

February 2000

Issue 341

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chair-Vernon Brown, Secretary-Dave Hardy, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-Martin Tudor, Ordinary Members-Anne Woodford & William McCabe, Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 30 & 31 Chair-Tony Berry.

Can you judge a book by its cover?

**A discussion with Fangorn, Dave
Hardy, Rog Peyton & Chris Morgan**

on

Friday 11th February 2000, *

**from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge, second floor,
Britannia Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union
Passageway).**

**Drinks may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine level
and taken up to the Lichfield on the second floor.**

**Admittance: Members £2.00 (£1.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £3.00
(£2.00 Unwaged). (*Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the
Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being
produced.*) (*VB: the second Friday of the month.)**

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified).

The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £16.00 per person, or £21.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Mids, B65 0RL, (e-mail enquiries via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum

Group News to: Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk)

Can you judge a book by its cover?

Well can you? I think we probably all know books whose covers have irritated us. My copy of Alexei Panshin's *Rite of Passage* springs to mind. The hero is a short dark haired girl who is dropped together with other children to see who can survive with minimal equipment on a semi-civilised planet. The cover shows a strapping Nordic girl, sporting radio equipment and gun. A more recent book with an even higher irritation factor for me is the hardback edition of *A Civil Campaign* by Lois McMaster Bujold. The hero of *her* books is Miles Vorkosigan, damaged by an assassination attempt of his parents while still in the womb. After years of surgery he just tops five feet tall. So why does the cover of this book show him towering at an estimated six feet?

Certainly, though, there've been many times when the cover has sold a book to me. I think particularly of the covers for the Brian Aldiss books I bought as a teenager. The covers of the NEL editions of *Space, Time and Nathaniel* and *The Airs of Earth* sold the books to me before I ever opened the covers. The Ballantine edition of John Brunner's *Shockwave Rider*, the Penguin edition of Alfred Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!* Or the cover for Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Lions of Al-Rassan* have all, at different times attracted me by their covers. Generic covers have done the same. The yellow Gollancz jackets in the library, the grey Women's Press books, the purple Corgi SF Collector's Library (not recently of course) have stood out on shelves as containing the sort of fiction I've wanted to read.

Fangorn, painter of some of the best fantasy book-covers I've seen and our own Dave Hardy with his stunning alien landscapes, discuss the effect of covers with Rog Peyton, bookseller, and Chris Morgan, a man who appreciates good art and good writing. What do you think? Come and join in.

Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

March 3rd, noon: Robin Hobb will be signing her new book.

April 18th, 6pm: Guy Gavriel Kaye will be signing his new hardback.

If anyone would like signed copies of any of David Gemmel's books please contact Andromeda.

Forthcoming Events

11 FEBRUARY 2000: Meeting at the Britannia. A panel discussion with Dave Hardy, Fangorn, Chris Morgan and Rog Peyton.

10 MARCH 2000: Meeting at the Britannia. To be announced.

25-26 March 2000: Memorabilia Europe's largest science fiction, film, cult tv, pop and collectors' fair. Hall 9, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Booking Office 0121 767 4555.

21-24 April: 2Kon, Eastercon at the Central Hotel, Glasgow with guests Guy Gavriel Kay, Deborah Turner Harris and Katherine Kutz. Reg £25, £20 unwaged; supp. £15. Contact 2Kon, 30 Wodburn Terrace, St Andrews, KY16 8BA. E-mail: 2kon@dcs.st-and.ac.uk
<http://www.theory.cs.st-and.ac.uk/2Kon>

26-29 May: Plokta.Con, small con at the Holiday Inn, Leicester. GoH Ken MacLeod. Further information from 3 York St, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH, UK, or plokta.con@plokta.com.

8-10 September: FantasyCon 24, the annual convention of the British Fantasy Society at the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham. GoHs Storm Constantine, Stan Nicholls. Further information from 46 Oxford Rd, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT, UK or <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/files/fc200reg4.jpg>

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVA CON 30 at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Chris Priest, Special Guest Rog Peyton, Guest Artist David A Hardy. Attending membership costs £28.00 until Easter 2000, after which it may rise again. Contact: Steve Lawson, Registrations, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n30/n30.html>

13-16 April 2001: Paragon, Eastercon at the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool with guests Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lisanne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership currently £25 Attending, £15 Supporting, £12.50 Junior and £5 Child. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114 281 1572. e-mail steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk

Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise

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readers to contact organisers prior to travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses. Please mention the BRUM GROUP NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.

If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor (e-mail yvonne@hallsfarm.sofinet.co.uk).

If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them about) please feel free to write a report or review and send it to the editorial address.

Announcements

As you probably noticed from the cover, Vernon Brown is now Chairman of the Brum Group with Dave Hardy as Secretary. Martin Tudor has taken over as Publicity Officer (and remains photocopying monitor). The rest of us remain the same. If you want to contact a committee member you can write to Vernon at:
Vernon C. Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH.

You can phone me, Yvonne Rowse, on 01299 400750.

If anyone is interested in a meal before the meeting please get in touch with me and we'll organise something.

Following the quiz last month I received the following e-mails:
From Dave Langford:

Dear Yvonne,

It's always nice to feature in a quiz, but unfortunately the question "Which British sf author writes a monthly column for SFX?" has more than one answer. John Brosnan does it too.

best: Dave

To which Steve Green replied:

Shall I fall upon my sword now? Guess I should buy SFX more than whenever Sarah Michelle Gellar's on the cover (Ann's a BUFFY fan). Are we sure JB is fully British? I demand a dna test Anyway, John writes horror under a scientificational veneer* -- Steve

*This is, of course, a kneejerk defence and, as such, wouldn't stand up to close scrutiny for a moment.

And then, shortly after:

Further checks prove that - unlike, say, Mel Gibson - Mr Brosnan is 100% Australian. Hah! -- Steve

Ray Gibberd from Andromeda suffered a recurrence of his brain tumor. He has been operated on and will be undergoing more chemotherapy. Things are looking good. I know you will all join me in wishing him the very best of health.

Um. Three efficient people handed book reviews to me at the AGM. I read them and filed them somewhere safe...and then we had our kitchen ripped out resulting in bits of kitchen stuff filling the rest of the house and, and... Anyway. I can't find them. If you'd be so kind, could you give me another copy? Please. I grovel in abject apology.

Book Reviews

THE BOOK OF SKULLS, Robert Silverberg, Millennium, pbk, £6.99, 222p.

Star Rating *****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

A strange book this, and strangely compelling. I picked it up because it was a book in the Masterworks series that I hadn't read. I read the plot synopsis with a certain lack of enthusiasm. Four students discover a manuscript, The Book Of Skulls, which reveals the existence of a sect offering immortality to those who can complete its initiation rite. They discover the sect is now based in Arizona and set out with the intention of seeking eternal life. People are only accepted in groups of four, and of those four, two must die for the others to succeed.

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'Ho hum,' I thought, and yet the first page yanked me in and I couldn't put the book down. The viewpoints of all four students, Eli, Ned, Oliver and Timothy, tell the story. Almost immediately I knew which of the four I wanted to live and I spent the rest of the book in dread for the fate of my favourites.

The first half of the book tells the journey to Arizona, the second half tells of the sect and the initiation, but much more, the whole book is full of the passions, reasons, souls of the four students. In a field where characters are often subservient to ideas, this is a wonderfully balanced book, beautifully and subtly written, full of the ambiguity of life. At the end you wonder if it *is* immortality they have achieved and, if so, if it is really worth it.

Well, well worth reading and re-reading.

THIS ALIEN SHORE, C S Freidman, Voyager, pbk, £6.99, 564pp.
Star Rating *****
Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

I hadn't heard of C S Friedman. I wasn't excited by the blurb, 'A cross between cyberpunk and Star Wars.' But hell, it was SF and it was sitting among a box full of fantasy so I picked it up.

I instantly warmed to her acknowledgement of Cordwainer Smith's inspiration. Almost immediately I realised that a comparison with Star Wars was an insult to this book, a book with a complex and fascinating background and intriguing characters.

The first faster than light drive, used to establish colonies on every planet in reach, also worked irreparable genetic damage on anyone making the journey. The resulting people, called Hausman variants, hate the Earth which cut them off without a lifeline in fear of infection of the human gene pool. This is the basic background, peopled with aliens and monsters that are human, Guildsmen who are the only beings capable of piloting ships through the ainniq, at huge cost to their sanity, a vast computer web and a proliferation of interconnected lives.

Against this background, Jamisia, a young woman with biological brain-ware more valuable and extensive than would seem reasonable and a cast of intrusive characters in her head, is fleeing assassination and attempting to understand herself. Kio Masada, Gueran, is also attempting to understand something, a computer virus infiltrating the web.

It really would be pointless to try to explain more. The story is too rich and complex for reasonable synopsis. Go out and buy it immediately.

RETURN TO LANKHMAR, Fritz Leiber, Millennium, £6.99, 454pp

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Star Rating ***

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Loads of people rave over the Grey Mouser and Fafhrd, the heroes of the Lankhmar books. This one includes an introduction by Neil Gaiman where he calls the book 'an enchanting confection of magic and adventure, funny and witty and sane.' I don't know. Somehow I've never quite found the magic of Lankhmar, maybe because it's very much fantasy for guys.

The first half of the book is a short novel about the attempted take-over of Lankhmar by intelligent rats. The second half is a series of interconnected short stories, some of which I feel were only included for completeness.

Um. What can I say? I struggled with this. It was well written but I didn't much enjoy it. If you like swords n sorcery you might well find the magic I missed.

"Cavalcade" – by Alison Sinclair. Millennium paperback - £5.99

Reviewed by Malcolm Jefferies.

"Cavalcade" is a First Contact novel. I've always enjoyed First Contact stories, from "The Mote In God's Eye" to "To Serve Man", possibly because the event might conceivably happen at any time, rather than waiting for (say) the discovery of FTL drives, time machine technology, force field projectors or the turning all of the spare minerals in the Solar System into a whopping big Dyson Sphere. So how does "Cavalcade", nominated for the Arthur C Clarke Award, bear up?

Well, Alison Sinclair's writing style is a bit of a bugger to get your head round, for a start. It's a bit like J G Ballard's, very dry, laconic and somehow faintly odd, and also reminded me of Ramsay Campbell, in that something important is often casually slipped into the middle of a sentence and you don't notice the implications until you think "hang on a minute..." and go back and re-read it. Also, the paperback is quite a thick one and when I opened it they've set it in a pretty small font, so the novel is, TARDIS-like, bigger than it looks on the outside. Having said all that, though...

An extra-terrestrial ship enters Earth's orbit. After weeks of Mankind trying all sorts of ways to communicate, the aliens finally reply, in the form of an invitation. They are, they say, representatives of a mixed community of sentient species which have been exploring the galaxy for

millennia and any humans who wish to join them are welcome: after which nothing more is heard from them. A wide variety of people take up the aliens' offer and, on the night, all of the thousands of volunteers are transported to a huge organic chamber within the ship, edged by caves and tunnels, including scientist Stan Morgan and an official NASA/Army Team. All digital watches have stopped, whereas someone's clockwork watch shows that two and a quarter hours have been lost in transit. It soon becomes apparent that nothing electronic works - palmtop computers, torches, radios, even a man's pacemaker and the resus kit which fails to save him - and although no food has been provided, their alien hosts are nowhere to be seen.

Much like the characters themselves, you are very much dropped in at the deep end of the book - within the first three chapters a dozen characters have been presented, with hardly any background detail, leaving you to find out even the most basic things about them as you go. The volunteer humans find themselves left with just their own supplies and little of the trappings of civilisation, and since they have all chosen themselves, and as such haven't been screened for any kind of suitability, they are of wide and differing backgrounds and social strata: so you have organisational and military types, criminals, pregnant girls, on-the-run murderers, medical and scientific specialists, cat owners, anarchists and a growing, exclusively female society, all having to deal with apparent comfortable imprisonment, and implied hidden alien captors, in their own ways. However, their hosts are testing their human guests: with experimentation, the walls of the caves can be drawn upon, moulded or tunnelled through, and it is found that more chambers exist, each housing more volunteers. Each chamber's occupants have been grouped together so all the principal English speakers are all together, as are all speakers of Spanish, or Arabic... which leads to historic enemies having to live closely together. The alien environment begins to produce food for the guests, and as people explore, they start to discover more about, and how they must learn to communicate with, their mysterious alien hosts...

"Cavalcade" has few in the way of new First Contact ideas to present, but did I find myself warming to, and being drawn by the interesting predicament the volunteer humans find themselves in, so I sort of liked and enjoyed it. Alison Sinclair's style of writing doesn't have an easy or appealing rhythm, and I assume that her Laptop has a Thesaurus Generator which is occasionally turned on as she writes - infrequently, what reading momentum has been built up is shattered as (I hope for her sake) without her knowing, her PC replaces a five word phrase with an

obscure multi-syllabic word, forcing a hasty grope for the dictionary. Also, having been abruptly dropped in the story at the beginning, I found the novel accelerating in pace as all sorts of things start to go pear-shaped on the ship, only to have everything all of a sudden go all right again in the space of one page and a postscript – so a swift and sketched-over finish too. Still, I'm a Fake Fan, so what do I know? Give "Cavalcade" a try if you fancy filling in the gaps yourself, pondering on a few new ideas and learning the occasional new word that you'll never use again.

The Jophan Report #128
by Martin Tudor

The Rocky Horror Shows returns to Birmingham in March. It will run at the Alexandra Theatre from 27th March to 1 April. Tickets cost £13.50-£22.50, contact the Box Office on 0870-607-7533.

Planet Time is a travelling Birmingham Mac production, for a young audience, of the first ever trip to Mars. As dizzy Dr Squash travels back and forward in time the mischievous Milly the Millennium Bug wreaks havoc. Written by Richard Da Costa and presented by Chloe Bounce, it will be staged in the Solihull Arts Complex Library Theatre at 2pm on Saturday 18 March, tickets are £3.00. Call the Box Office on 0121-704-6962.

Dazzle is "a brilliantly funny parody of Star Trek" from the SOSage Factory, again at the Solihull Arts Complex Library Theatre it will run from 23-25 March (7.30pm each night), tickets are £7 (£5 concessions) from Bob Kay on 0121-743-2648 or the Box Office (above).

Thunderbirds will become a game for Gameboy in the fall. British computer game maker SCi Entertainment said it would release the title to coincide with the re-broadcast of digitally remastered episodes of the show on the BBC.

A version of a Thunderbirds game will also be developed for the Playstation II platform, the company said. SCi acquired worldwide game rights to the 32-part children's series in December.

Creator Gerry Anderson expects the adventures of International Rescue to move to the big screen after the digitally remastered episodes have been shown on BBC2. However, the movie version will use computer-generated images rather than the marionettes used previously.

Fans of David Gemmell will be delighted to learn that the long-awaited third Waylander novel will be published by Bantam Press on 9 March

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(hardcover, £16.99). Entitled *Hero in the Shadows* it is set in the Duchy of Kydor, 2,000 miles from the lands of the Drenai, and features Kysumu the Swordsman, Yu Yu Liang the ditch digger, Ustarte the Beast-Princess and, of course, the mysterious Waylander.

Other Del Rey releases include in February: *Area 51* by Robert Doherty (Paperback, Dell, £5.99); *Colonization: Down to Earth* by Harry Turtledove (Hardcover, Del Rey, £26.00); *Colonization: Second Contact* by Harry Turtledove (Paperback, Del Rey, £6.99); *Double Full Moon Night* by Gentry Lee (Paperback, Spectra, £6.99); *First Evidence* by Ken Goddard (Paperback, Bantam, £6.99); *The Memory of Fire* by George Foy (Trade Paperback, Spectra, £13.95); *The Moreau Factor* by Jack L Chalker (Paperback, Del Rey, £6.99); *Star Wars: The New Jedi Order--Dark Tide: Onslaught* by Michael A Stackpole (Paperback, Del Rey, £6.99 and Audio Cassette £18.00); *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace Facsimile Script* by George Lucas (Trade Paperback, Del Rey, £18.95); *The Tenth Planet: Oblivion* by Dean Wesley Smith and Kristine Kathryn Rusch (Paperback, Del Rey, £6.50).

With March featuring: *Star Wars: Episode I the Phantom Menace* by Terry Brooks (Paperback); *Enchantment* by Orson Scott Card (Paperback); *A Calculus of Angels* by J Gregory Keyes (Paperback); *The Crusading Wizard* by Christopher Stasheff (Paperback); *Dragon's Egg* by Robert L. Forward (Trade paperback).

Boston has launched the third bid for the 2004 Worldcon, according to the web-page of MCFI, they are bidding for the 2004 Worldcon to be held in Boston, following their unsuccessful 2001 bid, which moved from Boston to Orlando, and the 1998 Boston bid which was not organised by MCFI. It appears that the high hotel occupancy in Boston, and the consequent lack of incentive for sites to agree to acceptable room rates, is now easing.

Presupporting memberships are available for \$12 or Intergalactic Friends memberships are \$75. Contact: Boston in 2004, P.O. Box 1010, Framingham, MA 01701, email info@mcfi.org, or visit their Web pages at www.mcfi.org.

There are already declared bids for 2004 from Charlotte (North Carolina) and "Nieuw Amsterdam" (New York).

Kim Stanley Robinson, best known for his Mars Trilogy, said he is at work on a new novel, an alternative history. "My alternative history is just of the 'what if?' variety that changes some incident in our past, and follows out some of the results of that change," the writer told fans during a chat last week on TheOneRing.net Web site.

Robinson also said he was delighted about the recent announcement that NASA and the Mars Society have chosen the colors of its proposed Mars flag based on the titles of Robinson's books Red Mars, Green Mars and Blue Mars.

"I love it!" he said. "It was a great surprise, one of the greatest I've ever gotten over the Internet for sure, because I had not heard anything about this flag until I saw the press release over the 'net, put out by the Mars Society. It was really very nice of them to acknowledge my trilogy as the inspiration for their flag, and it has gotten a lot of great publicity. Now I want a copy of the flag."

One-time BSFG supremo and Novacon Chair Bernie Evans will doubtless be delighted to hear that EVERY pub and bar in Birmingham has been given the go-ahead to open half-an-hour earlier from 10am in a landmark decision by the city's licensing justices. It was once Bernie's proud boast that the Novacon bar always opened earliest when she negotiated with the hotel! It is hoped that this ruling, which has now stretched Britain's archaic licensing hours to the legal limit, will boost the city's efforts to become a major European location. The change, made by magistrates in early February, will bring Birmingham more in line with its European rivals and enable its growing number of Continental-style cafe bars to satisfy a previously unmet demand, especially from overseas visitors, for earlier opening. The ruling will affect every pub and bar in Birmingham - not just the city centre.

John MacGeoch, chairman of the city's Liquor Licensing Committee, said: "In particular, it will help the city's cafe bars to operate as near as legally possible to their counterparts on the Continent. Giving Birmingham a more European flavour is what was at the back of our minds in passing this change."

British licensing laws stipulate 11am-11pm opening, but there is leeway to open from 10am if licensing justices believe there is good reason. Birmingham's opening hours were rolled back to 10.30am several years ago but many felt that was still not early enough.

Steven Spielberg has confirmed speculation that his next directing project will be the SF film *Minority Report*, starring Tom Cruise and based on the Philip K Dick story of the same name. "Right now, *Minority Report* is next," Spielberg told the *New York Daily News*.

"Tom Cruise spent three hours at my house today talking with me about the movie," Spielberg said. "Of course, with movies, you never know what can happen to bring about a delay."

Spielberg said he remains interested in directing a feature film

version of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter young adult novel series. "If a delay were to happen in this case, then I would do Harry Potter next. But right now, it's *Minority Report*, then Harry."

Cruise told the Daily News, "This is a dream to be able to work with Steven. I can't wait to get on the set with him just to see how he does it. He is such a visionary."

The Irish poet Seamus Heaney won the £23,000 Whitbread Book of the Year Award last month for his translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*. Heaney, 60, had been the bookies' joint favourite with Joanne Rowling, for her *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Heaney won the same award in 1996 with his collection *The Spirit Level*.

Beowulf beat *Harry Potter* into second place by a "clear" margin, said Dr Eric Anderson, chairman of the judges. But another judge said that the vote was five to four and that their 90-minute meeting had been tense.

Rowling, who has earned £14 million from her phenomenally successful books about a boy wizard and who guards her privacy, stayed away from the ceremony saying that she had flu. Her entry was named *Children's Book of the Year* and Rowling has since been named *Author of the Year* in the *British Book Awards*.

Star Trek's Scotty, actor James Doohan, will be a father again just weeks after his 80th birthday. Doohan, who played the Scottish engineer on the original *Star Trek* television series, will be a proud father for the third time. His wife Wende Doohan, 43, is expected to give birth to the couple's third child, a girl, on 1 April, according to the actor's agent Steve Stevens. Doohan will be 80 on 3 March.

Doohan told the DAILY MAIL that fathering children in old age ran in his family - his grandfather was 72 when the actor's mother was born. Doohan and his wife, who live near Seattle, already have two sons, ages 21 and 23.

The Canadian-born actor recently signed a deal to serve as a spokesman for a new online bill-paying service and has a lead role in a film, *The Duke*, scheduled for release this summer.

Argentinean fan Mae Strelkov died on January 27. A prolific and fascinating letter writer Mae was perhaps best known for her incredible hectography artwork, for which she boiled down cow bones to make her own gelatine. US fan Richard Brandt has made a selection of this available on the web at www.fortunecity.com/roswell/quatermass/87/mae/

A E van Vogt, the prolific writer who helped shape the Golden Age of Science Fiction, died on 26 January of complications of pneumonia in Los Angeles. He was 87. Van Vogt, a native of Canada who lived in the United States, had suffered from Alzheimer's disease for a number of years.

Van Vogt, who went by the nickname "Van," was best known for his first novel, *Slan*; the Weapons Shops stories; and the Null-A sequence of books.

Kurt Vonnegut is in critical but stable condition after a fire broke out in his home in New York City. Vonnegut suffered from smoke inhalation.

Comic book artist Gil Kane, 73, died last week at his home in Miami. During his career he re-introduced both the Atom and Green Lantern and drew many characters including Batman, Conan the Barbarian, Daredevil, the Hulk, Captain Marvel, Spider-Man, Superman and Thunder Agents. When DC revived Green Lantern in the 1950s, Kane took over its illustration and became well-known. He also re-introduced the Atom. Moving to Marvel, Kane became a model for new comic artists who studied his style.

About 10 million books tied to the release of *Star Wars: Episode I* in the United Kingdom have stayed on bookstore shelves, leading to the resignation of children's book executive. James Middlehurst, chief executive of Dorling Kindersley publishers, quit because of "a seriously misjudged" over-investment in the *Star Wars* books, according to the Associated Press.

The publishing house printed 13 million *Star Wars* books in the last year and a half. But sales totaled only about 3 million. The failure of the books will account for more than half of the publisher's expected pre-tax loss of \$41 million for the fiscal year.

Star Wars fans can reserve their copy of the *Episode I* video from participating retailers or at 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment's Web site. The video, to be released 4 April, comes in a regular version or a wide-screen collector's edition that features a 12-minute behind-the-scenes documentary, a 48-page booklet and a strip of 35-mm film snipped from one of the *Star Wars* release prints. Customers who pre-order also receive a poster.

But *Star Wars* fans frustrated that none of the movies are slated for DVD will have to wait a little longer. *Episode I* producer Rick

McCallum announced on the official Star Wars Web site, he adds "there's no conspiracy at work here, I assure you. It's really about exploiting an exciting medium in the best possible way. George [Lucas] hopes to do something special with the DVD release [of Episode I], but he isn't available to work on it right now since we're in pre-production on Episode II, with principal photography scheduled to begin this summer in Australia. Until George has some time to concentrate on it, we don't anticipate releasing any of the Star Wars movies on DVD in the foreseeable future," McCallum concludes.

Leonardo DiCaprio said he'll decide whether to play grown-up Anakin Skywalker in the upcoming Star Wars: Episode II only after he's read the script. Asked if he was interested in the role, DiCaprio he replied "I'll see when I read the script." The Titanic star confirmed meeting with Star Wars creator George Lucas about playing Anakin. "Yeah, I have talked to him," DiCaprio said. "There's no script as of yet." He added that Lucas had given him no firm date on when a script would be finished.

Unknown actor Jeffrey Garner is the new guy rumored to be in the running to play grown-up Anakin Skywalker in Star Wars: Episode II, according to the Dark Horizons Web site. Quoting an unnamed source at the Sundance Film Festival, the site says the Indiana-bred actor is "one of those very few 'up there'" for the coveted role. The site also says soap actor Jonathan Jackson told Empire Magazine that he will meet with Star Wars creator George Lucas to talk about the part in the next few days. Other names that have been linked with the part are Charles Hunnam and Jeff Garner.

Meanwhile, fans eager to see how supposed Anakin front-runner Leonardo DiCaprio would fit into the Star Wars universe can check out a fan-created phony Episode II trailer on The Force.net Web site.

The makers of *Battlefield Earth*, the John Travolta feature film version of Scientology founder L Ron Hubbard's SF novel of the same name, are aiming to give Star Wars creator George Lucas a run for his money. "Nobody had ever seen some of the things [Lucas] did in [Star Wars]," producer Jonathan Krane said in an interview on the official *Battlefield Earth* Web site. "We felt that *Battlefield Earth* should be done in a similar way," Krane said. "In other words, this would be the new science fiction movie for the new millennium, totally different from what anybody had ever seen before."

Krane, a fan of Hubbard's book, added that the movie will closely mirror the novel, which tells of the struggle of a band of human survivors against alien invaders. "The passion and vision that everyone has had has

been the same vision as the book," Krane said. "No one has tried to change that vision. The screenplay reflects the book."

John Travolta has already committed to a sequel to *Battlefield Earth*, the SF action film based on the L Ron Hubbard novel of the same name. Cory Mandell, who wrote the screenplay for *Battlefield Earth*, will write the script for the sequel, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

Barry Pepper, who plays the hero, will return in the sequel, and filmmakers are negotiating with director Roger Christian and actor Forest Whitaker to return as well. Mandell is expected to complete the script this summer, with tentative plans to begin shooting after Travolta completes his spring and fall 2000 projects. The sequel is targeted for a 2002 release. *Battlefield Earth*, from Franchise Pictures, is slated for release by Warner Brothers on 12 May.

Toy Story 2 took the award for best comedy or musical film at the 57th annual Golden Globe Awards ceremony on 23 January. The award was made based on a vote by members of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

Already the second biggest-grossing animated film of all time it could topple *The Lion King* when it opens in the UK this month.

Fahrenheit 451, a proposed movie directed by Mel Gibson based on the Ray Bradbury novel of the same name, has reportedly been shelved. The film has been a pet project of Gibson's for years, according to the *Dark Horizons* Web site. Now, Gibson told *USA Today*, "The window of opportunity for that one has passed me by." Gibson is already committed to other projects, including his next job, directing *Lady Gold*.

Beavis and Butt-head creator Mike Judge has signed on to direct *Messiah Complex*, a fantasy comedy about a virginal college student who believes he was cloned from the Shroud of Turin. Josh Sternin and Jeff Ventimilia wrote the screenplay, which was picked up by Columbia Pictures, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

Godzilla 2000: Millennium, a Japanese-produced installment of the longstanding *Godzilla* film franchise, will receive US distribution this summer by Sony Pictures. The movie has been breaking box-office records in Japan, according to the Hollywood trade papers. *Millennium*, which will be dubbed in English for the US, has the giant Toho Terror fighting an alien nemesis that has awakened from a 6,000-year slumber under the ocean. In addition to the theatrical release, Sony will distribute *Millennium* in video and on television.

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Meanwhile, producers Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich are still developing a US-made sequel to their 1998 Godzilla feature film.

Harlan Ellison will host *Beyond 2000*, a series of radio dramas based on classic SF stories and novels, which premieres on US National Public Radio in April, Ellison told SCI FI Wire. "This will be the most ambitious attempt at doing [SF] radio drama since the 1950s, when *Dimension X* and *X Minus One* were on," Ellison said.

The series will feature dramatizations of stories by Isaac Asimov, Fredric Brown, Ellison, Robert A. Heinlein, Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, A.E. van Vogt, Jules Verne, Kurt Vonnegut, H.G. Wells, Connie Willis, Roger Zelazny and others. The programs will showcase performances by actors Rene Auberjonois, Richard Dreyfuss, Samantha Eggar, Robert Foxworth, William Sanderson, Robin Williams and others.

The 26 one-hour programs are produced in cooperation with the Hollywood Theater of the Ear and were financed in part with a \$200,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Ellison said. Ellison helped select and adapt some of the stories. The programs will eventually be released as six cassette tapes by Dove Audio.

J Michael Straczynski, creator of *Babylon 5*, will write new adventures of the space station saga for publication in *Amazing Stories* magazine, he told fans on an Internet news group. He has already written and published two such stories; a third is coming this spring.

"The first one was a Londo story, because I really wanted to do something different and cool with the character, go inside his head and show the transition to being emperor, let folks know that inside he was still the same Londo," Straczynski said. "The second one with Lyta and G'Kar was mainly for fun, to play with them and see their relationship together out there.

"The third, which I just finished and turned in to *Amazing Stories*, and which will appear I think around May, was written with one express purpose: to set the proverbial cat amongst the proverbial pigeons with something that's going to send a ripple all through B5 fandom; it's a story I don't think anyone ever expected to see. Just the first line alone should stun a number of B5 folks," Straczynski said. "And that's all I'm going to say about it. But just know...there's a real toad-strangler coming up in May."

Meanwhile, the official *Babylon 5* magazine will start printing original stories by Straczynski starting in March. "These will be brand new stories, written just for the B5 magazine (the first of which will be determined by fan vote from four possible story areas)," Straczynski said.

Analog Science Fiction and Fact magazine and best-selling SF author David Brin are sponsoring a contest aimed at teachers who develop SF-themed Web sites. The "Webs of Wonder Contest" will award a \$1,000 cash prize and other awards to sites that best use science fiction stories to illustrate or enliven educational topics in the classroom.

"A chemistry teacher might illustrate part of her curriculum with a classic Hal Clement novel, while a social studies class would argue the ethical questions raised by Tom Godwin's famous story 'The Cold Equations,'" according to Analog. As an example, California high school teacher Don Braden created an award-winning Web site that taught lessons in history, society and ethics by using themes from the feature film *The Postman* and David Brin's novel of the same name, upon which the movie was based. (Details about rules and available supporting materials are available at the Analog Web site.)

Paper Tiger's Snarl newsletter reports that in the immediate run-up to Christmas it was discovered (by Patrick Nielsen Hayden of Tor) that the entire CD-ROM text of the Clute/Nicholls Encyclopedia of Science Fiction had been pirated on a website apparently belonging to the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, Tartu University, Estonia. There were other copyright works on the same site: more or less the complete works of Douglas Adams, John Wyndham's *Chocky*, William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, various books by AE Van Vogt . . .

A protest to the site from the EoSf's Technical Editor brought an unusually complacent response from Tartu's Richard Villems: "Students build sometimes their own pages (Internet is free) and create links to other pages - if that is the case, then I ask our sysadmin to try to disconnect such links. However, you should understand that there is little one can do to keep constant track on hundreds of students' activities. I apologize if something like that you suggested has happened. On the other hand, I found your tone and moralizing a bit exaggerated - a more academically friendly comment should have been more to the scale. This is at least what I think. Merry Christmas and all the best." When the scale of the problem was pointed out to him rather more formally by the publisher's m'learned friends, Villems - who probably thought it was a minor academic squabble - changed his tune and, so far as the Paper Tiger's Snarl newsletter can gather, has been a model of cooperation since.

Access to the pirated EoSf and the other books was swiftly blocked. Snarl added that it appeared that "the Tartu site was being used being used as a shield by the site's quondam designer, one Jaak Parik.

Within days after Tartu had blocked access via its own site, Parik was proudly displaying the pirated works on his own website. Once again the EoSf pages were rapidly blocked to public access. However, Messrs Adams, Gibson, etc., might care to investigate Mr Parik's activities for themselves. And, yes, Estonia is indeed subject to International Copyright Law."

Cate Blanchett, who will play elf-queen Galadriel in New Line's upcoming Lord of the Rings movies, says she's no stranger to JRR Tolkien, author of the trilogy of novels on which the films are based. "I was actually in *The Hobbit* when I was in high school, but I hadn't read the books, and now I'm delving into them," Blanchett told the Edmonton Sun newspaper.

Blanchett is now preparing for the arduous filming in New Zealand. "I start in June," she said. "It's a 14-month shoot. We're making three movies back to back. And I'll be in all three." She said she was drawn to the project by director Peter Jackson, "who has one of the most extraordinary, bizarre, out-there minds."

Extras playing the diminutive hobbits in the three films are working 14-hour days, a source told SCI FI Wire. Much of the time is spent in makeup or on the Hobbiton set at the films' New Zealand location.

"Apparently most of the hours spent at the makeup department involve putting on the prosthetic feet, which are latex and have to be glued on all over," the source said. "Once the day's shoot is over, they take about half an hour to get off, and every hobbit extra then gets a foot bath with eucalyptus oil - to help get off the glue - and then a long foot massage and powder. Something to look forward to at the end of the day, apparently."

Cyberpunk author William Gibson voiced his approval of *The Matrix* during a recent SCIFI.COM chat. "You know, I liked the damned thing," he said. "I thought it was a big, generous, essentially good-hearted movie, with no overtly fascist subtext. And I thought the William Gibson influence was adequately digested. No floating gristle."

Keanu Reeves confirmed earlier reports that he has signed on to reprise his role as Neo in the two upcoming sequels to 1999's hit film *The Matrix*. Speaking to Empire Online, Reeves said, "I just loved the ambition and creativity of the original. So when I was asked if I wanted to do the sequels there was only one answer. I can't wait! When I saw what [Matrix creators the Wachowski brothers] had planned for the rest of the trilogy, I just knew it was going to become something great."

Children aren't supposed to play with the toys based on The Matrix. That's because the action figures created for the R-rated movie carry labels saying they are "recommended for mature collectors," according to Entertainment Weekly.

Warner Bros. and N2Toys are marketing six action figures, complete with weapons, tied to the release of The Matrix home video. "There's been so much controversy over Hollywood and violence, we thought it wouldn't hurt us to be sensitive," Ron Hayes, president of N2Toys, told the magazine.

Meanwhile, the Dark Horizons Web site reports a rumor that comic book writer Grant Morrison is considering legal action against the brothers who created The Matrix, Andy and Larry Wachowski. Morrison has complained in the past that the movie resembles his comic book, The Invisibles, about a group of rebels fighting a force that secretly rules society. Do you think someone should tell him it isn't exactly an *original* idea...?

It has been confirmed that Gillian Anderson (FBI Agent Dana Scully) will write and direct her first episode of The X-Files, the 17th installment airing later this season, the official X-Files Web site confirmed. Meanwhile, David Duchovny (FBI Agent Fox Mulder), who has already directed one episode and provided story ideas for others, goes behind the camera again for the very next episode, No. 18.

Cyberpunk author William Gibson, who wrote the script for one X-Files episode, co-writes another with Tom Maddox; "First Person Shooter" has a tentative air date in the US of 27 February. And not to be left out: William B Davis (Cigarette Smoking Man) is scheduled to write episode No. 15, to be directed by Rob Bowman; the as-yet-untitled episode has a tentative air date in the US of 19 March.

On 17 January a complete fossil Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton, claimed to have the largest skull and longest teeth of any T. rex yet discovered, went up for online auction at sites run by Lycos and millionaire.com (the site for other people). The opening bid was set at \$5.8 million.

A few months ago I reported that the Paper Tiger website (www.papertiger.co.uk)

was interested in starting up an Online Gallery for artists, whether published by Paper Tiger or not, to use as a showcase for their wares - in effect, as a free web page.

Paper Tiger's newsletter the Paper Snarl now reports that several artists responded favourably at the time and more have done so since, and

so they've decided to commit themselves to this idea, starting as of now.

The amount of space available is essentially unlimited, but they'll have to restrict the number of images they use from each artist - although artists will be able to alter their selection periodically - to maybe a dozen or twenty or so. They will be exerting some sort of editorial control over both the quality and nature of the art exhibited in the Gallery, but that said, they're happy to accommodate, for example: pix of 3D artworks; animation art (and possibly actual animation clips; b/w linework; photography; comix art; and in general things that until recently would have been considered well outside Paper Tiger's customary scope, as well as straightforward fantasy and sf artwork.

They ask that all artists who're interested in being a part of this contact the Snarl address (papersnarl@aol.com), even if they've staked a claim before. If you're already in touch with Paper Tiger and they know your work, a brief note'd be fine. If not it might be a good idea to attach a couple of JPGs (no more at this stage) so they can have a look.

They aim to make this the biggest, best, most varied and most exhilarating Online Gallery of them all, and a first-rate showcase for the art of the fantastic and for the individual artists who decide to exhibit in it.

Anne Gay adds in the same issue of the Snarl that LineOne is pleased to announce its new online Gallery of Science Fiction and Fantasy Art - "Our first Gallery features the talents of Anne Sudworth, Steve Stone and Ruby". To view the Gallery go to www.lineone.net/clubs/entertainment/sciencefiction/gallery/gallery-d.html.

Stephen Baxter said it was Arthur C Clarke's idea to collaborate on a new novel, *The Light of Other Days*. Clarke drew up a four-page outline and sent it to Baxter via e-mail, and a correspondence began, Baxter told CNN online.

"It was easier by e-mail than face to face," said Baxter, author of *The Time Ships* and *Moonseed*. "I could kind of forget that it was Arthur and imagine he was one of my writing buddies."

Baxter, 42, had worked with Sri Lanka-based Clarke, 82, on a short story. But Baxter and Clarke (2001: *A Space Odyssey*) worked for four months to write the novel, all by e-mail correspondence. "I started typing the first draft, and Arthur did research," Baxter said. "And Arthur being Arthur was able to tap the world's experts on President Lincoln, for instance. And back would come - within a day - a 4,000-word essay on the aspect of Lincoln I was looking for. It was scary, but fantastic."

The Light of Other Days (Tom Doherty Associates) tells the story of an industrialist who discovers by accident a way for people to see into the past. It will be released this month.

Paramount Studios has rejected two pitches for a new Star Trek television series from Star Trek: Voyager executive producers Rick Berman and Brannon Braga, Majel Roddenberry told SCI FI Wire. The studio plans to air a new series once Voyager ends its seven-year run next season, "but it's not giving away any information to say they've already turned down two premises that have already been handed in," said Roddenberry, whose late husband, Gene, created Star Trek.

One premise centered on a much younger cast than in previous series, and another was based at a non-Federation outpost, said Roddenberry, whose own involvement with the franchise is limited to providing a voice for the computers. No new ideas have been pitched since the last one was rejected. "I think everyone is taking a little vacation right now," she said. Roddenberry added that a proposed tenth Star Trek feature film is "on the back burner for the while."

Trekkers are organizing to pressure Paramount Studios to consider actor George Takei's idea for a new series to replace Star Trek: Voyager. The International Federation of Trekkers fan group wants Paramount to endorse a series featuring Captain Sulu (Takei) in command of the USS Excelsior, a show with the look and feel of the first six Trek feature films.

"At this time, our plan is to basically bombard Paramount with mail," said Russ Haslage, president of the International Federation of Trekkers. "IFT has thousands of members around the world, and most have pledged their support to this mission. In addition, since this campaign is meant to represent all Star Trek fans, we hope to garner a great deal of help and support from the grassroots fans of the world."

Among other things, the fan group hopes to enlist the help of cast members of the original Trek series, including Takei and Nichelle Nichols (Lt. Uhura). Haslage said his group will launch its campaign later this month.

Dark Angel, James Cameron's proposed SF television series for the Fox network, is closer to reality. Producer David Nutter (Roswell) has signed on to direct a two-hour pilot, and six actors have been cast in lead roles, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The series, co-created by Charles Eglee, stars Jessica Alba (Never Been Kissed) as Max, a genetically enhanced 18-year-old girl who has

escaped from a lab project in the post-apocalyptic Pacific Northwest. Max befriends an underground cyber-journalist played by Michael Weatherly and a feisty lesbian character played by Valerie Rae Miller. Other characters will be played by Alimi Ballard, Richard Gunn, J.C. McKenzie and Jennifer Blanc.

Director Tim Burton (Batman) will develop Web-based animated shorts for Shockwave.com in exchange for an ownership stake in the company. Burton will create a series of shorts based on his character Stain Boy, who has appeared in Burton's book of poems and drawings *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

Stain Boy is described as a superhero whose only talent is the ability to leave a nasty stain. Burton will create 26 original two- to five-minute animated episodes. The first is set to debut in the spring. Eventually, Stain Boy could be developed into a feature film or a television series.

Confirming reports in *SCI FI Wire*, *The Hollywood Reporter* says that Sam Raimi (*A Simple Plan*) is in final talks to direct Columbia Picture's upcoming feature film version of Marvel Comics' Spider-Man. Raimi would begin the movie after wrapping *The Gift*, the Keanu Reeves supernatural thriller Raimi will start shooting in Georgia Feb. 3. Raimi had reportedly been concerned about scheduling conflicts between the two films.

No one has been cast for Spider-Man, though speculation is running rampant as to who will wear the red mask. David Koepp (*Jurassic Park*) is writing the script. The studio is eyeing a summer 2001 release date.

The Sixth Day, a clone thriller movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, will wrap production in Vancouver in the early spring, according to producer Mike Medavoy. The film, directed by Roger Spottiswoode (*Under Fire*), has been shooting since the middle of November, Medavoy told *The Hollywood Reporter*. The \$85-million movie deals with the morality of cloning, Medavoy said. "It's somewhat character-based - the story of a (man) who comes home one day and find she's been cloned. He was cloned by mistake, and it's against the law to clone human beings. It's called *The Sixth Day* because it's the sixth-day law: It's on the sixth day that God created man."

The film, written by Marianne Wibberly and Cormac Wibberly, also stars Tony Goldwyn and Robert Duvall. It was produced by Jon

Davison, Schwarzenegger and Medavoy and is slated for an autumn release in the USA.

Sheena, a syndicated series based on the comic book of the same name, has been bought by TV stations representing 92 percent of US markets, according to Cinescape. Queen of Swords, a syndicated series along the lines of Xena: Warrior Princess, has been bought by stations in 55 percent of the country.

The proposed Batman television series Bruce Wayne has been put on hold until a new feature film in the franchise is developed, according to The Hollywood Reporter. A pilot for the series has already been written by Tim McCanlies (The Iron Giant).

Dinotopia, an ABC miniseries based on James Gurney's children's book series of the same name, will feature talking, flying and fighting dinosaurs. The details of the miniseries from Hallmark Entertainment and producer Robert Halmi Sr. came to light during the National Association of Professional Television Executives' annual meeting in New Orleans, according to Cinescape.

The epic places the fate of a dinosaur-populated fantasy world in the hands of two brothers who find their way there by mistake while searching for their lost father. The mist-enshrouded island is ruled by talking dinosaurs who have created a peace-loving society with humans.

As the brothers learn more about the secrets of this dinosaur world, they also fall in love with a beautiful but mysterious woman. The brothers follow clues to find their father in the dinosaur underworld, run afoul of vicious pteranodons, encounter a society of outlaws and discover a secret that may save Dinotopia.

Director Wes Craven (Scream 3) goes into production this summer on the feature film The Fountain Society, an SF thriller about cloning. Craven is currently casting roles for two young actors and one woman in her 60s or 70s, the director told columnists Marilyn Beck and Stacy Jenel Smith.

The Fountain Society tells the story of a weapons scientist who becomes involved in a government cloning project while seeking a cure for his cancer. It is based on Craven's novel of the same name, released last year by Simon & Schuster.

Spawn creator and entrepreneur Todd McFarlane says his proposed new ape-themed SF television series for UPN isn't a Planet of the Apes knock-off. "The whole show is really about the process of evolution,"

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McFarlane told Mania magazine.

"What it is, is sort of a cool, sci-fi drama that happens to have a tip of the hat to my love of Darwin, evolution and Planet of the Apes," McFarlane said. "It doesn't have a real name yet. We're calling it Gorilla World at the moment, but that's not what it finally will be called. It will probably have some science fiction name like Sector 12 or something like that, because it's really not about the apes. The show is about man, apes and monsters, and there's going to be lots of monsters."

McFarlane said he's also planning changes to the animated Spawn television series. He has taken the rights for the show back from HBO and plans a series of 90-minute movies instead of six 30-minute episodes. McFarlane has also submitted a script to New Line Cinema for a follow-up to 1997's live-action Spawn feature film. "We're hopefully going to have a meeting with New Line later this month," he said.

(Many thanks to the following for the above news: BFS news site www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/news.htm; FTL ftlmagazine.com/; BFS News www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/index.htm; PNN [www.pnn/](http://www.pnn.com/pnn/); www.fandom.com; LINE ONE www.lineone.net/entertainment/index.html; BBC News Online; NASA www.nasa.gov/today/index.html; METRO MIDLANDS; Reuters; EXPRESS & STAR <http://www.westmidlands.com/>; BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL; WHAT'S ON; VARIETY www.variety.com/index.asp; Science Fiction News of the Week www.scifi.com/sfw/current/news.html; www.scifi.com; The Del Rey Internet Newsletter - to subscribe send a blank message to join-drin-dist@list.randomhouse.com).

Colophon

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