

IN APPRECIATION OF SCIENCE FICTION GOLD

Lon Cohen interviews Lou Anders

In *Matrix* #186 we published a fascinating interview by Lon Cohen with highly respected American editor Lou Anders. Unfortunately, the original piece ran to nearly 7,000 words – far too long for us to accommodate within the constraints of the old print format. We therefore had to cut the article to less than a third of its length and it was this edited version which featured in the magazine. Now, with the question of space no longer an issue, *Matrix* is delighted to present the full interview as it was originally intended.

Lou Anders is a pirate in the sense that not only does he look like one, but he displays his buccaneering ways by looting the English speaking world's best Science Fiction and Fantasy authors for his booty at Pyr, the imprint that he currently helms as editorial director. Fortunately for us over here on the left side of the Atlantic Ocean, pirate Lou Anders is a formidable and likeable hero, champion of expert writing, great cover art and highly crafted anthologies.

Where would a pirate be without a long list of conquests? A 2007 Hugo Award and Chesley Award nominee and 2006 World Fantasy Award nominee, Lou Anders has edited many anthologies, his latest being *Fast Forward 1* (Pyr, February 2007). Forthcoming are *Sideways in Crime* (Solaris, Summer 2008) and *Fast Forward 2* (Pyr, Fall 2008). He's written articles on everything from the state of publishing to book cover art to TV Sci-Fi. Known far and wide, his articles and stories have been translated into Danish, Greek, German, Italian and French, and have appeared online many sites including InfinityPlus.co.uk.

Although *Matrix* is meant to be British Science Fiction, one of the most interesting things about Pyr is the way they've picked up on some of the major UK names and promoted them in America. British authors add to Pyr's writers' stable which, of course, draws from America and reaches to the land down under with Australian Joel Shepherd's Cassandra Kresnov Trilogy of Novels. Lou Anders picked up Joel when no other publishers in America could figure out how to position his cyberpunk-military-espionage-political-thriller novels. In typical renegade style, Lou said that if it's good enough it doesn't need to be classified, it needs to be published.

Lou found himself in the unique position of being nominated in the category of Best Art Director and the Chesley Awards, administered by the Association of Science Fiction & Fantasy Artists.

"More and more, I find myself a spokesman for cover art and illustration too," Lou said during our interview.

On his blog, he talks about the decisions he's made at Pyr regarding cover art:

“Personally, I do not like the move away from illustration to design that I see coming out from a lot of houses (though it has its place for individual books – I’m talking about a general trend),” he writes in his blog. “I think to forgo illustration is to sacrifice one of the core strengths of SF&F and one of its unique selling points.”

This was in light of George Mann’s (consultant editor of Solaris Books) article for UK book trade magazine Publishing News about packaging and branding of SF&F novels.

I was able to wrangle an interview with Lou between raiding parties. When Lou talks people should listen, because he has a lot of good stuff to say about the industry from books to movies to television to art; he’s got it all covered.

Matrix: What is your earliest memory of this genre be it a movie, book, game, etc. and can you tell me when you realized that you were a lifer?

Lou: I’d say that my involvement with SF involves a three-stage connection/initiation.

First, one of my earliest memories *period* is standing in front of the big black & white television at my grandfather’s house, that ancient kind which was built into a piece of furniture to look like some sort of dresser or chest of drawers, and pointing at a grainy screen and my mother saying “Yes, that’s a man walking on the moon.” That’s pretty close to the first thing I remember.

Then, when I was an adolescent, I was captivated by Sid & Marty Krofft’s original *Land of the Lost*, about the family that falls through the dimensional gateway into what I’ve come to realize in later life is totally the Super Sargasso Sea. I was raised fundamentalist Christian in the Deep South, so the presence of missing link Philip Paley as Cha-Ka the ape boy did NOT go over well with my parents. As a result, *Land of the Lost* was something I had to sneak glimpses of, and you know what they say about forbidden fruit. As such, it’s combination of degenerate lost civilizations, dinosaurs, missing links, time gates, weird crystal technologies etc. was just too much amazing sensory overload. So I was doomed from the start. It wasn’t until years later that I discovered how many SF writers had been associated with it. Ben Bova, D.C. Fontana, David Gerrold, Larry Niven, Norman Spinrad and Theodore Sturgeon – they probably wrote it off as some stupid kid’s thing they did for a lark and had no idea how thoroughly they were sowing the seeds of young fandom. And I shocked Walter Koenig once by describing how the episode he wrote changed my life (“The Stranger,” the one which introduced Enik the gold Sleestak).

Finally, when I was 12 or 13, my father pushed a copy of Edgar Rice Burrough’s *A Princess of Mars* into my hands and said, “Here, you need to read this.” Since I resisted doing anything my parents told me to do on principle, I replied, “But it has a naked woman on the cover.” To which my dad said, “Yes, I know it has a naked woman on the cover, but it’s still a good book. And you’re going to read it.” And I did, followed by the rest of the Mars series, the Venusian series, the Pellucidar series, the Tarzan series, and everything else by Burroughs that was in print. That lead to Michael Moorcock and Fritz

Leiber, and from there to the Science Fiction Writers of America Hall of Fame series, and from there – well, you know the rest.

Matrix: What was the book that sucked you into the potential and possibilities of this genre in terms of literature? Not the first one but the one that made you think, ‘aha!’

Low: That's a difficult question. I largely stopped reading SF&F in high school, and in college, I read things like John Irving or Tim Robbins when I read for pleasure at all. But in the 90s, I was very involved professionally with SF television (Star Trek, Babylon 5) - I was the liaison between Los Angeles and London for several Titan Publishing magazines - and so my return to SF was to its media aspect. This in turn led to involvement with a dot com online publishing start up, which reintroduced literary SF to my life. So around the time Star Trek was beginning its slow degeneration and Babylon 5 was ending, these shows being replaced by Hercules & Xena and the various god-awful offerings of the SciFi Channel, I was reading Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* and Michael Swanwick's *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* and Michael Moorcock's *Dancers at the End of Time* and Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden* and William Gibson's *Idoru* and Mike Resnick's *Kirinyaga* and Philip K Dick's *Valis* and becoming increasingly disgusted and infuriated with the dichotomy between filmic and literary SF&F. So there was no one book - there was just this flowering of relevant, literate, important work that I was discovering all around me and a growing sense of outrage that it was so poorly acknowledged in and by the mainstream. (George Lucas has a lot to answer for!) This outrage continues, though I have said before and maintain that things have really changed in the last few years. As the quality of media SF&F has improved (BSG, Children of Men, Lord of the Rings, Pan's Labyrinth, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, so many, many more examples), coupled with the gradual awakening of the (American) populace to what happens when you stick your head in the sand and let the madmen run the asylum (tense times engender relevant metaphors in narrative), so the respect afforded SF&F has radically increased in recent months. Long way to go still though.

Matrix: So who are your editorial influences? Give me the names of editors that have influenced your style or work that most of the public may or may not be aware of?

Low: Michael Moorcock. We can almost start and end there. I think that what he did as editor of *New Worlds* had the greatest, most significant impact on our field since the golden age. I didn't realize the extent of his influence as a child, but reading "A Boy and His Dog" and "Aye, and Gomorroah" and all those other New Wave writings in the SFWA anthologies permanently shaped my perception of speculative fiction. It wasn't until around 2000, when I read Colin Greenland's brilliant history of the New Wave, *The Entropy Exhibition*, along with his (highly recommended) book-length interview with Moorcock, 'Death is No Obstacle', that I learned and understood how much of an impact my favourite childhood writer had wielded as an editor, and I remain in awe. Now, ironically, I don't consider Pyr to be directly mining any sort of New Wave (or New Weird) vein -- though I briefly did some magazine work where I deliberately/overtly set out to emulate Moorcock's editorial agenda. What we're going for with Pyr is not literary experiment but a much more traditional, recognizable core science fiction and fantasy,

what you might call pure quill or pitched-down-the-middle SF&F, albeit of a high literary standard. But the fact that we can speak seriously of genre fiction as holding to a literary standard at all has a great deal to do with this post-New Wave world that Mike ushered in. We all of us live and work on his side of the divide and thank the gods for that.

Matrix: In the interview with China Miéville for *The Believer* magazine, he mentioned an 'embattlement mentality' in genre literature. How grateful he was for people like Neil Stephenson and Susanna Clarke who unabashedly associate themselves with the genre and how people like the late Kurt Vonnegut find that they have to dissociate themselves for their own reasons. I have questions about this phenomenon:

- With the success of the Science Fiction and Fantasy genre in movies (see multi-BILLION dollar success of the LOTR trilogy) and genre bending authors like both Vonnegut, Clarke and others, don't you think this conversation is moot? I mean Michael Chabon won the Pulitzer Prize with a pretty hefty novel about superheroes, comic book creators and golems. Then he went on to contribute to the Spiderman screenplay.

Low: Yes, it is moot, but it wasn't at the time of that interview. Right now we are living through a very rapid swing of the pendulum of mainstream perception. I would date its inception from the moment Stephen King was chosen as recipient of the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters – which seems far less absurd now than it did to many in the mainstream at the time (remember the outcry?) – but that was the crack in the dam that is just bursting now. You mention *Lord of the Rings*, but equally important to its box-office (because when do critics care for box-office?) is the moment when *Return of the King* took all eleven Oscar awards for which it was nominated. When Michael Chabon wrote *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* he was still clothing his generic elements via a narrative-within-a-narrative, but in the wake of his Pulitzer, he has moved further and further into unabashedly genre territory, first with a YA fantasy, then with a Sherlock Holmes narrative, then with an alternate history and now, with *Gentlemen of the Road*, an outright sword & sorcery adventure, dedicated to Michael Moorcock no less, and following its New York Times serialization with a novel from an outright genre publisher (Del Rey). Throw in Susanna Clarke's novel being chosen as the #1 book of the year by Time magazine, Entertainment Weekly and TV Guide both proclaiming *Battlestar Galactica* as the number one drama series on TV, and the profusion of quality science fiction series and films being celebrated in the mainstream, and yes, it begins to look as if we have overcome. Not to mention Bradbury's recent Pulitzer. Personally, I'd love to see a bookstore create an entire shelf display of all the "mainstream" authors who've written SF&F titles - Margaret Atwood, Michael Chabon, Kazuo Ishiguro, P.D. James, Doris Lessing, Jonathan Lethem, Cormac McCarthy, Walter Mosley, Haruki Murakami, Audrey Niffenegger, Thomas Pynchon, Philip Roth - this is just off the top of my head and mostly recent examples. You could fill an entire display and put on a big banner right across the top SO YOU THINK THIS SF STUFF CAN'T BE LITERATURE? Yes, there are small cadres of critics who will never be won over, but who cares. I'm never going to be a Metallica fan either, but what need their millions of fans care about that?

Matrix: How much of this is self-perception and self-consciousness in our field and how much is true?

Low: There are still stigmas attached. I tried to hand a guy at my (martial arts) dojo one of our Pyr catalogues and he recoiled like I was handing him a Four Spiritual Laws tract. But again – SF doesn't need to attempt 100% world domination. We're not a religion, simply an extremely relevant branch of literature with a lot to say about 21st century life. Charles Stross compares the 'literary vs. sf' debate to jazz and classical aficionados. Some fans of the one are never going to accept the merits of the other. But so what? When literary writers are storming your gates, when you are taking the highest cinematic and literary awards, when your box-office is enormous and when your home genre is undergoing a renaissance of quality material (as it is), it really is self-consciousness (and maybe self-indulgence?) to bitch. That being said, I recently argued this with a very well respected and award-winning editor who felt the stigma is as strong as ever. I think, personally, that the perception is generational and the professional in question is labouring against years of working against the stereotype, whereas I had the good fortune to come into the field at a time when the respect the mainstream affords SF is on the rise.

Matrix: Also, in your Q&A with Miéville you spoke about golems. What do you think the golem/cyborg character says about human nature/society/etc. in the works you have come across?

Low: So much of fiction wants to propagate the notion that people are basically the same in all eras, times and places. There was a great article in Salon.com concerning the TV show 'Rome', which, I understand, didn't play as well over there as over here, but I loved it. Precisely because Rome didn't just pretend you could yank someone out of 2007 America and slap a toga on him and that was all you need do. The movie 'The Ten Commandments' always cracks me up when Charlton Heston gives the speech about how the Israelites are fleeing Egypt for the right to live 'free under the law'. He isn't marching them into the Promised Land; he's taken them straight to America. I read a manuscript once where the bad king set out to close down the bookstores and burn the libraries, but the good king was going to come back and put a stop to all this censorship. I got news for you – the good king wasn't any crazier about a free press than the bad king was.

As I find myself doing often these days, I'm going to quote the brilliant Robert Charles Wilson, who says, "The one compelling idea that recurs constantly in science fiction from H.G. Wells onward is human contingency – which boils down to three statements: The world in the past was a very different place than it is now; the world we live in could have been very different place than it is; and the world will inevitably become a very different place in the future. These assertions may seem obvious, but I believe they're counterintuitive, like the idea that the Earth revolves around the sun. Our lives are simply too short to give them real visceral meaning. So we have to use our imagination, we have to literalize the possibilities, we have to engage the truth that dinosaurs really did once wander over the prairies, that the Confederacy really might have bargained with England and won its independence, that human activity really might change the climate or sterilize the seas. Internalize this deeply enough and you do end up with a slightly distanced

worldview. You learn not to trust appearances, which is always a valuable lesson, and you realize that no human institution, good or bad, secular or religious, cultural or technological, is fore-ordained or guaranteed to last."

Science fiction is the literature of estrangement. It is a literature of subversion. It is a literature of the open mind. That's what the alien is – it's literalizing the ability to see from other eyes than the ones you were born with. And the cyborg – well, that's the stage at which you're halfway there; one part your old self and one part something other. That can be a terrifying position to occupy – ask anyone who ever kicked off the religion of their parents. But it's also the place where enlightenment occurs.

Matrix: You have got some really fantastic reviews for the Pyr imprint. Obviously your love of the genre motivates you but what is it that Pyr does differently than other imprints to make it stand out as a premier Speculative Fiction Imprint?

Lou: I'm not sure how I should answer this. There's plenty of fine work being done elsewhere, and I am very big on the notion that our competition is not with each other, but with all the various aspects of modern life that lure readers away to other pursuits, responsibilities and activities - work, games, movies, internet, etc. Every good science fiction or fantasy book published enhances the field. It has the potential to create a new reader – someone who will go on to being a dedicated reader for life – but it also sustains those of us who already are. We publish a wide, broad category of SF&F, and while I've met readers who are enthusiastically reading everything we publish, it's possible there are readers out there who are only reading a percentage and selecting by author, subgenre, or style. So, for instance, if you read and enjoyed Adam Roberts' *Gradisil* and/or Ian McDonald's *Brasyl* and are looking for more of same – Richard Morgan's *Black Man* (*Thirteen* in the US) can feed your need for smart, literate SF while Ian's off in Turkey researching his next book. Unless we're talking about the readerships for Baen's military SF or DAW's fantasy, very few houses have dedicated audiences who buy everything they output. Readers tend to follow authors and subgenres. I know I never looked at a logo on a spine until I was in the business myself. This is changing with the access to information the net affords, of course, but my point is that every good book published each year enhances the field and every bad one detracts from it. I want you all to read good books – mine and everyone else's. (I just read Gibson's *Spook Country* and heartily endorse it! Also check out my buddy Jeff Carlson's *Plague Year*.) Now, that being said, we have been told – by readers, critics, distributors and even by major chain buyers – that we are developing a through-line in what we do that is leading to a dedicated readership, and that that through-line isn't a subgenre, but the fact that we have a consistently high level of quality across the whole line. I hope that's true, because that's certainly been the goal. To date, I really love every book that I've selected, and I hope that that will always be the case.

Matrix: I know picking a selection from your list is like saying you have a favourite child but what forthcoming books are you particularly excited about foisting upon the genre marketplace? And why should I run out and read them?

Lou: Yes, they are all my children. But I'm very big on buying in your region and supporting authors in the appropriate market, so I'll stick to some we've got the right to ship to you in the UK, not ones you can (and should) get in their British editions from the wonderful Victor Gollancz house:

* Michael Moorcock's *The Metatemporal Detective* – because this hysterical Sherlock Holmes style pastiche is actually an Elric book, through and through. Because Mike is a living legend, and this is a very atypical book for him on the one hand, and an essential Eternal Champion work on the other. Because it's a Victorian, World War II, western, mystery, alternate history, multiple worlds tragicomedy. And it features an antihero with a Big Black Sword. Need I say more?

* Joel Shepherd's *Cassandra Kresnov* series – because not enough Western SF had really internalized Masamune Shirow's technological future, and because Joel succeeds where so much that is similar fails. Because anyone can write about the robot girl that wants to free of her killbot programming constraints and longs to be human, but Joel writes about the one that already is. Come for the ass-kicking and the well-drawn characters, but stay for the socio-political debates and the complex world-building.

* Mike Resnick's *Starship* series – because Mike is a master of good old school storytelling, writing at the top of his game, in his first-ever military SF, and we can all learn a great deal about damn good storytelling and narrative from him. Remember why you loved the original Star Trek, and why it was a damn shame Firefly didn't go seven years or more. Maybe there's been too much water under the bridge to ever boldly go with the Enterprise again, but the Theodore Roosevelt will remind you of how it felt the first time.

* Kay Kenyon's *The Entire and the Rose* quartet - because this is an epic SF, absolutely in the tradition of and the equal to worlds like Rama and Ringworld and Hyperion and Riverworld and all those classics of the field. Because this tale of an Earthman thrust headlong into a richly-detailed, incredibly populated alien milieu is what SF should be celebrating at its core – what Flash Gordon and Star Wars after it were emulating to begin with, but made smart and literate and "now" in a 21st century fashion.

* Sean Williams' *Books of the Cataclysm* quartet – because what's not to love about Ursula K Le Guin meets Mad Max? Because Sean is working with the traditional quest fantasy formula and subverting it by setting it in the Outback, in a world that used to be ours but which was shattered by a brutal collision between life and afterlife.

* Theodore Judson's *The Martian General's Daughter* – because this is a military SF with a strong female protagonist, that will thrill you with epic battles fought even as it makes you laugh and breaks your heart, with a lot to say about the decline of empire and the true nature of honour.

* David Louis Edelman's *Jump 225* series – because you need to be reading this now, first, while it's happening, not coming late to the party after the world has universally declared its paradigm-shifting genius. Because Infoquake took the type of SF as typified by Charles Stross, Vernor Vinge, Cory Doctorow, Neal Stephenson and their ilk and went in an entirely new direction, and MultiReal is all that again plus sex and violence.

Matrix: I love reading because even if I'm not reading a book of fact I learn something new with every book. Books are like epiphanies for me and unless I am moved (in the

right way!) I don't tend to go back to a book or an author. Speculative Fiction especially lends itself to this as it looks at the universe from a different perspective. What would you say is the kernel inside the love of speculative fiction for you?

Lou: Just that: The potential to be transformed. I grew up in a very different southern America from the one that I live in now, one that didn't have anything like the ethnic diversity or diversity of thought that my hometown now enjoys. One where certain sciences were kept out of the educational system I was a part of, and where outright lies were told about history, literature, and nature. Science fiction was my gateway out of ignorance and prejudiced and the monoculture. Timothy Leary once said that all effective methods of behavioural change must be hedonic – no one will do anything, no matter how beneficial you can show them it is, unless it is also pleasurable. That's science fiction to me – it's enlightenment packaged in entertainment. It's like chocolate covered spinach.

Matrix: From my research you seem to be a guy with great knowledge and with many interests within the genre. So I will try not to pin you down too much. That said, what are the most important things you look for in acquiring a new author to Pyr? (Whether established or never been published before.)

Lou: I want a book that is so good I have to put it down to come up for air. I want a manuscript that I can't wait to get back to when my administrative duties call me away. I want something that is so compelling, or mind-blowing, or clever, or funny, or poignant that I have to call my buddies and tell them, or dash off an email, or just take a break, stand up and walk around the room and breath. My wife can usually tell when I like a manuscript before I know myself. If I keep setting it down in my lap to describe it to her, she knows I like it. But if I stare off into space and say, "I don't know what I think about this," she replies, "I do. You don't like it." And really, as I know you've heard before, the scary, harsh, brutal, but honest truth is that you can usually tell which one something is going to be in the first few pages, if not the very first page.

With someone like Joe Abercrombie, or David Louis Edelman, or Justina Robson, or Kay Kenyon, or Ian McDonald, you really know from the first sentence that they've got what it takes. As you say, I do have a great many interests in the field, and, to invoke another editor, I've always admired Gardner Dozois for his comprehensive, "catholic" view of all that SF can be – which is why you'll find writers as diverse as Mike Resnick and Adam Roberts, Chris Roberson and Martin Sketchley, Alexis Glynn Latner and Michael Moorcock all in the Pyr line. If there is a through-line, it's not a subgenre or a world view or writing style, but, I hope, a consistent level of quality across the breadth of all that science fiction and fantasy can be.

Matrix: Ian McDonald, Adam Roberts, Justina Robson and Martin Sketchley are all UK writers that Pyr has published. One of the reasons the BSFA is interested in your career is the fact that you do feature so many UK authors in your imprint. Besides their superior storytelling skills, is there something "different" about the UK writer?

Lou: Besides their superior storytelling skills? Okay, when I was a child, my father used to drill into me that the British had a superior command of language. He'd take out Kipling's poem "The Gods of the Copybook Headings" and read it to me over and over - his favorite poem because of the prose. He didn't have a clue what a copybook was and "suspected" that the poem was uncomfortably close to endorsing Hindu concepts of reincarnation, but he loved it for its language. To this day, he'll still pull something out of the London Times or the London Financial Times to show me how much better the average UK journalist is. The result of all this is that I have an inherent bias to UK authors. I have a similar one for UK musicians and another for UK comedy. A lot of it has to do with layers of meaning and levels of humour. John Cleese lays this out beautifully in 'A Fish Called Wanda', which is really about an Englishman's attempts to comprehend American humour (how does Archie Leech beat Otto in the end? He talks down to his level! "We kicked your ass ree-eel gud."). Nowhere is the difference more painfully laid out than when Kevin Kline says, "You are the vulgarian, you fuck!" Half the audience is laughing at Otto's ignorance and the contradiction he's unknowingly spouting, and the other half of the audience just thinks it's funny anytime anyone says "fuck." The film really is brilliant in the way it incorporates both American and British comedy sensibilities.

I'm a big admirer of the music of Robyn Hitchcock, which manages that very British way of being both hysterical and heartbreakingly painful in the same breath. It's very similar to the way that Doctor Who can be absurd one minute and leave you in tears the next - which is something that Star Trek could never pull off - not in the same episode anyway. Before Beck came along, I'd say the closest we came to it musically was the Talking Heads, but what they did was far more technologically aware, much more rooted in an awareness of American consumerism, far less organically derived, which, again, we could apply again to Star Trek and Doctor Who.

Which is not to say that the US doesn't have its share of incredible prose stylists - Michael Chabon, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, Kurt Vonnegut spring immediately to mind in our field, as do (the aforementioned) Beck, the Counting Crows, Bob Dylan, the Flaming Lips when it comes to lyricists. But I didn't see that mirroring of high and low brow humour, or layers of meaning, in American comedy anywhere after the Marx Brothers until we get to Matt Groening and the Simpsons. Simpsons, in its heyday, really can't be beat. (And I still think Futurama is one of the best SF series of all time.)

I'm generalizing horrendously in everything I say above, you know?

Matrix: What can you divulge as common threads among your choices for stories in your anthologies (if there are any)?

Lou: The relevance, importance, and urgency of science fiction. Science fiction is first and foremost entertainment and must be entertainment if it is to function effectively. But it will never be just entertainment. It has been, since its inception, a fundamental contributing factor both in how we view our increasingly technological world and in

actually dictating the shaping of that technological world, and as the branch of literature devoted to examining humankind's relationship with technology, it is coming into its own as the most important literature of the 21st century. I will never willingly denigrate the field of science fiction and nothing gets my back up more than when people within our field undersell, devalue or deny this literature's importance.

Matrix: What goes into the genesis of an anthology from the Editor's POV? For example, your upcoming *Sideways in Crime* anthology is an alternate history mystery anthology. So, who came up with that? Do the stories make the anthology or does the anthology inspire the stories?

Lou: The anthologies inspire the story, always. All of my anthologies, after the first, are original collections, not reprint anthologies that began with a theme. In keeping with the sentiments above, I don't like frivolously-themed anthologies – 'More Stories About Vampire Cats', etc – and I try for each of my anthologies to ask a question that I feel is relevant to the health and direction of the field at the time. *Live Without a Net* was conceived in direct response to what I felt was the then-preponderance of post-cyberpunk fiction in American SF in contrast to what has since come to be called the 'New Space Opera' just beginning to be recognized as coming out of Britain at the time. (I thought you guys were thinking a whole lot more expansively and having a hell of a lot more fun than we were, and I wanted to bring some of that over here.) *Future Shocks* was an attempt to explore science fiction's role in forecasting hitherto unimagined dystopias (increasingly relevant in our post 9/11 world), and the *Fast Forward* series is a direct rebuttal of the sentiment that the short story is losing relevance as regards the rest of the field and within the short form the science fiction short story is losing ground to slipstream. You'll have to read my introduction to *Sideways in Crime* when it's out to see how I position the alternate history mystery in 2008, but I'm very proud of my opinions there. Theodore Sturgeon said that it was the job of science fiction to "ask the next question," and I take that very much to heart when I contemplate what my next anthology project will be.

Matrix: In every genre, the literary media has been superior to the rest of the media incarnations (with the exception of possibly 'Romance'). We all have our crosses to bear but isn't there anything out there in the TV universe that you respect these days?

Lou: I am a big fan of the new Doctor Who, which I think is just about one of the finest genre shows ever, and the fact that it wasn't produced by or for Americans, and wasn't even initially run in America until the Amazon pre-orders got too large for the SciFi Channel to ignore is very telling. I do think that certain episodes have raised the bar so high that it's in danger of outdoing itself, and now the sillier, zanier episodes, that would have been fine in the days of old Who are no longer going to cut it. But something like Steve Moffat's 'Blink' is about as good a time travel story as television has ever done. That's good science fiction period. And Paul Cornell's 'Human Nature' is probably the best exploration of the Doctor himself as a character we've ever had.

Over here, I really admire *Battlestar Galactica* for the way its raised the bar for acting, directing, quality of production, seriousness of tone, etc. The show is a quantum leap forward in the presentation of SF TV and there really is no going backward. It's as close to what I imagine an HBO series that dealt with SF would be. That being said, where the show breaks down is on the level of its extended arcs. It's fine for its inside-a-season arcs – the Pegasus arc, the new Caprica storyline, etc. but now that they are deep enough in, and are forced to answer questions about the Cylon religion, the Cylon 'plan', the ultimate meaning of their belief in cyclical time – you know, all the truly SFnal aspects of the series, the emperor's lack of clothes is starting to show. They really haven't given thought to what the entire storyline is, and this is a problem that I think Ron Moore carries over from his days on *Trek*, when the studios were still demanding stand alone episodic television that could be syndicated easily and the writers had to fight for (or hide) extended story arcs inside that structure. They became accustomed to working out short arcs and also in setting up problems in season finales without clear ideas of where they would pick it up in subsequent seasons. This is why *Deep Space Nine*, for instance, has some of the finest individual episodes of *Star Trek* ever produced but breaks down horribly in its final season when everything has to wrap up.

I wish that Sci-Fi TV would take advantage of the incredible resource that is its literary cousin. Screenwriting and prose writing are very different skills and they don't necessarily translate, but if *BSG* or its next equivalent would bring in an SF prose writer as a creative consultant (the position Harlan Ellison held on both the *Outer Limits* and *Babylon 5*) then I think they could have avoided the accusations of having "jumped the shark" we're hearing now. You bring in the SF novelist at the start when you're plotting out the series Bible, and you fly him or her in once or twice a season for a brainstorming session. Give the novelist a hundred thousand to pick his brain - huge money on our side of things but chump change in Hollywood - and you get a series that holds up across its entire run. (Which can only be good for the longevity of the secondary market sales.)

I think it's telling that *Heroes* - which is the show that so far has sustained its macro-arc better than any television show I've ever seen bar one, has comic book scribe Jeff Loeb on as an executive producer, comics being a medium that knows very well how to craft extended storylines across multiple issues.

That's bar one, not bar none, because to date *Babylon 5* is still the best SF television ever when it comes to a) being knowledgeable of and respectful towards science fiction's prose roots, and b) actually setting out to tell one story and neither stopping before it has been completed nor continuing past its finale. Yes, network interference forced Straczynski to radically rethink some of his plans for the overall arc, and also muddles his fifth season horribly, but *B5* is still the closest thing we have to a novel (or five book series) come to the screen. Sadly, the more sophisticated filmic techniques get, the less likely it is that newcomers will be able to go backwards. I know I'm going to have a hard time getting my wife to watch *B5* (despite my having worked on it and even being in it!) because *BSG* has raised the bar for look and feel so high. I really want someone new to come along, with the benefit of *BSG*'s example and the lower cost of special effects, and give us a show that is conceived start to finish to tell one tale in the way that that *Babylon*

5 did. When it comes, I suspect it will either emerge from the internet wholecloth or come from outside the US, where it's very hard for someone to invest so much forethought in a series before they know whether or not it will survive its pilot, its first six episodes, its first thirteen, its first season, etc. etc. etc.

While I'm on a soapbox, another pet peeve of mine is that when Hollywood does adapt SF for the screen, it's usually something from 20 years ago or more. I'd really like to see some of the modern classics be realized in film - something by China Mieville or Justina Robson or Charles Stross. A dream come true for me would be to see HBO do John Meaney's brilliant *Nulapeiron Sequence* as a three-year series, and Joel Shepherd's *Cassandra Kresnov* series, which shares a lot of thematic similarities with *Battlestar Galactica*, pretty much blows the new *Bionic Woman* out of the water. But I'm excited by the *Pattern Recognition* film, and we're actually living through a very good time for faithful adaptation, what with *LotR*, *Batman*, *Spiderman*, *X-Men*, *Narnia*, *Stardust*, *Harry Potter*, *A Scanner Darkly*, and a host of other genre films that are very respectfully aligned with their prose source material. I'm very optimistic about the future of SF&F cinema, especially as the cost of filmmaking continues to drop.

Matrix: Tell me about what you expect when you attend ApolloCon 2008 as Editor Guest of Honor?

Lou: I expect to be such a great GoH that you guys hear about my brilliance and fly me out to be a guest in the UK. I haven't been back to London since I lived there in 1991 and I really need to rectify that.

In all seriousness, I have never been to ApolloCon but hear only good things, am deeply honoured to be invited there, and can't wait to go. One of my writers – Alexis Glynn Latner - had a marvelous time there this past year, and had only good things to say (particularly about the attendees love of written SF&F.) And I've enjoyed many other great conventions in Texas in the past, a state that seems to have produced and/or afforded a home to more than its fair share of genre writers. Moorcock once described Texas as the only place in America to have a mythology deep enough to pull him away from Europe (or something to that effect), so maybe that has something to do with it. I'll also be out in Texas in January speaking to a gathering of central Texas librarians, and I can't wait for that either. I love going to Texas and am glad to be able to make fairly frequent visits. And two of my best friends, illustrator John Picacio and author Chris Roberson, hail from there.

Matrix: Lou Anders, thank you.