick up on in *Sunshine*, if you're being really pedantic, like the gravity on the ship. I mean *2001* is the only film that ever really actually bothered to really try and have the rotating sets. You think about anything else that's good like *Alien* or all the *Star Trek* films, whatever you like, there's only one science fiction film that bothered to do it right – because they could afford it! It's really hard to get rotating sets and so no one ever does.

I think I've learnt that films are meant to be entertainment and be about dramatic tension. All you can do really in a science fiction film is not jar people who are scientifically literate. You don't want anyone to say anything or to have anything happen that's clear bollocks. And I think I've learnt that now and that's right – that's got to be right. Most people who watch science fiction are not trying to pick up on the tiniest little things but if something stupid happens, they might notice.

**JH: So there's no one film that's really ticked you off?**

BC: Oh right, so you want an example of something that's shit! Well, I was watching *Event Horizon* again the other day because loads of people have been

saying it's a bit like *Sunshine*, which it isn't as there's no Hell when you go through something like a fold in space.

**JH: It sounds like you enjoyed yourself on *Sunshine* then.**

BC: Yeah, it's been brilliant. It impressed me actually. I didn't know how much attention to detail is in these films. The lead-in time's quite incredible. The care that people took in re-producing the Sun with computer graphics for example. They had images from SOHO – the satellite, not the place – they did all this work on that. And the care they took in designing the spaceship, they really tried quite hard to build a spaceship that would be sensible – although it looks nice. I was just really impressed with the amount of detail – especially when you saw the sets. I'm sure that you won't see it on film but they've done things like they know that NASA label almost everything. Even like the heads of screws. They've done things like that – they've labeled everything. They've done it in immense detail so you could crawl around the set and look a millimetre away from something and there's this exquisite detail on it, on the space suits, on everything. It's quite remarkable that they've bothered. But I suppose that's how you make it look real. And Danny is meticulous. He tries to get the logic right. He tries to get the geometry and the geography of the ship right so that if someone's walking along and they go into a room, it's right. So they had these huge blueprints of the ship all mapped out. They knew exactly where every room was in the ship and where every set should be in the ship. And they make sure that someone goes out of the right door if they want to go in a particular direction in the ship – even though this ship is football pitches in length. They mapped it all out and there's high precision drawings of everything. Quite amazing. You never see that, but I suppose if you get it wrong, you might pick it up on the film and get confused. They're just meticulous. It's really impressive.



# Mixing

Stuart Carter  
mixes art  
and science  
in a visit to  
the Dana  
Centre

Photographs © James Harris and  
Stuart Carter

**I**s there wine?" said my friend when I emailed her about going to the Dana Centre. "If they're going to talk about science then I'll need wine."

"Yes," I said, "there's wine. But it's not just about science tonight, it's dealing with the interaction between science and art, and, like, you know... all that."

"I'll definitely need wine," she said.

And so, despite cynical alcoholic misgivings, we found ourselves arriving at the Dana Centre to learn from the experts involved how data from the STEREO solar observatory is being used to create Art.

The Dana Centre is a purpose-built extension to the Science Museum in London's South Kensington. It's "a place for adults to take part in exciting, informative and innovative debates about contemporary science, technology and culture... blending the best from science, art, performance and multimedia to provoke discussion and real engagement with the key

issues of the day," or so says their website anyway.

With this in mind, I took a couple of self-described science ignoramus along with me to the Mixing It With The Stars event: to see what they made of this laudable effort to re-engage grown-ups with the system of thought upon which our entire civilisation is built (although we did manage to sample the wine, too).

The Dana Centre is easy enough to find, being just a few minutes walk from either Gloucester Road or South Kensington tube. It's well worth reserving tickets in advance as many of its events are surprisingly popular, and although security at the door is pretty laid back it's often a case of "If your name's not on the list then you're not coming in." Most events are free though, and the ones that aren't usually include a meal in the price.

The first thing you notice about the Dana Centre's main area as you go down the stairs is that it looks a bit like a trendy bar. It's been

designed to be very cool indeed, but without being forbidding (as "cool" so often is) – indeed it's very relaxed and informal, with plenty of chairs scattered loosely about a few tables, the absolute antithesis of the draughty lecture theatre. The bar itself wouldn't be out of place in Soho (only the friendliness of the bar staff gives the game away) offering a fashionably limited selection of beverages, plus a few bits of food and free internet access. The bar is open Monday to Friday until 6pm, and late till 9pm on event evenings.

We arrived about 30 minutes before Art and Science were due to collide: time enough to get a drink, a seat and a friendly chat with a few other early arrivals. Most of the evening's speakers had already arrived and were mixing presentations amongst us, setting up PowerPoint presentations and other such supports. It was very encouraging to see so many different people there: young, old, geek, non-geek; and so many women, too – not just because I'm a man,

The first thing you notice is the main area looks a bit like a trendy bar. It's been designed to be very cool indeed, but without being forbidding





# g with the Stars



but because science is so traditionally dominated by the Y chromosome. I've seen the same mix at the Dana Centre on a number of occasions now, so it wasn't a freak occurrence; in fact, earlier in the year there were even a number of dating nights held there.

So, what of the "informative and innovative debates," et cetera?

Tonight there were four guests: Chris Davis, a physicist connected with the STEREO mission; Jade Hamilton, musician in residence at the Royal Observatory; Don Kurtz, an astrophysicist (recently seen on *The Sky At Night*), and Semiconducator, a pair of multimedia artists. Each was allowed to briefly introduce themselves and speak about their areas of expertise, before returning to the floor to talk to us. We the audience were encouraged to circulate around the room and engage with the guests, who would enthusiastically explain in more detail what they did, whilst patiently fielding any and all questions.

It was a fantastic experience, a real eye-opening night. Not being a scientist, I almost never get to speak to real-life scientists about what, how and why they do what they do, so this hour of "free association" gave a unique perspective into their world. The artists were similarly intelligent, down-to-earth people, all fascinated by what science could show them, and perhaps more importantly, how they could then pass that knowledge and beauty along to us, the ordinary public.

My friends and I, as well as most of the rest of the audience, stayed long after the event was supposed to have finished, still chatting and asking questions. In the end the management had to dim the lights and ask us all to leave, and there can be fewer higher recommendations for anywhere than that.

Stuart Carter



The Dana Centre promotes a monthly programme of events with regular nights mixing with one-off and themed events across the year. Science is always in the mix somewhere, but the style of presentation varies from talks and panel discussions through to singles nights and comedy explorations of topical science issues. Visit [www.danacentre.org](http://www.danacentre.org) for more details.



# Shades of Sunshine

*Sunshine* is a film with energy, vision and a flair for ideas, says Richard Matthews. It's just a pity they're all somebody else's.

**Sunshine should come with a warning.** Watch it too long and ghostly images of other films may start to haunt your retina. Critical faculties may be affected for periods of time varying between hours and days, and those who find themselves susceptible should avoid touch-typing or operating heavy machinery...

This is near future science fiction, and for mankind near future is pretty much all we have left. All our fears over nuclear self-destruction, environmental apocalypse and the predominance of reality tv have been spectacularly trumped by the death throes of our own Sun, and suddenly the whole solar system is on a midnight countdown.

The crew of Icarus are our last, best, and extremely slim hope for survival. A manned mission to the Sun on a spacecraft strapped behind a vast reflective heat-shield and carrying an experimental 'bomb' with which they hope to re-seed the dying star and jump-start a second sun inside the remains of the first.

The whole world is watching, and then Icarus disappears.

Enter Icarus II. One last roll of the dice with all of Earth's remaining fissionable materials as the chips, and no more time left on the clock to try any other plan before the Sun's deterioration becomes absolutely final.

This time the project has also taken its creator, physicist Robert Capa (Cillian Murphy), along for the ride to ensure nothing goes wrong, and so, of course, as they near their journey's end, the ideas of things going wrong starts to take on an

almost mathematical certainty.

Equally, this is where the plot starts to gain more than a certain aura of movies past, and while the crew hurtle towards their various fiery fates there are distinct moments when the audience feels like they've not only got there first but also started the round trip back home.

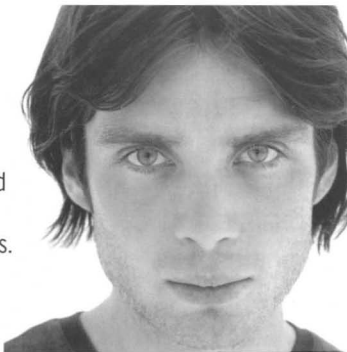
It's this predictability, not previous internet gossiping on the plausibility of the onscreen pop-science, that is *Sunshine*'s biggest flaw. Fortunately though, there are more than enough positives in the mix to prevent this sense of familiarity from overly dominating the mix.

The design and effects work on both Icarus II and its destination are both excellent, and while director Danny Boyle isn't as taken with the idea of artful long shots as, for obvious instance, Ridley Scott, he still manages to create an air of workable reality around his solar mission.

There's also screenwriter Alex Garland's nods to creative influences such as J.G. Ballard, in a scenario where not all of the crew are the engineer heroes of early space-based science fiction and rather a man-made metal can full of latent psychopathologies, waiting to be shaken.

If this is true, then there's also the sense that the film is only ever allowed to hint at the possibility of a wider psychological element (as its financial backers keep one eye firmly on the mainstream prize, perhaps?) and that while Garland is a more-than-credible screenwriter, you have to wonder what he would have created in his equally successful guise of fiction writer.

Still you don't go see an sf movie where a spaceship is basically throwing itself into the Sun and expect a three-hour study on character motivation and



You don't go see an sf movie where a spaceship is basically throwing itself into the Sun and expect a three-hour study on character motivation and interior monologue

interior monologue (or at least most of us don't), and where *Sunshine* really delivers is in bringing the big-screen space opera back home to our own solar system.

Whatever propulsion and slingshot system this ship is using to get within spitting range of the Sun, it's still taking them over 16 months to get out there, and while this might not seem unusual to *Matrix* readers, I suspect that the relative proximity of the setting will be exciting for newer genre fans who are more used to hyperspace jumping capacities of space travel and haven't really come to terms with the fact that space is both big (I mean really big) and also takes more than a quick edit to travel across.

In fact this is a movie that would make a classic double-feature bill with *2001: A Space Odyssey*, alternating the action of one with the art of the other; and who knows maybe the next film out of the multiplex door will even embody the best features of both.

Until then, this is, ultimately, a film worth seeing, and if you squint just right you may even see the aura of a classic movie shining through.

Richard Matthews



# SF of 2006 - Wired or Tired?

In a recent article in *Wired* (<http://tinyurl.com/2e4x7l>), Jason Silverman claimed that Hollywood studios no longer made great science fiction stories because the risk involved in making an effects-heavy, big-budget sf film were now so high that studio executives were terrified of taking risks.

Silverman points to *The Fountain*, which flopped in the US, as an example of the risks money men see in science fiction and complained that in an industry swarming with geeks and obsessed with technology there was no one willing to risk make great sf films.

But it was this quote that most caught my eye: "In an era of dwindling sci-fi cinema," Silverman said, "2006 has been a particularly dire year. Subtract the superhero and video game adaptations, and what's left?"

Silverman then lists just four films: *The Fountain*, *The Science of Sleep* (both released in the US in 2006 but in the UK in 2007), *Children of Men*, and *A Scanner Darkly*. And he's right, these are four very different but none-the-less exceptionally good films. These are all films that have "legs" – films that won't just be enjoyed today and tomorrow but have the potential to find a place in the "canon" (whatever that is) of really fine genre films. But is Silverman right? Were these the only four decent genre films released last year? And if so, would that make it a "particularly dire year"?

Let's start with the second question first. How many really excellent, new, sf novels have you read this year? I'm currently putting together my list for *Vector's* review of the year and, if I'm honest, I am struggling to fill up all five of my slots. So, even if we were to limit ourselves to just Silverman's four films, cinema is already standing up pretty well against my experience of the written genre.

But Silverman's list doesn't include the very best genre film of the year – *Pan's Labyrinth*. Silverman

would exclude it because it is not sf and it wasn't made in Hollywood, which only highlights the deficiency of his argument. First, who cares about the precise boundaries of genres when a film is this good, and second, in this globalised world, why should anyone care if a film is made by an American studio or an independent filmmaker in Mumbai, Manchester, Tijuana or Madrid. The audience doesn't care who makes a film, just that they make good films. So why should Silverman, or anyone else, give a damn if American studios are too flat-footed and hidebound to deliver the genre movies we crave. Broaden your horizons.

Now we have five films that I would place at various levels of excellence. But then there are those that were, perhaps, not classics but which were still well worth the price of admission and perhaps significantly more. This year I also saw *The Illusionist*, *Stranger Than Fiction*, *The Prestige* and *V for Vendetta* – four more American-funded films that appeared to me to be genuine attempts at using science fiction to make serious and interesting points with some considerable success. And, while I recognise I am rather on my own in this, I'd also add Shyamalan's critically mauled *The Lady in the Water* to my personal list.

Now we're up to ten films in 2006 alone – seven of them funded by major American studios – all of which have something in common beyond their genre roots and year of production, because they all also ask more of the viewer than passive consumption of eye candy. All are intelligent. All possess original thematic concerns tied to exceptional directorial vision. And all ask the viewer to work to get the most reward. By any standards these are very good films. Perhaps most encouraging, at least for me, was the fact that so many of the films took pains to address contemporary political issues in the way that only science fiction really can – a sign of the genre

playing to its greatest strength as commentator on the human and social condition, rather than offering only lightweight escapism.

Not that there weren't lightweight, guiltier pleasures. I enjoyed Korean monster flick *The Host* and *Slither's* entertaining mining of American science fiction's B-movie heritage, the near miss of *Mirormask* still had charm and there was gruesome fun in Brit-flick *Sevenance* – and even *Déjà vu*, Tony Scott and Denzel Washington's glossy sci-fi thriller developed an interesting time travel conceit before losing its way in a weakly tacked-on love story.

And all this in a year when Terry Gilliam, one of genre cinema's greats, managed to release two films in twelve months – neither of which were very good – and none of the franchises or comic book movies really delivered.

Do ten very good movies and a handful of lesser but still enjoyable offerings make for a particularly dire year in science fiction cinema?

Well, I'm a glass-half-full person by inclination, but I don't believe I'm risking condemnation as a weak-minded Pangloss when I suggest that, in a year when the genre didn't deliver a large number of really first-class novels, 2006 was actually a pretty good year for fans of sf films. And, at the same time, on television, we have the likes *Battlestar Galactica*, *Heroes* and the continued pleasure of *Doctor Who* providing genre viewing of the highest quality.

This is not an argument for the superiority of one form of sf over another, but instead an attack on nostalgia and on those whose first reaction to any situation is to slip into a kind of fatalistic miserabilism. The world, at least the sf world, is not always slipping into some long, inexorable decline where things can never again be as good as they were in your youth. There are reasons to be cheerful, grateful even, that we are living in a moment when the blossoming of technology and the fragmentation of media production capabilities mean that we no longer need rely on a small number of studios taking risks.

Costs are falling. *The Fountain* is a visually stunning film created with a relatively modest (\$35 million) budget. The ability to achieve fantastic effects no longer rests with the small cabal of highly resourced American studios – take a look at *Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Host* or *Mirormask* for evidence of that.

And there is an audience willing to make the production of intelligent, risk-taking sf a worthwhile endeavour – even if it is not always to be found in America.

Will 2007 be better or worse than the year before? It is too early to say, of course, whether any of the coming year's films will succeed, but there is certainly reason to be hopeful that amongst releases such as *Doomsday*, *Southland Tales*, *The Number 23*, *The Astronaut Farmer*, *Sunshine*, *28 Weeks Later*, *Standstut*, *The Invasion* and *His Dark Materials* we will be rewarded with our share of treats.

Martin McGrath



**2006** Darkness ruled across the land and near-future paranoia was the name of the game. Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* brought a classically science-fictional outsiders eye to a nastily dystopic vision of the UK where the human race is ending but everyone in the country still goes to work. Work and play was also the theme (well, sort of) in Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly*, the most faithful PKD adaptation yet, and also the funniest – assuming you like your humour black and drug-addled. This was also the movie that proved Keanu Reeves is not so much a two-dimensional actor, but more an actor who is really good at doing two-dimensional.

Also extremely noteworthy were Pan's *Labyrinth* (which we're mentioning sneakily even though it's really a fantasy) and *The Prestige*, which not only managed to be an excellent adaptation of Christopher Priest's equally fascinating novel, it also managed to be a clever, twisty movie all of its own, and one which should be applauded for pulling off a properly science-fictional sleight of hand behind its magically assisted plot.



**2005** was the year of the Space Opera face-off, or Browncoats Vs Battle Droids as we like to think of it. *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* was the biggie, and notable here for finally delivering the Origin of Vader pay-off. Lots of painful limb-slicing for young Anakin, and equally painful dialogue from Ewan McGregor, made for a mixed bag that we all went to see, but perhaps more from a sense of completion rather than wonder this time round.

Meanwhile, Wonder-Whedon's rag-tag bag of wise-crackin', misbehavin' space outlaw folk showed us that striking back at a galactic empire isn't all the fun and force-foolery it used to be and gave the best vision of *Star Wars* since Han Solo fell in the deep freeze and got turned into the most coveted wall-hanging of 1980.



# Best SF Movies Ever



**While** 2005 cranked up the space factor, 2004 felt more like the shortlist for the Arthur C. Clarke Award. In other words a good year for intelligent, non-mainstream sf titles of the kind you keep hidden in your back pocket until they're needed to win pub arguments and defeat popular preconceptions. 2046, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and indie-hits *Primer* and *Shaun of the Dead* all rated high on the innovation factor, and it was also the year of the smart sequel with *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence* pushing the boundaries of both post-humanity and animation, and *Spider-Man 2* proving to be one of the best-made and most popular movies of the year in any category whatsoever.



In honour of the imminent count celebration of the BSFA's 50th anniversary, we do a countdown of its own of decade, starting now and working our way back to the old days of 1958 (ish)...



**2003** and all's quiet on the science fiction front. *X-Men 2* delivered a far more satisfying mutant round-up than part one (especially in the final act) even if it did postpone the threatened all-out mutant war again in favour of fan-favourite Wolverine's back story. Meanwhile *Code 46* was an interesting release if only because it's always good to see 'proper' directors taking a risk with the genre, but ultimately felt more like an experimental testing of the waters rather than the hoped-for plunge.

# er!... 2000s

blown to 2008 and the anniversary, *Matrix* has decided the best sf movies of each decade would lead our way back to the good

**Zombies**, clones, space invaders and love on an alien planet. You could take your pick of the sf tropes in **2002**, and whatever your personal preference you'd likely go home a winner. *28 Days Later* combined Wyndamsque apocalypse, a Ballardian sense of psychopathology and a bloody great horde of fast-moving flesh-munchers to great shock effect. *Signs* eschewed the vapourisation of tourist attractions that's become shorthand for alien invasion in favour of a more personalised mythological take with patented twist ending. The idea of remaking *Solaris* was anathema to many fans, but for plenty of others it was an opportunity to see this sf classic brought back to the big screen while all the painfully long edits were reserved for the DVD alternative scenes menu. *Minority Report* felt like all the action bits that Spielberg couldn't justify in *A.I.* but was none the worse for that; and cynics who say the best thing about *Attack of the Clones* was it not being another *Phantom Menace* have missed the point that while first generation fans may have hated it, that's exactly what all our parents thought about the first three.



**2001** and fittingly Kubrick was back in the cinemas, even if it was necessarily somewhat second hand. Those who felt *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* was something of a hybrid creation probably didn't appreciate exactly how collaborative modern cinema really is, and while Spielberg can likely be accused of overt sentimentality in the final reel, this is more than redeemed by the film's sense of scope and playful reimagining of its fairy story sources. Meanwhile *Donnie Darko* was part time travel, part superhero, part strange arthouse philosophical thriller via 80's teen movie, and a cryptic joy that rewarded if never revealed on multiple watches.



**And** finally, in amongst the Scientology vanity productions and not one but two aborted trips to Mars, the real shining gem of **2000** proved to be *Pitch Black*. The premise was suspect, the trailer was dire, and the lead bloke looked like he'd trip over his own muscles if he tried to move and do dialogue at the same time, and yet... This was science fiction the way it should be. High concept yet low budget enough to avoid studio interference, taut plotting that left room for characters in amongst the story and a delightfully nasty deathworld all added up to a surprise success and a collective sigh of relief that 'proper' sf could still cut it in the new millennium.



**A**nyone who thinks it's difficult to pick some of the most influential and inspiring sf movies of the year should have a crack at picking the worst.

Admittedly there are worse films than *Alien Vs Predator* (2004) - more amateurish, howling, chokingly bad productions out there, yet when it comes to potential Fannish Anticipation Vs Big Screen Disappointment this tops even *Superman Returns* in the crash-and-burn cinema stakes.

You can just hear the studio exec version of *Aliens*' Lieutenant Gorman telling his crew he wants this production to go "smooth and by the numbers," because for our money '*Alien Vs Predator: By The Numbers*' would have made for a damn fine tag-line on this xenomorphic stink-fest.



# Multiplatform, Multimedia... That'll Do Nicely

Charles Christian engages his multimedia search engine until it cannae take it anymore, cap'n!

Once upon a time – so the story goes – we lived in a simple world where different types of media kept strictly to their own backyard and never strayed onto another's turf. So, publishers published books that you read on paper, TV companies transmitted programmes that you viewed on a box in a corner of your front room and Hollywood filmed movies that you watched at your local cinema. By comparison today you can do all of those same activities on a PC or even a smartphone. Welcome to the world of multiplatform, digital multimedia or – as it's sometimes termed in IT circles – access heterogeneity.

But while this is great for the consumer – with my latest iPod/iPhone I can download and watch video, catch TV reports, listen to audio podcasts, access my music playlist, surf the web and make phone calls – it does throw down a challenge to media publishers that if they don't exploit all the channels at their disposal today (a) they may be missing out and (b) somebody else may exploit them at their expense.

In the world of SF&F, the movie industry was the first to spot this potential, using the web to

carry trailers and teasers for upcoming movies. For example, in the lead up to the premiere of the movie *Independence Day* in 1996 – and back then web access had only been widely available in the UK for about 18 months – just about the only message the poster campaign carried was the name of the movie, the release date and the website address.

TV has been a little slower to catch but with the launch extra channel capacity on digital TV, we are now starting to see behind-the-scenes programmes – such as *Doctor Who Confidential* – becoming the norm rather than the exception. Indeed *Doctor Who* offers probably the most impressive range of multimedia add-ons, including audio CDs in the *Radio Times*, a website and even mini-adventures – called *Tandisodes* – that can be viewed on video/web enabled mobile phones. Indeed if I'm going to be cynical – I am – it's arguable that the websites now supporting some TV programmes – I'm thinking of ITV's *Afterlife* here – are actually more impressive than the programmes themselves.



Check out <http://afterlife.itv.com>. To paraphrase the old *Not the Nine O'Clock News* sketch *Nice Video (Shame About the Song)* great website, shame about the story.

So, movies, TV – fully signed up members of the digital age? Correct. But that brings us to the world of print, in particular books and magazines. Here we enter a world in which it is as if the internet never happened. A world where most websites are moribund affairs still stuck in a mid-1990s style brochureware time warp and where interactivity is almost unheard of. There again as many publishers – and a considerable number of magazine editors – seem to think email inboxes should only be checked every six months, this is hardly surprising.

But there are signs of hope out there. For example the new UK SF&F magazine *Hub* has a website – at [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk) – that along with all the usual submissions and subscriptions information also has content that complements the hard copy. So, for example, there is an edited highlights of an interview with *Genetopia* author Keith Brooke in the print version of the magazine but you can find the full transcript of the interview, along with hypertext links to the author's website plus a couple of SF oriented podcasts on the website.

And then there are those authors who have woken up to the fact the web provides a way for them to interact with their audiences – particularly their international readers – in a way that would be neither physically nor commercially viable if they tried to rely book signings, personal appearances, conventions and one-to-one correspondence. It was difficult enough for Charles Dickens to cope in his day and it is a complete non-starter today.

If your favourite authors website details do not appear in their books, try Googling their name or looking them up on Wikipedia – although you can usually find a UK writer by just putting

## Neil Gaiman

JOURNAL NEIL'S WORK COOL STUFF & THINGS ABOUT NEIL MESSAGE BOARDS WHERE'S NEIL SEARCH LINKS & DOWNLOADS MOUSECIRCUS.COM FASH

### JOURNAL

Q & A: NEIL, FEBRUARY 2007

Before this blog ever existed, I inhabited other places you could only get to by modem. First CompuServe, then Geocities, and then the Well, and answered questions and so on in each place, and hung around. [More...](#)

### NEIL'S WORK

On Sale Now: *Fragile Things*

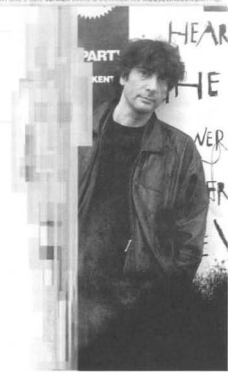


### Highlights From the Fragile Things Publicity Tour

VIDEO INTERVIEW

FORA TV

Reading and Q&A: at Ood's Books, Berkeley, CA





## Has Torchwood already jumped the shark?

Last time I complained that characterisation and back-story was in short-supply in *Torchwood* only to see everyone

fleshed out in the following weeks. Which is good, except for the fact they now have the characters of a bunch of misfits who would be hard pressed to get jobs as overnight shelf-stackers in a downmarket supermarkets, never mind be employed in a top secret alien hunting agency. However, having just watched the season finale, I'm now wondering if the big problem is not that we don't care about the characters but whether the serious has gone so far OTT as to be skating on thin credibility ice. Or, as the saying goes, has it prematurely jumped the shark?

For example, in the double-episode season finale, we had two lots of man-on-man snogging. In two separate incidents two members of the *Torchwood* team were shot by their co-workers - given there are only five people in total on the staff, this must play havoc with their employers liability insurance. And we had Captain Jack killed (again) and return from the dead (again) twice. Oh, and we also had one of the fearsome, primordial evil creatures from the bottomless pit whose disciples spend decades trying to raise, only to have them fall down dead very quickly.

Elsewhere in the Whoniverse (for more visit [www.whoniverse.org](http://www.whoniverse.org)) *Doctor Who* - in the shape of David Tennant - made a welcome return in a Christmas special with Catherine Tate in *The Runaway Bride*. Nice humour, great villainess (Sarah Parish totally unrecognisable as the spider beast Empress of Racnoss) and some unusual action shots - including the Tardis chasing a taxi down a crowded M4 motorway. Despite recent press speculation that Tennant may leave the role - the explanation here could be that he has only signed on to complete the upcoming third series because a fourth series has yet to be commissioned - he's probably got more 'attitude' than any Doctor since Tom Baker.

That said, the story line did contain some irritating holes. Yes, I know they are just MacGuffins but this is SF and we do notice these things. For example, where did *Torchwood* put all the material they dug out, when they drove an enormous tunnel into the centre of the Earth? And if the Racnoss were such an ancient and fearsome race - one of their ships even provided the core for the Earth when it was being formed out of debris in the solar system, how come the Empress's starship could be destroyed so easily by a

couple of tanks taking pot shots at it from Tower Hamlets.

And then there were *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, which made a one-off showing on New Year's Day as a precursor for a series scheduled for BBC later this year. Despite the fact this is meant to be a kids' show, it was an unexpected joy. Not only did we have that rarity in the UK - child actors who can actually act - but we also had scary CGI monsters with world domination plans, some neat gadgets (Sarah Jane's sonic lipstick has 'merchandise me' written all over it), and a superb villain - Samantha Bond as Miss Wormwood was bitchily sarcastic and sadistic. As for Sarah Jane, played by Elisabeth Sladen, when she was last on screen as the Doctor's assistant in the 1970s, she was like somebody's goody-goody older sister. Now she's feisty, more than a little foxy - and seems to be rather more on the ball than all the team at *Torchwood*. Definitely a programme to watch in future although how come both Sarah Jane and Tosh in *Torchwood* seemed to be wearing the same plum-coloured velvet coats? Maybe it's an SF fashion thing?

## It's that man again.

If you liked Marc Warren in *The Hustle*, then you may have liked him - complete with a long blond wig and a false eye playing the assassin Teatime in Sky One's pre-Christmas TV extravaganza *Terry Pratchett's Hogfather* (presumably to distinguish if from all the other *Hogfather* TV movies showing). On the other hand you may have thought that at 4 hours over two successive nights, this was a programme that could have been made a lot shorter, crisper - some of the minor characters' relevance was a little confusing - and less boring. I sat through the whole thing for you, dear readers, but towards the end found the interminable commercial breaks a relief as it gave me an excuse to channel-hop elsewhere. Cynics would say the whole production was slanted to give the David Jason character - he's a national treasure you know - more airtime. Still Michelle Dockery, who played Death's granddaughter Susan, made an excellent heroine.

Talking of Marc Warren, a fortnight later he cropped up on BBC 1 wearing a long black wig and false fangs as the latest manifestation of *Dracula*. The programme was described as a 'reworking' - which here meant syphilis and satanism - but with some of the main characters in the book either written out or given reduced roles - David Suchet was wasted as Van Helsing - it was difficult to understand why they bothered. There again, this is the BBC which regards *The Vicar of Dibley* as comedy and *Robin Hood* as adventure.

Charles Christian



## With the release of *Independence Day* in 1996, the poster campaign had only the name of the movie, the release date and the website address

.co.uk or .com after their name. So what should a good author's website look like? Visit Neil Gaiman's site at [www.neilgaiman.com](http://www.neilgaiman.com) to find out.

There is everything here, not one bit is dud - and the site works properly with no broken links or missing downloads. Once again there is all the information you would expect to find about an author: bibliography, photos, FAQs, where he has speaking engagements. But, there is also a blog - and he is conscientious, to the point of making almost daily postings over the Christmas holiday period. There are some very active discussion forum/message boards - one nice touch is the way the book oriented forum are split into two sections: one where you can discuss a book without giving away the plot and a 'spoiler' board where you can talk about the plot in detail. And there are extensive links to audio and video casts that Neil has been involved with recently.

Given that the site has no obvious commercial spin-off - you can't buy books or merchandise on it - why do it? The answer is because without your audience, whether you are a best selling author, a new magazine, a TV series or a movie, you are nothing. You have to engage with your audience - and that means using the same digital communications media they use.

# SEDUCTION of the Innocent

COMIC REVIEWS BY JAMES BACON ESQ.

## The Boys

Garth Ennis is well known in the comics industry and has a diverse writing repertoire to call upon. With *The Boys*, Garth has created his own superhero world, following in the footsteps of Kurt Busiek, Alan Moore and notably Pat Mills, in order to tell a different side of the superhero story – one where moral code and duty are just a veneer easily thrown to the wind, while abuse, sexual deviancy and corruption are the order of the day away from the cameras.

Ennis has a wicked and evil sense of humour and he brings this to his new creation. Hughie, a Scotsman who has an uncanny resemblance to Simon Pegg, is a normal fella whose girlfriend is killed by careless superhero, A-Train (who could resemble the Flash). As his life falls apart and lawyers rip him off, he is in a desolate place. Butcher recruits Hughie into his team, The Boys, who work for the CIA, monitoring and when needed to arrest or terminate Super Heroes. Butcher opens Hughie's eyes to the realities of Super hero life.

Hughie joins this anti-superhero team, and in the first six episodes that make up this graphic novel, he comes out of his shell, but still has much time for thought and conversation, as he juggles the morals and questions the situation he finds himself in.

The language is hard and every four letter word is there, the visual violence is not any stronger than anything previous and Pat Mills' *Martial Law* would have been equally hard, but there is a visceral quality about the comic, and it does seem to push some buttons if not boundaries. First look might make one think about school boy toilet humour, but as you learn in these six comics, there is more to Butcher than violence for its sake.

One scenario throws a spotlight on a teenage super team in a brothel, where every act of depravity is taking place, including a working girl having to deal with the after effects of having sex with a super human. Not pleasant at all.

Dark humour and overkill are the name of the game – this is, after all, a comic.



## Strontium Dog

Following on from the success of the *Judge Dredd Case Files*, which reprinted all of 2000AD's Judge Dredd stories in sequence, comes *The Complete Nemesis* and *Strontium Dog: Search and Destroy Agency Files Volume 1*.

All comic officians will (probably) know that *Strontium Dog* actually began in *StarLord*, a brother comic to 2000AD whose best characters were subsumed into 2000AD. The graphic novel begins with those original stories from *StarLord* and continues.

The stories written by John Wagner and Alan Grant were good science fiction. After a world war in the 22nd century, people suffer mutations due to the Strontium 90 fallout. Instead of creating an extraordinary super bunch, these people are seen as freaks and kept in ghettos, and the only legal work they are allowed is bounty hunting.

Johnny Alpha is one such mutant, who has eyes that allow him to see through things. His adventures include dimension jumping and time travel, and sometimes just visiting other worlds to capture people who have done wrong. He has a good moral sense, despite his difficult situation and the stories are packed with action and adventure with odd quirks. They need to be, as the punch has to come across over six pages.

A great place to start a wonderful comic series, and for those who remember the character from their 2000AD reading days a nice way to reacquaint. Its great to see Carlos Ezquerro's artwork improve as you read, and one hopes they will continue this series, although with the Judge Dredd case files already on Volume Six one expects these will be sellers.

## Meanwhile...

Darwyn Cooke has been allowed to play with one of the greatest comic characters ever. In the 1940's Will Eisner created the masked crime fighter *The Spirit*, and his stories have had a lasting influence on comic writing ever since. Comparisons are always made between Batman and *The Spirit*, and Cooke recently did a crossover between the two characters – but *The Spirit* captures something

quintessentially 1940's. The fedora hat, the gloves, the simple mask and the dames.

Cooke, whose *New Frontiers* has proven hugely popular, is just the person for this comic, with an respectful eye for history. He is joined by J. Bone, who does lovely artwork in a very clean-cut style that's a nod to Paul Dini and Bruce Timm's animated *Adventures of Batman*.





# The Science of Speech Making

Cartoon character Dilbert is the hero for many office workers. Creator Scott Adams may become a hero for those suffering from Spasmodic Dysphonia.

It is a condition where part of the brain's speech centre shut down often after infection or an allergic response. Ordinary speech becomes impossible; however, singing can be unaffected. Other weird effects, in Mr Adams case, were that he could talk alone, but not to others, though public speaking was unaffected. According to specialists there is no recovery.

Mr Adams wouldn't accept that and experimented every way he could think to 'relearn' normal speech and remake the neural pathways to his vocal cords. Poetry, especially children's nursery rhymes, seemed to do the trick. It's still unclear whether the recovery is permanent, but he is speaking normally.

Is this science? I think so. If not Adams has to be a SF writer since he produces work about a

parallel universe where men and women work in little boxes for soulless companies with no idea about people a bit like — oh dear.

Source: [Wired.com](http://Wired.com) and [dilbertblog.typepad.com](http://dilbertblog.typepad.com)



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# Dubya Trouble for Ozone Layer

In *Matrix* 180 I reported the ozone hole over Northern Europe and America had reduced by 10%. Jubilation was short lived as in October the Antarctic hole was found to have worsened with the largest hole of all time being measured. In September the hole reached 27.4 square kilometres with almost total ozone depletion from 8km above the surface of the earth to 13km.

The World Meteorological Organization's Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion predicts a potential recovery by 2065 with this large hole being an annual variation in a downward trend.

Meanwhile the Bush administration won approval for the use of a controlled ozone-

destroying pesticide, methyl bromide. Banned by international treaty two years ago the U.S. justified its use because the chemical stockpile existed before the 2005 ban and it will soften the economic impact of converting to safer products. Both European nations and the treaty's experts objected.

The request to use 7,100 tons was reduced to 5,900 tons.

"The U.S. position is that we are appropriately managing the strategic reserve," Druella Hufford, director of the Environmental Protection Agency's stratospheric protection division, said this week. "We've driven it down every year."

Source: [edie.net](http://edie.net) and Associated Press

# Birds And...

Would-be SF writers are advised to look at our own world to find aliens. Honeybees are excellent with their hive societies. Now their gender definition process has been found to be different to our own too. As discovered by a team led by Zachary Huang, Michigan State University associate professor in the Department of Entomology.

Humans use two sex-determining chromosomes, X and Y. A child receives one from each parent. If they get two Xs it's a boy, if XY a girl.

Bees use variations in the sex determination genes instead. Alleles are different versions of the same gene and in us they define things like hair colour, but not gender. In the females all the sex determination genes define sex rather than in the pairing of chromosomes. Two different alleles produce a female while a single allele gives a fertile male and two identical alleles gives infertile



males.

"This is a matter of gene transmission," Huang said. "It is an evolutionary strategy to maximize gene transmission to the next generation."

Very different from us, the females do all the work, the fertile males live a life of pampered luxury and infertile males get eaten, then again...

Source: [Michigan State University](http://Michigan State University)



In a contradiction to national stereotypes, while the Universities of Texas and Michigan are aiming for small physics, Europeans at CERN are going big.

Between now and Christmas 2007 the 2,000 tonne Compact Muon Solenoid (CMS) will be built into the 27km ring of CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC). Involving 37 countries and over 2,000 scientists the CMS is a huge machine with the goal of identifying new particles. It may spot mini black holes, go some way to work out how many dimensions there are and fathom what dark matter is.

When ready at the end of 2007, the LHC will smack particles together at higher energies than ever before. The CMS will measure the tracks, energies and charges of the bits that fly off.

Professor Virdee hopes to see a Higgs-Boson particle. Current theories suggest this is what gives the property of mass to particles like electrons, though it has never been seen.

Their findings should help shape understanding of the formation of the universe and how it works today.

Source: [Imperial College London](http://Imperial College London)



Big Brother is suffering from overload. As CCTV proliferates, the quantity of recorded information is becoming too much to sift through. Fortunately for our would-be oppressive overlords the University of Texas has been leaching a computer to do the watching.

It maps a simple model of the human body on to the images to find people in the picture and then compares their actions with 'standard behaviours' to spot the difference between punching or kicking and hugging or shaking hands.

Although tests have shown it to be accurate to 80%, it only works for side-on views from a single camera. This limitation is being worked on so the developers hope to produce a commercial system within the next few years. They had better work fast for in the UK there is now one camera for every 14 people and rising.

Source: [New Scientist](http://New Scientist)



At the annual conference on Neural Information Processing Systems, Associate Professor Rajesh Rao of the University of

Washington presented results of a demonstration to control a robot through the thoughts of an operator.

"This is really a proof-of-concept demonstration," Rao said. "It suggests that one day we might be able to use semi-autonomous robots for such jobs as helping disabled people or performing routine tasks in a person's home."

Rao's system uses 32 electrodes to measure signals from the brain, and so far it has been 94% successful.

Nintendo Wii users may be looking forward to the system so they can sit back on the couch.

Source: [United Press International](http://United Press International)

# Lost in Time

Andy Sawyer steps forward in time in this issue's Foundation Favourites with Staniland's novel *Back to the Future*

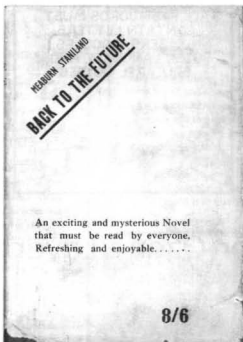
**N**o not that one. Way before Marty McFly, Meaburn Staniland wrote a novel of that title, published by Nicholas Vane in 1947.

Monkton, ("Monkey" to his chums) is at a loose end since leaving the Army, and when old pal Bunting, a scientist doing "some rather shattering work on time" wants to record the experiences of a human subject. Monkton volunteers (as you would). After a couple of test runs, he ends up in the comically drab future of 2047, where just about everything is rationed and the populace is planned to an inch of its life. Unfortunately the time machine's switch has broken and Bunting can't bring him back until it's repaired, although he is persuaded by a Government official to send a policeman after him. Monkton's adventures in the future are mildly harrowing and the opportunity for some topical (for 1947, that is) satire.

Writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1948, George Orwell extrapolated his times and created a horribly totalitarian future which still chills with its authenticity. Staniland (whoever he was, and we'll come to that in a minute) obviously loathed the bureaucracy and creeping socialism of post-war England, but his hatred of it is that of the middle-class bore who complains that the working class don't work nowadays and the nanny state interferes with an Englishman's right to be obnoxious. In many ways this is the opposite to Orwell, in fact, and despite the somewhat Welshian time machine one suspect that Wells's insistence on the "scientific" planning of society is exactly the target in this novel. At one point Monkton walks down a street to be met by a barrage of investigators questioning him about his opinion of government policy – and the joke is that when he disagrees, he's still marked down as a "yes" because no-one, of course, could possibly disagree with the government.

Furthermore, as science fiction, this is very much the kind of sub-Wellsian of that's written by people who see science fiction purely as a vehicle for satire rather than an exercise in imagination or extrapolation. John Wyndham's "logical fantasy" had yet to hit the mainstream and there seems no sign that Staniland had got any ideas from the American sf magazines. He seems to run out of steam towards the end; there's a bit of mumbo-jumbo to get Monkton back to his own time which seems to hinge on the revelation that Bunting had in fact made it to the future before Monkton, but from a point in the mid-thirties, (and some desultory love-interest who turns out to be Bunting's daughter).

So why draw attention to it? First, there's the fascinated interest in reading a novel by someone who seems so clearly to be inventing science fiction in the way so many British writers of



the period did – a dash of Wells and *et*, that's it. Second, some of the satire in the early part of the book really is amusing. After one of Monkton's early trips, he's advised to ask for details about this future – will the Bomb be used? Will there be a revolution? "You might well ask in what way are we going to solve the Palestine problem: if it doesn't work, we needn't try it." (p. 39). Sixty years later we're still asking that... And there's a glorious section where Monkton ends up in a school deluged by the "routine orders issued by the Minister every month... But then we also get special orders and extraordinary orders and even orders of the day, all signed by or on behalf of the Minister... Besides these we receive directives and instructions from the County Council Education Committee" (and so on). "Where are the school-books kept?" Monkton asks the Headmaster. "We don't use them," he said, in a surprised tone. "You are expected to know it all."

I first read this at the height of the cuts implemented by the Thatcher government, which of course was going to roll back all this wicked bureaucracy of the sort complained about by Staniland. Reader, I laughed like a drain...

There's also a somewhat less apt lampoon of the sort of intellectual who can talk sensitive nonsense about virtually anything – "as I look at it I can detect a tiny melody rising out of it, a sort of incipient symphony..." "starkly lonely in its eventualism". Staniland was obviously

soured by post-War England, and *Back to the Future* was his protest, and deserves a little attention for being a cry of frustration which so clearly establishes what a lot of people were thinking. Its use of sf tropes may be clumsy, but once again it shows how sf is the natural vehicle for this kind of satire.

Without any evidence at all, I feel that Staniland was something like his character Monkton – out of the army into a changing and unsympathetic world with no possibility of returning to "better" days. What Staniland did next, who knows? Who Staniland was: who knows? The *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* gives no dates for birth or death, and the book itself gives no information other than a slightly inaccurate synopsis of the plot and a rather wistful hope that this "exciting and mysterious Novel... must be read by everyone". The only other book recorded by the British Library for a "Meaburn Staniland" was *Law of Settlement. A letter to the Rt. Hon. Sir J. Graham on his speech Feb. 12, 1845: with reasons for the entire abolition of the Law of Settlement*. This Staniland was surely the solicitor who was Mayor of Boston, Lincolnshire in 1849-50 and MP for Boston 1859-1865. Was our writer a direct descendant? A "Rev. Meaburn Staniland Page" is noted as the father of a Michael Page of the 1st British Airborne Division killed at Arnhem in September 1944. The web is a wonderful thing, as a search for "Meaburn Staniland" shows a doctor in New Zealand of the same name who according to his practice website emigrated from the UK in 1989. It's somehow ironic that the identity of the author of this time-travel story should seem to be itself lost in the mists of time.

Andy Sawyer



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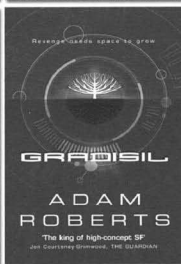
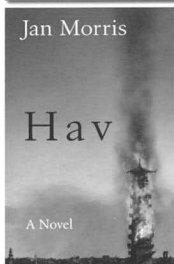
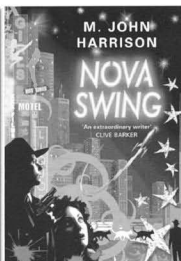
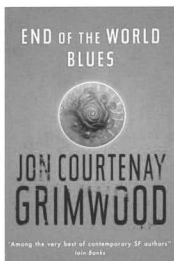
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