

July 2000

Issue 346

BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: FREE

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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, Newsletter & Publicity-Martin Tudor,
Ordinary Members-Anne Woodford & William McCabe, Novacon 30 & 31Chairman-Tony Berry.

**This month's meeting is on 14th July,
7.45pm for 8pm, in the Lichfield Lounge,
second floor, Britannia Hotel, New Street,
(entrance in Union Passageway).**

**Admittance: Non-Members £4, Members £3.
Concessions for full-time students & unwaged.**

This month's speaker is:

ANDY LOUND

ANDY LOUND, a member of the Planetary Society,
will present a talk illustrated by slides.

**Next month's speaker
to be announced**

**More details of meetings
on the back cover.**

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ANDY LOUND is a member of the Planetary Society and will present a talk illustrated by slides. - *MT.*

Forthcoming Events by Martin Tudor

14 JULY 2000: BSFG meeting at the Britannia. ANDY LOUND from the Planetary Society will be speaking to the Group.

1 AUGUST 2000: The Black Lodge, informal discussion group for those interested (mainly) in horror/SF movies, meets at the Hoghead, Newhall Street, Birmingham city centre from 8.30pm. Contact Steve Green on 0121-706-0108 for further details.

11 AUGUST 2000: BSFG meeting at the Britannia, details to be announced.

12 AUGUST 2000: METEOR MADNESS from 8pm until late. Meet at Beacon Lodge (off Beacon Road, Great Barr). Spend the night on Barr Beacon with members of the Great Barr Astronomical Society and Planetary Society. No booking necessary.

5 SEPTEMBER 2000: The Black Lodge, informal discussion group for those interested (mainly) in horror/SF movies, meets at the Hoghead, Newhall Street, Birmingham city centre from 8.30pm. Contact Steve Green on 0121-706-0108 for further details.

8 SEPTEMBER 2000: Joint meeting with FantasyCon 24 at the Britannia, details to be announced.

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>

3 OCTOBER 2000: The Black Lodge, informal discussion group for those interested (mainly) in horror/SF movies, meets at the Hoghead, Newhall Street, Birmingham city centre from 8.30pm. Contact Steve Green on 0121-706-0108 for further details.

10 NOVEMBER 2000: Joint meeting with Novacon 30 at the Britannia, details to be announced.

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVACON 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>
8 DECEMBER 2000: BSFG SKITTLES EVENING, at the Selly Park Tavern, Pershore Road, Birmingham. (On 45 & 47 bus route, 10 minutes from city centre.) £10 per ticket, available at Group meetings or by post (cheques to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group") from Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY9 7XN.

29 DEC 2000-1 JAN 2001: Hogmanaycon, Central Hotel, Glasgow. GoHs: Spider & Jeanne Robinson, Sydney Jordan, Archie Roy, Vince Docherty, Oscar Schwiglhofer. Membership £35.00, contact: c/o 26 Avonbank Road, Rutherglen, Glasgow, G73 2PA; john@gelsalba.demon.co.uk; www.members.tripod.co.uk/Chris_Boyce/conpage.htm
13-16 APRIL 2001: Paragon, the British National SF (Easter)Con at Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, with guests Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lianne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership now £35 Attending, £15 Supporting, £17.50 Junior (12-16) and £15 Child (5-11), Infants free. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114 281 1572. e-mail steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk or check the web site at www.keepsake-web.co.uk/paragon

29 MARCH-1 APRIL 2002: Helicon 2, the British National SF (Easter)Con, at Hotel de France, Jersey. Guests tba. Membership £30 Attending, £15 Supporting/Junior. Contact 33 Meyrick Drive, Wash Common, Berks., RG14 6SY.

Although details are correct to the best of my knowledge, I advise 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 me, Martin Tudor, (e-mail empties@breathemail.net). 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 - MT.]

The Jophan Report #132 by Martin Tudor

NASA officials have denied reports that a computer hacker endangered

astronauts by disrupting communications with the space shuttle Atlantis in 1997.

The BBC claims that during a rendezvous with the Russian space station Mir, a hacker interfered with communications and forced the shuttle crew to use the Russian station to maintain contact with NASA.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration spokesman Bob Jacobs admitted that hackers made about 500,000 attacks on the agency last year. But he said the astronauts never used the Russian space station as a communications relay. He confirmed that a hacker had delayed the transmission of astronaut medical data between NASA computer systems on the ground, but back-up systems corrected the problem. Ground control never lost contact with the astronauts, he added.

He said: "People try to hack into the system constantly, but any mission critical computer system is insulated from the communications network."

NASA headquarters did not know who had conducted the attack, but the agency's inspector general is investigating.

The BBC's Panorama programme looked at how hackers penetrate the computer defences of countries like the United States and Britain. (For further details check out the National Aeronautics and Space Administration at <http://www.Nasa.Gov>.)

As NASA scales back its immediate plans to explore Mars, it's beginning to look like a British-led mission might be very well be the next to land a spacecraft on the Red Planet's surface. (NASA announced on 12 May that it will send either an orbiter or lander to Mars in 2003 - but could very well do neither.)

So a \$200 million European mission just three years from launch may well take the next giant step in the hunt for water on Mars. The European Space Agency's Mars Express spacecraft should give scientists the best idea yet of where to find water on the Red Planet today.

That information could aid follow-up spacecraft in targeting the places most likely to find life, as well as the resources that could provide future human missions with air to breathe, water to drink and fuel for the return trip home.

Last month NASA unveiled photographic evidence culled from the thousands of images snapped by its Mars Global Surveyor that there may be vast stores of liquid water near the planet's surface. The Mars Express will literally peer below the planet's surface to map the extent of those reservoirs.

"Because these discoveries on Mars are very significant, this is actually one of our main goals: a subsurface sounding radar on the orbiter

will look for water and ice under the surface of Mars," said Augustin Chicarro, the Mars Express project scientist.

The probe will study the planet for a full Martian year (687 days) with seven high-resolution instruments. The orbiter's instruments include:

- A high-resolution stereo camera to make topographic maps with a resolution of 40-foot (12-meter).
- An infrared mapping spectrometer to conduct rock and soil analyses.
- A radio science experiment to measure Mars' interior composition and shape.
- A sounding radar/altimeter to measure the depth and composition of the Martian surface, including the presence of subsurface water.
- An energetic-neutral-atom analyzer to study the upper atmosphere and examine the effects of the solar wind on it.
- A planetary Fourier spectrometer to study the atmosphere in infrared to produce three-dimensional charts of its temperature and pressure.
- An atmospheric spectrometer to measure the atmosphere's composition and structure.

After a six-month journey, the Mars Express spacecraft will enter into orbit around Mars in December 2003. Although it will circle Mars for the duration of its mission, it will also dispatch a small lander called the Beagle 2 to the planet's surface.

From high in orbit, the satellite will use its instrument array to peel back the Martian surface to map the depth and extent of the aquifers that supplied the water that carved the gully features recently shown by the Global Surveyor.

The Beagle 2 will also advance the cause: The tiny spacecraft will use its instruments, robotic arm and cameras to search the planet's surface for water, minerals and organic materials.

Tempting as it may be, the spacecraft would have a difficult time reaching many of the sites that the recent Mars Global Surveyor images suggest held water, said Colin Pillinger, the mission's lead scientist.

Although scientists have yet to pick its final destination, the lander cannot be reliably put down on Mars with the pinpoint accuracy necessary to investigate a specific site.

But, Pillinger said, the team would do its best to target a spot as near as possible to the places most likely to hold traces of water. To land near water, he said, is to land near life.

"We would like to be able to choose a site of recent water," said Pillinger, a professor at the Open University in the United Kingdom. "This would enhance our chances of discovering past life, and increase our chances of finding current life. It's a very big discovery."

Rudi Schmidt, the mission's project manager, said the best-case scenario would have the Beagle 2 land within an ellipse roughly 62 miles

(100 kilometers) long by 12 miles (20 kilometers) wide. "I think the generic approach we're taking is to make things as simple as possible," Schmidt said. "We have a 60-kilogram (132-pound) lander which is smaller compared to the NASA lander."

Meanwhile, the talk at NASA is of improving landing technology so that the U.S. can follow, or possibly match, the Europeans with a Martian lander of its own.

Due to the recent losses of the Mars Climate Orbiter and Polar Lander spacecraft, the American space agency has scaled back its plans to explore Mars. It cancelled a 2001 lander outright, opting instead to send just an orbiter to Mars. It may choose to do the same in 2003, again choosing to send only an orbiter, but not a lander.

Eventually, NASA hopes it can send small, versatile spacecraft to specific locations that larger landers could never reach. "The intent is to build the pieces that would allow us to go to the most interesting places on Mars," said James Garvin, NASA's Mars program scientist. "We need to make an investment. We're talking about precision landing."

Mars Express is scheduled to be launched in June 2003 on a Soyuz rocket at the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. If that's the case, then the plucky Beagle 2 - a tiny lander that will piggyback to Mars aboard the European Space Agency's Mars Express orbiter mission in 2003 - would become the next spacecraft to make a soft landing on the planet.

The Beagle 2 lander will weigh in at a scant 66 pounds (30 kilograms), but is densely packed with an array of instruments designed to probe Mars for signs of life. Its name pays homage to the HMS Beagle, that ship that carried naturalist Charles Darwin on the voyage that inspired *On the Origin of Species*.

"We're commemorating that voyage since it's what told us about the evolution of life on our own planet," said Colin Pillinger, the Beagle 2 lead scientist, in a recent interview with SPACE.com. "What we're trying to do is see if it extends to a second planet."

The Beagle 2 team hopes to launch the \$40 million spacecraft in June 2003, tucking it aboard Soyuz/Fregat rocket with the Mars Express[®] for the trip to Mars.

The lander would arrive at Mars that December 26, Boxing Day in Britain, shortly after being jettisoned by the Mars Express orbiter as it enters martian orbit. The Beagle 2 would use parachutes to slow its descent through the atmosphere, ultimately relying on an airbag system to cushion its landing. (If NASA opts to send a lander to Mars in 2003, it too will rely on airbags like those used on the 1997 Mars Pathfinder mission.)

After landing, the circular Beagle 2 will open like a clamshell, unfolding four disc-like solar panels to produce the power needed during the 180-day mission. "The primary objective is exobiology," Pillinger, of The Open University in Milton Keynes, said of the lander. "Did life exist in the past, does it exist now or could it exist?"

The lander will sniff the atmosphere for traces of methane, examine rock and soil samples for organic residues, study and perhaps even date for the first time martian rocks in situ and send an imaginative probe diving beneath the soil and under boulders. As many as five cameras will snap images of its surroundings.

Beagle 2's "Pluto" probe will inch across the planet's surface, its robotic arm gathering samples. The mole-like probe, called the Planetary Undersurface Tool, or "Pluto," will use a percussive mechanism to scoot around the surface, moving a half-inch (centimeter) every six seconds. "It taps itself along," Pillinger said.

Pluto will venture as far as 17 feet (5 meters) from the lander on its leash, digging into the surface and under rocks in a search for samples sheltered from the strong oxidizing surface. A rock corer on the lander's robotic arm - called the "paw" - will also gather samples, relying in part on a grinder supplied by a Hong Kong dentist to scrape away the plaque-like oxidized surface that blankets surface rocks.

If nothing else, the mission will be the most "hip" to ever to venture to another planet. British artist Damien Hirst - whose work was featured in the recent "Sensation" exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art that incurred the wrath of New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani - will contribute a painting that will be used to calibrate the lander's cameras once on the surface of Mars. And British rock group Blur has penned a composition that the spacecraft will blare back at Earth to announce its safe arrival on Mars.

To help defray the cost of the mission, only partially borne by government funding, the lander may sport a few corporate logos. "We don't want the thing to look like a Formula One racing car, though," Pillinger said. The spacecraft may resemble a racecar all the same: the mission team recently announced that McLaren Composites Ltd. - which builds advanced composite car bodies for the Formula One circuit - will contribute its expertise to making the lander impact-resistant. (For further details www.space.com.)

The Science Fiction Poetry Association (<http://dm.net/~bejay/sfpa.htm>) has announced the winners of the 1999 Rhysling Award for the best Short and Long genre poems of the year. The winner in the best Short Poem category is Rebecca Marjesdatter for her poem, "Grimoire," which was first published in Tales of the Unanticipated #20.

The winner in the best Long Poem category is Geoffrey A. Landis for his poem, Christmas (After We All Get Time Machines)," which was first published in the December 1999 issue of Asimov's Science Fiction. (For further details check the SFWA site www.sfw.org.)

Jurors have agreed that Forry Ackerman is Dr. Acula, now fandom waits to see if he can collect any of the \$724,500 in damages they awarded him.

Six men and six women on a Van Nuys, CA jury deliberated four days, then declared the "Dr. Acula" name belongs to Forrest J Ackerman, not Ray Ferry, current publisher of Famous Monsters of Filmland. In addition to trademark infringement, they also found Ferry liable for breach of contract, libel, misrepresentation and intentional interference with prospective economic advantage. Ackerman was awarded \$382,500 in compensatory damages, including \$88,000 for libel, \$54,000 for breach of contract and \$184,000 for trademark infringement, plus \$342,000 in punitive damages. The jury also threw out Ferry's countersuit.

A jubilant Ackerman hugged his attorney, Jacqueline Connors Appelbaum, and publicly thanked his other attorney, Susan Loob, who couldn't appear in court on 10 May because of her pregnancy. "I don't feel 83 anymore. I only feel 80 years old now," Ackerman said at the end of the three-week trial.

Jurors claimed they were not star-struck by the celebrities who testified for each side, such as pro-Ackerman witnesses John Landis and Ray Bradbury, and pro-Ferry witness Harlan Ellison.

Ackerman coined the Dr. Acula name in 1939 and was forced to sue after Ferry began using it without permission. He also alleged that Ferry, with whom he collaborated to stage science-fiction conventions, refused to share profits as agreed and induced him when he was ill to sign an option contract that would allow Ferry to buy millions of dollars worth of his assets for \$1. After hearing from the jury, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Stephen Petersen rescinded the contract, calling it "the product of undue influence."

Ferry and his lawyer, Thomas Brackey II, vowed that they would appeal. "Mr. Ackerman's case was based entirely on sympathy," Ferry said. "On appeals, it's going to get ugly." As Mike Glyers asks in FILE 770 - "Like, it wasn't already?" (For further details check out FILE 770's web site at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mglyer/f770/index.html>)

Congratulations to Novacon regulars Caroline Mullan and Brian Ameringen on the birth of their daughter, Meriol Jessie van Ameringen, on 23 June.

Author J.K. Rowling told the London Times that Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, the much-anticipated fourth volume of the popular children's novel series, comprises 750 pages and features the death of a key character, according to the Reuters news service. Rowling would not name the character.

"If it is done right, I think it will be upsetting, but it is not going to be damaging," Rowling told the Times.

Rowling also denied reports that she clashed with director Steven Spielberg over the film adaptation of her first book, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. "Did I have a fight with him? No I definitely did not," she said. "There were things he said that I didn't agree with and things he said that I did agree with." The film is going ahead with director Chris Columbus at the helm.

Dame Maggie Smith is lined up to play Professor MacGonagll, Tim Roth the villainous Professor Snape and it is rumoured that Robbie Coltrane will play Hagrid the friendly giant.

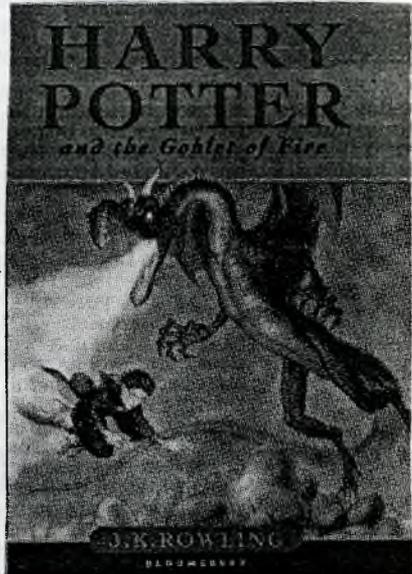
Filmmakers have yet to sign any child actors to play the key roles of Harry and his friends, Ron Weasley and Hermoine Granger, despite receiving tens of thousands of inquiries. It is rumoured that director Chris Columbus (who will

direct the Warner Bros. movie, based on a screenplay by Steve Kloves) prefers an American to play Potter and has cynically sabotaged the casting process so that he can tell Rowling (who is adamant that the actor should be British) that a suitable British youngster cannot be found.

Susie Figgis, a pivotal figure behind several major movies who was charged with finding a British schoolboy to play Harry, quit at the beginning of July saying "I feel I have done my absolute best to find a child and during our search we've met some great kids. Ultimately, it's the director's point of view and vision".

The Teletext Big Screen U.K. Web site reported that J.K. Rowling is contracted to write a total of seven Harry Potter children's novels, with each slated for eventual production as a feature film.

The first movie, based on Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, is already in pre-production under director Chris Columbus. But officials



have declined filmmakers the use of Canterbury Cathedral as the location of Potter's Hogwart's School for Wizardry, the site reported. The church reportedly didn't want to be associated with the film's "pagan" theme. Instead Inverailort Castle on the west coast of Scotland is being considered as a location for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Rowling has received an honorary doctorate, the Associated Press reported. Rowling received the degree from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland's oldest university. The university praised Rowling's ability to capture children's imaginations with her books, irrespective of the competing attractions of television, Nintendo and Pokemon, the AP reported. Rowling was also recently named an Officer of the Order of British Empire.

Meanwhile, the AP also reported that the next Potter book will be translated into Braille only weeks after the debut of the print version, instead of the usual several months. The National Braille Press in Boston will rush out a version for the blind within two to three weeks of the print release, the wire service reported.

Bloomsbury Publishing will print 1.5 million copies of the Goblet of Fire to meet anticipated demand, according to the Reuters news service. The 750-page book will also be translated into 49 languages and sold in 110 countries. (Further information can be found on SCI Fi WIRE at www.scifi.com)

Pi director Darren Aronofsky may collaborate with comic writer Frank Miller on a new Batman feature film, the Ain't It Cool News Web site reported. AICN reported that Aronofsky would co-write a script with Miller, who revived the Batman comic series in the 1980s with his seminal Dark Knight stories.

AICN added that the new film would be a departure from the previous Batman films.

In June Patrick Stewart, who plays patriarch Prof. Charles Xavier in Fox's upcoming X-Men movie, told SCI Fi Wire that he still hasn't seen the finished film yet. "There's some last-minute work still going on," Stewart said in a telephone interview from New York.

"Probably the editing process is completed, but there's probably still some fine-tuning."

The film premieres on Stewart's 60th birthday, July 14, and director Bryan Singer has reportedly been under considerable pressure to complete the film in time for press screenings and the official New York City premiere the week of July 10. "I haven't seen the movie yet," Stewart

said. "It's very difficult to assess ... exactly how it's going to look. I shall know much more when we see it. ... I've seen tiny portions of it. I think it looks very exciting, very cool and attractive, and it has quite an original quality about it."

Stewart added that he was confident the movie would satisfy fans of the comics series of the same name. "From having been in Star Trek for so many years, and having helped created a new version of Star Trek, I also know that people are very protective of the original work that first attracted them," Stewart said. "And some people don't want to see it change, [or] some people want an extension and development of it. It brings with it some problems too, because the expectation of course is based entirely on the comic book, and that's not what they're going to see. They're going to see something quite different."

Stewart said he's already committed to at least one sequel should X-Men please its audience. "[A franchise] will always depend on the quality of this film and of any future screenplays that there might be. [But] I find it an attractive prospect. Whether or not Bryan Singer were to be attached to another project, I find this ensemble of actors delightful to work with. It will be very interesting, if we have success with this film, to develop a sequence of films. [I'm committed to] one further film, if there is to be one."

Patrick Stewart confirmed that a 10th Star Trek movie is in the works and will feature the crew of *The Next Generation*. "The story's being developed, yes ... And my character [Capt. Jean-Luc Picard] is in the story. ... Conversations [with Trek producer Rick Berman] are ongoing," Stewart told SCI FI Wire.

Stewart added, "A director has not been selected. ... We're really at the very earliest stages of creating a possible story for this film, and perhaps in a couple of months ... I will have more to say."

As for rumors that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creator Joss Whedon might be asked to write a draft, Stewart said, "No, not as far as I'm aware."

George Lucas has arrived in Australia to begin directing principal photography on *Star Wars: Episode II*, the official *Star Wars* Web site reported. Shooting began June 26 at Fox Studios in Australia and will wrap at the end of August, producer Rick McCallum told the site.

The production then moves to Italy and Tunisia for a month of additional shooting, the site reported.

Star Wars: Episode II co-writer Jonathan Hales told the official *Star Wars* *Homing Beacon* newsletter that the film will add to the *Star*

Wars, but not just in the form of new characters, aliens, droids and locales. "It will add political complexity, but it will also add an interesting and a fascinating love story," he said.

Hales will travel soon to Australia to meet with director George Lucas, who is already filming there. "He and I will sit down, and he'll tell me what more thoughts he's had about the screenplay, and I will tidy that up," Hales said. "I shall only be there for a couple of weeks anyway. There's nothing more useless than a writer on a soundstage."

Hales added that he faces an exhilarating but daunting task. "My personal goal was to make it the best screenplay that ever was, so that it will be the best movie that ever was. You just do your very best. I tried to forget, in a way, that it was Star Wars, in a sense that I didn't want to think 'Oh my God, there is a world out there waiting to see this stuff.' I just tried to concentrate on it and what it was, and forget about that terrifying dimension that's out there."

Joel Edgerton has won the role of Owen Lars in Star Wars: Episode II, the official Star Wars Web site reported. Edgerton will play the young version of the man who grows up to be Luke Skywalker's Uncle Owen, played by Phil Brown in the original Star Wars film. Edgerton has appeared on stage and in television and films, including *Praise*, *Erskinville Kings*, *Dogwatch* and *Sample People*.

TheForce.net fan Web site, meanwhile, disputes a rumor that visual effects wizard Dennis Muren has dropped out of Episode II. Citing two unnamed sources, the Web site reported that Muren will indeed work on Episode II, even though he's reportedly also attached to Steven Spielberg's A.I.

A.I., which Spielberg will direct, is in pre-production.

FilmForce.com reported a rumor that Jeff Goldblum may reprise his Jurassic Park character, chaotician Ian Malcolm, in the third installment of the dinosaur franchise. The site reported that Goldblum is deciding whether to appear in Jurassic Park 3, which is in pre-production. Goldblum appeared in both the original film and the sequel, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*.

The Hollywood Reporter confirmed rumors that Sam Neill is in talks to star in Jurassic Park 3, reprising the role of Alan Grant from 1993's Jurassic Park. There is no completed script for JP3, the trade paper reported. Production is slated to start in the summer. Universal Pictures is closely guarding details of the project.

Meanwhile, FilmForce reported that JP3 will be a prequel to the first film. The site added that principal photography will take place in Hawaii, starting at the end of July. And the site speculated that JP3 will also carry the title *Extinction*, *Embryo* or *End of Chaos*.

Jim Carrey told *Newsday* that he sees good in the lead character he'll play in the upcoming movie *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. "I looked at him as not just being an angry guy," Carrey said about the Grinch.

Carrey added, "Nobody is just an angry guy. What we are is hurt, whether it's self-imposed or something happened to us. That made me able to make [the Grinch] sympathetic. That's how I approached it. This is a guy who wants to be invited to the party, but can't admit it to himself."

The film, a live-action adaptation of the Dr. Seuss book of the same name, opens in the US around Thanksgiving.

Douglas Adams told fans that he has finished a new draft of a screenplay for the movie version of his comic SF novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. "I finished an all-new draft of the screenplay last week, and [director] Jay [Roach] loves it," Adams said in a post on his official Web site.

Adams added, "It's the first time in all these years that we've had a screenplay which clearly works and seems to solve all the problems of it needing to be both a real version of *Hitchhiker* and also a proper movie. It's been a very hard circle to square."

The film version of Adams' popular book has been in development for years. "Please be patient," Adams asked his fans. "I have to be discreet. Don't believe anything you read here that doesn't come directly from me, especially anything from so-called 'informed, insider sources,' most of which belongs in the Half-Witted Crap Forum."

He'll be back: Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed on the dotted line to return as the killer cyborg in *Terminator 3*, according to the Hollywood trade papers. The third installment in the *Terminator* franchise is slated to go before cameras in Los Angeles in the spring of 2001, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. *Variety* reported that the film is aimed at a summer 2002 release.

It's unclear whether *Terminator* creator James Cameron will sign on to direct. Schwarzenegger has previously said he wouldn't do another *Terminator* film without Cameron, and he repeated his desire to work with Cameron on T3 during an interview on *Access Hollywood* this week.

The Reporter said the relationship is tenuous between Cameron and T3 producers Andy Vajna and Mario Kassar, and that Cameron has yet to meet with either about the project. But the trade paper cited unnamed sources as saying that Cameron has read the T3 script and that

Schwarzenegger is lobbying hard to bring Cameron on board. Variety cited unnamed sources close to Cameron as saying that the director is talking with Schwarzenegger about returning.

The film will have a budget of \$100 million. No studio has agreed to distribute the film yet.

Book Reviews

BEYOND HEAVEN'S RIVER by Greg Bear

Millennium; 256 pages, £5.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

I have read quite a few Greg Bear books, and generally enjoy them as 'hard SF'. This will not become one of my favourites, and if you're looking for a fast-moving, all-action, adventure story, this is not for you either. It is however a thoughtful and well-researched novel and worth a read - especially if you are interested in Japanese history. Because it revolves around the discovery on a distant planet of an ex-Japanese air force pilot who was involved in Pearl Harbour, over 400 years after his birth in 1918. He links up with a rich female spaceship owner, who realises that he holds some secret and spends most of the book trying to find out what this is. (It is never fully explained.) There is also a tussle between three parties over the ownership of the barren planet on which he was found, now abandoned by an enigmatic alien race.

Reading a book like this, I often wonder why the author wrote it. Bear does not seem to have any great philosophical point to make in this one, except perhaps the futility of life even when you have lived for 400 years. But he does show a great knowledge of the Japanese culture and history - so did he write this simply to make use of, and show off the results of a life-long interest? I have wondered this about some of Stephen Baxter's lengthier diatribes, too!

Oh, and as an artist, I can't resist a comment on the cover. As with most Millennium books by Bear, the art is by John Harris, though it bears little relation to the story and was probably done for something else. But someone in the Art department has decided to spice it up with a digital Photoshop lens flare - which really doesn't work, since Harris's work is very painterly, and flare needs a photographic image. Hey ho!

EMPHYRIO by Jack Vance

Millennium; 208pp; £6.99; pb.

Review by Tony Berry. Star rating ****

On the planet Halma, Ghyl Tarvoke, son of a woodcarver, grows restless with his life and starts to ask too many questions. The inhabitants live under a strict Feudal system: machines are forbidden, as are cameras, recorders and any means of mass production, including the printing press. The workers labour to produce artefacts by hand, for which they are paid a meagre price by the merchants, who then sell them off-planet for a fortune. The Lords who govern the land literally look down on the commoners from lofty towers; only they are rich enough to travel to other worlds.

Ghyl is fascinated by the legend of Emphyrio, which tells of a time when the people were enslaved by an alien race. Emphyrio led a revolt against the invaders and eventually drove them from the planet, so why do the inhabitants live in servitude now? When Ghyl's father is killed for printing leaflets, Ghyl takes the name of Emphyrio and starts his own revolution against Halma's oppressive regime.

Vance's strength lies in his ability to paint a convincing picture of an exotic society, with plenty of detail about its laws and customs, people and places. He even throws in a particularly silly religion. Because of this the story builds slowly; anyone looking for instant action will be disappointed, but those who like to immerse themselves in a strange culture will find it particularly satisfying. The action does come in the final part of the book, when Ghyl and his fellow-conspirators hijack a spaceship and escape Halma. But things don't turn out the way he planned. Despite hardship and betrayal he does eventually learn the truth about the history of his world, the fate of Emphyrio, and the mysterious Lords. The denouement is perhaps a little too quick and easy, but still, it's all Good Stuff.

BSFG Web Site

If you have a moment to spare in front of your browser why not turn it to William McCabe's BSFG web site at <http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com/> Comments, suggestions and any help will be welcomed by William who can be contacted by e-mail at wam@wamccabe.freesever.co.uk - MT.

Brum Group Dates for your Diary

- 14 JULY 2000: ANDY LOUND from the Planetary Society.
11 AUGUST 2000: To be announced.
8 SEPTEMBER 2000: Special meeting at Fantasycon 24.
13 OCTOBER 2000: BSFG vs B'ham University SF Group Quiz.
10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: Special Meeting at Novacon 30.
8 DECEMBER 2000: SKITTLES EVENING at the Selly Park Tavern.
12 JANUARY 2000: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Brum Group Meeting Information

The Brum Group meets from 7.45pm for 8pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). We usually have a Speaker 8-9pm followed by an informal meeting until 10.30pm. Drinks may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine and taken to our meeting room, usually the Lichfield on the second floor. Admission discounts are at the discretion of the committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.

Committee and Contacts

Group Chairman, Vernon Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH. **Membership** (which includes 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) is £16.00 per person, or £21.00 for two at the same address. Cheques to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: The Treasurer, Alan Woodford, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 7XN (e-mail enquiries bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). **Newsletter** Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail to empties@breathemail.net). **Web**: www.bsfg.freesevers.com/

Colophon

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