

BCSFAzine

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#302

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The Sword's Edge

Notes from the S'harien

By Don and Lisa McGovern

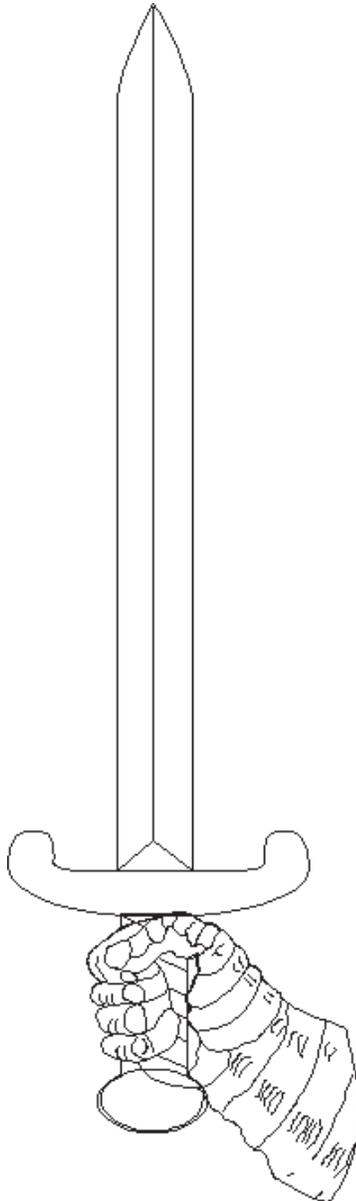
This is the first of many articles we hope to submit to the BCSFAzine. Other S'harien members might write them, but they will come!

We are sure you are all aware S'harien members have put in a bid for VCon 24. We hope for your support and will certainly be picking some BCSFA members' brains for advice on just how to do (or not to do) all this! Hopefully, we haven't bitten off more than we can chew! Thanks to **Les Shewchuk, Doe Poirier, Steve 40, and David Langtry** for helping us get this show on the road. We are looking to put on a great con. The latest update: **AC Crispin** has agreed to be our literary GOH. She is bringing her significant other **Michael Capobianco**, also a Science Fiction writer. The con will take place (pending acceptance of our bid) May 21-23, 1999 at the Surrey Inn.

Other news: We are working to get our entire executive to join BCSFA, as we would like to see more interactions between the two clubs. For the sake of clarity between us, the S'harien is now a **Science Fiction/Fantasy Social Club**. We may use titles like Captain and Section Chiefs, but that is mainly for story purposes. And to get **Steve 40's** goat!!! (If you want to know about the story, you have to join the club or buy the **Chronicles of the S'harien. The Neutral Zone Journal** - the bi-monthly club journal, is available for \$3. If there is interest we can bring Journals to FRED)

One last note. We would like to take this opportunity to invite any BCSFA member to S'harien events. The next major event is a club social on July 25th. It will be a S'harien Murder Mystery and we need to know by July 4th whether you will be coming as **Tammy and Lisa** are writing the murder mystery. Call Lisa @ 931-1241 or email to dmcgover@direct.ca. After that the next event is The Battle of the Starships. This is a wacky Olympics where teams compete against each other in strange events i.e. Frisbee tossing, popcorn run, etc. The winning team gets prizes and the trophy. It takes place Sunday, August 23 at 11 a.m. in Central Park. Get a team together and join us!

Catch you next month!

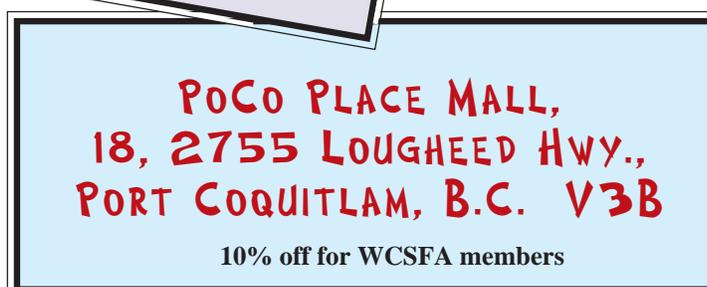


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Press Release:

The National Science Fiction and Fantasy Society held a very successful fund-raising auction on June 7 1998 at Ad Astra in Toronto.

The SF crowd is reputed to be a bawdy bunch and they certainly lived up to expectation at this event. Among the many auction highlights was a large wooden bas-relief depicting a scene of orgiastic decadence, this untitled work was the object of much frenzied bidding and was eventually knocked down at \$200. The

Fat Puppy Press

Fat Puppy Press is pleased to announce that it now carries a line of fine science fiction/fantasy art CDs (very high quality "clipart") with images from some of the best artists in the world. Inexpensive, they make great gifts, art resources, and aids in contacting other artists. For complete information about these CDs, please contact us.

The art CDs now handled by Fat Puppy Press are unique. They make great gifts (even... or especially... to one's self), valuable art resources, and can aid in contacting artists if you might wish to purchase their artwork (either originals or prints). The art can be used to make one-of-a-kind fantastic stationery and greeting cards, liven up letters to other artists or fans, dress up calendars, or... well, you get the idea.

The art on these CDs, while called "clipart," is in reality very high quality art in color and B&W by some of the best-known, award-winning professional and fan artists in, quite literally, the world. The CDs are Win 95, Win 3.1, and Mac compatible.

There are six CDs available now, with four more due out in the next year. They are:

1. FEVERED DREAMS: EROTIC FANTASY ART — This is the first title to be produced by Fat Puppy Press. It contains over 200

vintage fanzine **Weird Tails** containing soft-core slash fiction from such 'sedate' luminaries as Robert Runte, Lorna Toolis and **Diane Walton** was also a 'hot' item.

We have neither space nor time to list all the wonderful lots donated for auction but 'The Society' would like to thank everyone for their generous donations. In addition we would like to acknowledge the hard work of our volunteers and auctioneers including the two "guest" auctioneers Nancy Baker and Josepha Sherman. Donors, volunteers and, of course, bidders all combined to make this a memorable and successful event. The National Science Fiction and Fantasy Society will use this money to continue promoting

high-quality color and B&W images from artists such as George Barr, Monika Livingstone, Donna Barr, Gary Davis and more. This CD treats sex in a light, fun, and uninhibitedly erotic way. (You must, of course, be over 21 to purchase this CD.)

2. SCI-FI & FANTASY CLIPART: ATLANTIS TO THE STARS — A "generic" sf/fantasy art CD with 1000 images by 33 American and Canadian artists, including Alicia Austin, George Barr, Alan M. Clark, Steve Gallacci, Michael Goodwin, Monika Livingstone, Julia Lacquement, and David Martin.

3. DRAGONS & DINOSAURS — A "theme" art CD with 1000 images by 65 artists, including Kevin Brockschmidt, David Cherry, Gary Davis, Mark Ferrari, Cora Lee Healy, Randy "Tarkas" Hoar, April Lee, Ellisa Mitchell, Ingrid Neilson, Diana Harlan Stein, H.R. van Dongen, and Dixie Walker.

4. ROCKETS & ROBOTS — Another "theme" art CD with 1000 images by 71 artists from the US, Canada, Germany, and England, including Frank Kelly Freas, George Barr, Gail Butler, Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, Kelly Faltermayer, Bob Hobbs, Ross

Mathis, Jean-Pierre Normand, George W. Todd III, William R. Warren, and Dale Ziemianski.

5. SCI-FI & FANTASY 2000: THE STARS AND BEYOND — Another "generic" sf art CD with 1000 images by 46 artists from the US, Canada, and Germany, including Alicia Austin, Gabriele Berndt, Alan M. Clark, Gary Davis, Jael, Lissanne Lake, Mark Roland, and H.R. van Dongen.

6. ATLANTIS TO THE STARS SCREENSAVER — 250+ images in full color by 31 different artists, set up in seven different categories. It will be almost impossible to get bored with this screensaver.

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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, either by phone or e-mail. My phone number is (208) 882-3672, 8am to 10pm Pacific Coast Time.

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Canadian SF&F and to promote SF&F in Canada.

The auction was such a hit that 'The Society' has been asked to repeat it later this year at Con*Cept in Montreal. We look forward to seeing you there.

Donors, volunteers and event staff included: **Raymond Alexander**, **James Armstrong**, Ad Astra, **John Anderson**, Bakka Books, Edo van Belkom, Jack Brooks, Lesley Choyce, **Carolyn Clink**, Contact Editions, Con*Cept, Glen and Carol Cook, **Cory Doctorow**, T.M. Driverman, **Kyle S. Duncan**, Fabulous Finds, H.B. Fenn & Co., **Jamie Fraser Books**, Freelance, **Amanda Foubister**, **Marcel Gagne**, Michael

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FOX TAILS

Faux Fur

One of the more striking things that you'll see if you visit a furry convention or get-together is something shared with other SF cons and events as well. At each one, there are groups who enjoy not just being part of the fandom, but who get a little deeper into the theme - at SF cons, it's SCA members or Trek fans who show up in the accoutrements of their preferred interests, and at furry cons, it's the furs who show up in the fur. Or fursuit, actually.

Fursuiting is a growing interest among furry fans; there seems to be a real interest into getting 'into the skin' of the creatures that inhabit our minds and appearing that way towards other furs. For some, it's a hobby, for others it's bordering on a way of life.

I can't say that I'm an expert on the making or the wearing of fursuits - I've never even seen one in person, actually - but still, they do intrigue me, and the way that they seem to be the link between where we are and where we want to be has produced some fascinating discussions in newsgroups and mail.

A question in the most used Furry Code (which URL I don't have handy, check out <http://www.personal.isat.com/captpackrat> for a link to it) asks the responder whether, if it were offered, they would accept the ability to be transformed into their personal furry. Most (including me) wouldn't even think twice. However, right now that option isn't available to us, so many make that link with one of the various types and levels of fursuit available.

The complete fursuit is one that many people have seen - the most common type of suit is the sports team or corporate mascot, those big, bulky suits that are commonly seen hanging around at games. In Vancouver, the most noticeable is The Fox, the mascot for the radio station of the same name - which is actually a fairly good example of the mascot style. Cartoon character suits are also a popular example - I have

photos from a con last year of Pepe Le Pew and Lola Bunny suits that were *extremely* popular.

However, many fursuit builders have focused their attentions on more attractive, moveable and realistic creations. There are several fursuiters (none of whom I'm familiar with, alas) who have produced striking costumes of very animal-like beings that look very, very realistic in their design and wear.

Another method is something I've seen former BCSFA furry writer and fursuiter extraordinaire Lynx Meerkat use often, which steps away from the full-body suit and instead combines components to produce a less heavy, more flexible suit style. Instead of having a body and a heavy formed head that reduces visibility and serves as a portable sauna, portions of the suit are put on separately - paws and feet, ears and tail, for example. Generally, there's some makeup work involved, too - Lynx often used latex muzzles that he blended in expertly with the rest of the face, providing the usual markings of the character.

Often, that can also be broken down even further - furs will be seen wearing ears and tail through conventions, which is beneficial in that it's still totally cool-looking and if you have to pass through areas that are populated by mundanes, you can go into stealth mode by unclipping the tail and stowing the ears in your shirt. :)

Somewhat unrelated but still a way of connecting to the personal furry is the wearing of collars by furs. Many do wear them, but often it's considered a bondage thing by people who don't understand it. While some of the furs might lean that way, not all of them do. I have two collars, for example; I enjoy wearing them at times because they do give me a connection to my furry self. One of my closest furfriends wears a choke chain most of the time under his shirt, because he likes the feel of it. It's not a possession thing (though should I get tags, they'll bear sets of initials as required;)), it's not because I want to be leashed or tied up, etc., it's just a way to get in touch with my furry self. In essence, the collar is the lowest common form of the fursuit for many furs.

For more information about construction of fursuits, and some great pictures, Nicodemus' page is a great resource; he can be found at <http://www.best.com/~nico/fursuit.cgi>. There are links to other pages as well from his site; take a look if you're interested in the fursuiting community. But be careful - it can be addictive.

Until next month, keep your tails clean...



- Tony

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JOHNNY SAYS...

So here's the situation.

First of all, the computer that this magazine is laid out on takes itself and commits Hari Kari. As a result, the technician decides to erase the entire hard drive by reformatting it. Since this fails to solve the problem, the motherboard is replaced which seems to solve the problem.

Fine.

Now the computer runs slower and I have lost some of the programs and files that were on that drive. Nothing a few hundred dollars wouldn't solve.

Then the boss decides to replace the computer anyway. Now I am working on one of the newest power Macintosh computers on the market. It is a "G3" running at 233 megahertz.

Fast?

Hell, yeah!

So what's the problem?

I can't get my PC files to work on the Macintosh.

Now, don't get me wrong! I love the Mac. I started out on DTP using one of the early Macintosh computers. Given the chance, I would choose the Mac over the PC. Macs have the ability to read PC files built into the operating system. You need to buy the software to get a PC to read a Mac disk.

So here's my problem. My Pagemaker files are platform specific. I suspect that the Photoshop files are going to be the same as well as all the other graphic files which now have to be converted to the Mac side.

As if that wasn't going to slow me down, my Mac is going to have a PC emulator in it in a couple of months. All the PC programs will have to be installed into the PC side of the Mac.

So long drive space.

So what does this mean to you?

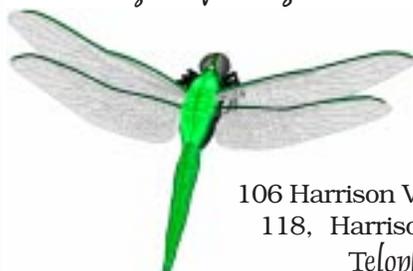
It means that the Acrobat files may take a bit of time as I have to now get the Mac version to create them. The next issue will be done on the Macintosh. As I switch over, things in this magazine will suffer a bit (maybe).

Please be patient.



John C.H. Wong

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Writer's Group is open for new Members

Clarion-style critique group for science fiction writers meet every two weeks, 7pm, Thursdays at the Metrotown Public Library in Burnaby.

All other genres are welcome. Our next scheduled meeting days are as follows:

July 2nd, July 16th, July 30th
August 14th, August 28th

Those interested in finding out if a writer's workshop is right for them should feel free to show up on the above mentioned meeting dates. We are located in the first floor meeting room. Contact Allan Lawson at 946-2427.

One for the Morning Glory, John Barnes (Tor 1996)

Komarr, Lois McMaster Bujold (Baen 1998)

Looking for the Mahdi, N. Lee Wood (Ace 1996)

First of all I'd like to thank all of you who walked up and waved indignant fists at me at V-Con. It's nice to know that my column is being read and that you disagreed with me about Lois McMaster Bujold's "Memory."

Thus, I would love to continue aggravating all of you by panning her very latest book, **Komarr**, but alas I cannot. **Komarr** is everything we have come to expect from a Bujold book. It's fast-paced, funny, tightly-plotted, well characterized, and has a great setting.

Miles is on his second assignment as an Imperior Auditor (an independent investigator with broad powers who reports directly to the Emperor of Barrayar), and this time he's been sent to the planet Komarr where a solar array which is vital to the planet's terraforming efforts has been seriously damaged—either by accident or sabotage. Since Miles is the only son of General Vorkosigan, locally known as "the Butcher of Komarr" because of wartime atrocities under his command 30 years before, Miles anticipates a bumpy welcome. What he doesn't anticipate is becoming smitten with the wife of the Barrayan official whose home he is staying in.

I won't spoil it by telling you more. This is a must read.

Another book worth your time is **Looking for the Mahdi**, an action-adventure novel set in the near future. It's pretty clear that **N. Lee Wood** has visited the Middle East because while the tiny Muslim country of "Khuruchabja" is fictional, the author gets many of the Third World details exactly right—from the travellers at the airport lugging in every Western consumer good they can carry, to the starving street children with sores in their eyes.

The viewpoint character in this book is K.B. Munadi, a tough-talking war correspondent who became famous for broadcasting live reports during the Khuruchabja war. What K.B.'s viewers never knew was that "he" was a woman disguising herself as a man so that she could travel freely in the Middle East. Ten years after the war she's working as a news feeder under her real name, Kay Bee Sulaiman, and she has no intention of passing as a man again, never mind returning to a poverty-stricken hellhole she'd barely escaped with her life.

Until, of course, she is blackmailed by the American CDI (CIA) who want her to return for one last assignment. Worse still, she has to accompany a humanoid fabricant—a patented, bio-engineered soldier/spy who is being sold by the CDI to the King of Khuruchabja. Kay Bee loathes and fears replicants, and she certainly doesn't

want to start feeling sorry for one—or sexually attracted to him.

There are a few weaknesses in this book. Wood cannot resist inserting long lectures about Middle East politics and genetic engineering. However, the reader who isn't interested in 8 pages of fine detail can just skip forward. A more serious issue is the one-note characterization of Kay Bee, who is just too angry and strident too much of the time. Also, there is a long, unnecessary torture scene near the end during which the villain explains his motives in best cliché style.

In all, the book ends weakly, at least from a character point of view. One gets the feeling that once the geopolitical plot threads have been tied up and explained for five pages, the author loses interest.

Still, this is a well considered, fast-moving story, with a refreshingly intelligent and complex view of the Middle East. CNN junkies and history/politics fans will enjoy this.

For a completely different type of novel, readers may want to take a look at the humorous fantasy tale **One for the Morning Glory**. When **John Barnes** writes a good book, it is tops (for instance, I highly recommend "*Orbital Resonance*"). However, I almost stopped reading Barnes because he is also very prolific and wildly inconsistent. He has written a lot of pointless and extremely gory novels, but this one is a refreshing, delightful change.

Did you enjoy the whimsical humour of T. H. White's "*The Sword in the Stone*?" Well, this is the book for you. It is the story of young prince Amatus, who accidentally swallowed the Wine of the Gods as a child and had the entire left side of his body vanish. Not long thereafter, four mysterious

strangers appeared and took up positions in the court—as the Royal Alchemist, Royal Witch, Royal Nurse, and Captain of the Guard. By this sign the whole Kingdom knows that a Story is unfolding, and indeed grand adventures and sweeping events take place.

I usually avoid fantasy so I expected to put this book down after a few chapters, but Barnes' clever humour kept me reading. Also, although much of the plot is absurd, Barnes managed to make the characters so compelling that the reader becomes very involved. This is a book which could be read and enjoyed by children (although a few of the scenes are a bit more violent than I cared for) but it is definitely an adult novel—well written, tightly plotted and intelligent.

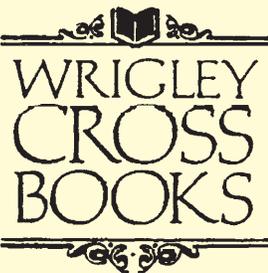
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by Donna McMahon



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Forget Reality Enjoy Feeding Frenzies

or tell me why I don't like Mondays again.

FREFF is an informal gathering of food fans where all who read this article are welcome to attend. Each month, on the last Monday, we pick a restaurant to dine at. Odd numbered months mean it's outside Vancouver, while even numbered months mean inside. And if you can pick a better selection than the choices made so far, please show up. We'd really like to hear from you.

July's restaurant will be Wah Lai Gardens (#201 - 4501 North Road, Burnaby). It is purported to be one of the best Chinese restaurants on the Burquitlam border, which says a lot, as the Burquitlam border is packed with excellent restaurants, Chinese or otherwise. I haven't eaten there yet, so this article will describe how best to get there.

Parking is no problem, as Wah Lai Gardens is part of a shopping complex - with three levels of parking lot! Skytrainers are well advised to disembark at New Westminster Station, then proceed on the #147, #148, or #156 bus. As soon as your bus is in close proximity to the overhead bridge that is the Trans Canada Highway, you will want to get off at the next stop. That stop puts you



right across the street from the Wah Lai, where you can calculate the odds of suicidal jaywalking or crossing at the light a few blocks up the street. Another bus route is the 99B-Line which runs from UBC to Lougheed Mall. Be very careful which one you board, as some 99B's end their route at Brentwood Mall. Once you make it to Lougheed Mall, walk south along North Road, and within a few blocks you will reach Wah Lai. Remember: McDonalds is north, and on the wrong side of North Road. Esso gas station is south, and on the right side of North Road.

So remember: 7pm July 27th, Wai Lai Gardens #201 - 4501 North Road, Burnaby.

August's FREFF will be Fatzo's Barbeque Smokehouse (2884 West Broadway, Vancouver). A place where vegetarianism means fried pickles and stuffed jalapenos! And a place where the secret ingredients for the house BBQ sauce is said to include pickle juice and Coke Classic. But more on that next issue.

So remember: 7pm August 24th, Fatzo's Barbeque Smokehouse 2884 West Broadway, Vancouver.

Editor's Note:

Don's book is still available at Granville Book Company near Robson across from the Granville 7 Cinema.

Night of the Writer Roasties (Coming in September)

Some background first.

The weekend before VCON, at an undisclosed location, I was glancing through an anthology of short stories written by Spider Robinson. Overhearing my pleasant surprise that the book in question had been published this year, a fellow BCSFAN made allegations of a conspiracy afoot in the club to systematically ignore all local authors over forty.

To which I can only say "What a lotta cr*p!"

May's issue proves otherwise. Okay, so Lois McMaster Bujold isn't local. But she is over forty. In fact, I think our current editor would happily print articles on local authors who are over forty, if only people would submit them.

However, there does seem to be a general lack of discussion of local authors in this club, which I'd like to try rectifying as follows. Every three or four months, I will organize a meeting date to discuss the selected work of a local author. Perhaps a novel. Perhaps a short story anthology. Perhaps even a single short story. And should the author in question show up to face the music, we would pay for his or

her meal.

The book I have arbitrarily decided to be discussed in September is "Steeldriver" by Don DeBrandt. This book is still on the shelves at various locales (such as White Dwarf, Duthies and the Vancouver Public Library system). If you can not find this book at your local bookstore, NOW is the time to order it. I do not believe they've all gone out of print yet. I secured mine at a Chapters on May 20 - two weeks after being unable to find a copy at the same store and long after the book was officially released. So your only excuse for not finding this book is that you really don't want to read it at all.

So where should this Writer's Roast be held? A restaurant? A pub? A coffee shop? A public space (such as a park, a beach or a university campus)? And when should it be held? On the weekend? A weekday? Should it be part of a FRED, FREC, or FREFF? Your suggestions are important, although Don DeBrandt gets the deciding vote should he choose to have any say in this. In the event that nobody contacts me prior to next issue's deadline, the final decision will be mine.

So remember. September's book will be "Steeldriver" by Don DeBrandt. Go out and secure your copy now. Date, time and place for the book discussion and roasting of author to be announced next issue.

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Post Accident Report IV.

Yes, I still ache and need to recover a bit more so my boss has given me the summer off. Hopefully I'll be back to work in the fall. Besides, I'm helping my Mom move and it seems like every few weeks I fly to Vancouver to see another doctor.

Hey, I really enjoyed VCon23 and I'm not making it up this time.

Oh, Uncle LJB and his new "friend" Billy say "Hello."

Babylon 5: We Pay For It?

Victoria's CHEK-6 TV could be giving local B5 fans a chance to see **Babylon Project: Crusade** this January. There's a catch. The station gets about \$3,200.00 from advertisers for that time slot and the show cost \$3,800.00 per-week to air. They are asking the fans to pay the \$32,100 they would lose per season. Many in the local Babylonian Underground find this bit too much, (heck it's just a show) so it could be back to square one again.

I remember telling you who's in "Crusade" back in BCSFAzine #300. Here now is the official list. Jeff Conaway has been signed for 17 episodes for the first season and 22 episodes for the second. Some early reports said Tracy Scoggins had been hired on. It now appears that Scoggins will be keeping her position on Babylon 5 and be a recurring guest character as the show will venture back to B5 as the "home port" for the starship Excalibur several times each season.

Jerry Doyle will also be a recurring guest character. No word yet on the rest of the characters, but it should be interesting.

Oh, all three stars will be in the B5 TV movie, "A Call To Arms", which sets up the events of "Crusade." It will air on TNT Sunday, January 3.

Sorry B5ers, but President Sheridan will not be part of BP:C, at least not for now. Bruce Boxleitner is taking the year off to raise his kids. He said he could be back in the second season. Meanwhile, Mira Furlan is also not taking part in the first season, no word on the second.

I caught bits of season five at VCon, and of what I have seen, it's worth getting together and seeing a few episodes of. Anyway, it gives a great excuse to hold a summer party when it's raining.

Dr. Who: The Feature Film?

Looks like TV's longest running sci-fi series is heading for the big screen. One of BBC's top brass announced at Cannes that a \$16,000,000 to \$24,000,000 (US) Dr. Who theatrical movie is on the way for 2001. Sir David Putnam later said it was a "joke" (As if a female Doctor isn't a hint.) Nevertheless BBC does have plans for the series but he didn't go into detail.

Days later a leak from BBC Worldwide said they were talking to an interested party. However "IF" the movie is produced, it would start pre-production in October 2003, and won't be in theaters until the summer of 2006.

Some rumors I heard at VCon and on the web said that Spielberg's DreamWorks:SKG is the "interested

party" and the film could cost between \$150,000,000 to \$200,000,000 (US). There's also a small independent British studio named HAL and Hollywood's Miramax which are rumored to be in "serious" negotiations.

BBC Worldwide announced June 7th, 'IF' a new TV series or theatrical version of Dr. Who goes ahead, work wouldn't start on it until the 14 million pound Daltenreys/Lumiere Pictures suit is settled. No talks with any interested party is going on at this time, and none will take place in the near future.

The Daltenreys/Lumiere Pictures suit is going to court on March 24, 1999 and the case could last as long as three months. Once again "Whovians" will have to wait.

Remember that "BIG" American studio that was suing a fan for leaking its "copyrighted" information? It changed its mind. The story around it would take up a whole BCSFAzine but what it came down to was "misinformation".

A production company wanted to make a series of family oriented time travel TV movies called Aunt Lue, starring a kind human-like being with a time-machine that travels around time (with her mentally challenged companion) showing people how their lives would be different if another person who died in the past had lived. Then giving them a chance to change their past would be letting the dead person live. AT NO TIME IT WOULD BE CALLED "DR. WHO", IT WOULDN'T BE A STUDIO-BBC CO-PRODUCTION (The BBC just likes the show.) AND HER TIME-MACHINE ISN'T A POLICE BOX. Still thanks to a few "jokes" from some BBC brass, and "misinformation" on the WEB, it became so. The studio has dropped the suit and the fan should be back at work at the BBC by the time you read this.

As for Aunt Lue, the studio and its American network are no longer interested. That's too bad, it would have been a great family Sci-Fi series. Anyway, doesn't The Doctor do sort of the same thing as Aunt Lue each week? **Star Trek: No Dax.**

Jadzia and Dax are both dead and Terry Farrell will NOT be replaced on ST:DS9. The reason, according to Paramount, is that all actors vying for the part wanted multi-year contracts. With the series in its last season and no new series coming up, just killing her/him off made the most sense.

Many Trekkers may recall that the last time they killed off a major character (Note: Kes doesn't count.) was ten years ago with Tasha Yar. Maybe they should do this each season from now on, (My suggestion for next year, the whole cast of ST: Voyager.).

Sorry Folks: No word yet on the future of Millennium.

I'd better go, other people write for this zine too. A special thanks to Lee Whiteside, Lisa G. and the Intergalactic Enquirer On-line of their help this month!

Till next time this is Dr. Media signing off.



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MULAN and the Disney Touch

Two thousand years have passed since the events that lead to the writing of a poem. The homeland was being invaded and the call for every family to send a man to war, preferably the first born son. Thus it began that one family sent their first born to war, and as time would reveal, a very special first born.

This one was a volunteer, taking the place of the ailing father who was too old and weak to go to war. Surely, one such as he could never survive the up coming battles. So it was that a weaver of cloth, in the guise of a man was to go to war for the honour of her family against the invading Mongols. Her name was Mulan, and the flower by which she was named still holds great status in today's Chinese culture, and she lived in the time of Zanadu and the great Kahn.

The Disney story is spun through the inspiration of a poem which recalls the bravery of this little flower. Another triumphant animation of a story as handed down through the generations.

Well, sort of. Once again, Disney has found it necessary to change the story to suit its needs. As a result, there have been many calls of racism against the Disney corporation. The characters have been changed in some cases. There is a lack of authentic Chinese music. Add that to the fact that the artists decided that three weeks in China studying the art made them experts in the Chinese style which is what the movie is being touted as being. The charge being that the only reason the Disney Corporation did an Asian story was to tap that very market.

The charge of racism is not new as it has come up during the Lion King's run when there were complaints of the fact that the voices of the hyena's were done by black actors and that the hyenas were the in the ghetto of the movie thus perpetuating the stereotype. (Forget the fact that the King was played by the regal sounding black actor James Earl Jones.)

And what of the changing of the stories which had the main character dying in the end turns into happily ever after stories at the hands of the modern Disney writer. The Little Mermaid, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Beauty and the Beast, all these stories of gore and repentance at death's door have been cleaned up for the modern audiences.

What child would now ever read the real story of

the mermaid who took her own life rather than save herself by killing the one she loved? Who would take the original text of the bell ringer who kills everyone in the end and read it to their

daughters after seeing the movie? How would your son react if you told him the story of a beast who found his love and salvation on his last breath?

It would be interesting to see how this retelling of a modified Mulan story would effect this legend. Chinese folklore has time and time again proven that the contents of the story hold more actual history than most legends. I would be hard pressed to find another culture which maintained its verbal tradition in spite of the developments in its written lore. Perhaps it is the fact that recitation of text is an important a part of learning the language that has helped maintain the spoken lore so well.

By looking at western fairytales we can see how Disney effected the traditional stories. How many of us know the original story of Cinderella? How many of us know about the disfigurement the sisters endured to try trick the prince. How many of us know how the birds pecked out the eyes of the wicked step mother and sisters and how Cinderella took them in at the end in spite of what they did to her? Could this be because of the Disney film? Or has the story been cleaned up enough in it's many versions already before Disney got his hands on it?

How many of us screamed foul when the animated Disney version of the Robin Hood story came out? (Or, for that matter, the Kelvin Costner film?)

Modern mythology, be they fairytale or lore, is an ever changing medium. It always has been. Stories change with each retelling and one can be sure that these changes effect the story ever more permanently as time progresses. Perhaps it is the blatant editing of the story that people take issue with in the Disney films. We all realize how much the stories have been altered.

Soon the children will grow up and realize for themselves what Disney has done as well. Perhaps, because of Disney's rewriting, these children will be curious about the original text of these stories and will go seek them out for themselves. There must be some CD ROM out there or a web site with the original text. The important idea here is that the story be told in one form or another so that when the child grows up, they too will pass it on to their children. And when they do, perhaps they will seek out the necessary reference materials to pass on their own version of the story.

So what is the real story of Mulan? Folklore has it that she will fight many battles and rise in the ranks of the army. She would eventually rise to the highest military rank of general and advise the Emperor himself. Perhaps it is through her inspiration that a thousand years later, the wives of a family, having lost all seven sons to war, raised an army of women to defend the land against the invading Mongols.

As a last word, may you live in interesting times, and your stories be animated Disney film features.

✍

JCHW

