

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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## EDITORIAL:

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**by alasdair stuart**

### Higher Callings

I think it was Andrew Cartmel who once described Gallifrey as a Grandfather Clock, that when the world finally ended it would slowly wind down, a polite whimper instead of a loud, uncouth bang.

Of course, that was before the planet was destroyed but the analogy has been on my mind recently, especially in the light of the ongoing hilarity in England over MP's expenses. As I write this the Chancellor is tipped to resign over an 'erroneous' expenses claim, ten members of parliament have already gone, the leader of the opposition has called for a General Election and a recent MORI poll revealed that the majority of people believe half the MPs in the country are corrupt. This is pretty much the definition of interesting times.

It's also incredibly fertile ground for science fiction. For the first time since the 1980s, the world is changing fast enough that we can write science fiction set now, in the real world. No metaphors, no thinly veiled takes on modern events, stories set now about now. William Gibson is already experimenting with this, as shown by books like *Spook Country* and there others like Iain Banks' *The Business* but I think there's another stage yet to come, a stage where ideas like Gibson's are married to concepts like *The West Wing* to create something unique; contemporary science fiction dealing with the structures we've put in place to deal with the world, how we make them better and how we survive. Science fiction which is based on corruption and revulsion and human failing and uses those things to tell stories about heroism, altruism and compassion. Stories which exist as a polar opposite to the consumerist, self conscious chic of early Cyberpunk, instead focussing on people engaging with the world, solving problems, building the future instead of complaining that it's not got the right brand.

The world is an interesting place these days in the best and worst possible ways. But it has the potential to be so much more and science fiction has the potential to lead the way there.

# FICTION

## Three Blind Dice

by lincoln crisler

Connor steps out onto the sidewalk. It's lunchtime, and he's hungry; he can smell the peppers and sausages from the vendor at the end of the block. There's a man leaned up against Connor's office building, throwing dice.

"Hey pal," the man says, "I'll stake one-hundred dollars on a roll of these dice." There's a confident gleam in his eye, and though he is well dressed, Connor thinks he smells a bit off.

"I don't have money like that to throw away," he says, and walks by. He's always had trouble saying no to risks, and this one is very appealing, but losing a hundred bucks would leave him short with the rent. Some risks just aren't worth taking.

"Don't worry about it," the man smiles. "If you win, you get the cash. If you lose, we'll come up with something. What am I gonna do, take your soul? Odds or evens; pretty fair shot, huh?" He kneels down and rattles the dice enticingly.

Connor does like to gamble. He hunkers down beside the man, who places three dice in Connor's sweaty palm. He's shaking with excitement; it's all up to fate. Luck. Chance.

"I pick odds."

"Toss 'em," the man says. And Connor does.

The dice strike cement, and three blind faces stare up at him. Connor, balanced on the balls of his feet, nearly falls backwards. The man grabs his shoulder and steadies him.

"What the Hell-?"

"Looks like I win." The man picks up his dice and stands up. Connor leaps up, prepared to protest, but the man aims two fingers at him with a crisp bill between them. "Here," he says, "Hold on to this for me." He hands Connor the money and walks off. Connor folds the money and puts it in his wallet. Obviously, the man is not all there. A hundred bucks is, however, a hundred bucks.

Connor whistles his way to the vendor. Today, he'll get two sausages with the works, to celebrate.

Connor wakes up the next morning and staggers to the bathroom to take a piss. He runs hot water in the sink and stares into the mirror. There's no reflection.

"What the fuck?"

He runs his fingers over the smooth glass. Somehow, one of his roommates must be playing a joke on him. He runs a hot shower and shaves blind under the faucet. Once he's clean, he dresses to some loud punk rock he used to listen to in high school, and trots downstairs to the bus stop at the end of the parking lot.

At the corner, where the lot lets out into the road, Connor trips and sprawls flat on the asphalt. He struggles to get up, but his hands are peppered with broken glass, and he lets himself drop to relieve the pressure on them. He rolls over onto his side to pick out the bloody glass.

Suddenly he hears the hiss of air brakes, the roar of an engine, and a garbage truck barrels into the parking lot to make its pick-up. Connor tries to make it to his feet, but only reaches his knees before the truck bears him back to the ground. The last thing he sees is the driver, be-bopping to the radio and singing off key.

Connor comes to. There's a weight on his eyes. He brushes it aside and opens them. He's surrounded by flames that give heat, but don't burn his skin. Mirrors that don't reflect and fire that doesn't

burn; what was the world coming to? Where was the truck? Why wasn't he splattered?

In the distance he sees the faint outline of a man. He's walking towards him, tossing three dice into the air and catching them.

"You dropped something," he says when he reaches Connor, and kneels down. He picks up a banded stack of bills; 'one-hundred dollars' printed on the band.

"I'll hold onto this for you," he chuckles. "Enjoy your stay." He walks off, tossing the dice and catching them.

**Three Blind Dice is an excerpt from *Despairs and Delights* published by Arctic Wolf Publishing**

Lincoln can be found at [www.lincolncrisler.info](http://www.lincolncrisler.info)

Arctic Wolf Publishing can be found at [www.arcticwolfpublishing.com](http://www.arcticwolfpublishing.com)



## REVIEWS

### **The Clone Wars Series 1 – Episodes 17-18**

*reviewed by richard whittaker*



**"Blue Shadow Virus" Directed by Giancarlo Volpe, written Craig Tittley**  
**"Mystery of a Thousand Moons" Directed by Jesse Yeh written by Bryan Larsen**  
**Starring: Catherine Taber, Matt Lanter, James Arnold Taylor, Ashley Eckstein, Anthony Daniels, Michael York, James Mathis III, David Kaufman**

Beyond the odd trip to Coruscant for some scene-setting, so far the *Clone Wars* series has avoided locations from the movies: But not this time. The Separatists drag the action back to the very first planet scene in the films – Yes, we're Naboo-bound, so get ready for the Gunguns!

Jar-Jar haters are probably readying some spit-balls for the screen at this moment.

Storywise, the series is also back in traditional territory with another super-weapon (seriously, that conceit is becoming to this show what big bads were to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.) Rather than restricting themselves to the blasters, ion cannons and lightsabers of the film franchise, the series writers have had some fun extending the available armory. There have already been portable EMP grenades to take out droids en masse, and the first ship-killing ion cannon: This time, in a belated nod to the old weaponized anthrax scares, the killing device is the Blue Shadow virus. Once a water-borne ravager of worlds, in its pure form it seems to have one symptom - immediate death. In a lab on Naboo, the Separatists have made it airborne and death is preceded by a hacking cough and some nasty blue veins. Conveniently for the plot, this is the version that Asoka (Eckstein) contracts, sending Anakin (Lanter) and Obi-Wan (Taylor) off to a seemingly devastated planet in search of a cure.

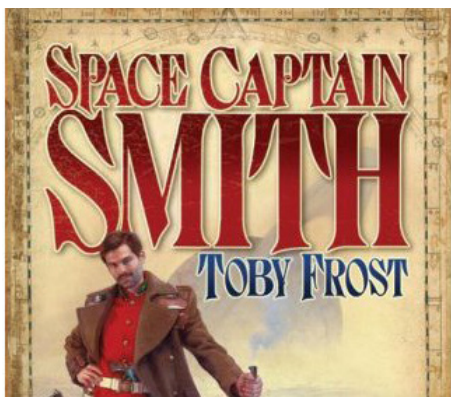
It's not an extraordinary story arc, and the direction in both halves is quite prosaic. Director Yeh, especially, takes it in an almost Loony Toons direction in places, although that does pay off when the space-faring equivalent of a drunken old jack tar turns up to warn everyone that they all be doomed. Yargh.

That tone established, York vamps it up as Dr. Nuvo Vindi, the lunatic scientist (part Dr. Mengele, part Professor Frankenstein) that has brought the blue shadow virus back from extinction and made it more deadly than ever. Delightfully Teutonic, down to the clipped *Allo, Allo*-esque accent and even a hint of a dueling scar, the two episodes could probably have benefited more from his presence. After all, the show could have taken the extremely dark subject matter and adopted the grim tone of the space-bound *Malevolence* arc from the first half of the season. Instead, the arc is oddly quirky, and the second episode depends on a spunky teenager Jaybo Hood (Kaufman) with a knack for reprogramming droids. Both Vindi and Hood disappear a little too suddenly: If the show is ever hoping to expand the cast with some original semi-regulars, there would be worse choices for return appearances.

Where the arc pays off biggest is in the little hints and nudges that it gives to the over-all über-plot between Padme and Anakin, and exactly how much Obi-Wan knows – or suspects – about it. Similarly, now the writers have worked out how to use Jar Jar as a chaotic attractor, even his biggest detractors won't be so inclined to hurl bricks at the TV. The eagle-eyed and obsessive should also watch out for a split-second but pretty overt design nod to *A New Hope*, and the first appearance of one of the angels of the moons of Iego that Anakin mentioned and compared Padme to in *The Phantom Menace* (voiced, with undoubted tongue-in-cheek, by Taber – the voice of Padme.) But, for all that, it's still just a superior piece of mid-season filler.

## Space Captain Smith

reviewed by martin willoughby



by Toby Frost  
Myrmidon Books Ltd  
rrp £7.99

Being the intrepid soul I'm not, I decided to browse the sci-fi section of Waterstone's for a writer that I hadn't heard of and read one of their books. Most of them had the usual black background, purple spaceship kind of covers, but this one caught my eye because it's a pale brown.

The front picture shows a square-jawed Englishman in a red and black late 19th Century British Army uniform, staring out, Flashman style, with his foot on a large, and presumably dead, insect.

The cover is as serious as the book gets. If you can imagine Michael Caine in *Zulu*, but without the brains, and then combine him with every Empire stereotype imaginable, you have an idea of the main character.

His ship, the *John Pym*, is slightly less well armed than a four year old with a balloon and a cap gun, and is piloted by a renegade sex-toy. His best friend is a skull collecting alien, whose idea of a good holiday (which he thinks this is) is to kill and decapitate as many people as possible and display their hollowed out skulls on his wall. Oh, I nearly forgot; there's a caged hamster as well.

Captain Isambard Smith is sent on a mission to collect a hippy from the New Francisco space station and deliver her to a planet in the British Space Empire: not because he's the best available, but because he's stupid and expendable. He is meant to be secretly guarded by a larger British warship, which gets destroyed by a ship from the Ghastr Empire, so he ends up trying to fulfill his mission on his own...and jolly well intends to do so.

Smith's best friend is called Suruk and his race speaks three languages, apart from English. They speak English like Klingons, full of honour and high-minded ideals. They have an archaic language similar

to Chuacerian English and one that is used to confuse passers by that is similar to Welsh. Asur'ah is the main tongue they use to communicate and sounds like (un)cool teenage speak. "I, like, sliced his head off man, you know." As the story unfolds, he is revealed as the only normal character, not to mention spiffingly brave.

The sex-toy-pilot, Carveth, is being chased by an android who is an android hunter...that seems familiar, but I can't quite recall where from. He's having qualms about killing other androids, though he's OK with killing humans, such as bankers and lawyers.

Carveth owns the pet hamster (did I mention him?) and gets to spend a fair bit of time dressed as little bo-peep, but armed with a maxim gun. She also has a personal weapon that intrigues Suruk. It's a black Kosh that is covered in flashing lights and vibrates.

I won't be spoiling anything by saying that Isambard Smith succeeds in his task what else would you expect of the British Space Empire of the 25<sup>th</sup> Century. On the way to success he has to contend with the insect empire of the Ghast, an empire of religious maniacs who are allied with the Ghast in order to bring on armageddon, assorted Frenchies and his repressed desire to have sex with the hippy woman, Rhianna. Though she's not really his type (he prefers his women to be British, wear wellies, love walking labradors and wear tweed underpants), he still wants to grab hold of Rhianna and jolly well roger her.

This is a scene setting novel for later books ('God Emperor of Didcot' is already out and 'Wrath of the Lemming-Men' is out this summer), and is full of laugh out loud jokes, wry asides and is best read at a breakneck pace to fully enjoy the humour.

Did I mention that there's a caged hamster called Gerald?

## FEATURES

# Big Screen Future

by *alasdair stuart*

### 3. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

*"Blessed are the forgetful, for they get the better even of their blunders"*

Joel ditches work one morning and, on impulse, goes out to Montauk. He meets Clementine on the train home, a wildly articulate, spiky, blue haired tornado who sweeps him off his feet.

Joel sits in his car, sobbing as 'Everybody's Got To Learn Sometime' plays on the stereo.

On a sunny morning, encased in a duvet, Clementine tells Joel she always thought she was ugly.

Joel wakes up, as outside, a car pulls away.

Joel and Clementine play in the snow on a Montauk beach, laughing as they throw snow over each other.

Nothing is mundane when you're in love. Every moment has a brilliant, shining opalescence to it that renders the normal magical, your partner extraordinary and the world a better place. You see in their eyes not only the idealised version of yourself but also the unshakeable belief that that is the person you will one day be. There is no feeling on Earth like it, nothing as empowering, as intoxicating, as wonderful. But when

you drop all your barriers you drop your defences and in those unguarded moments of honesty when you say not just what you think but what will hurt the most, you see nothing but disappointment in your partner's eyes, as, once again, you fail to live up to their expectations.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind exists in the hinterland between these two statements and in turn between two genres. It's definitively science fiction but it's also a romantic comedy/drama, each strand inter laced and wrapped around one another like Joel's increasingly deteriorating, knotted memories. It's both incredibly complicated and incredibly simple, the most grounded fantasy movie of the last ten years. It's also Jim Carrey's career best work.

Carrey's serious work is consistently his most interesting and here he's at the top of his game, playing a man whose rich internal life and dialogue is only made external as it's collapsing. Joel is an intensely normal man, clearly shy, clearly broken in the way almost everyone is and at the same time consumed by the dissatisfaction that kicks in at the end of the '20s. He's articulate and smart, funny and kind, shy and invisible. To most of the world, Joel is as faceless, as indistinct as the inhabitants of his memories.

Clementine brings him into focus, forces him to the front of his life and like Carrey, Winslet has never been better than she is here. Aggressive, confrontational and barely holding it together, Clementine is Joel's polar opposite. The only common ground they have is in the silent, unspoken acknowledgement that the world has broken them both and perhaps, with an extra pair of hands, they can at least patch the damage. The chemistry is instant and from the moment Winslet pursues Carrey across a railway platform with cheerful aggression to the final, tear-stained but hopeful exchange, that chemistry is maintained. These people belong together, regardless of whether or not they can survive that way.

Gondry's script never loses sight of this relationship, even as Jeffrey, Patrick and Stan are doing everything they can to erase it. Joel and Clementine orbit around one another in the exact way they've always done, the path of Joel's desperate escape through his memories and search for the truth mirroring the ascent and eventual descent of their relationship. Neither is wrong, neither is right, both are normal people struggling to cope with one of the most challenging problem there is; making a relationship work.

A lesser script would have contented itself with Joel and Clementine's frantic dash through his memories and the astounding spectacle that it allows Gondry to display. Cars fall from the sky, Joel is trapped on a Moebius strip street, an adult Joel relives a toddler memory of hiding under his kitchen table and finally, Joel and Clem say what they should have said as the sea destroys a house they spent less than half an hour inside. Gondry throws every visual trick in his considerable arsenal at the screen, as sets merge, images overlap and people become abstractions. Each effect is impressive and each one is there to emphasise one thing; Joel is losing, both the battle and Clementine.

With this constant undercurrent of poignancy, the script further complicates matter by playing on it's characters' principle flaws. Clementine's impulsive decision to erase Joel puts things in motion whilst Joel's desperate desire to control, to stop, leads to him resisting the process which leads in turn to the collapse of Doctor Mierzwiak's marriage, Mary and Frank's relationship and the eventual collapse of Lacuna Incorporated, to say nothing of damaging his natural drift back towards Clementine. This is extremely brave writing and several scenes, in particular the extended sequence were Clem listens to what Joel tells Lacuna about her are genuinely difficult to sit through. They also drive home the film's central theme; that however long Joel and Clem can stay together they ultimately do one another more good than harm.

Finally, as Joel hides in his memories he discovers that Patrick has stolen his entire relationship with Clementine. Coming off the Lord of the Rings trilogy, Elijah Wood is excellent as the plausible, insidious, increasingly desperate Patrick. His scenes with Clementine walk the line between very funny and intensely unsettling as he says what Joel said, does what Joel did to little or no effect. Patrick may be working from memory but he lacks the power that memory lends, becoming a bad copy, distorted and blurred.

The supporting cast also impress and, like Joel and Clementine, reveal their true natures over the course of the film. Tom Wilkinson's Mierzwiak changes from an archetypal science fiction scientist to an insidious, passive aggressive figure who uses his technology to erase his own mistakes. Similarly, Mark

Ruffalo's Frank, initially presented as a Clash fan obsessed with the concept of social justice is made impotent by the revelation that his suspicions were right and Mary and Mierzwiak had been involved in an affair. The script even manages to make it ambiguous as to whether he was the one who ran the procedure on Mary. Finally, Kirsten Dunst is excellent as Mary, whose education seems to go no further than a book of quotations but who is eventually revealed to be a woman of extraordinary courage.

But all this is window dressing for Carrey and Winslet. For all his invention, for all his desperate need to retain the memories of Clem, Joel loses. The film could, safely, end on the sequence at the beach house, the pair of them pulling apart and out of focus as night and the tide sweep in and the relationship comes to the end it deserved instead of the end it got. The fact it doesn't, and in fact loops back on itself not only mirrors Joel and Clem's inability to leave one another alone but also reinforces the film's message that there's no such thing as an easy ending, that life consistently refuses to be tidy.

Which, in the end, is the point. Gondry and Kaufman are on record as saying they believe Joel and Clem spend the rest of their lives dating, breaking up, erasing one another and falling in love again and it's difficult to argue with that logic. The best they can hope for is that with awareness of their last relationship they can work around their problems, break the cycle, the worst is that they spend the rest of their lives reliving the same beautiful, life-affirming, terrible months. The truth lies somewhere in between, with the pair of them playing in the snow on Montauk Beach, isolated from their past and their future and living, completely, in the moment. They love one another and as the film ends, the final message is clear; that's all that matters.

## ***Transformers Competition Winners***

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The winners of the Transformers competition from issue 90 are B J Stabler from Beverley, Paul Kane from Chesterfield and Brian Laverick from Southampton. Each of them wins a 4 box set of the original Transformers cartoons from the 1980's. Well done!



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