

Hub Magazine

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CONTENTS:

FICTION: *Under A Bridge* by Paul Fairbairn

REVIEW: *Franklyn*
Nation
Primeval

FEATURE: *Gun For Hire #2* by Guy Adams



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EDITORIAL:

by ellen j allen

Books made me who I am today. They shaped the person I've become and continue to have a disproportionate and sometimes unexpected effect on me. I'm very fortunate in that I don't remember a time when I couldn't read; I'm told I learned (thanks, Mum!) before I was 2 and I've rarely been without a book since. My childhood books were full of talking animals and magic and mystery and discovery and adventure - and they segued seamlessly into YA sci-fi and fantasy.

I learned what it was like to be different people, living different lives. I learned what it was like to go into space, to walk on the surface of other worlds. I learned about love and loss and how these things transcend species, let alone race. I learned about honour and bravery and integrity - and about selfishness and cowardice and consequences. I learned about friendship from books (I didn't figure out how to put that into practise until the last year of high school, but that's another story) and about self-reliance.

Books made me believe that people are incredible, amazing - capable of so much more than we ever believe. They scared me silly with the threat of nuclear war; instilled in me the belief that it's not our right to inhabit this planet, that we are guardians only and must take very good care because otherwise we're only ever a step away from extinction. Above all, books made me see that we need to be out in space, exploring, colonising, evolving, if we're to make that threat of extinction recede even slightly.

I'm still struggling with my disappointment that I won't ever have my own spaceship, still hoping that some amazing breakthrough takes place and that I'll stand on Mars, soar past Jupiter, see a new world by the light of a different sun. But in one respect I've already done this, by reading books, and if that's as close as I ever get to spaceflight, well, that's still closer than I'd ever have got on my own.

Here's some of the books which have made me who I am. **Nicholas Fisk's** *A Rag, a Bone and a Hank of Hair*, and his *Starstormers* series. **Douglas Hill's** *Last Legionary* series. **Monica Hughes'** *Isis* trilogy and *Arc One* books. **Arthur C. Clarke's** *Islands In The Sky*. I could list a hundred more and a hundred more again.

I could mention the last book I read, which crept inside my head and made me view the world in a very different, very creepy way (Kaaron Warren's *Slights*, in case you were wondering). But I won't. I'm sure that you all have books which have influenced the person you are. If you're interested in sharing them - and trust me, I'm always interested in hearing about them - hop on over to [Hub's website](#) and let me know.

Until next week, Happy Reading!



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FICTION

Under a Bridge

by paul fairbairn

His blood was on Vinnie's suit, spatters of it on the big man's pale tie and starched cuffs. There was a blade now as well, flashing wedges of yellow light across his face. And yet Johnny was still barely able to glance away from the locked door at the other end of this empty garage. Above, a train clattered across the bridge, making the lights sway lazily on their cords.

Michael reappeared, motioning at Vinnie, a brief flick of the head. The gleaming blade, and Vinnie's shaved skull, retreated.

Michael also wore a dark suit and subtle tie, but his clothes weren't splashed with blood. The privileges of rank, Johnny supposed. Michael had finished his apprenticeship, long ago; now, he could keep his hands - and his suits - clean.

'Why don't you make it easy on yourself?' Michael said quietly, his hands outstretched, palms upward. 'Make it easy on all of us. Tell us it was the Turks, like we all know.' He smiled, briefly and sadly. 'Nobody likes this, Johnny. Nobody.'

Johnny caught a glimpse of Vinnie, from the corner of his eye, and saw cold fire in the ape's dead eyes. Michael was wrong. Vinnie liked this. Vinnie liked this *plenty*.

'How long have we known each other?' Michael was saying. 'How long has it been Johnny?'

Since school, Johnny thought. Certainly long enough for Michael to know that Johnny would never lie, would never betray. 'Twenty years,' he said, his mouth overflowing with liquid, and, perhaps, the odd tooth.

'Twenty years,' Michael said quietly. 'At least ten of them working together, working for the Boss.' He gazed directly at Johnny. 'We were good,' he said. 'You were good. So I thought.' He looked away. 'And now. Now it's come to this.'

Johnny briefly remembered those first jobs, delivering packages for Michael, who'd already begun his ruthless ascent through the ranks. Johnny had never opened any of the envelopes, or boxes, or anonymous parcels, though, God knew, he'd been tempted often enough. And he'd never betrayed the Organisation either, although the temptation to do *that* had often been bright and seductive.

Michael waited, his bright, clear eyes meeting Johnny's. 'So what's it to be?' he said at length. 'You gonna tell me what really happened, or you gonna keep telling me these stupid stories?'

Johnny tried to raise himself up in the chair, but the cords were so tight around his forearms and lower legs that he couldn't move at all.

'I've already told you what I saw,' he said through his broken teeth. 'I keep telling you what I saw.' His voice was muffled even in his own skull, which felt stuffed with dense rubber.

Michael shook his head sadly, his dark, handsome face downcast. His hands came together in front of him, clasped as if in prayer. He was a devout man, was Michael, though if he'd seen what Johnny had seen last night, he would know the futility of prayer. There were things in this world, Johnny had lately come to realise, that praying could not help you with.

'One man,' Michael was saying. 'One man took out Tito? And the others?'

Yes, Johnny thought, even Tito the Giant. But he shook his head, warmth trickling into his collar, warmth he knew wasn't sweat. 'Not man. Monster.'

Michael turned away and walked towards the door. 'A *monster*,' he sighed, without looking at Johnny, his head bowed. 'This again.' He stopped, blocking Johnny's view of the door. 'Big as a horse, but

covered in rhino's skin.' He turned abruptly. 'Yet shaped like a man, standing upright. Yes?'

Johnny nodded. He'd seen Tito and his two henchmen walking into the shadow of the bridge, ready to make the deal. They'd each held a briefcase, stuffed with cash. Johnny guessed their contacts were already dead by then. The creature had appeared silently, as big as a rearing stallion, its grey, leathery flesh flexing. Johnny had barely even glimpsed its face, but he'd had an impression of a mouth as wide as its head, and of teeth like tusks, jutting at odd angles. It had taken Tito the Giant first, had simply pulled off his head, then dragged the others under the bridge, as Tito's corpse danced and spouted. Johnny had seen no more, and the piercing screams had lasted mere seconds.

Michael turned back to him, his dark eyes sad. 'You *will* tell me,' he said quietly. 'However much the Turks are paying you Johnny, you *will* tell me.'

He motioned to Vinnie, who stepped forward, scalp gleaming, knife glinting. Johnny didn't even glance at him, for he heard – through the blood that clogged his ears – something at the door, something trying the handle, testing the lock, assessing the hinges. Neither Michael nor Vinnie heard it, for they were too intent upon their business, one to extract information, the other to assimilate it. But Johnny heard it; heard it all too clearly.

After all, this disused garage was in one of the arches, under the bridge.

As he'd fled, Johnny had seen more of these things, all over the city, skulking *almost* out of sight, *almost* elusive enough to be put down to overactive imaginings, or tricks of the light. But Johnny had seen them, and no longer feared Vinnie's knife.

Without warning, the door exploded inwards, cartwheeling across the bare, grey-painted floor. It hit Vinnie as it spun, a corner striking his head, killing him instantly. He fell like a cow with a bolt in its brain, and Johnny strained in vain against his bonds.

Michael staggered backwards, half turned towards the doorway. Even as he was falling, he was reaching under his jacket. Johnny could have laughed: guns were no use here. Not now.

Amid the wood shards and metal dust, the beast filled the doorway. Johnny stopped struggling. What was the point? He barked a humourless laugh through his smashed teeth. Michael had his gun in his hand, but seemed unsure of what to do with it, and Johnny laughed again. The stories of his childhood were true: he'd always known – and feared – what lived under bridges.

Slowly, levering its leathery bulk through the doorframe, it entered. Inside, it raised itself to its full height, stretched the massive slabs of its muscles and ran a long, black tongue over its cracked, crogged teeth.

'No more telling stupid stories now,' Johnny said, and the troll pounced.



REVIEWS

Franklyn

reviewed by cathy hill



Starring: Ryan Phillippe, Eva Green, Sam Riley and Bernard Hill
Writer/Director: Gerald McMorrow
UK Cinema Release: 27th February 2009

I first heard of this film in a feature on *Film 2007* (at least I think that's the right year). They showed footage of the film being shot in London; the screen was full of actors in a whole array of strange costumes, forming part of a bizarre, bustling, fantasy street scene. It really caught my interest and I resolved to see it when it came out. When I finally got to see the finished product- after the release date was pushed back a month- it was weird and interesting and good, which is what I'd been expecting and looking forward to.

At its simplest the film is about four people who are looking for something, across different worlds. The sprawling Gormenghastian metropolis of Meanwhile City is constructed brilliantly and impressively for a small film. Everyone in the city must have a religion by law, meaning that a whole host of strange cults fill the thronging streets. The sets, costumes and props all add to the feel of a detailed and busy gothic otherworld. Jonathan Preest is a masked vigilante and the only atheist in town, making him a target of the sinister city Clerics. His inner monologues sometimes feel a little more like telling than showing, but without some explanation the important parts of this carefully created world might be missed by the audience. There are plenty of interesting little details in the background that should reward repeated viewings when the film goes to DVD. Preest himself is an intriguing figure, and being a citizen of a strange world it makes sense that we see things firmly through his viewpoint in order to understand him and his mission of vengeance. Unlike other famous masked men -notably V and Rorschach- Preest's face is not made into a great mystery as it is uncovered fairly early in the film. However this could be seen as a piece of misdirection on the part of the filmmakers.

The rest of the action takes place in London, where gothic, ecclesiastical architecture is used to mirror the appearance of Meanwhile City. However there are plenty of shots of modern, mundane or functional buildings to signal to the audience which reality this is. Reality is something of an issue for the characters; each one has their own illusions, understandable though they often are. Lovelorn Milo dreams of the purity of first love after being jilted and tracks down his childhood sweetheart. Emilia is a troubled, intense young woman whose art projects involve filming strangers and attempting suicide, ostensibly to annoy her haughty mother. Peter is a country church warden who has come to the capital to search for his missing son, a Gulf war veteran. Each one clings to a fantasy that makes life more bearable, however as the film continues and the characters converge, their illusions are gradually stripped away.

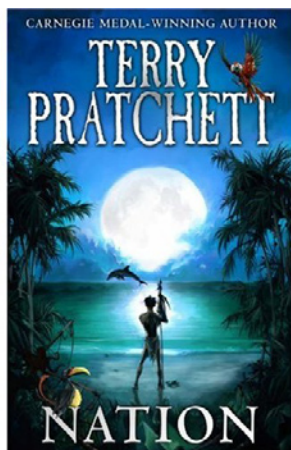
The two worlds blend together as the film goes on. The theatrical use of extras in double roles becomes significant rather than convenient. Clues become more frequent in the final third, making it fairly clear what is going on. I wasn't sure if there might be some kind of double bluff going on, but this probably has more to do with the large amount of weird fiction I read than the clarity of the film. Or perhaps it's because many films are made to appear more complex than is necessary, or try to purposely misdirect the audience right up until the climax. It's refreshing to find a film that reveals most of the truth before the climax. In this case knowing the facts heightens the action and drama. However not everything is given away, there are still questions that aren't resolved at the end. You won't come out of the cinema with your head spinning and you don't need to argue with your friends about what was really going on. However there are still things that can be discussed, re-examined and picked apart.

Nation

reviewed by patrick mahon

by Terry Pratchett
Doubleday
rrp £16.99

The first thing to say about *Nation* is that it is not the 32nd Discworld novel. The second thing to say is that you shouldn't hold that against it. It may not be the next in that repeatedly inventive series of fantasy



novels. But it is nonetheless a fantasy, this time based on a parallel Earth that recalls Britain's imperial history during the mid-19th century.

At the beginning of *Nation*, we meet Mau, a young man returning to his island home in the middle of the Great Southern Pelagic (read Pacific) Ocean, having spent the last month alone on a nearby island for his coming-of-age rite. He is looking forward to seeing the whole tribe on the beach, ready to welcome him home, now he's a man.

Disaster strikes when a massive tsunami crashes into his canoe – but, being in a small boat, he survives. When he regains consciousness, he manages to find his way back to his island. But nobody is there to welcome him. His family, his friends, everyone he knows – all have been drowned by the tsunami.

For a novel aimed at young adults, this is a very hard-hitting start to the story. And, for many of us, it will immediately bring to mind

television pictures from Boxing Day 2004, when hundreds of thousands of people were killed by the tsunami that hit South-east Asia – although Pratchett has been keen to stress that the idea for *Nation* pre-dates that tragedy by some time. Regardless, there's some very strong imagery in here.

While Mau is tidying up the wreckage of his village, which mostly involves burying bodies at sea, he comes across a large boat which has been shipwrecked by the tsunami. And – paralleling his situation – the only survivor from this ship is a young English girl called Daphne, who panics on his approach, and tries to shoot him, thankfully with a waterlogged pistol. After this inauspicious start, Mau and Daphne become friends, and set about ... surviving.

As time moves on, a few more survivors from nearby islands arrive, and so the task of building a new Nation falls to Mau and Daphne. But at every stage, Mau is haunted by voices in his head: the dead village elders, telling him what to do, demanding that he pay tribute to gods that he no longer believes in, and trying to stop him from doing things his way. But Mau will not be cowed...

An issue explored throughout the book is how religious faith is tested by natural disasters. For Mau, any faith he might have had is destroyed with the Nation: he is angry with the gods for killing almost everyone he cared for, and sees no reason to pay them any further attention. But one of the other survivors is an old priest called Ataba, whose faith is reinforced by this demonstration of the gods' power over the elements. I felt that the arguments between Mau and Ataba, as they slowly learn to respect each other's point of view, were some of the best written exchanges in the book.

This is a wonderfully understated story. Since it wasn't a Discworld novel, I wasn't initially sure what to expect. However, the abrupt first chapter pulled me in, and I soon found myself caring deeply what happened to Mau and Daphne.

There is a lightness and simplicity to the prose that is occasionally missing from some of the Discworld novels – perhaps because of the age of the intended audience. However, the story itself remains complex and multi-faceted, reflecting Pratchett's extensive knowledge of folklore and myths from across the world. The story builds slowly – perhaps a little too slowly, at times – but as it drew to a conclusion, I was absolutely rooting for Mau's new Nation to win through.

The release of *Nation*, in September 2008, was rather overshadowed by the announcement, earlier in the year, that Pratchett had been diagnosed with a rare form of early-onset Alzheimer's Disease. Most of the press coverage of Pratchett since then has been about his illness, rather than his writing, so it is good to be able to confirm that *Nation* shows no signs whatsoever of the author suffering any fall off of invention, wit or control over dialogue. Quite the reverse, in fact.

This may not be a Discworld novel, but don't let that put you off. *Nation* is an accomplished book, and manages to deal with complex issues of identity, adolescence and belief in a hugely entertaining, and extremely humane way. To my mind, it is one of the best novels that Pratchett has written for many years.

Primeval

reviewed by *alasdair stuart*

Season 3. Episode 1

Starring Douglas Henshall, Hannah Spearritt, Andrew Lee-Potts, Lucy Brown, Ben Miller, Juliet Aubrey, Ben Mansfield, Laila Rouass and Belinda Stewart-Wilson

Primeval's always got a little bit of a bad deal; after all it's easy to write it off as a 'monster of the week' show, a cheap and tacky attempt to dare to do British science fiction which isn't Doctor Who.

The thing is, it's actually a lot better and a lot smarter than its premise suggests and that intelligence, the willingness to pull the rug out from under the audience is what drives the first episode of its third season.



Reeling from the death of Stephen Hart (James Murray) at the end of the previous season, Professor Cutter and the other members of the ARC team are called to an anomaly that's opened in the British Museum. A *Pristichampsus*, in essence a huge crocodile, has come through and is loose in London. As Cutter and Abby (Spearritt) race to track it down, Connor (Lee-Potts) must work with new military liaison Captain Becker (Mansfield) as well as anthropologist Sarah Page (Rouass) who proves vital to dealing with the creature.

For all the build up, the creature plot in this episode is actually largely irrelevant. Cutter and Abby do little more than narrowly miss the *Pristichampsus* several times before it returns to the British Museum and the end result is some nice action sequences which, despite that, feel oddly empty.

However, the real meat of this episode is in the other plots. Rouass' Sarah Page is instantly likable, smart and has a different worldview that ends up spinning the series off in not one but two fascinating new directions. She's also a great double-act with Connor who is allowed to be a genius not once but twice this episode. Their plot, which superficially involves little more than stacking boxes around an Egyptian Sun Cage, quietly turns the series on its head and it's going to be fascinating to see how Page fits in and how Cutter's theory that the anomalies have been occurring for centuries pans out.

The C plot doesn't disappoint this week either as the splendidly arch Lester (Miller) finds himself forced to deal with new boss Christine Johnson (Stewart-Wilson) who has an agenda all of her own. On top of all that, the always good value Helen Cutter returns in a brief cameo that turns the C plot on its head and closes the episode with a vintage piece of *Primeval* misdirection.

If this episode has a weakness, it's that it tries to do too much. Two new characters are introduced, two major revelations about the anomalies are revealed and an entirely new faction appears to be in play. As a result, the monster plot feels rushed and at one point actively dumb as Connor climbs a chain for no other reason than someone needs to be in danger at that exact moment. However, looking past these faults, the episode suggests that this is the year *Primeval* finally comes into its own. Smarter than the average dinosaur, it's a unique show which has a lot more to offer than you might think. Make sure you catch the repeat, it's worth it.

FEATURES

GUN FOR HIRE.

by **guy adams**

"Some people's photography is an art. Mine is not. If they happen to be exhibited in a gallery or a museum, that's fine. But that's not why I do them. I'm a gun for hire."
- Helmut Newton.

1. Interest

When I went full time as a writer, my partner, who is an evil woman and likes to cause me pain, asked me to imagine writing an exhaustive volume about the making of *Last of the Summer Wine*. You know the kind of thing, hugely detailed, packed full of cast lists and shooting schedules... Dear God but the thought turned my guts to curdling ice cream... imagine the research... watching every episode of that most unremarkable comedy show, notebook open, stained with your own tears of misery... (and if you're thinking I'm being too harsh on this 'classic' of comedy then shut your grey and humourless face, you probably laugh at *Some Mothers Do Have 'Em* and your opinion is worthless to me, *Last of the Summer Wine* is as funny as bowel cancer -- *fact*). But then if I were asked I'd have to do it, the groaning bellies of my stepchildren would soon goad me forth. Somehow I'd survive it, find something about the book that interested me, something to keep me going. Perhaps hypnotherapy could create in me a sexual response to Thora Hird's face. Every time she moaned at that oily husband of hers I'd be close to fainting through the sheer eroticism of it all.

Thankfully I haven't had to write that book yet. I have a novel coming out in a month or so that's part of BBC Books *Torchwood* range. There was an assumption amongst certain scathing colleagues that *this* would be a hellish job, ploughing my way through two series of the show and trying to capture

Barrowman's performance on the page (I suspect it's a performance you couldn't capture with an elephant gun let alone a pen... unless the book could be trained to howl at you, grasping your testicles and singing songs from *Evita* every time you finished a chapter). I rather like the show actually -- or at least the *potential* of it, it's never quite as good as it could be but I live in hope -- there's certainly worse things on television (and if you doubt me, may I point your attention to *Demons*, let me stare through a telescope at a yak's defecating anus than watch an episode of *that* ever again*). Besides, the book became an opportunity to play with the concept of haunted house fiction, that was my "hook" and it was what motivated every chapter for me.

Life On Mars has been very well-tapped (and the capitalisation of the "O" is according to branding guidelines...trust me I have to know these things). I've written *four* books about that show and it was enjoyable stuff in a beige and corduroy way. TV that smelled sweaty. With those books the initial drive was to do something wildly different with a "making of" book (the designer and I became lost in the fictional world of the show and interacted with the characters, a story thread that we wrapped up with a two page comic!). Later, with the humour titles, the motivation was more obvious... to be as funny as possible within the format of a rule book. Oh and to shock my editor to tears obviously... Something I never actually managed, damn her, the terrible filth-pig.

But now we find the next little problem: if you liked it when you started the book you'll probably hate it by the time you finish. Familiarity breeds contempt. When I was a kid my best friend's brother worked in a chocolate factory. Aside from the predictable tales of staff emptying their bodily fluids into the vats he was thrilled about how many free sweets he could eat (the enthusiasm for one rather dismissing the veracity of the other, unless he savoured the salty taste of his co-workers which I doubt). The rules on staff consumption were simple: you can eat as much as you like but not take it home. Predictably enough he couldn't stand the taste of chocolate after a couple of weeks. I now sympathise. I was sick of *Life On Mars* by the end... to the point that I'd beat Phil Glenister to death if forced to be in the same room as him again (not that he wasn't a charming bloke you understand, it wouldn't be Glenister I was seeing it would be Gene Hunt, a man named after his own rhyming slang and someone I've been forced to speak "in the voice of" for far too long). Perhaps I should watch *Demons* again, at least then I'll have a good reason for killing him...

I've just finished a book on Sherlock Holmes and the same thing nearly happened as I poked at Doyle's stories with an obsession for detail they were never meant to endure. I found contradictions, research errors, whopping great plot holes that threatened to sink the damn narrative. I have loved Holmes since a child and for a while there was the threat of losing that affection... In this case it was avoided I think purely because the book was relatively small, I finished just in time... if there's a sequel though god help me, I'll be screaming amid a sea of smashed magnifying glasses, wishing the smart-arse consulting detective dead. It happened to Doyle after all...

*Just watch now as I get a gig writing spin-off novels of the bastard thing, ploughing through a boxed set with a notebook and a bucket by my side for vomiting great chunks of my soul into.

Next Week: Conrad Williams



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