

Friends of Fandom - The Triumphant Re-Return of ...

The Info Alert

<http://www.cam-info.net/archive/>

August/September 2003



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Greetings From the 3rd year of the 21st Century.

Much has changed since our last issue of the Info Alert. Clif and Margaret have celebrated their first wedding anniversary. Consortium is dead. Friends of Fandom is currently co-operating with the Inner Loop Group of the Houston SCIFI book trade network to host book discussions at the University of Houston. Friends and valued writers have died. Crises have come and gone. Semi-organized fandom continues to move to the Internet.

But much has not changed. Several Unlimited and Starbase Houston are still with us. REVELcon continues under the management of Mercury. We enjoyed ArmadilloCon as almost always. ALAMO and FACT plan new conventions. Worldcons happen (in spite of SARs, Mad Cow and the occasional mass power outage).

And invariably, if at long last, Clif and Margaret begin typing on another Info Alert.

Friends of Fandom - <http://www.cam-info.net/fof.html>

ALAMO - <http://www.alamo-sf.org/>

FACT - <http://www.fact.org/>

FACT Reading Group - <http://www.crimeandspace.com/reading/mtgpast.html>

REVELcon - <http://www.majorcrimes.freesevers.com/REVELcon.htm>

Houston SciFi book trade network –

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HOU-SCIFIBOOK-VERBOSE/>

Inner Loop Group - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ILSCIFIBOOK/>

Clear Lake Group - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CLSciFibook/>

Several Unlimited - <http://members.aol.com/ErikaF/su/>

Starbase Houston - <http://www.starbasehouston.org/>

World Con - <http://worldcon.org/>

And now...

Fasten your seatbelt and bring your browser window to an upright and locked position.

And we are off

As always, how far off you have to determine for yourself.

X-TERMINATE X-TERMINATE

Just in case you never read the political news, you should know that everyone's favorite Terminator, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has officially filed to run for governor of California in the upcoming recall election. If he wins, Arnold wouldn't be the first actor to turn into a politician. But he would be the first actor to play a machine that tried to kill every single living person on Earth to be elected. Another Science Fiction First.

What a great country.

The immediate effect of all this on the Science Fiction community is that films such as Conan the Barbarian, Predator and Total Recall have been pulled (total recall?) by FX and the SciFi channel, as they might be considered free political advertising for Arnie under US federal laws which mandates the fair distribution of air time between political candidates. But as the irrepressible SF Crowsnest pointed out, "In reality, the carrot-chomping free 'lovin denizens of California might find that having their cigarette-free airspace being invaded by a well oiled loin-clothed Arnie waving an axe the size of a small windmill, muttering such gems as 'you killed my family so now you too are killed', isn't as effective a vote collector as might first be thought".

Revolution Science Fiction's take on The Running Man –

<http://www.revolutionsf.com/article/1949.html>

Effect on the SciFi Channel -

<http://www.sffworld.net/sff/home.nsf/viewWebNews/F5FB3521436DEA11C1256D750035609B!opendocument>

Science Fiction Crowsnest - SF, SciFi and Fantasy –

<http://www.computercrowsnest.com/index.php>

So Long, And Thanks for all the Books

Among the many people who are currently dead and we wish they weren't is Douglas Adams (back in 2001 at the age of 49, not last week, so relax). Neil Gaiman has narrated a video documentary about the life and times of Adams titled "Life, the Universe, and Douglas Adams". It is on sale at the web site - <http://www.douglasadams.com/> .

Dewey Decimal:

The Dell-owned sf magazines Analog and Asimov's are changing schedule to 10 rather than 11 issues a year, including two double issues apiece. In theory, this is good because two double issues lets them print more long fiction. At the cost, of course, of less short fiction.

Analog - <http://www.analogsf.com/>

Asimov's - <http://www.asimovs.com/>

Things Are Tough All Over

Even Clarion Workshop is in trouble.
See our "The Write Stuff" Section Below for more details.

And the Tough Survive

Science Fiction author, Ed Bryant, and SF artist, Frank Kelly Freas, are recovering from surgeries that took place in early August.

Ed had non-emergency heart surgery in Denver, Colorado. He came through the quadruple bypass in good shape. He left the ICU August 12 and will have several weeks of recovery, both in the hospital and with friends.

Kelly had surgery in West Hills, California on Sunday following a hip fracture on Friday morning. His surgery went very well and he was on the rehabilitation floor for a couple of weeks. He was scheduled to be one of the Guests of Honor at Torcon 3, the World Science Fiction Convention, and their chair update says Kelly's recovery is going well, but he will not be able to attend.

Wormhole Books - Ed Bryant Heart Bypass Info -
<http://www.wormholebooks.com/news.html>
Torcon Chair Update - <http://www.torcon3.on.ca/news/chairframes.html>

And Ray Bradbury celebrated his 83rd birthday in good company.
<http://www.scifi.com/scifiwire/art-main.html?2003-08/25/13.00.books>

Bruce Sterling has closed his Schism Matrix blog at Infinite Matrix and will be opening a new one at Wired.
<http://www.infinitematrix.net/columns/sterling/index.html>

George R.R. Martin's, epic, "The Hedge Night" is being made into a mini-series by Image Comics with the first issue on the stands back at the beginning of August. For the cover they recruited an impressive line-up of Artists - Michael Kaluta, Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell, the Hildebrandt Brothers, Tom Mandrake, Ted Nasmith and Tom Yeates.

<http://www.sffworld.net/sff/home.nsf/viewWebNews/F5FB3521436DEA11C1256D750035609B!opendocument>

Forthcoming SF&Fantasy Books

Hugos were awarded. See our Awards section below.

New books announced from Catherine Asaro, Robert Asprin, Ray Bradbury, Marion Bradley Zimmer, Kristen Britain, Terry Brooks, Hal Clement, Charles de Lint, Brian Herbert & Kevin Anderson, Nancy Kress, Mercedes Lackey, Anne McCaffrey, George R.R. Martin, L.E. Modesitt, Jr., Larry Niven, Sherry Tepper, Harry Turtledove, & David Weber.

October releases from Piers Anthony, Lois McMaster Bujold, David Eddings, Stephen King, Mercedes Lackey, Elizabeth Moon, & Terry Pratchett.

For more sf&f new book listings and more detail (updated monthly), see <http://www.cam-info.net/forthcomingsf.html> .

Verbose? Who's Verbose?

Do you go through withdrawal when you don't get your Info-Alert? (Boy, have you been in trouble. But what's a two year gap among friends?) One solution is to stay on top of Science Fiction and vaguely related topics by joining the Yahoo Group, HOU-SCIFIBOOK-VERBOSE which has Clif Davis and T.B. Morgan as a co-moderators (mostly to eliminate spam). In theory, this group supports the HSBTN, the Houston SCIFI Book Trade Network, but in fact membership is open to anyone interested. All that is required is the ability to withstand discussions of NASA spacecraft, old movies, SF writers and the occasional bad pun.

VERBOSE - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HOU-SCIFIBOOK-VERBOSE/>

Strike Four?

Starbase Houston recently donned their Star Base Houston T-Shirts and an away team descended en masse upon a helpless bowling alley. Actually their first victim escaped by booking solid for the day requiring an emergency change of bowling plans. Both the bowling alley and Starbase survived the meeting. This is one of a number of activities that Starbase does just for fun throughout the year that have nothing to do with Star Trek, until of course they do them.

Since the last Info Alert, Starbase has joined the move to the web with their own Yahoo group, Hailing Frequencies Open.

Interestingly ex-Friends of Fandom Board member and all around good guy, Mark Hayes, has returned to Houston and become active in Starbase. He recently sent out an appreciation of Gene Roddenberry and his continuing influence, on the occasion of Roddenberry's birthday.

Starbase Houston - <http://www.starbasehouston.org/>

Several Unlimited pool partied in July and are currently plotting who they can stick with officer positions next year. The August issue of their always informative newsletter, Notes From the Underground, was published despite editor Dee Beetem's descent into the chaotic throes of remodeling, thanks to the help of Webmistress Erika Frensley. But perhaps that is why it went out with a 2001 Copyright. ;-D Or maybe it was just a strange case of time travel.

Over the years we have seen some really wonderful and really strange links from the Several Unlimited newsletter. The highlight of this newsletter's links was one that led to a guide to godawful fan tales on the web!!!

Several Unlimited – <http://members.aol.com/erikaf/su/>
Godawful Fan Tales – <http://www.go.to/godawful>

It's a FACT

The **FACT** Reading Group in Austin lists reports through January 2003 on their web page. <http://www.crimeandspace.com/reading/jan03.html> . At that time they had shifted to meeting at individual homes as their sponsor, Adventures in Time and Space is operating without a storefront. The Web page for Adventures in Time and Space has also not been updated in some time, although they were certainly present at ArmadilloCon 25, where Willie Siros was the Fan Guest of Honor.

FACT Reading Group - <http://www.crimeandspace.com/reading/mtgpast.html>
Adventures in Time and Space - <http://www.crimeandspace.com/>
ArmadilloCon - <http://www.fact.org/dillo/d25/>

Rumors at ArmadilloCon indicated that Fact's Reading Group Coordinator and Secret Master of Fandom, A. T. Campbell, III and long time Adventures in Time and Space indispensable person, Lori Wolf will be moving to Houston. This can't help but make a hole in Austin's Science Fiction Community's pool of talent. Whether Austin's loss could become Houston's gain isn't clear due to the large difference in structure between SF fandom in Austin and Houston.
(We can hope).

No Terminators Here

San Antonio's **Ursa Major** SF Literary Association is gearing for elections. They too are moving to the Internet as a place to communicate and socialize. Their Yahoo group sports a wonderful piece of Sherlockian art on its home page (though it can take a little while to load).

Ursa Major - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UrsaMajorSciFi/>

You Heard It Here First.

Hal Hall, Curator and Senior Bibliographer of the SF Research Collection at Texas A&M University, is putting out the word he is looking for donations of fanzines. He can be contacted at:

Cushing Library
5000 TAMU
College Station, Texas, 77843-5000
(972) 862-1840.

And you were wondering what to do with that old SF Enquirer.

Do you belong to other segments of area fandom?
Send us an email occasionally to let us know what you are up to.

SF on the Web

SCIFI.com has an interesting transcript of Gardner Dozois interviewing Kim Stanley Robinson, author of Icehenge, The Wild Shore, the Mars trilogy and The Years of Rice and Salt. http://www.scifi.com/transcripts/2002/robinson_chat.html

New fiction at Strange Horizons includes:

Pressure by Jeff Carlson -
<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2003/20030825/pressure.shtml>
Momi Watu by Nisi Shawl -
http://www.strangehorizons.com/2003/20030818/momi_watu.shtml
April, With His Shoures Soote by Jay Lake -
<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2003/20030818/rushes-eight.shtml>
Drowned Men Can't Have Kids - by Karina Sumner-Smith -
<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2003/20030811/drowned.shtml>
The Siren of Ocean City by Tobias Seamon -
<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2003/20030804/siren.shtml>

New fiction at Sci Fiction includes:

A Walk in the Garden by Lucius Shepard -

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/originals/originals_archive/shepard6/shepard61.html

The View from Endless Scarp by Marta Randall -

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/classics/classics_archive/randall/randall11.html

Threads by Jessica Reisman -

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/originals/originals_archive/reisman2/reisman21.html

'Like, Need, Deserve' by Robert Reed -

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/originals/originals_archive/reed4/reed41.html

Flowers on Their Bridles, Hooves in the Air by Glen Hirshberg -

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/originals/originals_archive/hirshberg2/hirshberg21.html

Thirty Days Had September by Robert F. Young -

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/classics/classics_archive/young/young1.html

Analog has a wide variety of fiction available on the web:

(These are all excellent, particularly the Asaro and Vinge stories, but Clif recommends the Landis story, but not to the squeamish as it is a vicious little story).

The Cookie Monster by Vernor Vinge - <http://www.analogsf.com/0310/cookie.shtml>

Aurora in Four Voices by Catherine Asaro - <http://www.analogsf.com/0209/Aurora.shtml>

In Spirit by Pat Forde - <http://www.analogsf.com/Hugos/spirit.shtml>

Slow Life by Michael Swanwick - <http://www.analogsf.com/Hugos/slowlife.shtml>

Falling Onto Mars by Geoffrey A. Landis -

<http://www.analogsf.com/Hugos/Falling.shtml>

"Hello" Said the Stick by Michael Swanwick -

<http://www.analogsf.com/Hugos/hello.shtml>

As does Asimov's:

Breathmoss by Ian R. MacLeod - <http://www.asimovs.com/Hugos/breathmoss.shtml>

Halo by Charles Stross - <http://www.asimovs.com/Hugos/Halo.shtml>

Madonna of the Maquiladora by Gregory Frost -

<http://www.asimovs.com/Hugos/madonna.shtml>

The Wild Girls by Ursula K. Le Guin - <http://www.asimovs.com/Hugos/wildgirls.shtml>

Lambing Season by Molly Gloss - <http://www.asimovs.com/Hugos/lambingseason.shtml>

The Little Cat Laughed to See Such Sport by Michael Swanwick -

<http://www.asimovs.com/Hugos/littlecat.shtml>

Off on a Starship by William Barton (Gotcha Warning – Ends in a cliffhanger to pull you into reading the next Asimov's) - http://www.asimovs.com/_issue_0310/Starship.shtml

Fantasy and Science Fiction (F&SF) stories available on the web:

Presence by Maureen F. McHugh - <http://www.sfsite.com/fsf/fiction/mmh01.htm>

The Political Officer by Charles Coleman Finlay -

<http://www.sfsite.com/fsf/fiction/ccf01.htm>

Creation by Jeffrey Ford - <http://www.sfsite.com/fsf/fiction/jf01.htm>

Bronte's Egg by Richard Chwedyk - <http://www.sfsite.com/fsf/fiction/rc01.htm>

A new fiction ezine edited by Claude Lalumière hit the Web this month, Lost Pages, a zine that, according to the blurb, “emphasizes writing that falls outside established parameters: fiction that doesn't conform to rigid genre templates; ideas that question dominant worldviews; obsessive passions that define people's lives; perspectives that celebrate the world's rich diversity”. Quite a lot for one little ezine. Claude is funding the zine out of his pocket, but is accepting per/item monetary donations, half of which go to the author of that particular story.

Lost Pages - <http://lostpages.net/lostpages>

Talebones, a magazine of Science Fiction and Dark fantasy is still publishing and their web page occasionally posts complete stories from the current issue. If you click previews and then click Fiction, there are currently listed links to stories by Jennifer Rachel Baumer, Mark Rich and James Van Pelt.

Talebones - <http://www.talebones.com/>

FictionWise EBooks has “Scatterbrain”, a collection of recent Larry Niven short stories and novel extracts. They are reporting an SF title, The Sealed Sky by Cynthia Ward, as their number one rated eBook, even though it's only number 9 in sales. At some point FictionWise started selling eBook subscriptions to Analog and Asimov's.

FictionWise - <http://www.fictionwise.com/>

Scatterbrain -

<http://www.fictionwise.com/servlet/mw?t=book.htm&bookid=16487&id=2848>

The Sealed Sky - <http://www.fictionwise.com/ebooks/eBook16364.htm>

e-Analog - <http://www.analogsf.com/E-Analog.shtml>

e-Asimov's -

<http://www.fictionwise.com/servlet/mw?t=book.htm&bookid=15586&id=28574>

The Science Fiction Crowsnest (now up to 116 issues, wow) has changed locations somethen during the last two years. They now have their own [computercrowsnest.com](http://www.computercrowsnest.com) domain name instead of the weird numerical URL they used to have. Interestingly they distinguish between SF and SciFi in their blurb during a time when fewer and fewer fans recall that SciFi was once considered an offensive term.

Science Fiction Crowsnest - SF, SciFi and Fantasy –

<http://www.computercrowsnest.com/index.php>

Those same two years have seen the Web littered with the remains of old SF efforts, but by the same token there are lots of interesting new SF sites that have appeared. The site 232.8°C has articles about Science Fiction and Fantasy, plus the genre's history and biographies of influential authors plus a newsletter to keep you abreast of site changes and additions. AllExperts has opened a section that sports a sizable collection of self-declared experts on different aspects of Science Fiction with links to previously asked questions. Runes is a new print magazine and Web site that published their first issue back in June. The silhouetted dragon on their website is beautiful. FutureFiction.com is a nice review web site. Of special interest to Canadians, the Made in Canada (MiC) newsletter sporting a graphic link to Torcon at the top, features news, reviews, interviews, and commentary. It is the place for finding out that four Canadians made the Hugo ballot this year.

Not Science Fiction/Fantasy exactly (or maybe it is) but interesting just the same is Alternate Headline. The web site is dedicated to bringing you newspaper headlines from alternate worlds. A sample or three –

AMERICA ENTERS WAR AGAINST NAZI GERMANY

Iroquois leaders key in breaking Indians' century-old isolationist policy

CHARLES MANSON ACQUITTED ON ALL CHARGES

Special Prosecutor unable to prove bribery charges against the governor

COMMUNISTS GIVEN ULTIMATUM

Czar Vladimir warns Soviet American Chairman Gus Hall: "No missiles in Sweden"

232.8°C - <http://hem.passagen.se/gumby/sf/eng/>

AllExperts Science Fiction Q&A -

<http://www.allexperts.com/getExpert.asp?Category=2157>

Runes - <http://www.runesmagazine.com/index.html>

FutureFiction.com - <http://www.futurefiction.com/>

MiC – Made in Canada - http://www.geocities.com/canadian_sf/Newsletters/

Alternate Headlines - <http://home.hiwaay.net/~billfl/altlines.html>

Science Fiction on TV

>From Magrathea's Science Fiction on TV pages
<http://www.sftv.org/sftv/sftvschd.txt>

SFTV New Season start dates / Special Airdates :

Duck Dodgers (Cartoon)	Aug 23 (Debut)
Enterprise (UPN)	Sep 10 (Season Three)
Jake 2.0 (UPN)	Sep 10 (Debut)
Carnivale (HBO)	Sep 14 (Debut)
CSI: Miami (CBS)	Sep 22 (Season Two)
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation	Sept 25 (Season Four)
Joan of Arcadia (CBS)	Sep 26 (Debut)
L.A. Dragnet (ABC)	Sep 27 (Season Two)
Alias (ABC)	Sep 28 (Season Three)
Charmed (WB)	Sep 28 (Season Six)
Andromeda (Syn)	Sep 29 (Season Four)
Mutant X (Syn)	Sep 29 (Season Three)
Smallville (WB)	Oct 1 (Season Three)
Angel (WB)	Oct 1 (Season Five)
Jeremiah (SHO)	Oct 10 (Season Two)
Tarzan (WB)	Oct 5 (Debut)
24 (FOX)	Oct 28 (Season Three)
Tru Calling (FOX)	Oct 30 (Debut)
Justice League (Cartoon)	Oct (Season Two)
Clone Wars (Cartoon)	Nov 7 (Debut)
Battlestar Galactica (SciFi)	Dec 7 (Debut)
Wonderfalls (FOX)	Jan (Debut)
Stephen King's Kingdom Hospital (ABC)	Feb 5 (Debut)
Fearless (The WB)	midseason (Debut)
Still Life (FOX)	midseason (Debut)

SFTV News and Info

According to a recent cover story in TV Guide, Stargate SG1 has been renewed for an eighth season as well as a spin-off series (with a new cast). New episodes, however, won't return until January 2004.

Yes, Clif and I (Margaret) have really enjoyed getting to see (for the first time) the first six seasons of Stargate SG1 but I still miss Farscape.

For more information, see our listing at:
<http://www.cam-info.net/sftv.html>

Let the Games Begin

Dungeons and Dragons in Chains

Valar Project, Inc, owned by a former Wizards of the Coast employee, formerly their licensing expert, probably tripled the value of his company with a single idea, a D&D rule expansion set for Erotic Role-Play. Published under Wizard's Open Gaming License, the photos for the "Book of Erotic Fantasy" will be by fetish fashion photographer Doug Safford. The photos, using live models, will then be manipulated digitally to create images of elves, fairies, nymphs, and other fantasy characters. Uh, ok. Wizards of the Coast was less than pleased, calling the book distasteful, but they are bound by the terms of their License (did I mention he was their former licensing expert?).

The GamingReport.com blurb says "Anthony Valterra helped found a fetish club (Oregon Guild Activists of S/M) and an occult church (Church of the Blood Red Moon) as well as engaging in a wide variety of other unusual adventures. He has used these personal experiences to guide him in the creation of this product".

I bet.

ICV2 Report - <http://www.icv2.com/articles/home/2695.html>

Wizards of the Coast Reaction - <http://www.gamingreport.com/article.php?sid=8260>

Gaming Report's Press Release - <http://www.gamingreport.com/article.php?sid=8253>

Science Fiction at the Movies

Lord of the Rings The Two Towers DVD is supposed to be released August 26, 2003. That is, next Tuesday as we type this section of the Info Alert but may lie in your past.

According to the "Coming Soon!" Website the DVD release date for the movie, "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," has been set for December 2. If you haven't seen the film, ignore what the critics say and check it out. I (Clif) can't say it is the greatest movie of all time, but it is a lot better than you would think from the reviews. Apparently they really made a mess of the comic book, but if you've never seen the comic book, you won't notice.

Coming Soon! 2003 DVD and video release dates

<http://www.comingsoon.net/dvd/dec03.php>

Hammer Returns From Dead

You may be too young to remember the old Hammer Films. They were a strange amalgamation. The plots were more than a little melodramatic and gave the term horror schlock new meaning (for the time anyway). But the films were beautiful. Now Hammer is planning on making a new movie for the first time in thirty years. Filmed in Australia. Apparently they have talked investors into the idea that new films will have long lives on DVD. <http://www.aintitcool.com/display.cgi?id=15873>

Awards Awards Awards

2003 Hugo Nominations - <http://www.sfgwa.org/News/03hugonom.htm>

Complete list of Hugos - <http://www.cam-info.net/hugonovels.html> .

Locus Awards - <http://www.locusmag.com/2003/News/News07Log2.html>

World Fantasy Nominations - <http://www.locusmag.com/2003/News/News08Log1.html>

The 2003 Hugo Awards

Best Novel: Hominids by Robert J. Sawyer

Best Novella: Coraline by Neil Gaiman.

Best Novelette: Slow Life by Michael Swanwick

Best Short Story: Falling Onto Mars by Geoffrey A. Landis

Best Related Book: Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill

Best Short Form Dramatic Presentation: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, "Conversations With Dead People"

Best Long Form Dramatic Presentation: The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

Best Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois

Best Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton

Best Semiprozine: Locus

Best Fanzine: Mimosa

Best Fan Writer: Dave Langford

Best Fan Artist: Sue Mason

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: Wen Spencer

Forthcoming SF, Fantasy, & Gaming Cons

Bubonicon 35

<http://bubonicon.home.att.net/>

August 22-24, 2003

Howard Johnson East

15 Hotel Circle, NE

Albuquerque, New Mexico

GOH: Charles de Lint

Toastmaster: Melinda Snodgrass

Artist GOH: Charles Vess

Panels, Art Show, Dealers Room, Gaming, Auctions, Film, Readings, Autographs, Filking, Science Talk, Costume Contest, Green Slimes, Audience Participation Events, and more!

For more information write:

NMSF Conference

Box 37257

Albuquerque, NM 87176

Or call (505) 266-8905

Or send email to cwcraig@nmia.com

Ballunar Liftoff Festival

<http://www.ballunarfestival.com/>

August 22-24, 2003

NASA Johnson Space Center

Houston, Texas

Visit this educational, exciting and educational family-oriented event at NASA/Johnson Space Center and enjoy hot air balloon competitions, evening balloon glows, skydiving exhibitions, commercial exhibits, concession booths, food from local restaurants, arts & crafts exhibits, entertainment and various aviation equipment displays.

Ballunar Liftoff Festival, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Its mission is to help the public learn about aviation and space exploration, and to sponsor and fund educational activities that encourage young people to learn about aviation and space and to study mathematics and the sciences.

TorCon III (The 61st World Science Fiction Convention)

<http://2003.worldcon.org/>

August 28-September 1, 2003

Metro Toronto Convention Centre

255 Front Street West, Toronto, Canada

GOH: George R.R. Martin

GOH: Mike Glyer

GOH: Robert Bloch

Artist GOH: Frank Kelly Freas

Toastmaster: Spider Robinson

And A NEW Listing

FenCon

<http://www.fencon.org>

September 24 - 26, 2004

Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex

Writers, Filk, Panels, Videos, Lots of fun stuff. This is a fan-operated convention being planned with fans in mind.

For more information write

FenCon

P. O. Box 560576

The Colony, TX 75056-0576

or send email (info@fencon.org)

Houston, We Have a Problem

With the passing of CONTEX, ConTroll, and now Consortium, Houston has no regularly occurring Science Fiction convention (with the exception of REVELcon, which is specialized). Any number of us have lamented the fact. But now, Houston fan, Brent (founder of the Houston SCIFI Book Trade Network) wants to take it to the next level.

Brent wants to start a dialogue with the goal of creating a general interest Science Fiction convention within the next two or three years. This is an open call for individuals who are interested in some level of involvement with putting on such a convention. The new convention might (or might not) act as a committee of Friends of Fandom, the convention might be held under the auspices of a local fan group such as Several Unlimited, it might be held as an activity of the relatively new Houston SCIFI Book Trade Network, etc. At this point, everything is on the table.

If you want to be involved, email that fact and your contact information to fof@cam-info.net and we will make sure that Brent gets it. When the conversation starts, you will be there.

Space, The Final Frontier.

When Bad Astronomy Happens to Good People

Astronomer, teacher, lecturer and all-around science junkie, Philip Plait (who works with NASA and for the physics and astronomy department at Sonoma State University) was exposed to all sorts of people and their ideas about what goes on in the sky around them. He was delighted to find that most people are very curious, but unfortunately there was a lot of misinformation spread about astronomy. Sometimes this information was just plain silly, but many times it made just enough sense that people believe it. Among the nonsense, most was harmless, but some, such as the belief that Planet X, a rogue giant planet, was about to destroy the Earth, in May 2003, was not.

His solution was a wonderful Web page at <http://www.badastronomy.com/> where he takes it all on in a completely entertaining way. Currently he is taking on the rumor that at its upcoming approach Mars will be "as big as the full Moon". (Thanks to Keith Irish for pointing the site out).

Bad Astronomy - <http://www.badastronomy.com/>
The Planet X Saga <http://www.badastronomy.com/bad/misc/planetx/nutshell.html>
Mars - Bad News - <http://www.badastronomy.com/bad/news/index.html>

Seven Asteroids for Seven Astronauts

Seven asteroids have been named in honor of the seven astronauts who were killed when the space shuttle Columbia disintegrated over Texas on February 1. The asteroids, which orbit in the main belt between Mars and Jupiter, were all discovered in 2001 by Jet Propulsion Laboratory astronomer Eleanor Helin and range from 3.1 to 4.3 miles in diameter.

<http://spaceflightnow.com/shuttle/sts107/030806asteroids/>

Houston, We Have a Marriage

Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko married Ekaterina Dmitriev on Sunday, August 10 as planned. Malenchenko is currently serving aboard the International Space Station while Dmitriev was in Houston, Texas. The ceremony was performed using a video hookup. This is the first time a wedding has been performed while one of the participants was in orbit. Malenchenko was defying the wishes of Russian officials in order to go ahead with the first marriage in space.

Malenchenko is an air force colonel and under Russian law is considered the holder of state secrets. He can marry a foreigner only after getting permission from his superiors. Dmitriev was born in Russia, but moved to the United States as a child and is now a U.S. citizen. Russian air force chief Co.-Gen. Vladimir Mikhailov reported was angered by Malenchenko's plans and told the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda that a "cosmonaut mustn't behave like a movie star". Malenchenko quietly arranged to have his tailcoat and wedding ring flown to him aboard a Progress cargo ship that arrived at the station in June. Hopefully the Russians wouldn't risk the bad publicity of taking action against their cosmonaut after he returns.

It might add new meaning to the phrase, "old ball and chain".

View From Mars

The first picture of the Earth and Moon taken by the Mars Global Surveyor is on the web at the National Geographic site, together with a quote from War of the Worlds.

National Geographic's First Picture of Earth From Mars -
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/05/0522_030522_earthmars.html

The Write Stuff (Pen and Ink Optional!)

A Clarion Call

What do Octavia Butler, Bruce Sterling, Kim Stanley Robinson, Pat Murphy and Nalo Hopkinson have in common? They were all students of Clarion, the Science Fiction and Fantasy writer's workshop that has been giving us some of our best writers for decades. But things are tough all over. Michigan State University was facing a severe budget crisis, and the university administration decided that Clarion was expendable. In July, millions of sf notables were urged to rush email to university officials and plead for a reprieve; the response was overwhelming. A continuing blow by blow account with copies of letters from Gardner Dozois, Gordon van Gelder, Ellen Datlow, Cory Doctorow, Karen Joy Fowler and Justina Robson can be found hidden deep within Eileen Gunn's webzine, The Infinite Matrix. Meanwhile, a fundraising campaign was kicked off by Clarion co-founder Kate Wilhelm's donation of \$5,000. She asks for Clarionites and friends of Clarion to at least match her contribution.

The Clarion Web page says “The amount and quality of emails and letters is overwhelming, and the University administrators are being affected. We ask that everyone who has not yet sent an email send one to Interim President and Provost Lou Anna K. Simon and Dean Wendy K. Wilkins, with a copy to us at clarion@msu.edu. Time is still of the essence”.

Sometimes snail mail gets more attention than email and the Physical Addresses are listed on the SFWA News site.

Provost Simon - laksimon@msu.edu

Dean Wilkins - wwilkins@msu.edu

Clarion - <http://www.msu.edu/~clarion/>

The Infinite Matrix - <http://www.infinitematrix.net/>

SFWA Clarion News - <http://www.sfwaweb.org/news/fundgone.htm>

Speaking of SFWA, the Science Fiction Writers of America, have updated their membership requirements. The official line is that the changes are to make membership requirements more clear, but who knows what politics lurk behind the scenes. As I (Clif) read them the regs are very mildly tighter now, and they still have not addressed the criticism that Piers Anthony made in his autobiography, that the entry requirements aren't applied to writers each year so that once he/she was in, a writer could be in 30 years later without ever again setting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboards). Dunno. If they did that their membership might shrink enough that they were no longer as well financed or as effective in their fight against the evils of corporate publishing.

SFWA Membership Requirements - <http://www.sfwaweb.org/org/qualify.htm>

Listings received since the last InfoAlert

The Mercury Studio Screenwriting Group offers amateur and professional screenwriters a chance to meet and share ideas with other screenwriters in the Houston area. Bring your ideas. Ask questions. Join in guided discussions and activities. Contribute and receive professional feedback. Everyone welcome!

For more information and meeting schedule, www.mercurystudio.org

Or call Fred Stawitz at 281-591-7479

Meetings held at:

Mercury Studio

1600 W. 13th Street

Houston, TX 77008-6451

Business Office: 713-864-9669

Or send email to stmkr@aol.com

Austin SlugTribe (<http://www.jedi.net/slugtribe/>)invites you to join us for semi-monthly sf/f/h critique. This writers critique & networking group meets 2nd & 4th Tuesdays 7 PM-10 PM at the Hancock Rec Center, Activity Rm 2, located at 41st & Red River, Austin, TX. All levels of writing welcome. Over 15 years of taking writers from newbie to pro. Austin SlugTribe also coordinates the annual ArmadilloCon Writers Workshop.

FFFeedback

We heard from :

Well, we may have heard from a lot of people, but it's been so long since we have published an issue, who knows? We knew there would be no emails of comment before the issue went out.

So we went to the HOU-SCIFIBOOK-VERBOSE group and asked a burning question that has been on our minds for some time. Well, on Clif's mind anyway. The question: What is the number one absolute worst movie of all time for making a total hash of science??? Mere anachronism, stuff where we know better now but didn't then, doesn't count. Neither does outright fantasy. If they are flying around on broomsticks, then they are throwing science out the window to start with, rather than making hash out of it.

We were interested in what the assembled minds of VERBOSE would suggest, but we were particularly interested in Al Jackson's opinion, since his knowledge of both science and movies is encyclopedic.

We heard from **Al Jackson**:

That is an interesting question.

Because, after a few SF films in the early 50's , like Destination Moon, The Day the Earth Stood Still, War of the Worlds, The Thing, ... things really went sour! Everything from the industrial strength ennui of Fire Maidens from Outer Space, to the loony toons of Robot Monster and Plan 9 From Outer Space. But there were so many of these late 50's Z-films, and they didn't seem to have a thought behind them at all, so they seem to hardly count.

I do know that a couple of films , THIS ISLAND EARTH and (the 1959) FLY, have been touted as 'classics', but I think are awful, in fact MST3K did a perfect number on THIS ISLAND EARTH.

I don't know, the recent ARAMGEDDON was very bad in the science area, ... it seemed they had no science advisor at all... it was strange to watch that film when DEEP IMPACT came out a few months before with a much better science behind it.... tho it had its goofs.

It's interesting, the best film, almost perfect science-wise, Kubrick-Clarke's, 2001, hewed to the old SF prose maxim of, 'show it working', don't explain it! I think one of the most befuddling things about SF film and TV, from the 50's to the present, is 'techno babble', even our darling Star Trek has, at times, gone in for it, I don't know why!!!!

Why screen writers and teleplay writers think techno babble advances dramatic narrative is beyond me! 99% of viewers, surely, don't give a damn about how some piece of 'super science' works! John Campbell set the rules about this back in 1938! And prose SF have benefited ever since!

One thing to note is good SF prose is usually not about 'science', even if John Campbell had a lot of puzzle stories in his magazine, the best stuff that appeared there, and elsewhere, used good science, extrapolated science and technology, to make a setting, a milieu, for a good story. Good science and even well extrapolated technology + a poor story = bad prose!

You know Cliff, a better question is, why has so much classic prose Science Fiction been ignored as source material for film? (It has fared a little better on as radio and TV drama.)

That is, if one were to sit down and make a list of good films made from genre fiction,..... let's take Detective and Western novels as an example, you would find great films made from Raymond Chandler's novels or Jack Warner Schaefer novels, just to name two, you make your own list.

See how long these lists are compared to the films made from Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke!

Not to mention better SF writers such as Sturgeon and Pohl.

Alas people have done a few Phil Dick novels, but with only one success, Blade Runner. (Just think of the crap movie made out of Starship Troopers! Why Paul Verhoeven was interested in Heinlein's novel is beyond me, especially after trashing a Phil Dick story in Total Recall (1990) , I guess his Robocop is kind of fun, but he ventured into SF again (well SF horror) with Hollow Man (2000). He should have stuck with films like Showgirls ! He is really a strange guy, .. he went from making art films like Soldier of Orange and Spetters to Hollywood 'junk' film! Actually since Hollow Man he seems to have disappeared, ... maybe he has gone back to Europe and is going to make good films again!)

Well, of course, I know one reason for ignoring top SF is, top SF prose is 'big thinks', 'o, that makes my head hurt!',

The Stars My Destination is still a dynamite idea for a SF film, in fact, I know that Bester, himself wrote a screenplay for it....

Better yet ... Heinlein's juvie's , these are still terrific stories , with beautiful verisimilitude, would only need a little touch up.....

or

Poul Anderson's super sophisticated space opera, like his Dominic Flandry series, a step up from Star Trek, but nothing that would hurt your brain!

One of the most enjoyable experiences of my life was getting to talk to Gene Roddenberry at the World Con in Cleveland in 1966 and finding out he had actually read a lot of SF! Knew it well.

The rest is history.

I don't see 'hurt your brain' SF such as Sturgeon's More Than Human or Ursula K Le Guin's Left hand of Darkness or Walter M. Miller's A Canticle for Leibowitz , etc....., ever being made into film, ... still there is a lot of classic SF that I think would have commercial appeal..... and it still lies fallow.

Al

We heard from **Russ Ault**:

Oy. There are so many worthy candidates. The list of movies without serious science problems is shorter. (And as far as I'm concerned, none of the Trek or Star Wars movies is a candidate for the latter.)

Would the movie get extra discredit for being a bad movie with bad science, or would a *good* movie with bad science be the preferred target?

(Dunno. As with a number of questions Conan asked that made me realize, I didn't think the question all the way through before I asked it. – Clif)

We heard from **Keith Irish**:

Off the top of my head, Armageddon has to top the list. The science was atrocious. It made me cringe. The story was lousy. The characters didn't interest me (well, maybe one ;-)), and then the things like the guns on the ships? Plus it was too cookie cutter plot device. About the only redeeming value the movie had for me was they got access to NASA and actually filmed at Johnson Space Center. The training scene with the water tank was filmed at the JSC water tank facility - they paid for it. Of course, I laughed/cringed when they tested out the special space suits for thruster ability in the large chamber. That chamber is Chamber A in the Thermal Vacuum test facility in

building 32. It provides vacuum and cold, but does not provide antigravity (as suggested by the movie). *sigh*

I hear the recent movie about the trip to the center of the Earth was pretty bad, but I didn't see it so I can only go on rumor and speculation.

Anyone seriously interested in scientific reviews of popular movies should check out Bad Astronomy www.badastronomy.com. The author reviews movies on their depictions of astronomy and what they get wrong, plus what they get right. He also deals with misconceptions in the media, from print to television news to TV series.

I think one has to understand the flaws in the Hollywood movie making system to understand the problems of SF in movies. I read an excellent summary of the challenges of getting Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* movie made, written by one of the writers of the screenplay. Quick review of the movie: the first half was a decent rendition of the concept if slightly modified to fit the times, but then it took a tangent mid-movie with the depiction of the alien craft. Also, more controversial elements were ignored/omitted. Summary of the problem: this guy and his buddy, fresh on the success of another movie, went to producers and said "We want to make *The Puppet Masters*". The producers let them write a screenplay. Somewhere along the way, they were booted off the project and alternate screenplay writers brought in. Then there was another similar movie made, a sequel in the *Body Snatchers* set of lousy take offs (incidentally written in part by the same writers who started *The Puppet Masters*). Finally, the original writers were brought back to *The Puppet Masters*, and found themselves competing with themselves to tell the story and not copy what they had just written for the other movie. Enter the butchery. And then the director got ahold of the movie, and changed things to suit his fancy.

Plus this wonderful encounter when the writers had a conversation with a producer who balked at having the female character be so strong and important, saying "Women in this type of movie are always the girlfriend." And this from a female producer.

As for *Starship Troopers*, that is once again a clear demonstration of the power of the director to affect a movie. What started out as an attempt to do a good rendition of Heinlein was molded by Verhoeven, who decided that Heinlein was a fascist and remolded the elements of the story to make them unappealing (Sergeant Zim becoming a sadist, for instance, or playing up the militaristic element) while satirizing the genre through his choices (like casting Doogie Howser as the scary psychic agent, or using WWII infantry tactics without air support/artillery while eliminating the powered armor that made the concept work in the book). What comes out is *Bug Hunt 2000* and only bears a distant resemblance of Heinlein's story.

Now from the standpoint of science, I don't think *Starship Troopers* was that bad.

But I agree that what makes good science fiction prose is characters you enjoy and a good story. That was actually what made Star Wars a success - they used the futuristic settings and flashy effects to tell a fun story with common themes and fun characters.

-K

We heard from **Conan Allcorn**:

Although I am not at all a fan of techno-babble, if they don't explain how something works, can the scientists be sure that the makers of the movie are being correct in their science? I mean there's a right way to travel to the moon in a rocket, and a wrong way; I assume that sometimes you could tell through visual (or other) clues whether the science was more or less correct, but in others it might be up in the air. Of course, this could be a boon for SF writers/directors, who, if clever, can get away with 'realistically' presenting tech working that they have no idea about, simply by being minimal and 'hiding' their ignorance.

Which seems like an OK thing to me.

I think one of the main problems with film in this area is that presenting such sophisticated ideas and milieus AND good stories AND characters is difficult in the movie time frame, which at the moment might be stretched to 3 1/2 hours if you're feeling brave.

How much useful incident and subtle milieu clues can you expect people to absorb in the middle of the flashy effects and nail-biting tension that is bound to creep in (and even in a good SF movie that isn't 'about' the effects, they'll still probably be eye-catching)?

Consider LOTR: in my opinion (as a moderate Tolkien fan), there was too much combat screen time (especially in the Two Towers - but I wanted more Ents so I guess I'm biased). However, what else could they have done, realistically speaking? In the books themselves there are many combat encounters, but Tolkien didn't feel the need to give us a blow by blow account of any of the battles; he could do that because the written medium allowed him to. However, in LOTR the film, if the fellowship gets ambushed by a bunch of orcs, there isn't much film way to avoid the combat. Imagine the orcs burst in and everybody screams, then we immediately cut to the Fellowship wounded and bruised and shaken and running down the hallway away from the already finished battle. Tolkien could do something similar in his books (where he had considerably more space in the first place), but people watching such a movie might be a bit, um, disturbed by the lack of detail.

It might make an interesting Indie film, but probably even many Tolkien fans would feel a little weird about it. Not because they want to watch 5 minutes worth of sword-slogging, but because people just seem to like continuity. And if all the fights take 10 seconds (all the orcs fall on their swords or something) it will take away the air of menacing danger that is supposed to be hounding the Fellowship; they are supposed to be bruised and wounded, and not by continually tripping over their own feet and dropping

their weapons on their feet. In a 3 1/2 hour film there doesn't seem to be much room to compromise in this area (although there's always a little). Of course the same would go for spaceship combats or laser battles or any episode of real tension that can be left to the imagination in a book (where setting and character have been considerable built up over a longer period of time) but not so successfully in a film. (Sorry to bring up Tolkien, I know many of the SF/Fantasy people I know really don't like his stuff at all, but it seemed germane to the point).

I can even think of many relatively short novels that would be hard to fit into film format. Short stories would probably fare better, but they too might need to be reworked by someone familiar with the author and their material. Of course you can always make trilogies or septologies I suppose, but has anyone yet taken a single discrete story and made into a film trilogy - a long miniseries that gets shown on TV, yes (with correspondingly less attention and budget paid to the details and subtleties), but does anyone know of a discrete written story split up into a trilogy for mainstream film status? LOTR and Potter each have one film dedicated to one of the books in the series (and frankly I'm wondering how they will fit Potter 4 and 5 into even a 3 hour movie format without butchering it); people seem averse to breaking up a discrete story (say Niven's Ringworld - just the original by itself) into three (or seven or ten) discrete movies (as opposed to miniseries, which people do all the time). I'm not sure why that is, but it seems true (although my knowledge of movies before the 80's is less than complete).

Although we have established my lack of engineering and scientific credentials (although I remain an interested observer when it suits me) the movie Armageddon leaped to my mind as well, for some reason. I mean I couldn't tell you on the fly what exactly was wrong with it (partly because I haven't seen it a long time) it definitely gave me the feeling of wrong-ness. A real "yeah, right, whatever" feeling. The Core also seems like a good candidate, but I didn't see that one either - the preview for it gave me the same feeling though.

Cheers,
Conan
Perfect Machine, Perfect Justice

We heard from **David Forbus**:

I think in many cases, the writer doesn't have enough technical knowledge to explain how something will work. People can extrapolate from what they do know, to what may be possible. The really bad mistake is trying to explain something that is totally wrong. In a story about race cars I can see the writer explaining the workings of the engine. In sci-fi, such technical details are important. To be true sci-fi, some technical concept should be key to the plot. As an example: In Forbidden Planet, the idea of a machine that turns thoughts into reality is key to the conflict. A love story about the daughter is of no consequence. So a scene where the machine is explained is a must. Now, the actual details of how it works may not be necessary, but the concept of the machine is.

Has anyone ever heard of a scientifically sound explanation for "force fields"?

Personally, I love stories where a scientific concept is key to the story's plot. The Andromeda Strain is an example of a great story with lots of technical detail that drives the plot.

DLF

Thanks, guys. The thought that was put into answering the question far exceeds anything I expected.

- Clif

That's about it for another Info Alert. We will try to shorten the gap to the next one.

The Info Alert is edited and mostly written by Clif and Margaret Davis operating under the authority of Friends Of Fandom Vice-President of Publications - Dave Branda.

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And now with a certain comforting inevitability, **THE FINE PRINT...**

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