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"...What You've Been Doing to Lee?"

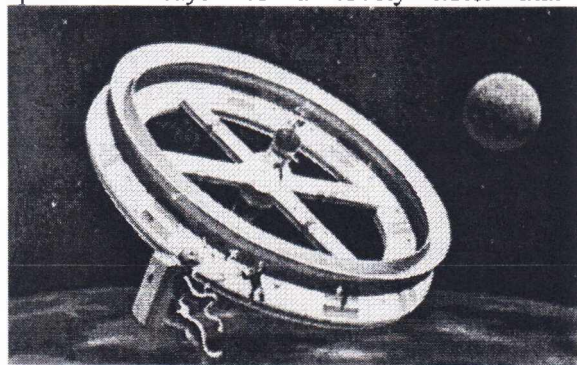
By Special Guest Secretary Cathy Green <Thanks bunches>

WSFA Meeting February 1, 2002 was called to order at 9:16pm by VP Sam Pierce. Reading of the minutes from the previous meeting was waived due to the absence of both the minutes and the secretary. Also, there was no secretary's report.

Treasurer's Report: We have \$881.56. Capclave past is still not cleared up fully. The increase in the amount of funds on hand is attributable to dues, contributions and book sales. The Hospice of North Central Florida sent a thank you letter acknowledging WSFA's \$141 contribution in memory of Jack C. Haldeman.

Capclave Past: still not wrapped up.

Capclave Present: Elspeth is looking at hotels. Initially, Elspeth was not at the meeting and her message of the thumbs up sign was conveyed to the membership. This resulted in a number of rude comments that culminated with Lee Strong getting so unnerved his eyeballs popped out and he accidentally crushed the (not empty) soda can he was holding. When Elspeth arrived immediately after this, and unaware of what had just gone on, she grabbed a hard cider and asked, "Do I want to know what you've been doing to Lee?" Elspeth reported that she had 3 proposals she likes from hotels and that the hotels are in something of a bidding war. The Sheraton Columbia is now offering us a complimentary punch and chips reception on Friday (with which we could offer a cash bar). Elspeth has some problems with the function space but says it's a lovely hotel that was



originally built as a resort. Elspeth couldn't remember what the available date was at the Sheraton. The Gaithersburg, MD Holiday Inn is now down to \$700/day for function space, has the most space and is offering an \$89/night rate for rooms. A drawback is that there is really only one suite suitable for the con

suite. It's on 2 floors with connectors and would cost \$350/day. The function space is not as close together as the other hotels, but the rooms are nicer. There is free parking, an indoor pool and it's within 3 miles of the subway. The date of the Con would be Oct. 11-14th.

The Gaithersburg Hilton is offering \$800/day for function space and 69/night for single and double rooms. They also have an indoor pool. You can smoke in the bar. A drawback with the Hilton is that it is up for sale. The date of the Con if we're at the Hilton would be Sept. 20-22nd. The Doubletree in Rockville has been dragging their feet about giving Elspeth specific details but they are interested. They are near the metro. Nicki mentioned that they've had SF cons there before.

Capclave Future: was out sick.

Capclave Far Future: Has been approached regarding the guest of honor, and she's talking with people.

The Austerity Committee had no report. The Entertainment Committee briefly discussed the State of the Union Address. Lee Gilliland mentioned that she was planning on setting May 7th as the date for the Star Wars Attack of the Clones movie party. Webmaster Keith announced that Dreamworks will send us free passes for *The Time Machine* and a free poster. Lee G. said to e-mail her if you're interested in going and there will be a drawing for the tickets. She said someone else will conduct the drawing.

Old Business: none. New Business: none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sam L's pro forma announcement re: getting your announcements into the WSFA Journal was delivered by Sam P. Eric Jablow announced that Dr. James Watson would be discussing his new book, *Genes Girls and Gamow*, on March 7th at 7:30pm at the Bailey's Crossroads Borders. Lee G. asked people not to feed or pick up the cat because she's just been spayed. And reminded people to use toilet paper. Chuck Devine, who was not wearing a dress, announced that there would be a prospective Mensa members party at his place the last Sunday in February (the 24th). He also announced that his procrastinator's New Year's party for 2001 would be held March 2nd. Elizabeth Twitchell warned people not to go to *Brotherhood of the Wolf*. She said that contrary to the commercials, which make it look like a

good movie, that it's just Sleepy Hollow with French prostitutes. Peter Heck had a mild heart attack on January 30th, but he's okay. The Philosophical Society of Washington (f. 1871) meets on February 8th at the Cosmos Club, 2107 Florida Ave. The topic of the lecture is "Art and Science - 2 Ways of Seeing." There is also another lecture on February 22nd but the substitute secretary didn't catch the title. Fortunately, the relevant information can be found on the Society's website: www.philsoc.org

Keith announced that Adrienne had suggested an e-mail discussion list and that there had been some marginal interest. If more people are interested, please follow up by emailing Keith. Elspeth mentioned that she thought the email list would be a good vehicle for discussion of topics such as "whither Capclave." Mike Walsh mentioned that he had books for sale. One of the books was "Stranger Things Happen" by Kelly Link. Kelly Link won a trip around the world with an entry in the essay contest "why do you want a trip around the world" that was as follows: "Because it's easier than going through it."

Mike asked people to please nominate "Being

Gardner Dozois" for a Hugo. Hugo ballots were discussed and it was mentioned that if you went to MilPhil, don't wait for them to send you the form because even though they're suppose to they won't. Download it from the ConJose web site. A question was asked about the hotel forms for ConJose. Elspeth said she's handling suites. She said the form is supposed to go out this weekend. The Fairmont is the party hotel. They're using a Housing Bureau. Keith asked how to get there that didn't involve showing a form of id and that if anyone was driving he'd help pay for gas. Someone said, "so what you're asking is do you know the way to San Jose."

Nicki Lynch announced that Strange World will be shown in its entirety on the SciFi Channel in place of *Invisible Man*. John Pomeranz recommended that everyone get the Mad Max DVD. It's in the original Australian. General Comment was made about the 3d Friday meeting being small due to the wealth of conventions that weekend including Boskone and Farpoint. Lee G. asked that if you're going to Lunacon please help her run the Con suite. There will be a luau. Meeting was adjourned at 9:53pm.

FANZINE REVIEW

By Ted White

NONSTOP FUN IS HARD ON THE HEART #5 (Dwain Kaiser, P.O.Box 1074, Claremont, CA 91711; e-mail to dkgkaiser@hotmail.com; available for "the usual" - trades, contributions or letters of comment - but send the guy a buck for postage when making an initial query).

Nonstop Fun is a good journeyman fanzine. Once upon a time fandom was full of good journeyman fanzines - one or more could be counted upon to arrive in the mail weekly, if not more often. These days such fanzines are rare and to be prized. They're also a good place for newcomers to fanzines to get their toes wet. They won't overwhelm you or intimidate you with their brilliance; they're more likely to make you feel like this is something you can do and want to do too.

They are easy to participate in.

The fifth *Nonstop Fun* runs a solid 52

pages of readably large computer-set type mimeographed impeccably by the LASFS superGestetter on a light turquoise paper. There are a few color-printed pieces (art and photos) and most of fandom's best artis is well-represented in these pages but the late William (Bill) Rotsler

gets the place of honor: in addition to a generous helping of his art throughout the zine, Rotsler is remembered appreciatively by Earl Kemp in the centerpiece article, "Just My Bill, An Ordinary Guy." Several of Rotsler's short written pieces are also reprinted.

The issue opens with a photo tribute to the late Jack Harness. In his editorial Kaiser talks about a "mini-vacation" in nearby Nevada - and

illustrates it with a color photo of himself on a jet ski. Following the "Rotsler section" there are a



couple of pages of folk lyrics – “This Old Fan” and “Talking LASFS Blues.” Then there’s Jim Schumacher’s “The Good Ol’ Daze,” about Los Angeles fandom in the late ‘60s – in which Rotsler also figures prominently, “Las Vegas Adventures 2001” by Lyn Pederson, “The ValSFA Chronicles,” a story by John Welsh, and 17 pages of letters by fans whose names will be increasingly familiar to you as you read the fanzines I’ve reviewed here in the past year.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of fans out there in Greater Fandom now. But the number of fans who are active in fanzines is much

smaller – between 500 and 1,000 worldwide. And of those fans perhaps 200 are regularly active in English-language fanzines. Thus the same 20 or 30 names will crop up over and over in the letter columns of various fanzines, and fairly quickly they become easily identifiable individual voices, people you begin to think you know (at least a little) and with whom you want to discuss various topics. And that’s what fanzines are really about: unambitious venues for discussions, essays, arguments and conversations. Sound interesting?

Get a copy of *Nonstop Fun*.

Science Versus Magic in Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (Part I) By Samuel Lubell

Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* may be the most retold science fiction story ever. It has been filmed with the central character replaced by everything from a spaceman, one of the *Cosby* kids, and even Bugs Bunny. But the power of the story and its central conflict of science versus superstition remains.

While the scientists in the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Twain's predecessor as America's leading novelist, are disguised sorcerers, using magic and pseudo-science to achieve control over others. Mark Twain's 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, written almost forty years after Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, reverses this formula. Although the Connecticut Yankee, Hank Morgan, pretends to be a wizard using *magic*, he is really an engineer using *science*. While Hawthorne's scientists mingle science and magic; Twain's Yankee opposes the whole sixth century system of magic and superstition. The Yankee's science easily defeats the magic of the wizard Merlin. “Somehow,” Hank reasons, “every time the magic of fol-de-rol tried conclusions with the magic of science, the magic of fol-de-rol got left.” Twain does not reject science even in the Yankee's defeat at the end of the book.

Mark Twain had a positive outlook towards science in his own life. He took a deep personal interest in inventions and devised several of his own, including a self pasting notebook and a memorization device. In addition, he spent thousands of dollars on a machine to set typographical print, the Paige typesetter, which he funded while writing *Connecticut Yankee*. This machine found its way into the book; Twain makes the Yankee a foreman at the Colt Arms factory, the factory where Paige worked. Twain also read extensively in scientific literature: more than sixty scientific books, comprising a “a roll call of the major contemporary scientists and philosophers of science,” have been identified in his library.¹ Although he occasionally lampooned excesses of science, Twain valued science and invention for their human possibilities. For Twain:

The inventor/poet was a “liberating god.” Twain's enthusiastic response to and extensive involvement in inventions of all sorts was motivated not just by the profits he hoped to realize, but by the new perspectives they symbolized. They represented for Twain new historical milestones, not just in technological progress but in human stature... [and] power of creativity.²

Mark Twain's own life mirrored the Yankee's industrialization of Arthurian England, through his progression from his boyhood home in the pre-industrial Hannibal, Missouri, to the more highly mechanized city of

¹ Sherwood Cummings, “Mark Twain's Acceptance of Science,” *Centennial Review* Spring 1962; p.253

² James Johnson, *Mark Twain and the Limits of Power* (Knoxville Tennessee, University of Tennessee Press 1982); p. 123

Hartford, Connecticut. By casting Hank Morgan as a Connecticut Yankee, Twain deliberately identifies him with this more scientific world.

Although Twain never directly calls Hank Morgan a scientist, the Yankee represents science and technological progress in the struggle against sixth century superstition; and the Yankee himself specifically identifies his methods as being science. [507 & 538]. This was possible because, by Twain's time, science, invention and technology had become intertwined in the popular mind. Robert Bruce, in his The Launching of Modern American Science, summarizes the development of this belief:

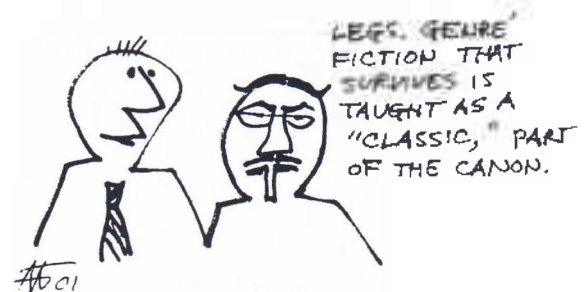
The notion that science might *sometimes* yield material benefit was, of course, far from new... What was new was the dubious but spreading popular assumption that *everything* in technology was rooted in science.³

This assumption enabled the people of the nineteenth century to envision the engineer/inventor as the embodiment of science and progress. Since science contributed to the new inventions, even those produced by mechanical engineering, Hank's technology would have been considered "practical science". Introducing himself to the reader, Hank Morgan boasts of his ability to make "anything in the world," and stresses his inventive talent: "and if there wasn't any quick new-fangled way to make a thing, I could invent one- and do it as easy as rolling off a log." [20] In addition to recreating nineteenth-century technology, the Yankee originates his own, devises a form of insulation "of my own invention." [121]

Twain devotes the bulk of A Connecticut Yankee to the positive elements of Yankee's nineteenth century civilization, the benefits of his "practical science". He describes the people of King Arthur's court as mindless children, even "animals" [65], who wear uncomfortable armor, and quest for pigs. Writing in a time when science was transforming civilization, Twain's novel uses the Yankee to show that science would inevitably bring progress. Because of its celebration of science and technology, Louis Budd labels Twain's novel as "virtually a manifesto summing up the Gilded Age just before times changed with a vengeance."⁴ It assumed progress as a booming fact; and gloated over the rise of science and political freedom. The Yankee always favors the abolition of sixth century concepts and their replacement by the more scientific nineteenth-century techniques. He tries to reform the aristocracy, selecting men for army positions "on the basis of mere efficiency." [328] In an attempt to establish a modern mechanical civilization, he introduces the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, the typewriter, and the sewing machine, innovations which met with great success: "and all the thousand willing and handy servants of steam and electricity were working their way into favor." [513] Most important of all to Mark Twain, himself a patent-holder, the Yankee founds a patent office. When the Yankee visits a Hermit's cave and discovers one of his telephone operators already there, he contrasts the achievements of the sixth and nineteenth centuries, "Now what a radical reversal of things this was.., what a fantastic conjunction of opposites and irreconcilables- the home of the bogus miracle become the home of a real one, the den of a medieval hermit turned into a telephone office." [303]

Although the novel is written in the first person from Hank Morgan's viewpoint, Twain frequently communicates his own views. He clearly identifies with Hank Morgan, even to the extent of accidentally giving his Connecticut Yankee pieces of Twain's own Mississippi River background, and many of Hank Morgan's speeches are paraphrases of Twain's notebooks and letters.⁵ Twain's philosophical tone often

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN GENRE AND LITERARY
FICTION?



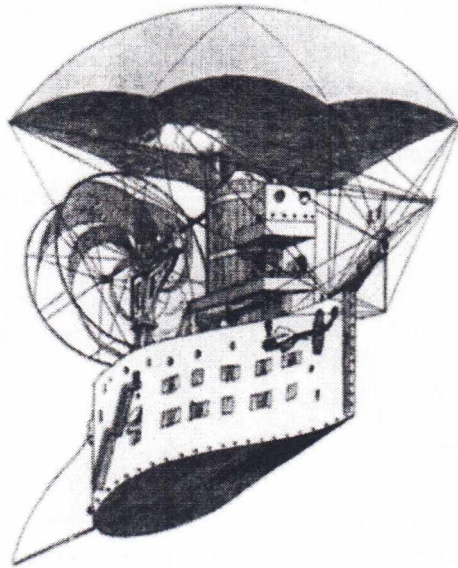
³ Robert Bruce. *The Launching of Modern American Science*. (NY: Alfred A Knopf 1987) p. 128

⁴ Louis J. Budd, "Uncle Sam" in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: Norton Critical Edition* Ensor, ed. p.407

⁵ Everett Carter "The Meaning of A Connecticut Yankee" in Ensor, ed. p. 443

drowns out the Yankee's vernacular in these speeches, which echo Twain's own ideas about science. Like Twain, the Yankee criticizes the Church, slavery, feudalism, superstition, and ignorance. In his autobiography, Mark Twain states his purpose in writing *A Connecticut Yankee* as:

an attempt to imagine and after a fashion set forth, the hard conditions of life for the laboring and defenseless poor in bygone times in England, and incidentally contrast these conditions with those under which the civil and ecclesiastical pets of privilege and high fortune level lived in those times., contrast that English life., with the life of modern Christendom and modern civilization, to the advantage of the latter of course.⁶



This contrast shows Twain's faith in the "secular theology" of scientific progress, and his use of the Yankee for its spokesman. Because of Twain's more positive view of science, the Yankee's control of others is not the soul-destroying control of Hawthorne's scientists, but instead a liberating force. The Yankee forces Morgan Le Fay to free her prisoners, creates Protestant churches independent of the "Established Church", sets up schools, works to destroy the feudal system, and ultimately frees the slaves. After Arthur's death he issues his proclamation declaring England a free republic:

"all political power has reverted to its original source, the people of the nation. With the monarchy, its several adjuncts died also; wherefore there is no longer a nobility, no longer a privileged class, no longer an Established Church:
all men are become exactly equal, they are upon one common level.
[544]

While he occasionally abuses his power, for instance where he kills a humorist and burns his books, the Yankee's rule is mostly benevolent, producing new education and new freedom. As the Boss, he cares more for the serfs than the king ever did, even disguising himself as one of them to learn how they see the world. This is a major difference from Hawthorne's scientists who consistently use their power for their own selfish ends.

Although a representative of science and progress, the Yankee is forced to pretend to be a magician in order to gain a position in the sixth century. Magic was a known entity and easily understood by the inhabitants of Arthurian England, while science was thoroughly alien. In his "Legend of the 'Spectacular Ruin'", part of *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), Twain foreshadows *A Connecticut Yankee* by showing the derision with which science was viewed in the middle ages. In this story, a tramp who has volunteered to defeat a dragon after many heroes had already failed, asks:

"Were any of these heroes men of science?" This raised a laugh, of course, for science was despised in those days. But the tramp was not in the least ruffled. He said he might be a little in advance of his age, but no matter- science would come to be honored, some time or another.⁷

In *A Connecticut Yankee*, after pretending to cause an eclipse in order to save his life, Hank Morgan must continue to claim magical powers mightier than the wizard Merlin's to maintain his status as "the Boss"

⁶ Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, quoted in Ensor, ed. p. 304

⁷ 10 Mark Twain, "The Legend of the Spectacular Ruin" from *A Tramp Abroad* (1880) reprinted in Ensor, ed. p. 283

and his efforts to modernize Arthurian England. "I am a magician myself," the Yankee declares to the page Clarence, "and the Supreme Grand High-yu-Muckamuck and head. of the tribe, at that,"[65] and belittles Merlin's abilities: "He don't amount to shucks, as a magician; knows some of the old common tricks, but has never got beyond the rudiments, and never will."[64] By combining feigned magic with actual science, Hank Morgan becomes Boss of the country.

While the Yankee gains this authority by claiming to have magical powers, he never forgets that he is only *pretending* to be a wizard, while really using the far more effective power of science. He could not simply declare magic worthless, and expect the country to believe him, since the habit of superstition was too deeply ingrained. While on a quest with Sandy, his future wife, the Yankee realizes the divergence between the sixth-century culture of superstition and the nineteenth-century culture of science. To be accepted in Arthurian England, the Yankee had to pretend to believe in its magic- the majority determines what is sane:

To doubt that a castle could be turned into a sty, and its occupants into hogs, would have been the same as my doubting, among Connecticut people, the actuality of the telephone and its wonders,- and in both cases would be absolute proof of a diseased mind, an unsettled reason. Yes, Sandy was sane; that must be admitted. If I also would be sane -to Sandy- I must keep my superstitions about unenchanted and unmiraculous locomotives, balloons and telephones, to myself... if I did not wish to be suddenly shunned and forsaken by everybody as a madman. [252]

The Arthurian society accepted magic as an indisputable fact. Therefore, while under this belief system, and only until he can change its structure, the Yankee disguises his science as magic. While the Yankee obviously enjoys showing off, he never believes he really has magic, but only brags of its great power because of the science that backs it. The Yankee always intends to educate the Englishmen, to remove their superstitions; and he reveals his secrets to his assistant, Clarence, and to others in his schools and man-factories.

Disclave, Capclave

The 2/15 Third Friday meeting opened with Prez Judy coming in at the last minute, saving Sam from having to chair and Cathy from having to write. "It's 9:18 by my watch. Mr. Secretary, say something."

"Something," said the secretary, obediently.

"I didn't hear from our treasurer so I assume he's at Boston having a good time."

"On \$300?" asked a WSFA. "Having a start on a good time," Judy shot back.

Capclave present was missing. For Capclave Future, Sam said that he had positions open. "For lifeguard?" asked Eric. "That's Disclave," someone quipped back. Keith asked if there was a reason why we have to wait until the next meeting to find out about a Capclave hotel. Nicki Lynch said she heard a rumor (ie email from Elspeth) hinted at Gaithersburg having a problem, so possibly Silver Spring." Judy said "I'll check with Mike and email Keith so he can post." Capclave Far Future has decided on a film program. "I want recommendations for really bad movies, I haven't seen them," said Lee. Sam

replied. "You do realize you are chairing that Disclave so won't have time to see them." This was corrected by the club to read Capclave.

People suggested throwing in 50 cents into the hat for every time someone says Disclave when they mean Capclave. Lee, at the request of Adrienne amended this to be just five cents for those without a job or working under 15 hours a week. Judy called the question, the ayes had it. It passed and so is official WSFA policy.

The entertainment Committee described the perils of having to fix the chimney <I guess Santa must have complained.> Talk about job creep. Lee added, "We're not going to Egypt this year."

The Publications Committee thanked Keith for establishing the WSFA email list. The club applauded his efforts. Keith reported that "So far 60 messages have been posted by 17 people. 24 people are on the list. To sign up, look at our web page and follow the obvious links. I check to make sure email is sent from a WSFA." Eric asked if there was a digest mode. Keith said, "Not yet, but there are archives. I plan to add indexes. They can

be read at www.wsfa.org/list. Please don't mention this address so spammers don't harvest it."

The Activities Committee got a letter from WETA asking us to do phones like we did last year. We have three possible times and I'll send to Keith and Sam. It would be sometime in March. We get to pick the program so we could get Dr. Who or something SF or Science instead of Jazz.

There was no old business. There was no new business.

Announcements. Sam Lubell told about getting email from the *Warsaw Business Journal* asking for help finding Polish Tolkien fans to interview about the opening of *Lord of the Rings* in Poland. I passed the email on to Richard Lynch and Lance and Lance replied with a whole bunch of contact information. Erica said that Griffen is back. She has Harry Potter cookies made in their potions class. There was a fire at the restaurant she went to for Valentine's Day. She never got her food. Nicki

Lynch is in a Quilt Show, April 26-28, Montgomery County Fairgrounds, Home Arts Building, Gaithersburg, MD. Actor Kevin Smith (Ares) died. Eric has been RIFFed. He's looking for work. Meeting unanimously adjourned at 9:50.

Attendance: Pres. Judy Kindell, Sec and 2003 chair Samuel Lubell, Trust and 2004 Chair Lee Gilliland, Trust. Eric Jablow, Trust. Nicki Lynch, Adrienne Ertman, Carolyn Frank, Alexis Gilliland, Erica and Karl Ginter, Cathy Green, Sally Hand, Scott Hofmann, Ron Kean, Bill Lawhorn, Keith Lynch, Richard Lynch, Walter Miles, Barry and Judy Newton, Evan Phillips, George Shaner, Steven Smith, Michael Taylor, Andrew Williams, Ivy Yap, Madeleine Yeh, Cat Meier, Lydia.

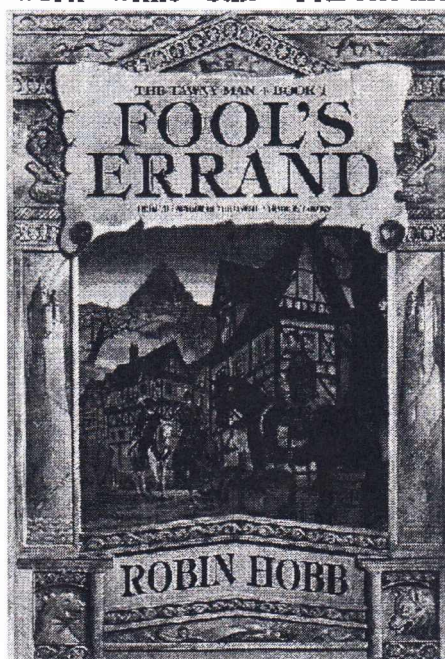
Review of Robin Hobb's *Fool's Errand* (New York : Bantam Books, 2001)

By Colleen R. Cahill

Often times sequels to trilogies are disappointing. They can lack the magic of the original or just retell the same story. Occasionally, however, an author can take us back to a familiar place and recapture the essence of the earlier work while still presenting a new and interesting tale. Such is *Fool's Errand* by Robin Hobb, published by Bantam Books. This first volume of **The Tawny Man** series is a sequel to the **Farseers** trilogy which is often called the assassin books. Like the first series, *Fool's Errand* is narrated by FitzChivalry Farseer, bastard son of royalty who is also a trained court assassin. He has two magical abilities: the Skill, which

gives him powers like a wizard and the Wit, which allows him to communicate and bond with animals.

In the opening chapters, we learn that more than a dozen years have passed since Fitz left the Royal court. Believed dead by all but four people, he has transformed from a court assassin to a peasant farmer and avoids all contacts his past. He is content living simply with his adopted son and his wolf companion, Nighteyes. But in the last few years the Skill has tugged at him to return to the Capital. This feeling is strengthened by visits from his former friends, including the Fool, who is also transformed. No longer the pale court jester, the Fool has become Lord Golden, a tawny-skinned foreign noble of mysterious background. But the Fool is



still the White Prophet, trying to put the world back on the right path and once again he needs Fitz to make this happen.

While these and other pressures are pushing Fitz to return to Buckkeep Castle, he resists. It is too painful for him to return to the life he lost and he knows that his return would threaten those he still loves. The country has changed: peace has brought prosperity, but also increased the persecution of the Witted, who are being driven from their homes and even killed. Fitz resists being drawn back into the intrigues of the court until crowned-Prince Dutiful disappears. No one is sure if the Prince is kidnaped or run away, but Fitz is sent to track him down. Posing as part valet, part bodyguard to Lord Golden, Fitz returns to

his childhood home which, like many things in this book, seem familiar, but are not the same.

Hobb has done a wonderful job of continuing FitzChivalry's story in the same style as the assassin books. But it is not the same story, as Fitz is not the same person: from his past he has learned caution and understands the advantages of not being the center of attention. Throughout the book, Hobbs fills in the details of what happened in the years between the two series, which broadens our understand of Fitz. She also gives enough background information that you can follow the plot even if you have not read the earlier works. If you have not any of the assassin books, you will want to track them down after reading *Fool's Errand*.

Black Hawk Down vs. Starship Troopers: A Comparative Review by Kit Mason

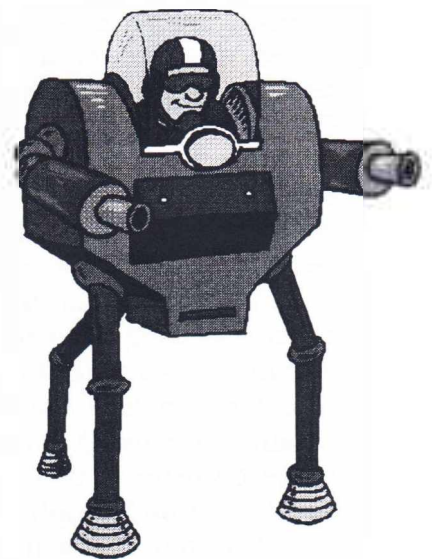
Several years ago, I read Mark Bowden's *Black Hawk Down* as research for an article I was considering writing on the US Army Rangers. As an elite unit, little of what they do or how they train was known to the public, and the few hints I'd gotten from the Rangers website made me interested in learning more. (The Rangers website appears to be down, though the International Society of Dysfunctional Veterans site, wae.com/px/dysfunc/, is still there and good for a laugh.)

Today, if someone wanted to know about US Army Rangers, I'd suggest going to see Ridley Scott's adaptation of the book, the movie version of *Black Hawk Down*.

Several people I've spoken with have compared the movie to Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers*, and it's true that both involve small units going up against overwhelming odds and confronting dangerous, unpredictable enemies. Any similarity between the movies ends at that superficial level, however. In *Starship Troopers*, Verhoeven discarded the critique of democratic society's roles and the political system that were key to Robert A. Heinlein's 1959 novel and replaced it with a purely

fascist state populated with pretty people who never really seem to get badly injured despite supposedly heavy fighting. Anyone who misses the political implications of the story's structure need only glance at the retro-Nazi-style uniforms worn by officers during pseudo-propaganda clips near the end of the film to understand what's going on.

In *Black Hawk Down*, the political situation is delineated lightly, in order to fit into the first few moments of film time, but it is present. (The book spends a great deal of time on the detail, and is worth the read.) Within that time, the viewer understands that the Rangers were sent in as part of an international force to help safeguard an international effort to feed starving people in Somalia, and that local warlords were



interfering with food distribution, hijacking the trucks and letting their own countrymen starve. This may be a small amount of background, but it's vital for understanding the story.

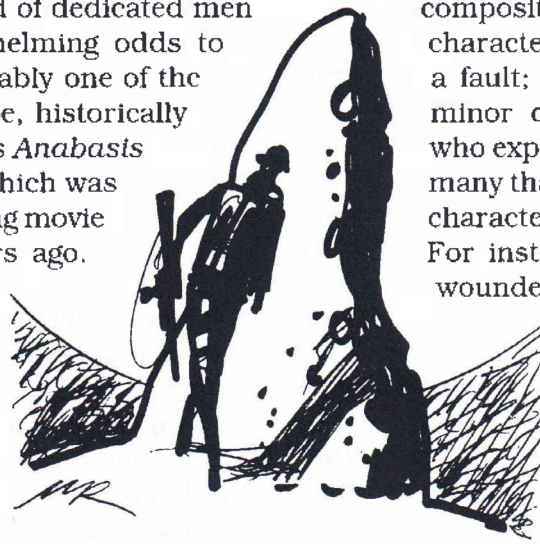
What's the difference? In *Starship Troopers*, the military units are offensive, purposely going out to attack the menacing bugs, and for good reason. They're in an official war, on the advance, and have an abundance of support troops and armaments. Any small groups are temporary; they have support, they always have a way to leave the situation even though it's not the best. In *Black Hawk Down*, the Rangers and Delta Force members were there in a policing capacity; they could not interfere unless requested. Early in the film we see the Rangers watching a food truck being taken over by a warlord's men, who attack the starving people trying to obtain food; the Rangers are obviously upset that, according to the rules, they aren't allowed to defend the people who are being hurt and help them get the supplies that they are supposed to be guaranteeing. It's a crucial difference, between aggressive warfare and policing, and when the city of Mogadishu rises up against them it is even more important.

I doubt that there's anyone in the general viewing audience who's never seen a war movie of a small band of dedicated men who have to face overwhelming odds to regain safe ground. Probably one of the earliest stories of this type, historically speaking, was Xenophon's *Anabasis* (The March to the Sea), which was the basis for the street-gang movie *The Warriors*, some years ago. Other, probably more familiar examples, would be John Wayne's *The Alamo* and any of Chuck Norris's *Missing in Action* films. In *The Warriors*, the Coney Island gang finally makes it home safe; in Norris's films, he brings along freed prisoners as well. In *The Alamo*,

the heroes go down fighting as the fort is overrun. (There is historical evidence, in untranslated records in Spanish in Mexico, that Davy Crockett and a handful of Alamo defenders were marched into Mexico by Santa Ana's men, where they were interrogated and shot by a firing squad, but you can bet that John Wayne never heard of it.)

Black Hawk Down differs from all of them in one vital way: in this case, the Rangers who actually were there and survived what became known as the Battle of Mogadishu were the primary technical consultants on the movie. The sets were built in Morocco, duplicating the inner area of Mogadishu, Somalia; they are roughly on the same latitude, so even the angle of the sun striking shadows on the buildings would be nearly the same. In interviews since the filming, the Rangers have said how pleased they were with the realism of the movie, and with how well it documented what happened to them. (Considering that Verhoeven discarded so much of Heinlein's novel to start with, he probably did not consult any experts except perhaps an entomologist for the giant bugs, though I doubt he even did that.)

Certainly there were places where liberties were taken with what happened; in some cases movie characters were composites of several similar characters. I don't think of this as a fault; I'd rather see one or two minor characters be composites who experience events that affected many than have a larger number of characters with only minor events. For instance, the scenes with the wounded soldiers, emergency surgery and lack of supplies were graphic and emotionally wrenching; I know from the book that what was portrayed happened to more than one of the men who were there. Seeing it once in the movie was enough.



The movie excels at giving the viewer a sense of who these soldiers were, of what their backgrounds might have been, of how they viewed their job and what they considered important. Most important -- and key to the whole story -- was the implicit promise to never leave a man behind, dead or alive, no matter the circumstances. The lengths to which they went in order to try to keep that promise formed much of the story.

Black Hawk Down also succeeded in something that many similar movies did not; it showed men under fire, in difficult situations, as human, fallible and still admirable. These soldiers were not pretty-boy Tom Cruise clones but guys who got dirty, who became hungry and tired, who tried not to hurt non-combatants -- for example, a Somali woman sheltering small children in a schoolroom -- but who were forced, again and again, to fire at armed women and children, not just men. This was reality, and this was also part of the genius of

this movie, to leave in the crazy things that really did happen, like the untended donkey pulling its empty cart through the streets between battles and never being hit, and the stupidity of the rescue force never really being able to get close enough to recover all the men at any one time.

Would I recommend the movie? Yes. However, I'd also suggest that anyone who has serious questions about the story told there read the book afterward. It is, to my knowledge, the only book ever written about the activities of Rangers and Delta Force soldiers with the assistance of the soldiers involved; it documents the events that occurred as closely as possible, and it is thorough and involving. I am not a fan of the US military in general, for many reasons that go back many years, but I came away from the book with a great deal of respect for the men in it, and that respect was not diminished by the movie.

**The Library of Congress Professional Association's
What IF... Discussion Forum for Science Fiction and Fantasy present**

Speculative Fiction: Writing, Selling, and Marketing Long and Short Fiction

A presentation by Mindy Klasky, author of *Season of Sacrifice*

Monday, Mar. 11th, 2002 12:10pm

West Dining Room (6th floor), Library of Congress, Madison Building

Coming Soon:

Eric Kotani (Yoji Kondo)
Title tba
Tuesday, April 16th,
12:10pm
Pickford Theatre
3rd Floor, Madison Building
Library of Congress

R.A. Salvatore
Title tba
Friday, May 30th, 12:10pm
Pickford Theatre
Third Floor, Madison
Building
Library of Congress

China Mieville
Title tba
Tuesday, July 16th, 12:10pm
Place tba
Madison Building
Library of Congress

**Treasurer's Report
By Bob MacIntosh**

January damage:

We spent \$10.00 for the Journal and \$25.00 for the First Friday meeting.
Total \$35.00 in expenses.

Revenue was big time: We got contribution of \$110.00 (they wants to remain unidentified, that gentle, kind fen that they are) Revenue from sales of books of \$96.00.

Dues collected from Bob MacIntosh, Mike Nelson, Keith Lynch, Mike & Beth Zipser, Sam Lubell, Alexis & Lee Gilliland, Scott Hoffman, Elspeth Kovar, Catherine Green, Mike Taylor, Ivy Yap, John Pomeranz, Kathi Overton, Barry, Judy and Meridel Newton, Richard & Nicki Lynch, Eric Jablow, Lee Strong, George Shiner, Vicki Smith, Liz Twitchel, Judy Kindell, Bill Lanhorn, Rebecca Prather, Sam & Judy Scheiner, Bernie Bell, Boots Coleman, Suzanne Hetiger, Colleen Cahill, Leeza Kessler, Ron Kean, Jim Thomas, Karl & Erica Ginter, Sally Hand, Candy & John Madigan, Adrienne Ertman, Sherri Bell, Brian Lewis, Madeline Yeh, Steve Smith. That's \$470.00 if I did not skip anyone. Misspelling are my fault and I should be whipped with wet noodles.

We also got a confirmation letter from the Hospice in Florida we sent the money for Jay Haldeman. I'll bring it for the Journal.

February:

All right, so I was only there one meeting - so what. Boskone was a pleasant convention, and there were almost enough WSFAns there to have a quorum (likely most of those missing Third Friday).

Expenses are simple- First Friday \$25.00

Revenue:

Dues collected from Sam Pierce, Chuck Divine and Chris Damrosch - \$30.00

Mysterious, masked person with heart of good gave contribution of \$120.00 (whoa!). That nets out to total revenue of \$150.00, and a monthly gain of \$125.00 for the month. Gosh, we might be able to afford the insurance and have enough left over to survive. I suspect from looking at the contract Mike has for his Capclave that all remaining money from Capclave 2001 will go to him to put him in good stead with his hotel. We'll see.

WSFA Email List Update By Keith Lynch

As of this writing, the WSFA email list has been running for half a month. There are 25 subscribers. 22 senders have sent 185 messages in 15 days, an average of 12 messages per day. The top two senders are Lee and Lee. Top two in quantity, I mean.

Most of the messages are very short. None have attachments (mainly because I block all attachments, HTML, and rich text). The archives of the list are available at <http://www.wsfa.org/list/> with a mirror site at <http://keithlynch.net/wsfa/list/>

Most participants who expressed a preference said they'd rather these archives only be visible to WSFAns, so please don't mention either URL on any web pages or in any newsgroups, and please don't submit them to any search engines. But you're welcome to share them with friends and prospective WSFA members. Thanks.

To subscribe to the list (or to find out where the archives are if you're reading this on the online version of the WSFA Journal, from which the above two URLs have been censored) please email me, kfl@keithlynch.net.

For more information about the list, please see the first message in the archive, or ask me. Thanks.

