



SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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ISSUE 79 · 15TH MAR 2009

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by ellen j allen

It looks as though this year is shaping up to be another good one for lovers of sf, f and horror films. The adaptation of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* is already out in cinemas, *Monsters vs Aliens* will be out at the start of April, followed a month later by *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. Exciting trailers are running for that last film, as they are for *Star Trek*, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* and *Terminator Salvation*, not to mention *Lesbian Vampire Killers*...

With the exception of *Watchmen*, *Monsters vs Aliens* and *Lesbian Vampire Killers*, all of these are franchise films and fortunately, they all look like they're very well made indeed. I'm looking forward to watching all of them, which should (almost) be enough to make up for the lack of a series of *Doctor Who* this year...

Not to miss them out altogether, here are a few books to watch out for this year. *A Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters promises to be a nicely chilling ghost story. *A Memory of Light*, the final volume in the enormous *Wheel of Time* series should be on our shelves at the beginning of October, completed by Brandon Sanderson after the death of Robert Jordan. And *Moxyland*, a techno-thriller set in a near-future Cape Town by Lauren Beukes, is a cracking read and one I can't recommend highly enough.

As if all of this weren't enough to keep me busy this year, I'm not much of a computer games player, but I'm looking to playing *Diablo 3* if only Blizzard will ever release it.

After my last editorial, and just to show that it's not all doom and gloom around here, *Realms of Fantasy*, after announcing their closure - a very sad day indeed - have been bought by *Tir Na Nog Press* and will be keeping going after all.

Also, in a year in which everyone's pockets have taken a bit of a battering, I'm very proud that here in the UK, Comic Relief (a bi-annual charity fund-raising drive held last Friday which does incredible things to help people all around the globe) raised £57,809,938 on the night, with more cash still rolling in. If you have a bit of change spare after going to see that film, buying that book, that computer game, you could do a lot worse than donate it somewhere it'll make a difference. You can still donate to Comic Relief, but there are charities everywhere in need of funds, no matter how little. And if you're feeling in a really generous mood, you can give it to us, to help us pay our writers. <http://www.comicrelief.com/>



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FICTION

SBIR Proposal

by richard k. lyon

Dr. Francis Nelson Stein, Contracts Officer,
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Sept 31, 2012

Mr. Frank James
Law Offices of James, James and Younger
13th Floor, The Pinkerton Building
1886 Bank Street
Northfield, Mn.

Dear Mr. James,

Please accept my condolences on your late brother's untimely passing. While I share your grief, there is an awkward situation which he was handling. Though you are probably not aware of this situation, you need to deal with it immediately.

Let me explain the background. Before the United States entered WWII, the Army recognized the coming need for a greater supply of explosives than civilian sources could supply. To meet this need the Army built plants to manufacture TNT, including one in Minnesota. Unrecovered TNT, and by-product dinitrotoluene, and tetratoluene were sent to holding ponds called pink lagoons. It was believed that this practice would not damage the environment because all these explosive byproducts would remain in the holding ponds.

Unfortunately this assumption proved to be correct. By the time RDX replaced TNT as the Army's explosive of choice, the pink lagoons had accumulated deposits of unstable explosive by-products several feet thick. That was a problem for Minnesota because, by then, real-estate developers had built houses in the areas around this plant.

Obtaining the necessary permits to haul the accumulated lagoon material away by truck over suburban streets would require filing an environmental impact statement. This statement would need to certify that the material is not likely to detonate if bumped or shaken, and such is not the case.

Building an incinerator on-site would also require an environmental impact statement, and it would involve public hearings at which intense opposition could be expected. There was also the problem that the workers who removed the material from the lagoon and transported it to the incinerator would be civilians. Given the hazardous nature of their duties, complying OSHA regulations would be extremely difficult.

While detonation in place was clearly feasible, this was what we were trying to avoid because of the intense collateral damage which this would involve.

Having found that all conventional methods of managing this problem were non-feasible, the Army recognized the need for an innovative approach and issued a request for proposals under the Small Business Innovative Research program (SBIR).

The only feasible proposal we received was from Busy Bee Inc. Busy Bee is a small company, duly incorporated in the state of Delaware, engaged in producing and selling honey. Under this proposal bees would remove the explosive byproducts, make it into a high nitrogen fertilizer by adding enzymes, and use it to grow flowers throughout the neighborhood. While this approach makes a great deal of sense, I was surprised to learn that the CEO and all the officers and workers of Busy Bee were bees.

On investigation, I found that your law firm drew up the incorporation papers for Busy Bee and for a variety of other unconventional corporations, and that your firm has been very successful in negotiating bank loans on behalf of these firms. I also learned that Mr. James, your late brother, wrote this proposal on

behalf of Busy Bee.

In scoring an SBIR proposal, the technical merit of the proposed technology is not the only consideration. The company's plans for commercializing the technology are also important as are the company's prior experience and their facilities and equipment.

Busy Bee's proposal received a high score with respect to facilities and equipment, Nature having given the bees everything they'll need to do this task.

The evaluation committee was also very favorably impressed by the company's prior experience in finding and deactivating land mines in Iraq. Disposing of those mines prevented insurgents from digging them up and using them to make IEDs.

The committee was, however, less favorably impressed with Busy Bee's plans for commercializing the technology. In today's intensely competitive economy, "Be fruitful and multiply." would not seem an adequate business plan.

The budget in an SBIR proposal is not scored, but it must be reasonable if the proposal is to be accepted. The budget for your proposal consisted almost entirely of legal expenses, which, considering the circumstances, is reasonable.

Busy Bee's work in Iraq also allowed the company to claim veterans' status, giving their SBIR proposal a 5 point bonus.

Since all of their executives (and indeed all of their workers) were female, the proposal got another 5 point bonus as an equal opportunity for women employer.

Since the bees had a substantial percentage of African ancestry, and since they have been the victims of discrimination based on that ancestry, they were entitled to be considered "black" irrespective of their actual coloration. This qualified them as a disadvantaged minority, giving the proposal a third 5 point bonus.

While all this gave the proposal a remarkably high score, there was a problem. The Small Business Innovative Research Act of 1960 required that awards be given only to small businesses. At the time of the award, the business must have no more than 500 employees. Busy Bee had a work force of roughly 15,000 worker bees, all of whom received food, lodging, medical care, and other benefits. Under these circumstances I fear it will be necessary to decline the proposal.

On the other hand, if some unfortunate event were to decrease the number of bees, the proposal could be quickly accepted with prompt payments to your law firm. If such an event does occur, please advise me of this as quickly as possible.

Very Truly Yours
Francis Nelson Stein, Ph.D.

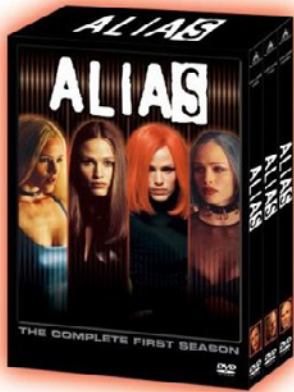
P.S. In dealing with the bees, please be more careful than your late brother Jesse.



Alias - Season One

reviewed by *alasdair stuart*

Starring Jennifer Garner, Patrick Garber, Michael Vartan, Carl Lumbly, Kevin Weissman, Ron Rifkin and Greg Grunberg



Sydney Bristow is a driven, highly intelligent postgrad student with a bright future in international finance.

Sydney Bristow is a friendly, beautiful, popular young woman, with a fiancé who loves her. She has two best friends, her housemate Francie and Will, a laconic and highly gifted young journalist.

Sydney Bristow is a deep cover operative for SD-6, a covert offshoot of the CIA who, along with her partner Marcus Dixon, is regularly sent across the world to recover vital intelligence, monitor conversations and steal cutting edge technology.

Sydney Bristow has three lives. All of them are about to change forever.

One of the most fascinating things about Alias, oddly, is the credits. The production staff are filled with some of the most important names of the last ten years in genre TV and cinema, ranging from JJ Abrams himself to Cloverfield scriptwriter Drew Goddard, Fringe co-producers Orci and Kurtzman and in front of the camera Garner, Grunberg and Garber have all gone onto much greater things. Simply put, the creative team of this series are something close to US TV royalty, a group of some of the most influential creators working today. As a result, there's a sense now of this being a series on which people cut their teeth and whilst it's patchy, the invention and energy on display is staggering.

Much like Sydney's fractured life, there are multiple plot threads here including the unfolding truth about Sydney's family, Will's gradual discovery of the true nature of her job, her own personal problems, her complicated relationship with Will and her CIA handler Michael Vaughn and finally her boss, Arvin Sloane, who is searching for antique artifacts built by Milo Rambaldi, an impossibly visionary Renaissance scientist and architect. The series runs headlong at each and every one of these plots, always with an eye to making Sydney's life as difficult as humanly possible. The end result is a bizarre, frantic series that throws events at the viewer at impossible speed, especially as the series frequently begins new stories halfway through episodes. Sydney's life is impossibly fast, impossibly complex and if you let it carry you along, at times, impossibly entertaining.

It's also pleasingly morally ambiguous. Victor Garber and Ron Rifkin are magnificent as Sydney's father and boss respectively, two men who have done terrible things but have done so time and again for what they have convinced themselves are the right reasons. Garber has incredible screen presence and it's no accident that Jack Bristow has formed the template for much of his later TV work, his unusual combination of absolute calm and constant, seething rage giving him remarkable on-screen charisma.

However, Rifkin is arguably the series' strongest asset as a man who is by turns homicidal and compassionate, savagely violent and savagely principled. Arvin Sloane is an almost Shakespearean villain, a hateful figure who has an air of tragedy throughout and with him and Jack Bristow at its core the series rarely wavers.

Jennifer Garner's career was made by her work here and it's easy to see why. She's got an unusual combination of fantastic physical presence and tremendous vulnerability, bringing credibility and humanity to a role which is a quarter step down from a superheroine. Whilst some scripts take Sydney dangerously close to melodrama, Garner's willingness to throw herself into the physical aspects of the role and her portrayal of Sydney's gradual collapse under inconceivable stress more than make up for it. Sydney Bristow is the next evolution of the genre heroine and without Garner's work here you wouldn't get the women of *Lost*, *Fringe* or *Leverage*.

The rest of the cast also impress, especially Vartan's genial and quietly driven CIA handler and Grunberg doing great work as his fiercely professional comic relief. Also worth of note is Bradley Cooper as Will, a man who's life is turned upside down by the events of the season, alternately terrified and fascinated by the Pandora's Box he's opened.

Alias is a truly unique series, an eccentric hybrid of jet-black spy thriller, family drama and Raiders of the Lost Ark adventure series. It's aged remarkably well and remains the only place you'll find Quentin Tarantino, kickboxing female spies and ancient prophecies jostling for position. Spycraft has never looked prettier and rarely been more fun.



by Justin Gustainis,
Solaris Books
rrp £10.99

Almost a year after the events in *Black Magic Woman* we rejoin Quincey Morris as he's doing a little private investigating. This turns up some interesting information, and when Agent Fenton of the FBI gets in contact about a range of murders similar to those they had investigated the previous year it is clear that something deeper is going on. Not only this, but it turns out Agent Fenton's new partner is, unbeknownst to him, more than meets the eye: a white witch.

When Libby Chastain is the victim of an attempted murder in her own apartment she starts to worry - not many people should have been able to get past her protections, especially not the goons who did. Unknown to her is the fact that this is happening across the country to many white witches in the sisterhood. As events start to converge it is clear that all those on the side of good must pull together to stop evil prevailing.

Walter Grobius, the mega rich billionaire, is dying. After being foiled the previous year in his attempts to gather the vital ingredients that will help him achieve eternal life, he is now relying on Pardee, a black magician of great power, to give a successful conclusion to what could be his last chance. While Pardee prepares for the event on the blackest night in memory - a full mooned Walpurgis Night - Quincey, Libby and company are quickly putting the pieces of the puzzle together, but will it be in time?

Last month I read *Black Magic Woman*, the first book in the Quincey Morris/Libby Chastain series. I loved it. Not only was the book a page turner, it had great characters and I didn't feel out of my depth at all reading outside my usual comfort zone of sci-fi. I had *Evil Ways* sitting on the shelf when I finished *BMW*, but I decided to hang off for few weeks before jumping into it - I wanted to know that I had a book on my shelf that had great promise and I knew I would enjoy. Joining company again with Quincey, Libby and a few other familiar faces was a welcome treat - it felt like rejoining a group of friends.

Although the series is named after Quincey and Libby, Agent Fenton also makes a reappearance here, and not just a small one. By recruiting Quincey onto the FBI payroll as a consultant in the case it felt much more like it was heading towards a small team that tackles the bad guys, rather than the lonely hero, or even duo. Add to this the fact that Fenton's new partner, Colleen O'Donnell, is a white witch who is hiding her abilities from him, we have a great cast of characters involved in an interesting and gripping plot.

The location is also an interesting part of the story because it's not set in one place. Although this could be a hindrance to many novels it works perfectly here, from Iraq to Chicago (and the pub of another famous wizard) we get a good description and a good feel of the places we visit. This also puts the characters in the position of not having a regular office or home and in that slightly uncomfortable situation of nowhere to go when it hits the fan. Again, this really helps with the story and the sense of danger involved - not that it needs anything extra when the bad guys can break down the protections of the white witches wherever they are.

This brings me to the central point of the story and the very real, credible threat facing the sisterhood. Gustainis pulls it off remarkably well and the tension I felt when bad things started to happen really kicked the story into another gear. The descriptiveness employed in the telling of this story not only keeps the narrative flowing amazingly well, it also brings a vivid picture to mind with some of the more spectacular scenes.

Bottom line, this is a book that I not only enjoyed, but has reinforced the fact that I'll be a fan of Quincey and Libby for life and I'll eagerly await the next addition to this great series. Highly recommended!

FEATURES

Radiodays



by neil gardner

"Tis The Season To Be Sci-Fi"

Pinch yourself because you are not dreaming; we are not all experiencing some strange mass hallucination; and no, we haven't died and gone to some Sci-Fi lovers heaven! It is March 2009 and BBC Radio is running a Science Fiction Season across Radios 3, 4 and 7. Not one series, or a documentary, or a repeat of something from the 1970's, but a veritable smorgasbord of genre dramas and comedies from some truly impressive writing and performing talent. The announcement of the season caused no small amount of debate within our community, mostly because the Commissioning Editor of Drama at Radio 4 claimed that big name actors were now interested in doing Sci-Fi because Dr Who had made the genre 'sexy'. Much of the blog-sphere was up in ampersands about his statement, and I must admit that it took me by surprise for all of a few seconds, before I remembered that this was the same Commissioning Editor who had confessed to me a couple of years ago that he 'didn't get' science fiction. He certainly doesn't if that statement is anything to go by. But let's not be overly unfair on him, after all, he has put together this season of new programmes, and for that we should all be profoundly grateful.

As one of the producer/directors of the season, I have been asked by numerous journalists and fans, friends and interested parties how the season came to be. I think it would be remiss of me not to mention the role HUB had in the decision by the BBC to run this season. Back in the early mists of HUB history, when it was still a published magazine, rather than this shiny new-media behemoth it has become, I wrote several Radio Days articles, one of which was an investigation of 'Where The Heck Has All The Sci-Fi Gone From Radio?!" As research for the piece I interviewed Jeremy Howe, the Commissioning Editor of Drama for Radio 4, as well as Caroline Raphael, the former Drama Comm Ed and current Comedy Comm Ed for Radio 4. We spoke at length about where Sci-Fi had gone, and they revealed that part of the reason was their lack of knowledge of the genre, as well as a fear of multiple failed attempts to create a 'new' Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy (I've never understood the fear of trying to emulate HHGTTG...we should fear poor copies of it instead!) They were also wary of pushing 'zap guns and alien invasions' on the traditional Radio 4 audience. To their credit, they invited me and other producers to recommend and discuss Sci-Fi works and writers that we thought could fit the network's output, and promised that the genre would find a way back on air.

Well, they have lived up to their promise, and not just on Radio 4. Radio 3 has also become a part of the season, as well as the recently re-branded Radio 7. And can you believe it...a TV trailer as well! Radio being cross-promoted on TV? Has the world turned upside down? OK, so the trailer does seem to scare the bejeesus out of most people, and I have had to tell endless people that it is a Sci-Fi season NOT a horror season. But these are mere peccadilloes, we have a Sci-Fi season and I for one am overjoyed. And so should you, as these are all brand new productions, from some very talented people, all of who have a great love for the genre...this is no cookie-cutter production run, this is real passion production radio!

OK, so yes, I have produced two of the plays that are in the season, and my adaptation of Robert Rankin's "The Brightonomicon" is also a part of the season, so yes, technically, I do have a natural predisposition towards being positive about the season. Hey, I got paid to make stuff, as a jobbing radio blokey that is 50% of why I do this job, and right now we all need work, eh? And yes, I am going to use my opportunity here to ask you, ever so nicely, to tune in to my productions in particular, sorry, but wouldn't you? But before I do so, I wanted to consider the future, once the season has ended. This season is an experiment for the BBC, they are still very wary of Sci-Fi on the radio, and even though we have proven that they have access to unique writers, top talent and compelling stories, we still need to show that the audience have responded positively. It is natural that for some of the Radio 4 audience, this season is going to be a switch-off, in the same way that for me the endless weeks of kitchen-sink dramas and 'rat-catcher by day, thief-catcher by night' cop thrillers makes me retune to Absolute Radio! As producers we have been careful in our approach to the season, by creating subtle Sci-Fi, think-pieces, existential concepts and, well let's say it, less overt Sci-Fi stuff (no zap guns and alien invasions...well, maybe some!). Does it matter if the Commissioning Editors like what we have made? Not really. Here's a trade secret... they don't actually hear everything we make, and we rarely find out whether they liked something or not, unless someone writes in to praise the programme, or complain about it! No, what the BBC are looking for

is proof that the audience have enjoyed having Sci-Fi as a part of the schedules...not take it over, but be an integral part that should always be considered, rather than feared. What we as producers want, is to be able to propose Sci-Fi ideas and not have them rejected out of hand. I believe fervently that a weekly or fortnightly slice of Sci-Fi can sit happily alongside The Archers, the Today Programme, Woman's Hour, Book At Bedtime, Sunday Feature and all the other staples of the BBC schedules. But we need YOU to do your bit. If you enjoy any of the programmes in the season please send an email or letter to the BBC and tell them. Please let them know that Sci-Fi being back on the BBC is a great thing, and that as listeners you would be more than happy to hear more of it. You can use the message boards at any of the network websites, or write to Jeremy Howe at the address at the end of this article.

So then, on to the self-promotion! When the season was announced, almost 2 years ago now, I started speaking to a host of top Sci-Fi writers, the likes of Paul Cornell, Kim Newman, Jonathan Courtenay Grimwood, Mike Maddox, Martin Day, Jonathan Clements, and many others. There were five Radio 4 afternoon plays to bid for, and between us we pitched 13 ideas. After much waiting, I was finally gobsmacked to be awarded two of the coveted five slots..."Cry Babies" by Kim Newman and "Mayflies" by Mike Maddox. Some of the other proposals still sit in commissioning limbo as the commissioning editor liked them but didn't know what to do with them (useful for future commissioning rounds!). And so the adventure began. One of my favourite parts of the job is working with writers to develop the original concept into full script, and working with Mike and Kim was a wonderfully collaborative affair. Both have a strong sense of what makes science fiction so popular to so many of us, and neither had any problem with keeping things subtle. We played with some of the ideas, changing characters from boys to girls, adding gags, removing jargon...and of course, being careful of the ever-present Daily Mail censorship (called compliance in the broadcasting world).

Once the scripts were completed in late 2008, I went about the task of casting. I had several priorities here. The first was the network's wariness of Sci-Fi, and the belief (wholly untested) that the BBC audience would be scared off by anything too overtly Sci-Fi. The second was a desire to give my writers some great acting talent. And the third was to prove to everyone that I could deliver big name talent, most of which were not known for their Sci-Fi performances. And I think we have done quite well. "Cry Babies" stars Alex Jennings (The Queen), Natasha Little (Teachers), Colin Morgan (Merlin), Rupert Degas (The Brightonicon), Sarah Douglas (Superman 2), Sia Berkeley (Skins), Sam Alexander (Skins), Emma Darwall-Smith (The Snow Queen), Rob Kendrick, Emma Handy (Wire In The Blood) and Kirsty Stuart (Doctors). "Mayflies" stars Derek Jacobi (everything!), Jason Isaacs (Harry Potter), Catherine McCormack (Braveheart), Danny Webb (Valkyrie), Sarah Douglas (Superman 2) and Steven Cree (The Brightonicon). I think Mike Maddox, the writer of "Mayflies", nearly had a heart attack when I told him who was in the play!

Believe it or not, this was formally my directorial debut for Radio 4 (even though I have produced, directed and engineered hundreds of hours of programming for them, this was my first time being the commissioned director!). To help me out and offer advice and experience I called on the mighty Dirk Maggs to be my Executive Producer, and he brought some terrific insights throughout the process, and helped calm me down during a few tense moments. I also knew that I needed a great composer, and someone I could rely upon. So one more time I returned to my coterie from "The Brightonicon" and recruited Jeremy Paul Carroll to do the music for both plays. Finally, and for the first time ever, I handed the engineering reigns over to someone else. I knew that my usual 'do everything myself' routine would not be the best approach, and I wanted an experienced drama engineer to worry about all the technical things so I could focus on pretending to know what I was doing as a director. Also, the engineer is always the most important second set of ears you could ever want. So say hello to Simon Willey, who not only engineers dramas and radio programmes but also for a lot of big name musicians.

Well, we got on with recording the two plays back to back over 4 days in mid January 2009, and then Simon and I spent almost 100 hours editing and mastering them, and all of a sudden, after two years of effort, they were done. And now I place them in your hands (well, ears) and hope that you enjoy them as much as we do. "Mayflies" is a think-piece, a consideration of what we should do when we receive a message from outer space...does the message bring nirvana or disaster? "Cry Babies" is a what-if fable, a parody based on cryogenics and modern day parenting. Experienced from the perspective of a cryogenically reared child, it asks some pertinent questions about our own society, as well as warning us of a future we really don't want to see come to pass!

Alongside these two wonderfully made productions (ho ho!), you can also hear "The Time Machine" by HG Wells, featuring music by Jon Nicholls, "The State of the Art" by Iain M Banks, adapted by Paul Cornell, "Blake's 7" reimagining, "Rendezvous With Rama" by Arthur C Clarke, "The Death of Grass" on Woman's Hour, "Bring Me The Head of Philip K Dick" on Radio 3 and "Homesick" on Radio 4. Everything can be heard for 7 days on the iPlayer, and undoubtedly through other more nefarious means as well! "Cry Babies" and "Mayflies" will be released in their full-length 60 minute incarnations as downloads in April. And

hey, don't forget "The Brightonomicon" is being repeated on Radio 7 as well as being available as a rather tasty 7 CD boxset!

So here is the season in full...on behalf of all my fellow producers, directors, composers, writers, performers and engineers, I hope you enjoy what you hear, and please, if you do, let the BBC know!

22 Feb 2009 18:00	BBC Radio 7	The Scaryflies
22 Feb 2009 20:00	BBC Radio 3	The Time Machine
28 Feb 2009 21:00	BBC Radio 3	Salmonella Man on Planet Porno
28 Feb 2009 09:00	BBC Radio 7	Blake's 7
28 Feb 2009 18:00	BBC Radio 7	The Twilight Zone: The Hitch-Hiker
28 Feb 2009 18:40	BBC Radio 7	Temple of the Winds
1 Mar 2009 11:00	BBC Radio 7	The Sofa of Time
1 Mar 2009 15:00	BBC Radio 4	Rendezvous with Rama
1 Mar 2009 18:30	BBC Radio 7	The Drowned World
2 Mar 2009 10.45	BBC Radio 4	The Death of Grass
2 Mar 2009 18:00	BBC Radio 7	Planet B
2 Mar 2009 18:30	BBC Radio 7	Oneira
3 Mar 2009 11:00	BBC Radio 7	Alpha
4 Mar 2009 11:00	BBC Radio 7	Omega
5 Mar 2009 11:00	BBC Radio 7	2025
5 Mar 2009 14:15	BBC Radio 4	The State of the Art
8 Mar 2009 20:00	BBC Radio 3	Bring Me The Head of Philip K Dick
9 Mar 2009 14:15	BBC Radio 4	Cry Babies
9 Mar 2009 18:30	BBC Radio 7	The Brightonomicon
11 Mar 2009 14:15	BBC Radio 4	Homesick
13 Mar 2009 14:15	BBC Radio 4	Mayflies

If you would like to contact the BBC to show your support for more science fiction on BBC Radio, here are the details:

Jeremy Howe, Commissioning Editor, Drama, BBC Radio 4
BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London. W1A 1AA

Or visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbradio4/>



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