

THE WSFA

JOURNAL

The Official Newsletter of the Washington Science Fiction Association

May 2007 – ISSN 0894-5411

Drew Bittner, Editor / Gayle Surrette, Assistant Editor

Email Address: editor@wsfa.org Please put "Submission:" at the beginning of the subject line if it is to be considered for publication. Entries not marked this way may not get routed by our automatic filters.

Mailing Address: WSFA Journal, 5911 Edsall Rd. #611, Alexandria, VA 22304

This and previous issues of the journal may be seen by going to www.wsfa.org

The world ended fifteen minutes ago. Why are you finding that out here?

CONTENTS

- From the Editor
- Minutes of April 2007's Third Friday Meeting
- Review: Next
- Story: Itinerary
- Story: The Gray Cloud of Somber (part 2)

FROM THE EDITOR...

Hello, all!

Time's up. This time next month, you'll have an entirely new editor on board the WSFA Journal. I hope she does a better job of making this particular train run on time. In any event, I'll be reading and rooting for her.

It's been an interesting year as Secretary. There's a lot that goes into this job and a lot that's learned by doing. Good luck to all our new officers... and I'll write something for the Journal once in awhile (if only to wrap up the Gray Cloud story) just for the heck of it.

See you all soon!

Drew



REVIEW

Next

Starring Nicolas Cage, Jessica Biel, Julianne Moore

Released April 2007

Reviewed by Lee Strong

I approached this tale of precognition with serious concern since it is based on a Philip K. Dick short story that I found rather unappealing. To my pleasant surprise, the film bears little resemblance to Dick's story – and it is much better for the lack of resemblance.

Our hero, played by Nicolas Cage, is gifted—and cursed—with the ability to see about two minutes into his personal future. Since he learned one of science fiction fandom's greatest life lessons early in childhood – no one likes geeks – he mostly uses his gift as part of a stage magic act and to win small amounts of money at a local casino. Despite his efforts to remain inconspicuous, the casino and the FBI both twig to his oddity, setting up the first of several dramatic and humorous “just in time” escapes. While he's dodging the forces of law and disorder, he saves several lives and finally meets a fabulous babe, played by Jessica Biel, whose forecoming is one of the rare exceptions to his 2 minute time limit. Meanwhile FBI agent Julianne Moore convinces her superiors that our hero is just the mutant to help them track down a rogue Soviet nuclear weapon being smuggled into the Los Angeles area. The climax is a triumph of special effects and an unexpected plot twist.

While the film is not without its shortcomings, I enjoyed it a great deal. The most interesting aspect of *Next* to this fan of alternate histories was the use of multiple camera shots to illustrate the alternate time tracks that result from our hero's ability to foresee the consequences of his intended actions. For example, when he finally meets the girl of his visions, he is able to role-play several possible opening scenarios until he finds the right way to appeal to her. A very clever altho not unprecedented storytelling device here used extremely effectively, especially in the action climax pitting the heroes against the nuclear terrorists. As the film progresses, he discovers better control of and additional uses for his power. The result is a powerful if subtle story of people learning to use their abilities and to put strange powers to practical use. It's a classical science fiction concept and one that is very well realized.

The more mundane aspects of the film were also generally good as well. I thought the actors well chosen for their roles and the characters well realized. The settings were alternately faux glamour, beautiful countryside and industrial machinery. The dramatic music was excellent and really maintained the mood and pace. Some of the logic struck me as weak. I didn't see how the casino, the FBI or the terrorists really caught on to the existence of the previously unknown power. And some of the side plots could have been dispensed with. In the defense of the side plots, they did build up the humanity of the characters, making the action climax or climaxes all the more chilling.

I rate *Next* as four out of five stars because it shows human beings using logic and decency to master strange abilities and to put those abilities to good use... – LS

WSFA MEETING MINUTES

WSFA Minutes

Third Friday

Madigan's home, Maryland

April 20, 2007

CONVENED: The meeting convened at 9:17pm.

ATTENDEES: Mike Bartman, Drew Bittner, Katherine Bittner, Colleen Cahill, Adrienne Ertman, Carolyn Frank, Paul Haggerty, Shirl Hayes, Brian Lewis, Sam Lubell, Nicki Lynch, Rich Lynch, Bob MacIntosh, Candy Madigan, John Madigan, Barry Newton, Judy Newton, George Shaner, Steve Smith, Bill Squire, Gayle Surette, Michael Walsh, Ivy Yap

SECRETARY'S REPORT: The Secretary summed up the minutes of the first Friday meeting in April after much cajoling.

TREASURER'S REPORT: WSFA has \$12,734.14 in its account, \$7802 in CDs. The club approved authorizing payment of \$500 to renew our insurance.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Capclave Present: Hotel (Hilton in Rockville, MD) and date are confirmed, webpage is coming. Restaurants at the new location in Rockville are not as close as in Silver Spring, but are available. The room rate is the same (\$119). Onsite parking is free, the dealers' room will be smaller. Robert Scott, a local author who sells in the UK, will be invited as a guest; it was suggested we reach out to past guests and attendees, as well as sending fliers to Ravencon and Balticon. Our goal would be to sign 100+ memberships at other conventions. We have 70 memberships sold to date.

Capclave Future: Capclave Future has a date (Oct. 17-19, 2008) confirmed at the same hotel as 2007, GOHs (James Morrow and Mike Dirda) are confirmed.

Datclave: nothing new

Miscellaneous Other Conventions: no report.

Publications: There will be print copies of the past few Journals (including this one) at the next meeting. It was suggested that we try selling off stock of *Future Washington* at the DHS conference in late May.

Entertivities: Will was not present but a report was offered in his name. DHS, via Capt. Chris Christopher, has invited WSFA participation in a conference May 21-24. Volunteers have stepped forward to attend. Sam will sign up volunteers and send their names to Will. We are considering organizing a book signing for the author guests of the conference via a bookstore on 20th and K Streets. Tuesday, May 22, has been floated as a possible date.

Rules Committee: no report.

Trustees: Lee Strong reports 13 nominations for club positions. For President: Cathy Green. For VP: Steve Smith. For Secretary: Adrienne Ertman. For Treasurer: Bob MacIntosh. For Trustees (3): Judy Newton, Lee Strong, Elizabeth Twitchell. For Capclave 2009 chair: Bill Lawhorn. For Awards Committee: 2 year terms- Cathy Green, Paul Haggerty, Bob MacIntosh, 1 year terms- Barry Newton, Gayle Surrette. The floor will be open for additional nominations at the May first Friday meeting; nominees must be present, agree to be nominated and drawing breath.

Committee to Talk About Science Fiction: The group intended to discuss *Asimov's* May issue as well as the possibility of editorial psychos... well, let's just say the group is cranky.

Awards Committee: Colleen read her draft proposal to the last meeting.

OLD BUSINESS: none

NEW BUSINESS: WSFA 4th of July party? Not officially, but John and Kathi might be doing a little something. Sam S cannot host the first Friday meeting in July. Balticon needs a Capclave flier; Mike Nelson had one and the club voted to approve the new flier.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: send email announcements to Drew. Host and hostess announcements were made, including that Mike Nelson's cloak was done. (He may pick it up provided he brings Capclave fliers—suggested by Mike W.) Greenbelt Green Man festival was announced, a setting for environmental networking. [www . graphicaudio.com](http://www.graphicaudio.com) was announced, described as “men’s gunporn.”

Mike W announced books for sale. It was noted that Jamie Bishop, son of sf writer Michael Bishop, was among the victims of the Virginia Tech shooting. Condolences may be sent to Mr. Bishop care of Pine Road, Pine Mountain, GA. It was also noted that celebrated sf writer Kurt Vonnegut passed away.

ADJOURNED: The meeting was adjourned at 10:04pm.



INTINERARY

By Lee Strong

“Good afternoon, sir. Welcome to Interstellar Starlines. How can I help you?”

“Hi. I’d like to book travel to all of the planets in the Alpha Centauri System leaving....”

“The Smith System, sir.”

“... next week. Pardon me? ‘The Smith System’?”

“Yes, sir. The colonists voted to rename all of the planets after various science fictional authors and characters. The planets are now named Cordwainer, Edward, George H, George O, Jedediah...”

“Why two planets with the same name?”

“It’s a double planet pair, sir.”

“Whatever. As long as the Smithies still buy farastats. Can you book the itinerary I’m transmitting now?” Dialog boxes flashed across screens as data was transferred, sorted, compared, matched, folded, spindled and mutilated. Happy faces appeared on both screens.

“Yes, sir. We have your entire trip booked starting on Steve and ending on Anna Nicole.”



THE GRAY CLOUD OF SOMBER, PART 2

By Drew

Obadiah looked up at the cloud. “Perhaps I could get everyone in town to say ‘I’m sorry’ all at the same time. Would that help?”

=I’m afraid not. How would I know if the one who insulted me said he was sorry? Everyone else would be apologizing for nothing, as you just tried to do.=

“It’s been a long, long time. Maybe the person died or moved away or something,” Obadiah said.

=No, else I should have been freed to move along,= Strat said. =If the insult-giver were dead or fled, my curse would lose its meaning and I could stay no longer. No, Obadiah, the person who insulted me yet lives somewhere below, and I will deny them the sunlight until they give me what is owed.=

“But you’ve killed the flower garden! There aren’t any flowers at all in Somber—it’s one of the Seven Official Reasons why they renamed the village, back when my daddy was a boy,” Obadiah protested.

=The flowers will return when I have my apology,= Strat said, clearly unconcerned with flowers after so many years.

“How will you know who it’s supposed to be?”

=The power of the curse will tell me. Besides, that one will know why he must apologize. If it comes from his heart, I can forgive and move on. Until that happens, though, I will stay exactly where I am.=

Obadiah felt like crying. He’d tried so hard to figure out how to make the cloud happy and had failed. It was worse than getting sent to the corner in school (which had only happened three times and two of them weren’t really his fault) or getting a Lecture on Decency and the Proper Conduct of Young Men (one of his father’s favorite lectures,

which varied only by the name attached to the front of said lecture). It wasn't fair! There had to be some way to work this out.

=Perhaps if you had each elderly man in Somber come to the roof and offer an apology...= Strat suggested, his breezy voice thoughtful.

Obadiah sniffled and wiped his eyes on his pajama sleeve. (He had NOT been crying, he told himself sternly, just exercising the ability to make tears, because it would be a shame if his eyes suddenly forgot how.) "I... maybe I can do that," he sniffled. It wasn't like there were that many old men in Somber anyway, no more than twenty or thirty at most.

=Well, I wish you luck, Obadiah,= Strat said. =You know how to find me if you bring up people to apologize.=

Obadiah sighed and turned back, crossing the Roof That Must Not Be Trod (but was) and stepping through the Door That Must Not Be Opened (but had been). He closed the Door and scooped junk in front of it while his child's mind buzzed with half-formed ideas. Sinking onto his bed, he felt bone-weary and a little sad.

"I hope this is not what it feels like to be grown up, because this is horrible," he mumbled to himself as he pulled up his blanket and fell into a dreamless sleep.

The next morning, there was no thunderbolt from the blue (or in Somber's case, the gray) to strike Obadiah down for violating the Family Edicts. Despite hints (mostly from his older brothers) that there was worse to be had than just the Burden of Crushing Guilt and Family Dishonor, nothing out of the ordinary happened as his mother put a bowl of oatmeal before him and asked if he'd washed behind his ears.

Walking to school, none of the others noticed if Obadiah was walking a little more slowly or had less to say than usual. Indeed, Obadiah was making up a list in his head: a list of all the elderly men in Somber.

Let me think. There's Mr. Hamish, who keeps a shop on the square, and Mr. Jerobom, who sells apples on resting-day, and Mr. Winnse who make shoes. They all have white hair so I bet that they're old, but are they old enough? That was the question that puzzled Obadiah most. Maybe I should ask Miss Charlot. She would probably know the oldest men in town.

Satisfied at the thought of asking his teacher's advice, he hummed a tune under his breath and stole a glance upward. One moment, he suspected that a cloudy eye was peering back at him, but then it was gone and nothing but gray blankness could be seen overhead. Obadiah stopped humming.

The fate of Somber rested heavily on the shoulders of an eight-year-old boy.

END PART 2