

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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## EDITORIAL:

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**by alasdair stuart**

### **Zero to Magazine in 48 Hours**

I spent Saturday working on two pieces for a magazine that didn't exist 12 days before. The 48 Hour Magazine project launched on Friday night, it's goal to produce a magazine's worth of material in 48 hours, which would then go on sale on Magcloud, a print on demand magazine site. 48 hours from the issue concept, 'hustle' being released to the deadline for submissions, midnight on Saturday, Greenwich Mean Time.

48 hours to go from idea to execution to revision to a submission you're happy with.

They received over 1500 submissions.

However you cut it, that's extraordinary, a ringing endorsement of the idea that a magazine can be constructed on almost no time scale by a group of contributors who don't live in the same time zone let alone city. A single word, a single idea brings people together from all over the world, as much for the chance to play the game as to get published in something that stands so close to luminaries like *Wired* and *Mother Jones*. Even if you didn't get in, like me, the idea is so simple, so elegant that the lure of doing it again is almost irresistible. The future, it seems, is not only well worth reading but crowd-sourced.

You can find out more about the 48 hour magazine at <http://48hrmag.com/>

## **Alt.Fiction - Derby's Festival of Horror, Fantasy and Sci-fi**

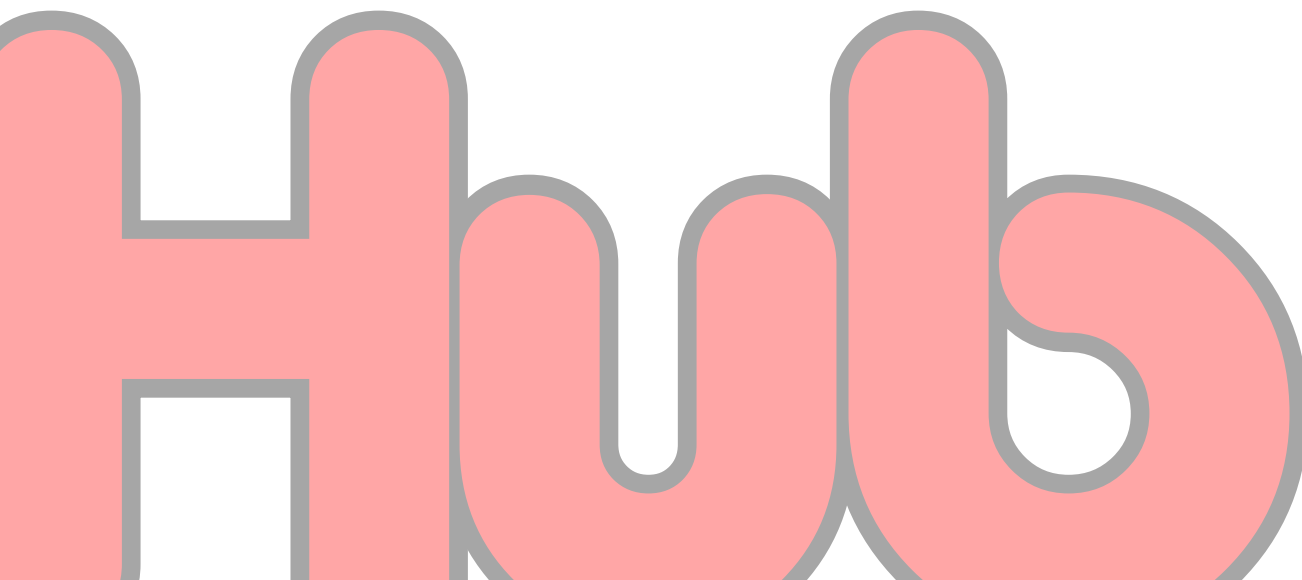
*Saturday 12th June, early until very late.*

Derby's festival for genre fiction is a one-day event focusing on science-fiction, fantasy and horror and features some of the top authors in the field such as Paul Cornell, Ramsey Campbell, Robert Shearman, Steven Erikson, Mike Carey and *many* others.

The day is made up of a number of different types of sessions, including author talks, Q&A sessions, discussion panels, readings and workshops. There will be plenty of opportunity to get books signed by attending authors, and many publishers have donated books so you can pick up some impressive freebies, as well! There will also be a number of editors and publishers in attendance, including Angry Robot Books, Gollancz, Solaris, Abaddon and BBC Books, while genre agents John Berlyne and John Jarrold will also be sharing their considerable experience.

Hub editor Alasdair Stuart, and Hub publisher Lee Harris will also be milling around. Come say Hi!

For tickets and further information visit the website at [www.altfiction.co.uk](http://www.altfiction.co.uk)



# FICTION

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## **The Sea, The Sea, The Sea**

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**by jennifer williams**

"Every night I dream of the sea, my darling Imogen. Every night it draws me back."

My grandfather lived in Arkeys Bay, right down on the coast and just above the bleak sea and grey rocks. His house was large if somewhat running towards the decrepit, and every summer I would go and stay there for a few weeks. Principally this was for my betterment- Grandfather was a very learned man who lived surrounded by his books, and he had a great passion for passing this knowledge on. As he got older, I was also sent down there to keep an eye on him. It was an isolated place with no friendly neighbours to pop in for tea or a cup of sugar, and I think my mother worried about those big leaden skies and the vastness of the ocean. She worried about what that could do to someone, faced with those long horizons every day. Perhaps she was right.

That summer we had already settled into our old routine; breakfast on the porch, usually kippers for my Grandfather, and scrambled eggs for me. Then we would study for a bit, pouring over his old books, drawing pictures and talking. He was good, my Grandfather, he never made it feel like school. His questions would tease knowledge from me that I hadn't realised I had absorbed, and his praise was always glittering. He may have been slightly distracted that summer, but I put it down to the changes in the weather; dark clouds rolled in from the sea and away again, bringing squalls of rain and brief, toothless thunderstorms.

When we were hungry again we would lunch and then venture down to the beach to explore. My Grandfather was, I suppose, what you might call an amateur marine biologist. Certainly much of what he taught me concerned the sea, and it was always his favourite subject. I learnt about which parts of crabs you could eat and which were poisonous, how to rake for cockles, about the ecosystem of the sea floor, and how male seahorses carried their young in their stomachs. I absolutely wouldn't believe him about this until eventually he took me to the aquarium in town to see tiny fish bobbing delicately about in their tank. I was amazed.

He had always fancied himself a writer, my Grandfather, and sometimes while I poked at small green crabs in the rock pools he would stand looking out to sea and talk about it in a tone I would normally think of as-"Grandfather's Authorly Voice".

For obvious reasons some of what he said that summer stayed with me. I remember him standing on the beach with his white hair whipping about his ears, facing the oncoming weather like a rock.

"What ancient shapes lurk beneath the surface of that great community? What shapes unchanged and untethered from time?"

At other times he would just look, staring out at the waves as if he were waiting for something. More than once that summer I had to rouse him when it was time to go back again, or the threat of rain had become a promise.

In the evenings we would sit quietly, Grandfather reading and sipping at a scotch, while I would lay on the floor playing card games or drawing. A few years ago I found some paper from those weeks slipped into a side pocket of an old suitcase. They were covered in swirls and spirals, and bobbing seahorses. Goodness knows why I kept them.

There were other changes too, aside from Grandfather's distracted mood. There were differences to our cosy routine. My Grandfather suddenly became very strict about when I should go to bed: previously this had rather been up to me, provided I did not push my luck or stay up too late and end up tired in the morning. I protested, and may even have thrown something of a tantrum about it, but my Grandfather

would not be moved on the subject.

"Imogen," he said, "despite your childish posturing you are growing into a young lady, and young ladies go to bed at a respectable hour, and do not stay up all night like wild beasts."

I was most put out of course, but I did as I was told.

It was on this first early night that I noticed my Grandfather was returning down to the beach in the dark. Laying awake long after I should have been asleep, I heard the latch on the front door click. Curious, and still not a bit sleepy, I slipped out of bed and ran to the window. Through the curtains I saw him making his way down the coastal path with every sign of eagerness. He wasn't wearing his coat, just a thin jumper, and beyond the porch lights the bay was utterly dark. I lost him behind some rocks then, and after taking a moment to consider exactly how much trouble I would get in for such behaviour, I went back to bed.

By the next morning sleep had washed the incident from my mind, and I only thought about it again in the evening, when I noticed Grandfather's jumper balled up in the wash basket. It was soaked through and smelt of sea water. Grandfather was in high spirits though, even agreeing to a game of Ludo before bed.

As I lay there again unsleeping, I realised I was waiting for the latch to click. When it eventually did, I scrambled from the bed, suddenly sure that I should stop Grandfather from going to the sea, but I only watched as he walked quickly down the path and into the black.

On the third night, I followed him. I felt bad of course; surely Grandfather was an adult and it was his own business what he got up to at night. But a seed of disquiet had been growing in my belly, and I kept thinking of the way my mother's face looked when she talked about the house by the sea. She was afraid of this place for some reason, and now so was I.

With my shoes already on and the biggest jumper I could find, I crept out onto the landing, listening as hard as I could. Grandfather was pottering about downstairs singing under his breath. When he left I went as quickly as I could, skirting down the stairs as swift as a bat.

Once I was away from the house and the porch lights I could see that the night was not as dark as I imagined. The moon was almost full and gaps in the clouds allowed the stars to peek through. The beach was painted in icy greys and velvet black. Someway ahead of me my Grandfather was a stark figure against the sand, towards the bay and away from the areas we normally explored.

The beach is an entirely different place at night, do you know that? Everything is transformed by the dark, with the sea a great sleeping monster, the surf its breath and the moonlight on the waves its glittering eyes. It sleeps, but it still watches.

My Grandfather was lost to view for a time, behind a scattering of rocks. I climbed up to them and over the top I spied him walking down to the surf, meeting it barefoot. I looked and spotted his shoes back up the beach some, abandoned like washed-up detritus. He walked into the water up to his ankles, his shins, his knees. I shivered and pulled my jumper closer around me. It was summer but the water was never warm. At night I imagined it would be like ice.

But my Grandfather walked on until the tops of his thighs were dark and soaking. And then he just stood there, arms by his sides.

I waited. And I grew colder. And I became bored. My Grandfather simply stood in the sea, letting the waves rock him slightly, but otherwise unmoving.

I wondered if this was a sign that he was moving towards an age when he would be unable to live in a house by himself, a portent of his great intellect lost in advancing age. Or perhaps it was some kind of bizarre constitutional routine he had decided upon as an aid to health. He was always talking about the benefits of fresh air, after all.

And then the sea around him began to churn. Startled, I rose from behind the rock, but my Grandfather was too intent on the sea water to notice me. As I watched a shape rose from the water, a great hulking thing both taller and wider than the elderly man in front of it. I shuffled out onto the rock in front of me for a closer look, and as the starlight illuminated the shape in wet, glistening detail I gave a small cry and felt the bile rise in the back of my throat.

It was human shaped but bulbous and heavily muscled, with long pendulous breasts flat against its ridged chest, and its dark meaty thighs melted into scales below the waist. What I assumed were fingers were webbed and tipped with claws, and across its chest and arms and stomach it was covered in what

looked like suckers and hooked barbs. The face, mostly hidden by a slight tilting of its head, was split from side to side with a wide fish-like mouth. I could not bear to look on that for long, and I pushed my fingers to my mouth to keep from being sick. It was a mermaid, but a hideous mockery of those beautiful fey creatures that filled my story books.

She reached for my Grandfather with long sinewy arms the colour of a fish's belly, and to my shock he reached back for her. They embraced like lovers, while the surf rose and crashed around them.

Perhaps if I'd been a little older, or with my cousins John and Patrick, I would have rushed down the beach to separate them, to save my Grandfather from the sea beast. But I was frightened and on my own, so instead I crouched on the rocks, frozen between movements. Besides, the way they were caught at each other reverberated in my mind. Grandfather had appeared to go to her willingly, and the longer I watched, the more I felt I was intruding rather than witnessing.

It is always a distressing thing for young people to realise that the guardians in their lives, the people they have trusted for as long as they remember, are more than they appear to be. We grow up trusting that we know our parents and that they could never hold any mysteries for us, but then you catch your father looking at a pretty young girl in the street, or your mother crying over an old song on the radio and you realise that before you were around, they were people too.

Feeling ill and betrayed I opened my mouth to shout at them both, but that was when I caught the noise. Hidden under the rush of surf was a softer hiss, a slow persistent tearing. I thought of the suckers and barbs peppered across the merwoman's chest and belly and I couldn't bear it any longer. I don't know if my Grandfather saw me run from the rocks, but he didn't call for me. I'm not sure what I would have done if he had.

The next morning he wasn't in the kitchen making breakfast or on the porch reading his newspaper, and immediately I was crushed with guilt. He had drowned after I'd run away, or worse. I was preparing myself to go and look for his body on the beach when weak noises alerted me to his bedroom. Grandfather had not left his bed. The covers were pulled up to his neck and his forehead was slick with sweat. He looked at me with watery eyes.

"A fever, Imogen, that's all. I shall have to keep to my bed for a few days."

That he did, and I brought him broth and bread as my mother did for me when I was poorly, but he only seemed to worsen. His skin grew waxy and pale, and although he barely touched what I brought him he began to bloat up. The wrinkles on his face, so familiar to me, were beginning to disappear, smoothed over with the swelling and the skin on his neck grew taut.

Worst of all was his stomach, which by the end of the second day had bloated up like a beach ball. He wouldn't let me look at it and kept himself covered by his blanket, but sometimes I would catch him groaning and drawing his breath like he was in pain. I was of course beside myself by this time, but he would not let me go for the doctor, and I was afraid to leave him.

On the fifth day of this illness he seemed to brighten, and although he was still dreadfully swollen he sat up in bed and ate breakfast with me. He even appeared to enjoy it. He questioned me closely about the subjects we'd covered, and praised me for my progress.

As ridiculous as it might sound, I was cheered by this. The days of illness had pushed the night at the beach to the back of my mind, and in truth I was half convinced it had been a dream. I went to bed that night hopeful that Grandfather would be further recovered in the morning and we could return to our more usual activities of rock pools and reading.

So when the latch clicked shut in the small hours, I woke not with surprise but with hopelessness.

I ran to the window to see Grandfather in his robe striding with great vigour down the coast path. The winds blew his robe about briskly and for a second I saw the white moon of his stomach, distended and cratered with strange dark circles.

I flew from the house, but he was moving so quickly that by the time I got down to the beach he was already up to his knees in the water, the robe discarded in the surf behind him.

The merwoman, I thought. She'll have come back for him!

But there was no sign of the creature, only the roar of the sea and my Grandfather, a tiny sliver of white

against the vast black.

As I watched, convinced that the fever had driven him half mad, my Grandfather raised his arms solemnly and pitched forward into the sea.

I suppose that was when the spell was broken. Seeing his old white head disappear beneath the waves I ran straight into the water to where I'd seen him go down. I soaked my pajama bottoms and shouted myself hoarse, but I could see no sign of him.

Around my feet the sea began to boil. It churned itself to white foam and beneath the surface small writhing bodies were visible, sleek and wet, and a terrible noise reached me from the sudden spawning; hungry mouths full of sharp little teeth, feasting on their first meal.

I ran.

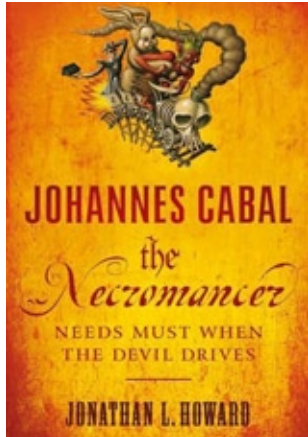
They never found Grandfather's body, even though the coast guard from miles around looked up and down that beach for him. I didn't tell them about the nights by the sea. What could I possibly say?

My mother and father sold the house on Arkeys Bay, and I for one have not put so much as a toe in the ocean since. But I look at my swirling seahorse pictures, and at night I dream of the sea.



## Johannes Cabal the Necromancer

reviewed by amanda rutter



by Jonathan L. Howard

Headline

rrp £7.99

*From the blurb: **Johannes Cabal**, a brilliant but reclusive scientist, has never pretended to be a hero. There is, after all, little heroic about robbing graves, being chased by torch-bearing mobs and selling your soul to the Devil. All routine inconveniences, however, when your business is raising the dead.*

*But now Cabal wants his soul back and he descends to Hell to retrieve it. Satan, incredibly bored and hungry for a challenge, proposes a little wager: Johannes has one year to persuade one hundred people to sign over their souls or he will lose his own forever.*

*With little time to lose, Cabal raises a crew from the dead and enlists his vampire brother to help out. On the road, Cabal wields weird science and black magic with the moral conscience of anthrax, but are his tricks good enough to beat the Devil at his own game.*

So far so Tom Holt, or Terry Pratchett, or any other comedy fantasy author, right? No, definitely not! **Jonathan L. Howard** infuses his novel with flavours from other authors, or films, but ends up with a novel that is unique and very, very funny. For instance, the novel feels similar to a Tim Burton film – in fact, it has the same gruesome humour as *The Nightmare Before Christmas* – but remains distinctive through the use of snappy one liners and characters you love to hate.

The pacing of the novel was perfect – we start with an entertaining visit to Hell (which just happens to be a bureaucratic nightmare, with a pen-pushing clerk as a doorman) before the novel kicks into a higher gear and sweeps through a year of thrilling adventures as Johannes Cabal attempts to win his wager with Satan. This includes the fact that Howard presents us with a sample of Cabal's attempts to collect souls, but doesn't overdo this aspect of the novel. He still spends time on character development and other escapades, so that the reader never becomes bored.

I was thrilled to discover as well that, despite the fact this novel is pitched mainly as comedic fantasy, it presents us with some extremely spine-tingling and creepy moments, especially the whole scene in the Druin crypt. **Howard** also takes us to some darker places – we watch with horror as a young lad is enticed to sign his soul away, and a young mother is encouraged to commit infanticide.

Over the course of the novel we learn that **Johannes Cabal** is a Very Bad Man, yet he somehow remains endearing to the reader. From his inept social skills to his way with sarcasm, Cabal shines from every page. In particular his exchanges with his brother Horst virtually crackle with snark:

"Given my profession, being careful is what separates the successes from the failures."

"Ha! What makes you think you're such a success, Johannes?"

"Because I'm not tied to a post, up to my knees in bonfire."

The other characters are just as memorable – from the dozy zombie pair Dennis and Denzil who drive the train, to Bobbins, one of Cabal's nefarious creations ("...the result of some of Cabal's tinkering with the basic 'a rag, a bone, a hank of hair' formula; in this case by the addition of a tin of Brasso metal polish. As a result everything that Bobbins did, he did brightly).

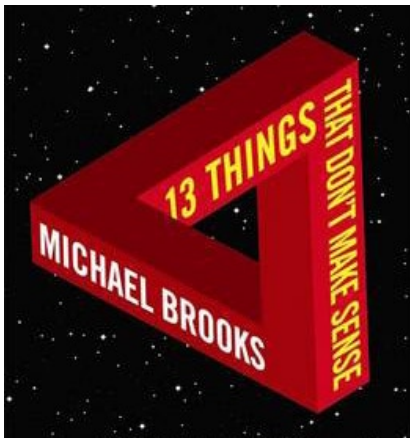
In fact, the only rather disappointing aspect of the novel is that the world building is almost non-existent. In fact, we do not know whether this is some bizarre alternative world to our own, or is based somewhere completely off-world. Howard works on creating such a fabulous mix of characters and building the carnival into an entity that lives and breathes, that we do not see anything beyond this. And when I say disappointing, I only mean that I would love to see more of the world that Howard has written, rather than feeling the lack in the book.

Luckily it appears that a second novel in this series is on the way, which I now look forward to with great excitement. This is the sort of book that, having finished it – even in the wee small hours of the morning – you want to rush around all your friends and insist they begin it immediately. In fact, I insist you all go and grab a copy – now!

*This review was originally published at [www.FloorToCeilingBooks.com](http://www.FloorToCeilingBooks.com) and [www.FantasyLiterature.com](http://www.FantasyLiterature.com)*

## 13 Things That Don't Make Sense

*reviewed by martin willoughby*



by **Michael Brooks**  
**Profile Books**  
rrp **£8.99**

A lot of science books are, to all intents and purposes, information dumps so that the author can put his/her new idea into the public domain. Whilst they are of interest to people with degrees in science, they are unreadable by the general public. Michael Brooks' book is based on his article in New Scientist, is very readable and, at 210 pages, short.

The book begins with a quote from Isaac Asimov: The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds the most discoveries, is not "Eureka!", but "that's funny". The thirteen following chapters are all about the curious things we see (or don't see) around us.

His first chapter is about the missing 96% of the universe. He covers, in enough detail, the search for dark matter and dark energy and gives an up to date account of where science is in its search for these things. At no point does he lapse into jargon without explaining himself.

The next two chapters cover some basics of physics and why they may be wrong. He delves into the problems of the Pioneer probes and why they are not acting in accordance with the known laws of physics. Brooks then tackles the uncomfortable discovery that the universal constants, such as the speed of light, may not be constant after all.

Cold Fusion. The very name brings sighs of despair from many scientists, but this is the subject of the next chapter. Although he makes no conclusions about it he does give the timeline of the experiments and the politics around the subject.

Chapters 5,6, 7 & 8 are about life: life on Earth, life on Mars and life in the universe. Did Viking discover life on Mars? The evidence says yes according to some, but everyone else says no. The same is true of life in the universe as we have received the WOW signal, albeit only once. Here again, Brooks lays out the evidence and leaves the reader to make their mind up. Chapter 8 is about the giant virus that may require the theory of evolution to be rewritten.



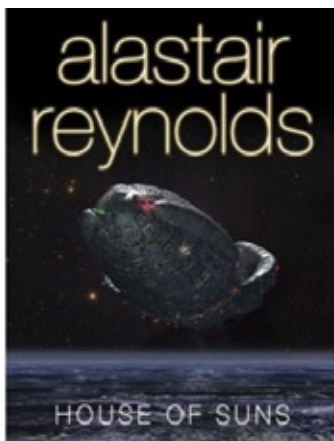
Death is the subject of chapter 9. Why do biological creatures self-destruct? Even more importantly, in the next chapter, why do they have sex, especially as there are better ways to reproduce. Whether or not we have free will is covered in the next chapter, and it is a chapter that makes for disturbing reading.

The final two chapters concern medicine. Why does the Placebo effect work and how? Linked to this, in the final chapter, is Homeopathy. Whilst evidence based medicine shows that neither of these should work, some evidence suggests they do. Here again, Brooks lays out the evidence for the reader and leaves us to make up our own minds.

Anyone with a passing interest in science, or any branch of science, will find this an interesting and engaging tour of 13 difficult and, so far, unresolved areas.

## House of Suns

reviewed by martin willoughby



by Alastair Reynolds  
Gollancz  
rrp £7.99

The Star Trek films became partly known for the odd numbered films being regarded as bad ones, which I always thought was a little unfair. I was beginning to wonder if Reynolds had also got trapped in good/bad mode. *Century Rain* had been a superb book, whilst *Pushing Ice* was a disappointment. So after enjoying *The Prefect*, I approached *House of Suns* with a little worry: I needn't have.

It is a superb book, well paced, well thought out and as much a murder mystery as SF. There are a few red herrings along the way, but by the time you get two-thirds of the way through, you may well guess the ending... only to find out you're wrong.

The Gentian Line is result of a cloning of Abigail Gentian. She shattered herself into 1000 clones six million years ago, as did several other rich people. Now, however, the line is deemed to be a danger and they are going to be exterminated by the House of Suns.

The House of Suns plays the long game and plan to destroy the Gentian line at their next reunion. An ambush is planned which doesn't go according to plan as a number of the shatterlings escape.

This is the background to the novel.

In the foreground we have a man and a woman in love, but have to hide that love due to the Line's rules that forbid it. This doesn't stop them and they resort to lies and subterfuge to hide it. At this reunion they are likely to be found out as they are so late and will arrive together.

Before they get to the reunion they are almost kidnapped and come across a frozen member of the Machine People, who has agreed to join them at the reunion. They hope that bringing Hesperus will ameliorate their punishment.

After the ambush, they arrive at Neume where we meet a mysterious entity called the Spirit of the Air whose interesting history is slowly revealed.

Add into this mix the internal politics of the Gentian Line, some well thought out technology and you have a gripping story.

There is also a smaller story about Abigail herself that takes up the first few pages of each part to the

novel (there are eight parts). My first thought was that this was unnecessary, but its conclusion gives some more explanation of events and people, especially the Gentian shatterlings.

The two main characters are Purslane and Champion and most of the story is told from their points of view. That the story is written in first person form is fine, but it takes some getting used to when both main characters points of view are used. It doesn't swap in each chapter, but it takes a few lines, or paragraphs, of each chapter to realise who is telling the story.

I've never been enamoured with Reynolds' characters, and these two are no different. It's not that I'm not interested in them, far from it, it's just that they lack some depth. They're not cardboard cut outs, but there seems to be an indefinable something about them that's missing.

At the end there is an interesting question raised about Abigail, which does give a little more depth than normal, but the problem still exists. Given the depth of the universe he has created, and the story that is being told, this can be forgiven.

What we have here is a thrilling tale that covers two galaxies and several hundred thousand years of the future. The background is well thought out and there are no wasted scenes, even though there appear to be on occasion.

I dislike wasted words and in *House of Suns* there are so few. The whole 500 pages slipped past without boredom or a desire for me to skip anything. I can't wait to read his next novel.

## **Doctor Who: "The Vampires of Venice"**

*reviewed by scott harrison*



**Written by Toby Whithouse**

**Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Arthur Darvill**

**Directed by Jonny Campbell**

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May, BBC1

Vampires in *Doctor Who* isn't a new concept. Not at all. They've been linked with the show many times over the years, in one medium or another.

Not counting a brief appearance from a robot Dracula in the 1965 story *The Chase*, vampires made their first real appearance in *Doctor Who* in 1980, in the Terrance Dicks penned story *State of Decay*. These were creatures from Time Lord mythology, a terrible race of colossal humanoids who were hunted to extinction by the Doctor's people in a long and bloody war, or so they thought.

Although extra-terrestrial in origin it was the horrific exploits of these ancient creatures that would eventually give rise to the popular vampire legend in Earth culture. Vampires, in one form or another, would make another appearance in televised *Who* before going on to become the subject of three spin off *Doctor Who* novels in the 1990s.

You'd be mistaken for thinking that this particular vein had been bled dry, if you'll pardon the pun. But no. A show that has always, in the past, been quick to give a level-headed, rational and scientific explanation to the more bizarre, unearthly and seemingly supernatural occurrences, this new rebooted version of *Doctor Who* appears more than happy to continue the trend.

The Doctor takes Amy and soon-to-be husband Rory for a romantic weekend in Sixteenth century Venice. What they find is a frightened city, closed off to the outside world, and its inhabitants desperate

to keep out a plague that, according to the Doctor, is no longer a possible threat. But the real threat is the House of Calvierri, it's group of beautiful vampiric women and the ferocious creatures that live in the canals and waterways that surround the great city. Corpses are being found completely drained of moisture and the only way the Doctor can get into the Calvierri's residence to investigate is to send in Amy, alone.

*The Vampires of Venice* is a triumph of style over substance. What it lacks in depth of story it more than makes up for in sumptuous visual beauty. With the historic Croatian town of Trogir doubling for Venice (there being too many new shops and trendy bars for the production team to hide to make Venice a viable shooting location) director Jonny Campbell really makes the most of the town's breathtaking architecture with barely a second of the episode going by without an arty low-angled shot or sweeping panoramic view of domes, spires and turrets.

In the accompanying *Doctor Who Confidential*, show runner Steven Moffat explains that he wanted to film abroad to give the show a different look, to take it out of its very British setting, to really ring in the changes - and they're certainly getting their money's worth. Not only is it doubling as Sixteenth century Venice but we'll be seeing it again in four weeks time doubling as Nineteenth century France when the Doctor and co. meet artist Vincent Van Gogh.

Although a lot more leisurely in pace and lacking the excitement and dramatic punch of the previous two episodes, *The Vampires of Venice* still has a lot going for it. Both Matt Smith and Karen Gillan are again in fine form as is new travelling companion Rory, played by Arthur Darvill - although his comedy sword fight with the villainous Francesco is a little over the top in places, shamefully over-egging what could have been a dramatically bitter-sweet scene. It's at times like this when I can't help but be reminded of those dark days of *Doctor Who* under script editor Douglas Adams and it's then that I really start to worry.

Still, time will tell...it always does. But for now the Dream Lord awaits. Is this real or just a dream - we'll have to wait and see.

## **Doctor Who: "Amy's Choice"**

*reviewed by scott harrison*

**Written by Simon Nye**

**Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Arthur Darvill, Toby Jones**

**Directed by Catherine Morshead**

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May, BBC1

OK, I had one minor quibble with this week's episode of *Doctor Who*. Just the one, but an important one, nevertheless. I think it's best if I get it off my chest now, in the outset, so we can all get past it and move on.

The title *Amy's Choice* is awful. I mean truly awful.

We've had some stinkers since the programme returned in 2005 - *The Doctor Dances*, *Fear Her*, *Daleks in Manhattan*, *The Doctor's Daughter* - even classic *Who* had it's fair share with *City of Death* and *Death to the Daleks*; I mean, I thought *The Beast Below* was bad enough. Mind you, this isn't taking into account that the confirmed title for episode 10 seems to be *Vincent and The Doctor*. So in three weeks time we may have a new winner!

Anyway, moving on.

The episode itself was satisfyingly sinister, with the TARDIS finding itself infiltrated by a mysterious little man

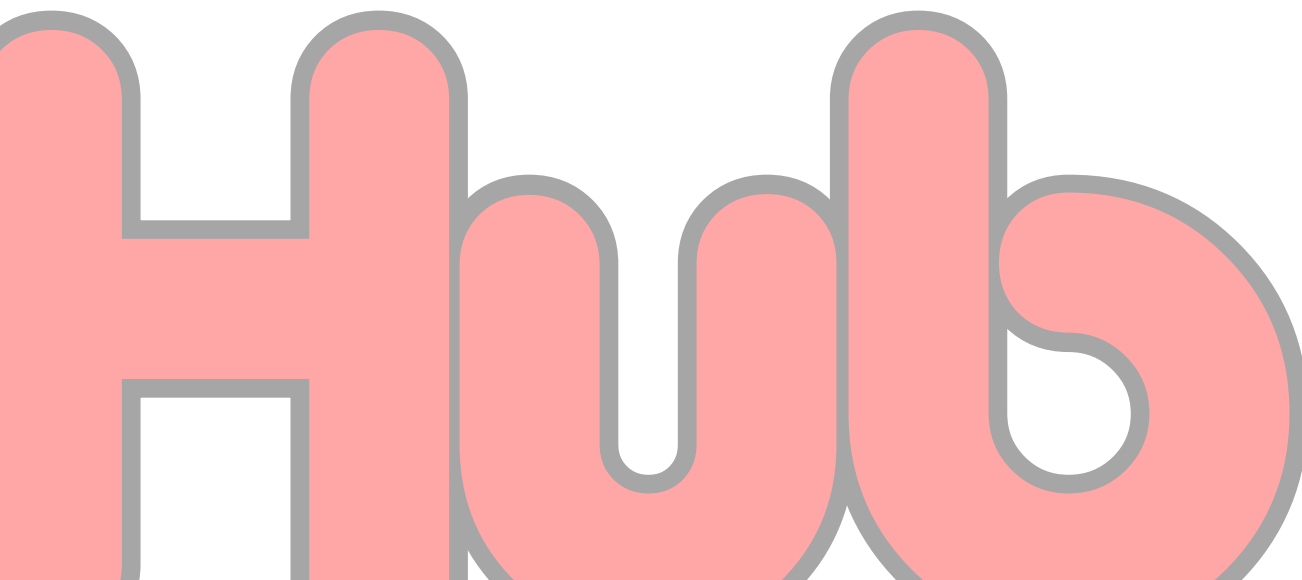
who calls himself the Dream Lord. Constantly shifting the Doctor and co. between two different realities - the TARDIS and Earth in the year 2015 - one supposedly real the other a dream, the Dream Lord informs them that they must make a choice, choose between dream and reality, the only snag being that the wrong choice would mean certain death. But which is which? And just who exactly are the strange pack of OAPs terrorising the quiet little village of Upper Leadworth?

It's hard watching this episode of New Who without being reminded of the Classic *Who* stories *The Mind Robber*, *The Deadly Assassin* and, more importantly, *The Trial of a Time Lord*. There's an odd feeling of unreality that pervades both 'realities' that the Doctor, Amy and Rory find themselves waking up in, a feeling that the world around them is a fiction or a virtual simulation. The Doctor himself notes, upon waking in Leadworth to find snow falling from the sky, that it could be the pixellation of a computer generated image.

Back in 1968 the Second Doctor found himself in a very similar situation, being hijacked by a strange little man who could manipulate the world around him. Although back then he had found himself in a small fictional universe that existed outside of space and time, it's difficult not to draw comparisons between the two when the character of the Dream Lord first appears. The same with the stories *The Deadly Assassin* and *The Trial of a Time Lord* which both contain episodes dealing with the Doctor entering the Matrix (part of the Amplified Panatropic Computer Network on Gallifrey that stores the memories of all dead Time Lords) and being faced with strange and twisted realities; the latter being of particular interest here as it's final two episodes see the Sixth Doctor being moved unbidden between different 'dream-like' realities by a dark and evil aspect of his own personality - this time The Valeyard.

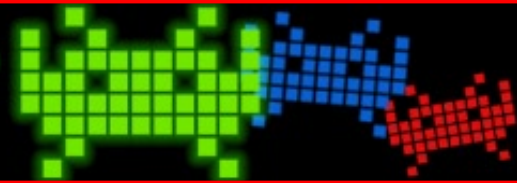
As with *The Vampires of Venice* last week the comedy once again goes a little over the top, inevitably watering down the TARDIS crew's scenes of peril, causing them to have less dramatic impact than they really deserve. One lesson show runner Steven Moffat must surely have learned from his first series on *Doctor Who* is that a tighter control is needed on the more comedic moments in next year's set of thirteen scripts or the show is in serious danger of becoming a self-mocking pantomime, exactly as it did under the influence of the show's other sit-com writing script editor Douglas Adams.

Next week it's the return of yet more old *Doctor Who* monsters, this time the Silurians, last seen in the much maligned and woefully underrated Fifth Doctor story *Warriors of the Deep*. Watch out for that hole in the ground!



# FEATURES

## STAR POINT



by phil lunt

### GAMING 0.1

Video games aren't just "games" anymore, there's more to it all than that. Nowadays they can be *interactive storytelling* devices and often, through that, a continuity of canon in various franchises. They are widely classed as viable storytelling methods. Yet another reason to stay glued to the goggle-box... or computer screen or handheld device!

Back in the day, I'm thinking early 80's, the video games we played left a lot for the imagination to fill in the blanks. Take a classic like *Space Invaders*, for example. We don't know why we're being attacked or where these invaders have come from. We just know we have to shoot them, destroy them, wave after wave of the blighters. Our imaginations automatically filled in a storyline for us, helped keep us going, to a point. Well my imagination did, anyway.

Nowadays the videogame development budgets are much bigger. Professional writers are hired to give, or try to give, the games substance and backbone. Warren Ellis (*Transmetropolitan*, *Global Frequency*, *Gravel*) was hired to write the "...groundwork, back-story and structure" for 2008's sci-fi/horror romp *Dead Space*, for example. Antony Johnston (*Wasteland*, *Spooked*, *Stealing Life*) was then hired to write the prequel comic book and Wii game. Stories in video games can unfold very much like in a book, comic, TV show or film. However, unlike these more traditional outlets, games are interactive by their very nature.

We push or drag the character through their quest and learn more, develop the story, at our own pace, making our own mistakes and claiming the character's victories for ourselves. The story could be relatively short, like in recent hit *Shadow Complex*, or vast and sprawling like in *Oblivion* or *Fallout 3*. More often now, there are games appearing that stray from linearity, with various intertwined storylines and arcs dependent on our choices, our actions, either at certain points or through the whole game. Even how we're choosing to play the game itself can alter our character and the story, such as in the *Fable* games – reckless, devious and uncaring or honest and protective actions can physically affect how the character looks and how other people respond to us. Choices can matter.

"How does this fit in with Hub Magazine?" I hear you cry. "Is it genre relevant?" Well, yes! Sci-fi, fantasy and horror genres have been catered to pretty much since video gaming began. Let's look at some of the big guns of the past few years. For fantasy we have one of the biggest selling, most successful games of all time that is still head and shoulders above all its competition, *World of Warcraft*. A "massively multiplayer online roleplaying game" (MMORPG) set in the wonderfully stylised fantasy world of Azeroth. It is followed by *Everquest*, *Lord of the Rings Online*, *Warhammer Online* and *Dungeons & Dragons Online* in the online fantasy stakes and *Eve Online*, which is a sci-fi RPG that some see as a natural progression from the old 80's space-trading game, *Elite*. Fantasy doesn't just lend itself to RPGs, of which there are many, but also to fighting games, such as *SoulCalibur*. Even the *Professor Layton* series on the Nintendo DS, which is a puzzle solving game at heart, can be considered fantasy through the fantastical story that weaves the puzzles and mysteries together.

The expanded universe of *Star Wars* has been repeatedly explored in various video game forms. In 2008, *The Force Unleashed* looked into a period of time set between episodes 3 and 4, closely following Darth Vader's secret apprentice in a tale which leads to the founding of the rebellion we know and love from episodes 4 to 6. Oh, and Big George says it's canonical, too! Vin Diesel's "Riddick" character and the universe he inhabits have currently been expanded upon in two games, *Escape from Butcher Bay*

and *Assault on Dark Athena*. The aforementioned *Dead Space* is a sci-fi horror fusion that has you fighting the un-dead on a giant ship in the loneliness of outer space... with your living-room lights on, surely. Then there's *Doom* and it's sequels as well as *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Psychonauts*, *Beneath a Steel Sky*, *Shadow Complex* etc etc ad infinitum!

There is also plenty to look at in the horror genre. The first horror game dates back to 1972, pre-dating what some regard as the first fantasy game, *Colossal Cave Adventure*, by 4 years! Okay, calling *Haunted House* on the Magnavox Odyssey "horror" is pushing it a bit but a lot of people class it as the forerunner to today's "survival horror" games, honest. However, another *Haunted House* appeared on the Atari 2600 in 1981 which had far more familiar elements to today's games: puzzle solving and action elements. The horror genre of gaming grew up through the 80's, though most folk don't count anything until the appearance of *Sweet Home* on the Super Nintendo in 1989. However, in our house the game of the movie *Aliens* was horror as far as we were concerned. It was the first game I had experienced that, intentionally or not, relied on the environment and fear of what was around the corner to scare the player rather than giant two-headed zombie vampires wanting to suck out your brains.

The early 90's saw the arrival of CD-ROMs as a commercial medium which gave developers more to play with when it came to graphics and sound. This resulted in some downright terrible games, reliant purely on video and audio effects and forgetting about game-play almost entirely, such as Sega's controversial *Night Trap*. At the time, *Night Trap* appalled many people because of the "violence" it contained. I owned that game and I wouldn't class it as violent. Over-hyped? Yes. Badly acted? Certainly. Poor gameplay? Definitely. Violent? Nah! Well, ok, each to their own. Mary Whitehouse was still doing the rounds back then and it was still a time when "games were just for kids", obviously. However, because of the content and use of interactive video in the game, *Night Trap* carried a BBFC 15 rating. Soon after this, to cover games not classified by the BBFC, a voluntary age rating system was set up in the UK in 1993 which further developed into the age ratings systems we see on games today.

1992 also saw the arrival of the *Alone in the Dark* series, initially a PC game and another early adopter of the CD-ROM medium, it employed ground-breaking 3D graphics and relied heavily on puzzle solving in a Lovecraftian environment. The *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* series have been around since the mid-nineties and helped define "survival horror" gaming, with strong influences from the Japanese horror film genre. The *Fatal Frame/Project Zero* games, from 2001, further developed and enhanced this. It's not all about puzzle solving, though. We also have first person shooter type games such as *F.E.A.R* and the rather excellent and atmospheric *BioShock*; a game I'm not ashamed to say I won't play in the house whilst on my own... To continue the "movie to canonical-interactive-storytelling medium" thread, we have a *Saw* video game, which continues Detective Tapp's story from the first *Saw* film. There's even a survival horror game for the Wii, *Cursed Mountain*, that'll have you shaking your Wiimotes in fear!

Speaking of which, the invention of the Wii, and the Wiimote controller device, further helps to make video games not just more accessible to casual players but also gives more varied and original story-telling opportunities and immersion in the gaming environment. An example being, in *The Force Unleashed*, that the player can use the Wiimote to directly control the main protagonist's lightsaber in the game. In *Cursed Mountain*, the Wiimote is used, in combat, to free the souls of your enemies. In *Dead Space: Extraction* the Wiimote is simply used to aim and fire at onscreen enemies in much the same way as the "light-guns" of old, while the nunchuk controller is used for melee attacks. With the addition of the Wii MotionPlus device, which basically increases the Wiimote's sensitivity, as well as rival systems coming up with their own similar controllers I think it's safe to say that the best, most original and intuitive uses of the Wiimote are yet to come.

Then there are the huge numbers of alternate reality games (ARGs) that can spread over various formats across all media, be it the internet, TV, newspapers, playing cards etc. It's a tenuous link as they're not *strictly* video games, sure, but what could be more sci-fi than alternate reality gaming? Employing the "This Is Not a Game" ethos and "existing" briefly in the universe of, for example, our favourite film, book or TV program in a way that is, sometimes, more encompassing and on a much bigger scale than just looking

at something on a screen. Narrative and puzzle-solving are central to alternate reality gaming, no matter which medium they are delivered in. They are mostly free to play so it's no surprise that the biggest, most publicised, ARGs have tended to be related to advertising or promotion of a product in some way yet others, the numerous *Lost* ARGs for example, often expand upon the universes which they are set in. The first ARGs I experienced were advertising based; one for *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999 and another by Nokia in 2000, which was sprawling and confusing. Nowadays there are far more safety nets for the casual gamer with the most important being the various forums set up to chart the progress of the multitude of games currently in play. They have a lot in common with role playing games but ARGs are on a much bigger scale and, in most cases, there are no rules to learn or conventions to stick to. They're a massive phenomena that encompasses much about the social aspect of gaming and collaborative processes.

Ever since the early days of video games it's never all been about Pong clones and sports simulations. Defending the earth from alien hordes and rescuing treasure from goblin infested caves have, pretty much, always been there. Although video games are still not as accessible to most people as books, TV and radio programmes or film, they are now, more than ever, every bit as important and viable where story-telling is concerned.

