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The Bookseller

Nicholas Clee on the latest news from the publishing industry

Saturday June 5, 2004
[The Guardian](#)

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In what is said to be the first arrangement of its kind for a children's publisher, Chicken House has signed a deal giving exclusive first look at its titles to New Line Cinema, producer of The Lord of the Rings. Given the small number of film projects that make it to the screen, such a deal may promise more than it delivers; but children's fiction is fashionable at the moment, and New Line is already developing a film version of Chicken House's bestseller Inkheart, by Cornelia Funke. Chicken House is run by Barry Cunningham, who boasts an achievement to make film producers sit up: in his previous job at Bloomsbury, he took on Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone .

The growth in the second-hand book market has been dramatic in recent years - and has come at the expense of the new books market, according to some US publishers (the Bookseller, May 22). Now Abebooks, the largest online site for rare and used book sales, is selling new books too. Abebooks is a "portal", directing buyers to its affiliated retailers. If you search at abebooks.co.uk for Michael Connelly's new thriller The Narrows (Orion), you will find six UK bookshops that will sell you copies, some of them signed. But you can buy it more cheaply at Amazon.

"Things are coming to a head" at Cork International, the supermarket supplier, publishers believe. They have been shipping books to Cork on a cash-on-delivery basis since the company ran into financial troubles earlier this year, but time to secure a refinancing deal may be running out. If it does, sales of some of the big summer titles will be hit, as Cork's customers switch to alternative sources of supply. The titles include paperbacks by Patricia Cornwell, Paul Burrell, Shane Richie, Helen Fielding, Martina Cole and John Grisham.

The first industrial action at a leading publisher for many years is a possibility after staff at T&F Informa, the academic house, voted for action in protest against the company's new in-house agreement. The NUJ organised a ballot in response to changes to terms and conditions for new starters, and may now stage a series of one-day strikes. Meanwhile T&F Informa, created following the merger of Taylor & Francis and business information publisher Informa, is preparing to move from London to new premises near Oxford, with about half of its staff moving with it.



After a rash of gloomy statistics about libraries, some good news came out this week. According to the Chartered Institute of Finance and Accountancy, visits to libraries increased in the year ending June 2003 for the first time for 10 years. However, while library spending on books was up, the proportion of budgets devoted to book-buying continued to fall, as did issues of books.

A few hours after the Derby today at Epsom, New York stages the Belmont Stakes, at which Smarty Jones, having already won the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes, will attempt to become the first horse for 26 years to complete the US triple crown. As Greg Wood wrote in this paper on Wednesday, Smarty Jones has a romantic story to rival that of Seabiscuit, hero of Laura Hillenbrand's bestseller and of the recent film; so it is no surprise that a US publisher has not waited for the Belmont result before signing up a book about him. Miramax has paid a six-figure sum for a proposal by Maggie Estep, and of course the contract specifies an increase on that figure should Smarty Jones be first past the post tonight.

• Nicholas Clee is editor of the Bookseller. Readers of the Guardian can subscribe to it at www.my-subscription.com/bse1/guard.html

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[Critical eye: Jun 12](#)

[Forget-me-not](#)

[Bibliophile: Jun 12](#)

[African renaissance](#)

[Review: Building Jerusalem
by Tristram Hunt](#)

[Review: James Joyce by Ian
Pindar](#)

[Audio: Jun 12](#)

[Review: Wondrous Strange
and Beyond the Notes](#)

[Adaptation of the week:
Paul Verhoeven's Total
Recall \(1990\)](#)

[Review: Brief Garlands by
Stanley Middleton](#)



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