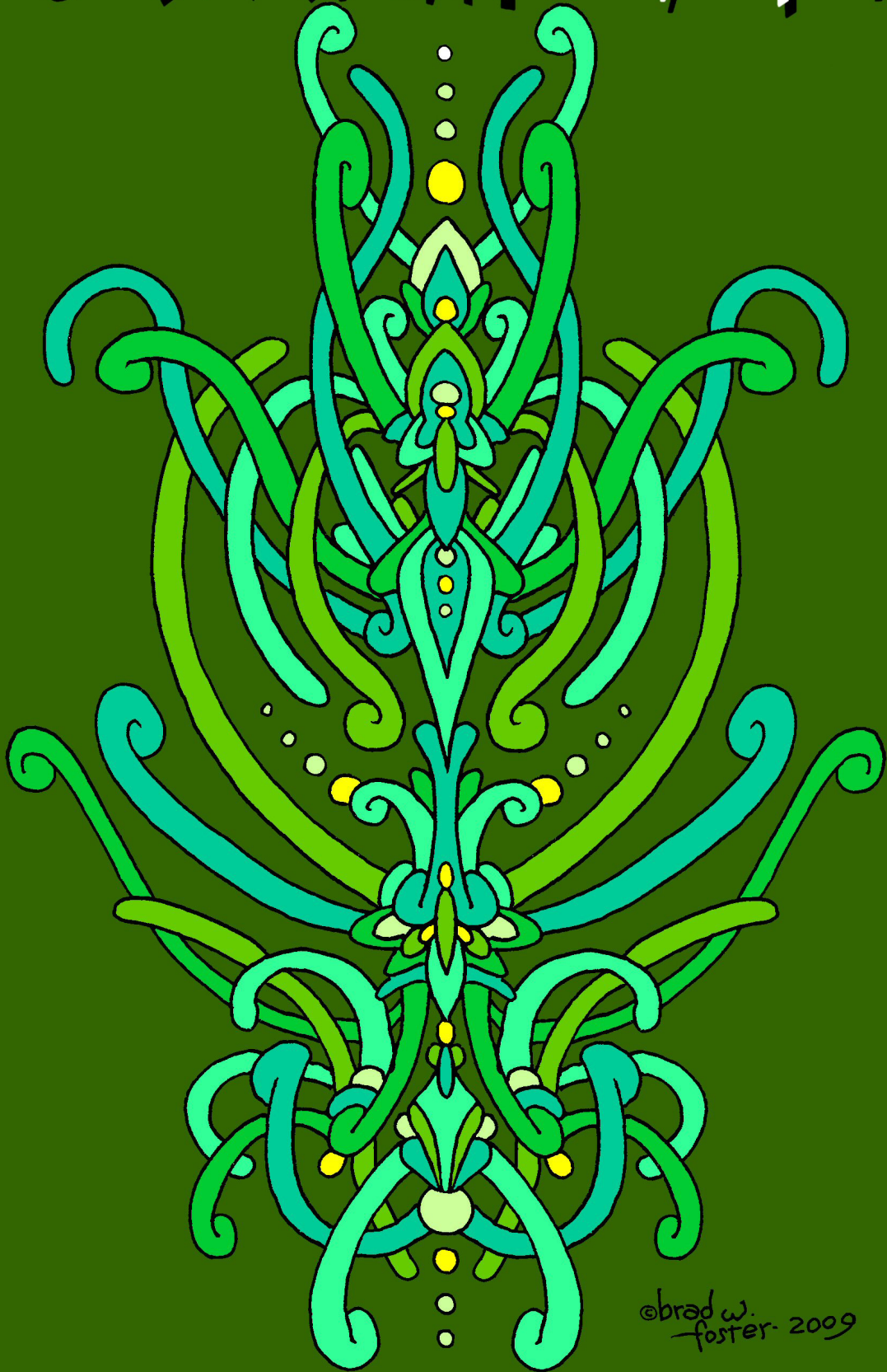
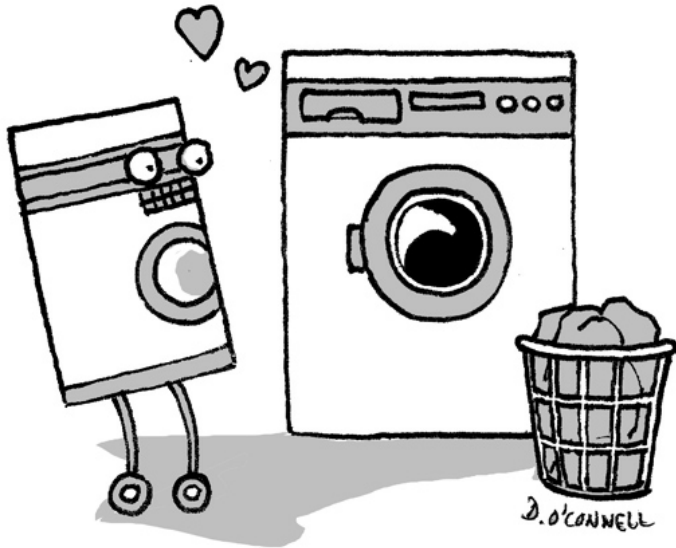


THE FORTNIGHTLY FIX



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“We’re a nation of risk-taking, alcoholic lard-buckets.”

-- Dr Phil Hammond, comedian & ex-GP

“I have just provoked Steve Green into doing a Sid James impression and the convention hasn’t even begun yet.”

-- Christina Lake, at Corflu Cobalt, 2010

News From Planet Me

In what some might see as an intervention, I was yanked out of my hobbit hole on 19 March and escorted across the Shire to a Tolkien-related square dance near Sarehole Mill, the area south of Birmingham granted a fantasy doppelganger by JRRT in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

My kidnapper was Theresa Derwin*, who mentioned she had a ticket going free in the full knowledge that I still felt vaguely guilty about some of the cinematic horrors Ann and I propelled her towards back when we helmed the 1990s fan group The Black Lodge (recently immortalised by fellow ex-member Joel Lane in his novella *The Witnesses Are Gone*).

Anyhow, it was a thoroughly pleasant event. I finally met Theresa’s Brum Group committee colleague Dave Corby (who reacted to our introduction as though he’d just encountered some notorious figure from the organisation’s past, which was entirely appropriate), the food would have satisfied a passing Hobbit (for at least one of their dozen or so daily meals) and all those who took part in the ‘Hobbit Hoe-Down’ (Theresa and Dave among them) appeared to have a great time. Plus, it raised money for the annual Tolkien weekend at Sarehole Mill itself.

Before anyone asks: no, I didn’t dance. Even before my left leg decided to take a vacation from normality, my terpsichorean endeavours were as scarce as Kentucky Fried Dodo. Indeed, when I ‘boogied on down’ at my friend Salli’s engagement party nearly a decade ago, she eventually had to relocate to Hong Kong to recover. There’s no way I would wish that psychological trauma upon the innocent occupants of a suburban church hall.

[*whose new horror-related website can be found at terror-tree.co.uk.]

Film Capsules

- *The Adjustment Bureau: Bourne Ultimatum* screenwriter George Nolfi makes his directorial debut with this slick adaptation of Phil Dick’s 1954 short story “Adjustment Team”. Matt Damon is the New York politician whose future is literally mapped out for him, Emily Blunt the dancer who keeps challenging Fate and crossing his path. Entertaining, even if the denouement is way too tidy.

- *Battle: Los Angeles*: Frantic fusion of traditional blood 'n' guts war drama with science fiction, filmed at such a breakneck speed I was left exhausted rather than exhilarated. Aaron

Eckhart does a fine job channelling Lee Marvin in the lead role, but he has to combat the leaden script as much as the alien invasion force.

- *Beastly*: Rather hamfisted retread of the Beast & Beauty legend, with Alex Pettyfer as the narcissistic rich kid cursed by campus witch Mary-Kate Olson and challenged to win the heart of fellow student Vanessa Hudgens in order to regain his Hollywood hunkishness. The irony that his quest to understand beauty is only skin deep rests with arguably the cutest-looking girl at his school will doubtless be lost on this tale's teengirl demographic.



- *La casa muda* (aka *The Silent House*): Sinister thriller from Uruguay director Gustavo Hernández, offering a few chilly moments but generally underwhelming. Florencia Colucci deserves special mention for her performance, taking centre-stage for vitrually the entire movie (like Hitchcock's *Rope*, it appears to all take place in one shot; like Hitchcock's *Rope*, it cheats), but it's by now means the scarefest it could have been. Perhaps Hernández's English-language remake, previewed in January at Sundance, manages to amp up the tension.

- *Chalet Girl*: Lightweight but amiable romcom starring Felicity Jones as the former skateboard champion who finds her former skills of use whilst trying to bolster the family finances by becoming a chalet maid for a rich businessman (Bill Nighy), his stuck-up trophy wife (Brooke Shields) and their son (Ed Westwick). That she'll end up in bed with the last despite his impending engagement is entirely predictable, but that pretty goes | with the territory and it's a lot more enjoyable than such recent 'comedies' as *Bride Wars*, *All About Steve* and *Leap Year*.

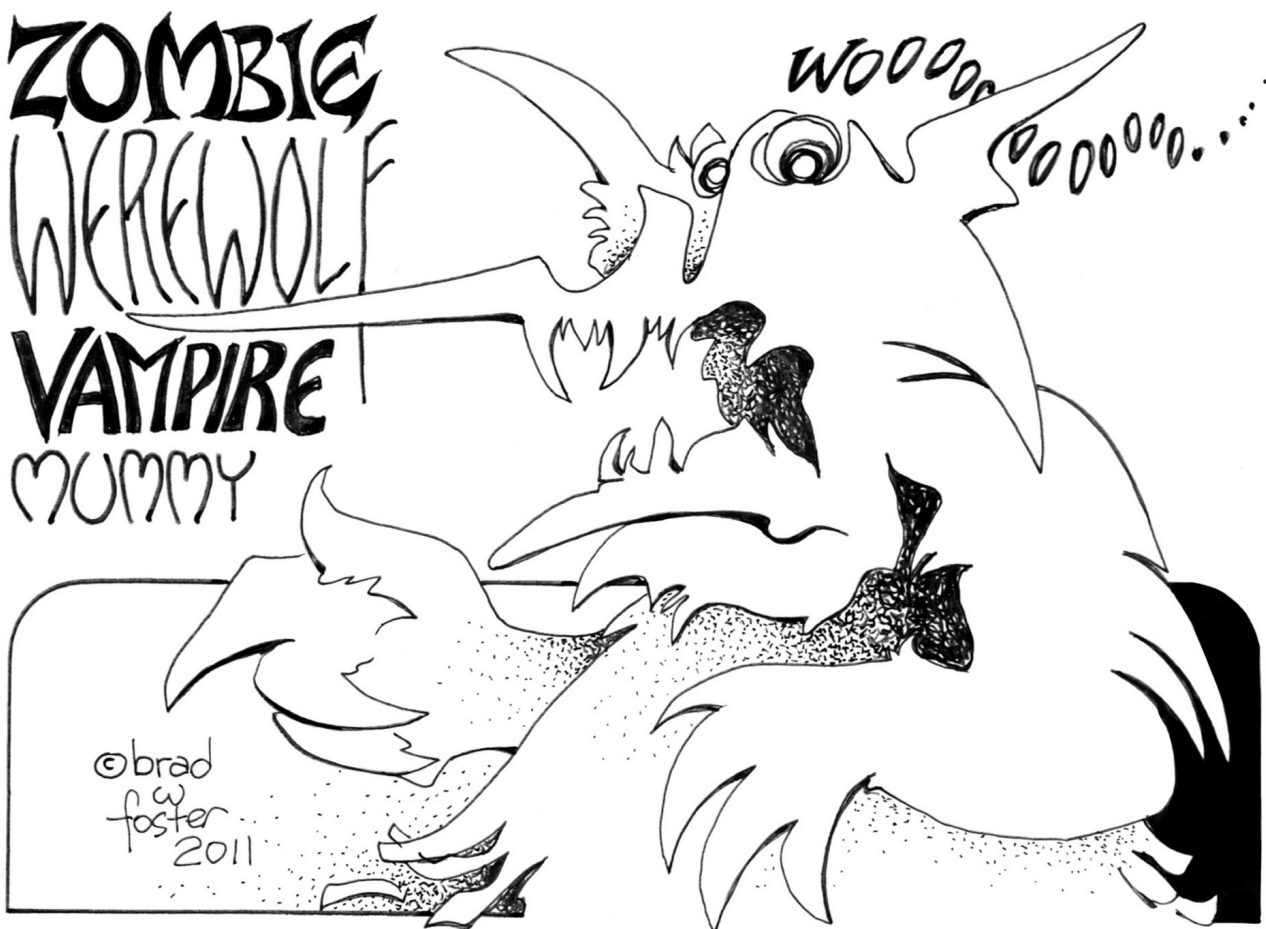
- *Drive Angry 3D*: Engagingly over-the-top supernatural thriller from Patrick Lussier (*My Bloody Valentine 3D* and the forthcoming *Hellraiser* reboot), featuring Nic Cage as the laconic anti-hero freshly escaped from Hades to rescue his grand-daughter from devil worshippers, Amber Heard his unlikely companion and William Fichtner in great form as Satan's accountant. Bonkers, but huge fun.



- *The Eagle*: Gritty recreation of Roman Britain, adapted from Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth*, wherein the son of the commander of a legion which went missing twenty years earlier (Channing Tatum) heads into hostile territory to retrieve his father's golden eagle, and with it the honour both of his family and Rome itself. He's accompanied by a slave whose life he saved (Jamie Bell), little realising his native guide is the son of a Brigante general. Although the action flags a little as the pair retreat towards safe ground, director Kevin Macdonald provides several strong set-pieces and makes a commendable stab at historical accuracy (the true mystery of the Ninth aside).

- *Fair Game*: *Bourne Identity* director Doug Liman turns his attention to the real-life spy drama wherein senior White House officials, angered by former ambassador Joseph Wilson's refusal to back up the claims used to justify invading Iraq, seek revenge by exposing his wife Valerie Plame's undercover missions for the CIA. Sean Penn and Naomi Watts turn in solid performances as the couple under fire, but the end result is more worthy than gripping.

- *Faster*: By-the-numbers modern western, charting the triangular relationship between an ex-con out for vengeance (Dwayne Johnson), the cop on his trail (Billy Bob Thornton) and the contract killer hired to prevent the manhunt reaching its final target (a less than convincing Oliver Jackson-Cohen, though that's not entirely his fault). The accent is on brawn rather than brains, and the finale holds few surprises.
- *Hall Pass*: The Farrelly Brothers return after a four-year absence from the big screen with a slightly subdued but frequently amusing sex comedy about two middle-aged husbands (Owen Wilson, Jason Sudeikis) let off the leash for a week by the pair's end-of-their-tether wives (Jenna Fischer, Christina Applegate). Needless to say, both soon learn the perils of getting what they wish for, even if one of them might be pneumatic barista Nicky Whelan.
- *Killing Bono*: Hugely entertaining account of the Dublin band formed in parallel to U2, a story which becomes even more bizarre when it becomes clear large parts of it are rooted in reality. Ben Barnes and Robert Sheehan really spark as the two brothers cursed by the eldest's hubris, and Krysten Ritter is great as the ex-punk rocker who becomes their manager. Part of me wishes the 1987 assassination were also factual: that was pretty much the last time U2 were worth listening to.
- *Limitless*: Fast-moving, stylish near-future thriller featuring Bradley Cooper as a stalled author offered the chance to release his pent-up creativity -- and a great deal more -- with a newly-developed cognition-enhancing drug. Adapted from Alan Glynn's novel *The Dark Fields*, it's a slick rollercoaster ride along the boundary between science fiction and the latest real-life pharmaceutical breakthroughs.



- *Oranges and Sunshine*: Jim (son of Ken) Loach's directorial debut is an earnest portrayal of Nottingham social worker Margaret Humphreys' campaign to reunite families torn apart by a century-long British policy of deporting 'lower class' children to the four corners of the Empire (although, despite the impression given here, only a minority of the 130,000 involved were sent to Australia, and of the five children's homes later condemned, just two were run by the Christian Brothers); ironically, as Margaret brings together the victims of this enforced diaspora, her mission threatens to fracture her own family. Loach deliberately avoids sentimentalism or emotional manipulation, but perhaps takes the restraint too far: the film often feels flat, almost monotone, despite the obvious worthiness of its subject matter and a strong central performance from the ever-reliable Emily Watson.

- *Red Riding Hood*: The classic fairy tale reworked as a lycanthropic whodunnit, as the just-about-virginal Valerie (Amanda Seyfried, looking even more doe-eyed than usual) tries to identify the killer of her elder sister whilst choosing between the guy she loves and the guy her family wants her to marry. Having cut her genre teeth on *Twilight*, director Catherine Hardwicke will be well-versed in such hormone-fueled triangles, but the real fun here is David Johnson's script, which keeps the audience guessing the werewolf's identity until the closing scenes.

- *The Roommate*: Rather lack-lustre rehash of themes from 1992 psychodrama *Single White Female*, with few surprises and even fewer genuine thrills. To be frank, it's a tv movie with delusions of grandeur.

- *Source Code*: Fast-moving science fiction thriller directed by Duncan Jones (*Moon*) from a spec script by Ben Ripley, previously responsible for two straight-to-video *Species* sequels. It's tight, well thought-through and a great action vehicle for Jake Gyllenhaal as a USAF pilot repeatedly implanted into an eight-minute quantum bubble in order to solve a terrorist atrocity. Hopefully, having proven *Moon* wasn't a one-off hit, Jones will now get studio backing for his proposed quasi-sequel.



- *Sucker Punch*: Storming in with every indication of having been a longstanding pet project, Zack Snyder's latest cgi extravaganza comes across like *Inception* remade as a rock video from storyboards by Frank Miller, with a dash of *Brazil*'s nuts. Emily Browning plays an institutionalised orphan who slips into a bizarre fantasy bordello which itself offers access to a series of increasingly fantastical challenges. It's entertaining enough, but utterly hollow, rather like watching someone else play a video game for 110 minutes.

- *Your Highness*: Whilst slightly reminiscent of Mel Brooks' early movies, this fantasy spoof tends to paper over the cracks in its narrative with coarse humour and swearing rather than wit. However, the film's not without its comedic moments, and Natalie Portman in a tin swimsuit has its attractions.

Endnote

I suppose I could write about yesterday's season-launch episode of *Doctor Who*, but many of you won't have seen it yet. Or the forthcoming referendum over British voting systems, except I'd rather not lull you all into a coma (for the record, I'm backing AV because not doing so would stick us with the existing system for another century at least; once AV is in place, we can work towards real proportional representation). Or the TransAtlantic Fan Fund, but I really hope everyone on my mailing list who's inclined to vote will have done so by now.

Or I suppose I might promote my fervent hope that a decent number of UK / Irish readers rush off to produce their own fanzines, paper or electronic, in time for the next Nova Awards sweep (the cut-off is 30 September, but that's a topic for next issue (in the meantime, check out the current 'longlist' at http://www.novacon.org.uk/nova_candidates.htm).

Tomorrow's my birthday, and I have at least one friend visiting, but I still plan to have another issue of *The FFix* out before the end of this month. Bit of a cheat on the eponymous schedule, I know, but TAFF has rather sucked up my time recently.

This has been *The Fortnightly Fix* #22, dated 24 April 2011. Edited by Steve Green. Artwork by Brad Foster (cover; pg.4), David O'Connell (pg.2), Bill Rotsler (pg.3), Pete Lyon (pg.5). My usual thanks to Bill Burns. Feedback is welcomed via stevegreen@livejournal.com. This is a Gutter Press fanzine. Dedicated to the memory of Lis Sladen.