

Values

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Can You Spot the

WARDROBE MALFUNCTION?

Values By Lee Strong

The potential customer walked up to the register, book in hand.

"May I help you, sir?" inquired the sales associate.

"Yes. This book is labeled a 'Greentree Book.' What does that mean?"

"Greentree Books are designed for long lasting, environmentally safe use. They're specially manufactured for long shelf life, good quality reading, and ease of storage."

"Don't books pretty much last forever anyway?"

"No, sir. Many 20th Century books self-destruct due to acid in the paper."

"What about Gutenberg Bibles from the 1400's? They've lasted for 600 years."

"Older paper had a lower acid content than 20th Century paper. It's actually easier to find a 19th Century original book today than a mid-20th Century original."

"I didn't know that."

"Most people don't. So Greentree Books were created to prevent book self-destruction. The paper is specially formulated and manufactured, heavy duty, acid free superparchment. The inks are all organic mixtures that bond with the paper without destructive etching. The covers are real leather sewn together rather than glued. This book is guaranteed to last for 500 years, or your purchase price will be refunded upon presentation of the original sales slip."

"Well, that certainly seems to be very substantial." The potential customer paused. "But wait a minute. Frankly, some books aren't worth keeping forever. What if I want to recycle this book? A book so long lasting might be impossible to recycle."

"Oh, no, sir. The developers of Greentree Books thought of that, too. Although, naturally, we hope that you will enjoy this work for as long as you live and eventually pass it on to your heirs, Greentree Books are easy to recycle. Just soak the book in ammonia and the book will disintegrate in a week. Ammonia is available in common cleaning fluids but is seldom stored near one's library so it's extremely safe. The natural leather covers can be recycled in any organic landfill."

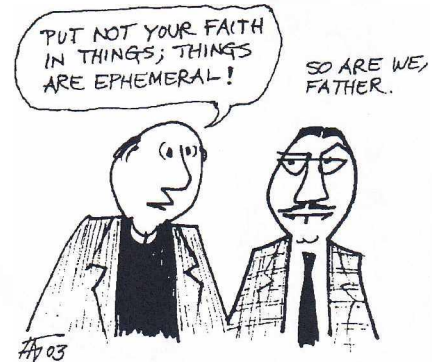
"Well, that certainly sounds very gentle on the earth. And Cathy Harney Early is my favorite author. I'll take it."

"Yes, sir. That will be eleven thousand nine hundred ninety-nine dollars and ninety five cents."

"Wow, I'm not sure that I have that much on me." The customer started checking his pockets.

"Sir, we accept cash, checks with three forms of picture identification, travelers' cheques, and all major credit cards."

"I never carry plastic!"



How To Not Spend Ten Thousand

The 1/2/04 first Friday (and first of 2004) meeting began with Cathy banging the gavel. "9:15 time to start." Old business was the Gillilands being absent for next month's first Friday. Candy Madigan has volunteered her place. Keith said that he had directions from five years ago if they haven't moved. Elspeth said they live near the Ginters. Lee G. said Beltsville. Lee Strong moved that we accept her offer. Vote was Unanimous. Rebecca said, "So we'll have three consecutive meetings in Maryland. Sam said, "Unless you volunteer." Keith said that he has volunteered for Fifth Friday and gave his address. Cathy commented, "And it is road accessible." Keith said they don't even tow people away.

Budget \$3,678.42 in account but just \$1,278 belongs in the general fund. The rest is SMOFcon. For Capclave Past, Sam L. said that we're in the red. Bob clarified, "About \$300" in the red. Capclave 04 said nothing new. Working on contract, talking to Elizabeth. Hope to have it settled before leave for Egypt on 21st. Elspeth said, "Let the record show lots and lots of jealousy over going to Egypt." Song Walk Like An Egyptian.

Mike said that WFC is wrapping up. There's about \$1,200 final hotel bill. Will be lots of money left. Capclave future will have Patrick and Teresa Neilsen Hayden. They will be fun guests. Don't get her laughing, she drops like an accordion.

Entertainment committee doesn't remember anything after the eggnog at the Pomeranz party. "Who was driving?" asked John. "I was" said Alexis.

Austerity had nothing to say. Publications reported 18 years of *WSFA Journal* on-line except for four missing issues. John suggested posting on SMOFs.

Sam read from the vocally challenged Lee's note about not being able to talk. John said, "She might have something else, a SARS apocalypse." Lots of Egypt jokes were made. We're in de Nile here.

New business. Bob proposed using the WFC money to cover Capclave's expenses and \$10,000 for the student contest. Even with that, there'd probably be \$30,000 in the treasury. Elspeth suggested making a contribution to Sf-Lovers. Rich said that SF-Lovers never cashed the check he sent them before. The motions were separated. The motion to use WFC funds to cover outstanding expenses of Capclave up to \$500 passed with just one abstention.

The 10K of WFC funds as a donation to the student contest proved more controversial. Rich asked what other sources the contest had. Bob said it can get through the year without more funding. It is supposed to get money from Worldcons and other sources. Elspeth said, "Before we start doing things with money, wouldn't it make sense to form a committee to decide or we'd be giving it here and there and then it adds up to real money." Alexis asked where the money is now. Bob said it is currently in WFC accounts.

Alexis suggested waiting until the money is in WSFA accounts before we decide. Lee S. said these were good points. We should wait and think this through. I'm not sure we need another committee; we have an executive board to debate it for a little while.

Eric moved to table it for a future meeting. Lee seconded. Rich asked about the contest budget for the year. Bob said \$10,000 covers a year. John said, "This is not a one year deal, a lot of the other contributions are in-kind. Will assure the contest continues. Other worthy causes exist too – fan funds, medical funds. I think having the executive committee report back and establishing a nest egg would be a good idea. Vote to table passed

unanimously. Alexis voted too, "Sometimes it doesn't pay to abstain."

Announcements. Charles Gilliland said December 04 Paramount is releasing *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*. Lee is already working on getting passes. Chuck Divine said that the apocalypse is at hand since William Shatner is releasing a new album. Keith said Evecon is in Reston this weekend, someone should take flyers. Mike Walsh saw the theatrical version of *His Dark Materials* in London and pronounced it "jaw-droppingly good." Production will have to be rewritten if it tours because it takes advantage of special features of this particular stage. His most recent book, *Limekiller*, was reviewed in the Post and praised by Michael Dirda. Lee has a new job as his agency changed its name. It is the Military Services Deployment and Displacement Command. His book plundering party continues –2,822 books discarded. Eric asked, "Didn't I read a story about you in the paper?" Lee said, "I saw that story [about people crushed in the piles of their books and papers] and decided to avoid that fate. John held up a giant chocolate bar. Dues are due and payable \$10.

Ernest Lilley introduced himself. He's been editor of SF Revu since June 1997 getting 250K hits a month. He needs reviewers. He'll give you a free bound galley if you promise to review the book.

The meeting unanimously adjourned at 9:53

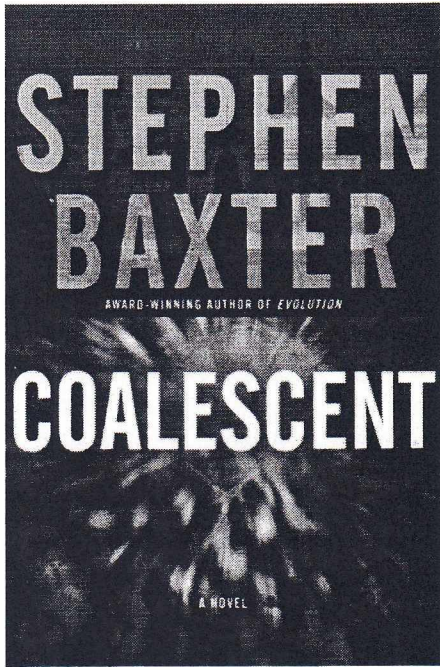
Attendance: VP Cathy Green, Sec & 2003 Chair Samuel Lubell, Treas. Bob MacIntosh, Trust Keith Lynch, Trust Steven Smith, 2004 Chair Lee Gilliland, 2005 Chair Mike Walsh, Alexis and Charles Gilliland, Scott Hofmann, Eric Jablow, Jim Kling, Elspeth Kovar, Bill Lawhorn, Nicki and Richard Lynch, Wade Lynch, Larry Pfeffer, John Pomeranz, Rebecca Prather, Judy and Sam Scheiner, George Shaner, Lee Strong, Michael Taylor, Ernest Lilley, Chuck Divine, Tom McCabe, Anna Reed, Stan Field, and Duck Dodgers.



Two Views of Stephen Baxter's *Coalescent*

Samuel Lubell's Review

Stephen Baxter is known for writing hard science fiction with the emphasis on the science, chock full of speculations on physics and the laws of space and time. So *Coalescent* (Del Rey Books \$25.95) seems a bit of a departure for him as a writer since it reads almost like a mainstream novel



with about half of the chapters being straightforward historical fiction (albeit one in which King Arthur makes an appearance). The science in this novel is that of sociology (or maybe organizational theory) with a little bit of evolutionary biology thrown into the mix.

The novel begins with the death of George Poole's father and the discovery of a photograph showing George as a toddler with an unknown twin sister. This sparks a midlife crisis for George, who, dissatisfied with his current job and separated from his wife, becomes obsessed with finding his sister. He learns that his family, then very poor, gave his sister Rosa up to an obscure religious order with strange connections to his family – the Puissant Order of Holy Mary Queen of Virgins. Joining him in this search is a former school friend, Peter McLachlan, a science nerd who appears to have wandered in from a different Baxter novel. Peter is involved with an online SETI group and prone to paranoid speculations on why so much of the universe is composed of dark matter. Together, they find out that the

order was interested in George's sister because his family is descended from the founder of the order, Regina, who lived in Britain during the start of the fall of Rome, when the empire lost its toehold on that island.

The first-person narrative of George's investigations alternates with the story of Regina growing up a spoiled daughter of a wealthy Roman family in Britain, whose status becomes more and more impoverished as the novel goes on until she and the family of her former slave have to teach themselves farming and all the skills necessary for survival. Baxter does an excellent job with her character, undoubtedly the most developed in the novel, as she moves from spoiled daughter, to rebellious adolescent, to leader of her people, to queen (to war leader Artorius of Caml fort) to cold and calculating religious leader. Baxter paints a fascinating picture of life was like after the fall of civilization, with Regina knowing that a better life exists and thinking of that as normal with the current conditions something to be survived until normality returns. (There are some wonderful passages comparing the wonders of civilization with the pitiful products her town's workshops can do.)

And ultimately, Regina is willing to do whatever it takes for the survival of her family's bloodline, even pimp her daughter's body in exchange for passage to Rome. Once in Rome she finds her own mother, who had become part of the remnants of the pre-Christian Vestal Virgins, and through sheer force of will and instinct, forges them into a religious order based on three rules: "Sisters matter more than daughters" (because only a few are allowed to breed so that the whole

group can be one family of sisters rather than separate groups of family lines), the Orwellian "Ignorance is strength" (because the structures of the group allow it to survive), and "Listen to your sisters" (so that peer pressure keeps everyone in line.)

Finally, halfway through the book, a third plotline evolves. Rosa, who has become influential in the Order, chooses 14-year-old Lucia, to become one of the mothers. This ultimately leads to Lucia meeting an American in Rome and choosing to run away from the order. Naturally, they encounter George and Peter and reveal some of the biological secrets of the order that leads Peter to suspect that the Order has evolved into a whole new species. I had the most trouble with this plotline. In many ways Lucia behaves more like a stranger to the Order than someone who had grown up there. For instance, she is surprised that her baby only takes three months to gestate since she saw on the Internet that it normally takes nine. And if the smell, warmth, and comfort of the Hive is so seductive that even George is tempted to join, why is she so rebellious? Also, neither Lucia nor Rosa act like drones. It is hard to see how a system that produces a Lucia could remain as stable as the one described here. As to the science, I find it very hard to believe that evolution works as quickly as it does in this novel (and along seemingly Lamarckian lines at that) to cause groups to diverge especially since the hive uses males from outside and outsiders like George's sister join the hive so it is not completely isolated.



Science aside, I found this an interesting novel of the "secret history" variety. Putting the Hive in Rome, the center of much of history, rather than a hidden backwater, was an interesting choice of Baxter's that worked to provide contrast – the center of western civilization hiding an alternative civilization beneath it. The Hive itself is dedicated to survival. It was created out of Regina's sense that it was easy for civilization to fall so evolved into a system independent of civilization and even of the

individual humans that comprise it.

The back of the book describes it as first of a series, *Destiny's Children*. But it is hard to see where this plotline could go as the Hive, at least as shown in this book, is essentially a dead-end for humanity that has no drive for expansion (never spreading beyond Rome in 2000 years) nor any goal beyond survival. I suspect that the next book will not simply pick up where this one ended but will instead present a different course of evolution for mankind.

Readers who have avoided books by Stephen Baxter because of the stereotype that science fiction written by scientists have better science than fiction should certainly give *Coalescent* a try. This might also be a good book to give fans of historical or even mainstream fiction a taste of science fictional speculation.

Colleen R. Cahill's Review

Science fiction is often classed as hard or soft and this leads to arguments about definitions of each, which is superior, and people camping on each side of the question. It is wonderful when an author can write a work that goes beyond those boundaries. Such is the case with Stephen Baxter's *Coalescent*, which gives us a look at human society and what possible alternative evolutionary paths exist.

While going through his recently deceased father's house, George Poole discovers he has family he never knew: not a distant cousin, but a twin sister! When very young, his sibling was sent to be raised in a religious group in Rome known as The Order. George is pulled into a deep family secret, one that extends back into the past – to the era when the Roman Empire was losing control of Britain.

As we follow George's investigation, the life of his ancestor, Regina, is revealed. This daughter of a Roman noble watched the last vestiges of the Empire in Britain disappear while society slipped further and further into barbarism. We find a strong, determined and confident person in Regina, but also one that is sure she ... and only she knows the right way. Her experiences of living on the edges of civilization led her to find a new way for her family to survive, regardless of what the individual members wanted. And this new society is the heritage that George is facing.

I found the chapters of this book that deal with Regina especially intriguing. She was present at many historic turning points: the last Roman troops at Hadrian's Wall, the rise of King Arthur, the fall of Rome. What is believable about this is that she was never a major force or key player: what Regina did do is survive, as did those who followed her.

This is not to understate George's hunt. He deals with the legacy Regina has left, because she is the one who started The Order. What is seemingly a Catholic religious group for women is actually much, much more. The Order is a different type of society, with elements more like a hive, complete with queens and drones. Not only has their way of life changed, but members are altered at basic level making them biologically different, a difference that could be a threat to humanity.

Baxter gives us much food for thought. *Coalescent* delves into the nature of how humans live, grow and interact, while exploring alternative paths to community, reproduction and evolution. Through the story of one family, both in the past and present, we see how this extraordinary society was created. From the pressures of poverty, violence and an unstable civilization, a new set of survival rules shapes a group into something that is dramatically different.



This is the first book in *Destiny's Children*, a three-volume look at human evolution and where we might be going in the far future. Hopefully the next two works will be as interesting and original as this one. If you are a fan of Baxter, you will enjoy this new book. It is also not a bad starting place for a new reader of his work. Whether hard or soft science fiction is your preference, there is something for you in *Coalescent*.

A Shortcut in Time

By Charles Dickinson (New York, Tor, 2003)

A review by Colleen R. Cahill

Time travel is the stuff of science fiction. Much of this genre has an engine that propels one back or forward in time to witness or change events. Charles Dickinson has taken a different tact in his latest fantasy *A Shortcut in Time*. When time travel is accidental, the issues and problems for those who make the journey are not the same as those who use a

machine.

Josh Winkler is a struggling artist in Euclid Heights, Illinois, who has a fairly good life. While artistic success evades him, he has a solid marriage to Flo, a local doctor who supports both her husband and their daughter, Penny. Josh and Flo grew up in Euclid Heights and are tied not just by marriage, but by an event in their childhood: both their brothers were caught in an attack that killed Flo's brother and left Josh's brother severely brain damaged. The Winklers are normal people, but with a twist in their past. This is much like the town, which has angled walking paths that are relics from the town's first mayor. One stormy night, Josh discovers if the right combination of emotion, weather and direction come together on these paths, he can travel back in time. Granted, his first trip is only fifteen minutes, but this only accentuates his oddness when the word leaks out to the town. And being a small town, everyone knows. More complications arise with appearance of a young girl who tells Josh she is from 1908.



A Shortcut in Time is a work with lots of atmosphere. Dickinson captures the essence of a small town and combines it with a feeling that you get in some *Twilight Zone* episodes. Under the veneer of normalcy is the feeling that something is not quite as it should be. Josh comes to hate his discovery because of its cost in human anguish, not just for the young woman from the past, but for his own daughter, who goes back to the influenza epidemic of 1918 and refuses to leave. The price of moving through time and the effects of changing events and people's paths gives this book an eerie and unpredictable ending.

Many will find this book hard to pigeonhole. While it has time travel as an element, some would find it closer to a mainstream novel, with its emphasis on characters and their relationship to each other. Josh never tries to find out how or why the shortcuts allow people to travel in time, he is too busy just trying to keep his life together. This book reminds me of the works of Jonathan Lethem, as both authors set their plots in our world with elements of the unusual. Dickinson is also a writer who is a wordsmith, crafting language to create a flow that adds to the feeling within this good read.

This work has been a sleeper. It is worth seeking out and for those on a budget, the trade paperback will be released in January. If you want a fantasy that has atmosphere, entertainment and reality with an edge, try *A Shortcut in Time*.

Quicksilver by Neal Stephenson

Review by Judy Newton

With the publication of *Quicksilver*, it's official: Neal Stephenson has succumbed to the dreaded Epic Disease. Volume One of a promised 3-book saga weighs in at a carpal-tunnel inducing 900-plus pages. It also stands as a prequel to *Cryptonomicon*, Stevenson's previous puppy-killer.

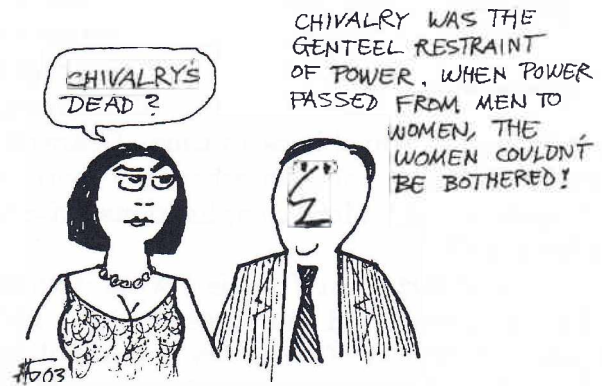
Divided into three parts, *QS* addresses Stevenson's theme of working out the hidden meanings of the natural world from two angles: first, as a tale of intellectual discovery at the seventeenth-century interface of alchemy and science; then as a picaresque journey across war-torn Europe; finally, as the resolution of the story lines when two of his major characters meet and interact.

The first part is the most satisfying for those interested in the history of science. Intercut chapters follow Daniel Waterhouse, a Puritan scholar and member of the Royal Society, from his childhood through his education at Cambridge (where he interacts with Isaac Newton and other luminaries, both real and fictional), through the Plague, the Great Fire of London, and dynastic upheavals

from Cromwell through the Glorious Revolution. Concurrently, we jump ahead in time and breathlessly follow a sea journey by Waterhouse, now aging, back from Boston to England, fraught with danger from pirate attacks.

For a change of pace, the second part introduces Jack Shaftoe, a Vagabond, and his traveling companion, Eliza. They are in constant danger but manage to survive the Siege of Vienna, cross Europe and reach the Netherlands, where they are separated by an unfortunate investment on Jack's part and Eliza's reaction. Readers of *Cryptonomicon* will recognize both Waterhouse and Shaftoe as character names; the *characters* of the characters in *QS* seem to breed true, as the ancestors of those in the previous book are reflected in this one. Eliza, a native of Qwghlm (also appearing in *Cryptonomicon*), has no last name until she acquires a couple of noble titles under interesting circumstances.

Stephenson seems to have trouble presenting believable female characters. Not only is Eliza ingenious (she is a master of cryptography), but an accomplished dressmaker, stock manipulator, spinner of tales, mistress of exotic Oriental sexual techniques, and fearless rescuer of princes from kidnapping plots. And she's still a teenager! Oh, did I mention she's beautiful? However, until she is ennobled, she is the only character in the book with no last name.



Eliza's character is part of the problem of the third part of *QS*. With a long epistolary section, the story lags a bit after the ascent of William of Orange. There is the extended resolution of Eliza's unintended pregnancy, with a frankly unbelievable lapse in suspended disbelief concerning the ambiguity of her child's paternity. And yes! Even such a superwoman can ultimately succumb to the frailties of the flesh! This, after remaining a resolute virgin for the previous 19/20ths of the book.

These are quibbles, however, and did not stop me from enjoying the book overall. It's a long slog, true, but worth it. I look forward to slogging through the next two in the series.

P.S. There's bound to be a fannish controversy over whether this book is science fiction or not, just like there was when *Cryptonomicon* was nominated for the Hugo. These arguments remind me of Polonius' disquisition on categories of plays in *Hamlet*: "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral..." Stephenson has included s-f elements in *QS*: a fictional country, whose language contains no vowels, and a character who seems to have advance knowledge of events. He appears at critical junctures in the plot, imparting critical information and delivering lifesaving medicine. One could argue that this sort of *deus ex machina* is just a lazy author's plot device, but Neal Stephenson is anything but lazy.

Schild's Ladder, by Greg Egan.

Reviewed by Keith Lynch

Egan has perhaps the best view of what a truly transhumanist, post-singularity future might be like.

Mankind has spread through the galaxy. Illness, aging, and unwanted psychological states are all relics of the distant past. People move at will between inhabiting various custom-grown highly fit bodies, robot bodies (some microscopic), and a purely software existence.

Everyone makes offsite backups regularly, so that nobody will be permanently killed no matter what happens. At worst, they'll lose the last few hours of their memories.

All of mankind's knowledge and skills are at everyone's fingertips. No, not fingertips -- inside one's skull, available in microseconds. When someone is threatened by a thug with a metal rod, he loads a

martial arts package in time to disarm the (unenhanced) assailant, as if he'd spent hours every day for decades mastering judo, karate, and all other martial arts.

Almost any material object which can exist can be quickly and inexpensively designed and built.

The final theory of physics, which elegantly unifies General Relativity with Quantum Mechanics, was developed in their distant past. Almost in our own time. In fact, it looks a lot like the Loop Quantum Gravity that's the cover story of the January 2004 Scientific American magazine.

This theory has been perfectly in accordance with every experiment for tens of thousands of years. But there was one experiment which couldn't be done until their time, due to the resources it required. The prediction is that it will create a small region of "novo-vacuum", a different state of space-time, which will persist for a few nanoseconds then disappear.

Much to everyone's surprise, the "novo-vacuum" instead proceeds to expand at half the speed of light. And keep expanding, non-stop, destroying everything in its path. Nobody is actually *hurt* by this, you understand. But it is an inconvenience. Do you abandon whole solar systems, or try to quickly accelerate them to the same speed? Or might there be some way to destroy the "novo-vacuum," or at least stop its expansion?

Most of the novel is set on a space station that's keeping pace with one side of this novo-vacuum, a few centuries after the experiment that went awry. Scientists on board are using the best technologies of the day to study the novo-vacuum.

Two factions develop: Those who want to stop the spread, and those who want to colonize the novo-vacuum, where the laws of physics are apparently far richer than in our world. In fact, there is evidence that intelligent life has already evolved in the few centuries since their "universe" began. At first the two factions mostly get along. But eventually violence is used, with various improvised weapons, from a metal rod to an antimatter bomb.

Though the space station is heavily computerized and networked, there is no "hacking". Egan realizes that computer network security is already pretty much a solved problem. Cyberpunk is not a plausible future in his opinion or mine. In the far future, if you want to disable a computer, you use an axe.

Egan is one of my favorite authors. If you're into truly hard SF, i.e. a look at what things might really be like in a few centuries if civilization doesn't collapse first, you should give him a try. Several of his short stories are available on his web page,

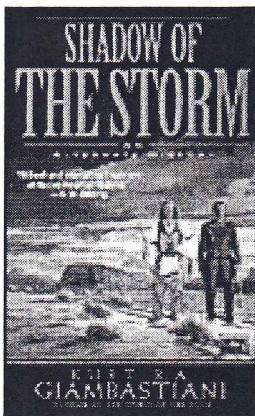
<http://gregegan.customer.netspace.net.au/>

Shadow of the Storm

Written by Kurt R.A. Giambastiani

New York: New American Library/Roc, 2003

Reviewed by Lee Strong



"There is no reason for any soldier to follow this officer except for idle curiosity." -- Legendary officer evaluation report.

And the same is true of Mr. Giambastiani's latest non-epic of elves and orcs disguised as very alternate American Indians and American "bluecoats." Mr. Giambastiani's basic problem is a lack of internal and external logic in his stories of American Indians riding dinosaurs across a North American almost cut in half by a gigantic extension of the Gulf of Mexico. His world raises a lot of questions that he simply never answers even when his plot turns on the nonsensical results. Instead, he presents a leaden story in which US President George A. Custer tries to make peace with the Indians, but is nearly assassinated in a bungled plot to disrupt the peace process. The assassin gets away with murder and so does the author.

I rate *Shadow of the Storm* as ★★ on the 5 star scale because the storytelling is clearly inferior to the average science fiction novel. -- LS

Treasury to Convert to Gold Bars

The 1/16/04 Third Friday meeting opened with Judy saying it is 9:15 (leading to a dispute over the nature of time) Mike Walsh walked in. Old business is Fifth Friday at Keith's, next 1st Friday at Candy's. At the last meeting we voted to spend up to \$500 to get Capclave out of its hole and tabled the motion to spend ten thousand on the sf contest to the executive committee. The treasurer reported \$3,978.42 of which a significant part is SMOFcon. \$1,578 is unallocated. Eric asked about accounts. Bob said that all we had was a checking account.

Madeleine moved that we convert our treasury into gold bars and put them under our beds. There was no second. Entertainment committee preoccupied with going to Egypt which he promised would be entertaining. Activities committee said people are working on American Film Institute film series. There's a possible tour of the space museum. Austerity reported that we're still here until the money is distributed.

Capclave past reported being bailed out. Bob said we owe Peggy Rae, Sam, and Judy. Capclave present said that the hotel released rooms to us. GOH has a downloadable file TEQUILA MOCKINGBIRD accessible via our web site. The hotel contract will be signed tomorrow. Capclave Far Future said Howard Waldrop will do either a new story or a reprint of the "Ugly Chickens" on its 25th anniversary as a chapbook. Everyone who pre-registers will get it free. To send Howard email, type it normally, print it, put it in an envelope, and attach stamp. Fan guest will be the Neilsen Haydens. Story how at one con the fan and pro guest were both Wilson Tucker under different names.

WFC has some bills to send out still. The Souvenir book hasn't collected all the advertising yet so that's another \$10,000 coming in, so the surplus will be around \$50K. So thinking of what has to be done. The DC3 people could pick a date, say we have this pile of cash, wanna fight? Amount of expenses is petty cash, so under 1 K and revenue over 10K. People should think.

SMOFCON reported 78 members and hotel. First weekend in December at the Wyndham in Thomas Circle.

For new business, Eric said that webmaster Keith asked that the club pay for the website instead of asking members for it. Someone asked how much it was. Alexis said we're paying \$25 a month. Keith suggested that we move it to Panix for added benefits. Lee said hers was \$12 a month and get bells and whistles. Keith said that with these cheap sites you get what you pay for. "I'm familiar with Panix and they've been around since the 80s." Bob suggested that he go and do some research. Keith said he'd rather go with what he knows. Barry Newton asked how long is our registration paid through. Bob said another year. Eric moved that we pay through May while we look at other sites. Passed unanimously. Judy told publications to look into other sites and anyone who has info should send it to them.

Barry suggested postponing any other decisions about money until we have time to think things through. Adrienne said that "WFC was something that we won't be doing again any time soon. So let's not spend it. We won't be getting it back." There was a debate over difference between lottery tickets and T bills. If the government falls, we're all in a lot of trouble.

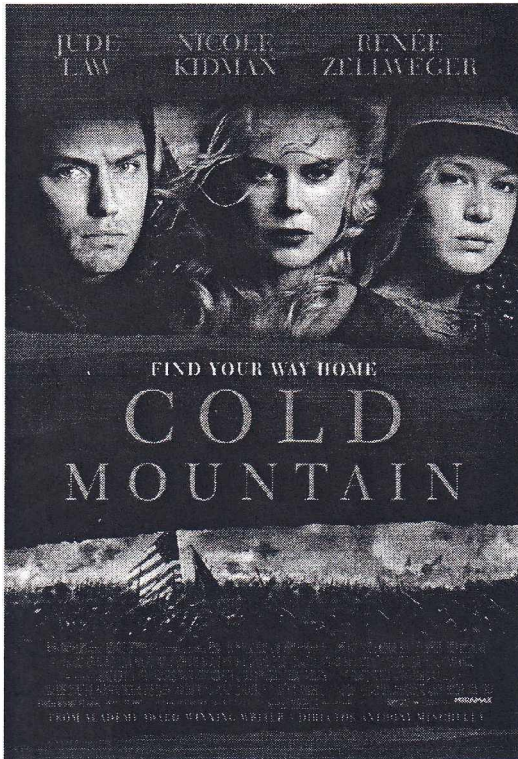
Keith Marshall said the last party at Evecon was closed by Evecon's own security. BBC found a missing ep of Doctor Who. The Mars Rover is a-roving. A small trip for a robot, a giant trip for all robot kind. The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:45

Attendance: Pres Judy Kindell, VP Cathy Green, Sec Samuel Lubell, Treas Bob MacIntosh, Trust. Adrienne Ertman, Trust Keith Lynch, Trust Steven Smith, 2004 Chair Lee Gilliland, 2005 Chair Mike Walsh. (All Officers Present), Alexis Gilliland, Erica and Lydia Ginter, Scott Hofmann, Eric Jablow, Bill Lawhorn, Nicki Lynch, Wade Lynch, Keith Marshall, Marilyn Mix, Barry and Judy Newton, Evan Phillips, George Shaner, Ivy Yap, Madeleine Yeh, Dave Taylor, Liza Barry-Kessler, Bill Herriman, Kaiey Herreireu, Hugo Gernsback.

Cold Mountain

Reviewed by loyal Virginian Lee Strong

The US Civil War continues to be of great interest to WSFAns as well as mundanes. Both can appreciate a well told love story spanning the war years and their aftermath.



Sheltered preacher's daughter Ada Monroe comes to the town of Cold Mountain, North Carolina where she meets the introverted but versatile handyman W.P. Inman. Just as they discover their love for each other, the war begins and he goes off to fight for the Confederacy. Shortly thereafter, Ada's father dies, leaving her alone and without visible means of support just as the distinctly unchivalrous Confederate Home Guard increases its tyranny over the remaining citizens. Meanwhile, the bloodbath of the Battle of the Crater causes Inman to desert and trek home. The movie follows their converging stories as Inman struggles to reach Cold Mountain while dodging martial law patrols and the inequalities and disruptions of Southern life. While he hikes onward, Ada and her new business partner, Ruby, struggle to rebuild the family farm, put food on the table, escape the leering attentions of the Home Guard, and not shoot Ruby's father.

This is a well told, generally realistic tale that contrasts sharply with the better known and highly romanticized *Gone With The Wind* (GWTW). The smallholding, neighborly Cold Mountain community is distinctly unlike and certainly more human than the aristocratic plantation owners of GWTW. Initially, they are no less patriotic than the O'Haras and Hamiltons, but change under the grinding poverty and petty tyranny that the Confederacy brings. The characters are very well realized with Ada learning to become more useful and self reliant and Inman learning to care about others. The script could easily degenerate into politically correct nonsense but intelligent writing and acting brings out the positive qualities of each character without destroying a 19th Century story with 21st Century posturing. The scenery is beautiful and the photography splendid. On the negative side, the film is somewhat long -- about 2½ hours -- for its story and is certain to make some Confederate apologists uncomfortable.

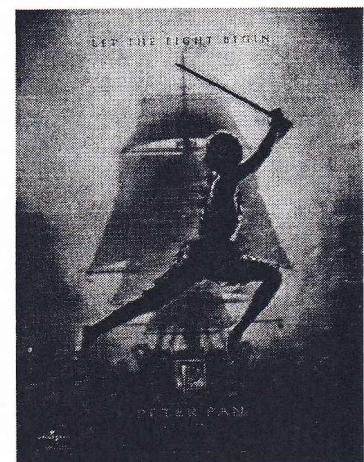
I rate historical fiction *Cold Mountain* as ★★★½ on the 5 star scale. -- LS

Peter Pan (2003)

Reviewed by Sue and Lee Strong

This is a very nice version of the classic children's story suitable for children of all ages.

The Darling children of Victorian London enjoy imaginative tales about pirates, Indians, fairies, mermaids, exotic settings, and, of course, children without any responsibilities. So they take the arrival of the spirit of Never Never Land, Peter Pan, in stride. Once the introductions are out of the way, the



foursome fly off straight on til morning past the second star to the right. In a series of rollicking adventures, they explore the most exotic and lively of tropical islands, all the time dodging the menaces of Captain Hook and Red Handed Jill, not to mention a crocodile and a jealous fairy.

This is a delightful live action version that is generally quite faithful to James Barrie's original story. Never Never Land is well realized and the special effects are very well handled. Some minor changes from previous versions, including the addition of a Black Castle and the charming custom of thimble exchanges, keep things fresh. The characters and plot are well known to most fans, but that shouldn't stop the young at heart from enjoying a retelling of a true classic.

We rate *Peter Pan* (2003) as ★★★ on the 5 star scale. -- SS and LS

Email to WSFA
By Keith Lynch

For the past four years, I have been WSFA's semi-official email contact. When someone reads our web page, and wants to know about the next meeting, or Capclave, or anything else relating to WSFA, the email address they find points to me.

Three years ago, the volume of spam (unsolicited bulk email, usually touting fraudulent products, usually with a forged email address), viruses, worms, denial-of-service attacks, bounces of spams that were forged to appear to be from me, and other junk in my mailbox, caused me to start filtering. At first, I only blocked messages from Argentina, China, Korea, and Taiwan, messages in HTML, and messages with attachments. But as the volume of junk doubled, doubled again, doubled again, doubled again, and doubled again, I've been forced to construct more and more draconian filters -- ones which reject any message which mentions any of several African nations or their capitals, any of several popular medications, any messages marked urgent, and messages containing any of several other words or phrases often found in spam and seldom found in legitimate email.

By the end of 2003, I was spending upwards of half an hour every day updating my filters -- finding words and phrases in each day's spam that were also in previous spams, but not in previous legitimate email, and adding them to my filters. And I was continuing to fall further and further behind. I was failing to respond to legitimate email which successfully reached my mailbox, simply because my eyes glaze over after paging through spam after spam after spam, and after an hour or two, I no longer see what's before my eyes.

I've considered Bayesian filters, but those reject less spam than what I'm doing already, albeit with a lot less labor. I won't consider challenge-and-response, for several reasons -- see <http://kmsself.home.netcom.com/Rants/challenge-response.html>. Other proposals such as micropayments and hashcash have been discussed for years, but the infrastructure isn't there yet, so they're not options I can choose this year. Starting fresh with a new email address is a possibility, but has the disadvantage that any messages sent by people who only know the old one would be lost -- and I'd have to keep starting fresh, as spammers learn one new disposable email address after another.

Then there's the government's new CAN SPAM solution: By federal law, as of January 1st 2004, all spammers must use valid email addresses, and must stop spamming anyone who requests removal. If this sounds familiar, it's because it was the "solution" touted by spammers and their apologists a decade ago. It failed then, for the simple reason that spammers are crooks, not businesses, and because nobody prosecuted the spammers for fraud, forgery, theft of services, or anything else, even though the vast majority of spammers have been in violation of numerous laws for as long as there's been spam. No new laws were needed.

However, just so nobody can say I didn't give CAN SPAM every possible chance, I sent a remove request to every email address that spammed me in January. Needless to say, the vast majority of my requests bounced -- the addresses were fake. I guess I should have also gone to the FBI headquarters and filled out 27,000 crime reports. And then done the same the next day. And the next. Sure, that will work.

What I've chosen to do is a combination of disposable email addresses and whitelisting.

Blacklisting means accepting all email unless I can find a reason to reject it. That's what I've been doing. Whitelisting means rejecting all email unless I can find a reason to accept it. That's what I will soon start doing.

I will accept all email sent to the current disposable email address, no matter who it's from, or where, or how it's formatted, or what it says. And I will also accept all email sent by anyone whose name, email address, or domain is on my new whitelist, no matter which email address of mine it's sent to, or where it's from, or how it's formatted, or what it says.

This is not a concern for WSFA members who want to email me, since all WSFA members are on my whitelist, along with everyone with whom I've exchanged email in the past four (soon to be five) years, everyone with whom I have corresponded in any newsgroup in the past year, the top hundred posters in the rec.arts.sf.fandom, rec.arts.sf.written, and comp.risks newsgroups, everyone in John Lorentz's fannish email directory, everyone who has handed me a business card or a piece of paper with their name or email address scribbled on it in the past few years for any reason, and many others -- a total of over nine thousand names, email addresses, and domains so far.

I'm impressed that Panix can check each incoming message against this whitelist in less than a tenth of a second. My whitelisting will use more computer power every hour than the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs used in their entire history.

I've been whitelisting the WSFA email list for the whole two years it's been in operation. Messages from WSFA members directed to the list go to the list (unless they're in HTML, or resemble spam in some other way). I used the old WSFA member whitelist as the starting point for my new general whitelist.

Messages from unknown addresses to the list go directly to me. If they appear to be from WSFA members, I forward them to the list, and add the new address to the whitelist. This has only happened twice. Once, two years ago, when we got a message from "Weyrlady", until I figured out that was Meridel Newton. The second time was just last month, when we got a message from ekovar at a new site. Since this was obviously Elspeth, I forwarded to the list, and added her new address to the WSFA member whitelist.

Since then, I've checked and seen that there have only been five spams in the past year where "ekovar" was in the email address. So I added "ekovar" to both whitelists. Now, anything with that string anywhere in the email address, I will see. And it will go straight to the email list, if sent there.

I've done the same with all WSFA member names and email addresses, where possible. For instance only ten spams in the past year contained "walsh" in the name or email address, so any message with "walsh" anywhere in the name or email address will be accepted. Or "hofmann". But not "smith", or "michael", or "green", though "steven smith", "steve smith", "smith, steve", and "cathy green" will be, along with numerous other permutations of their names, and all their known email addresses. (Elspeth's message would not have been held up had the From: line contained her name, even with a new email address.)



Under the new system, users of the email list shouldn't notice much difference. Messages from a completely unknown name and address will be rejected rather than held as they are now. However, messages in HTML, or with attachments, will be held rather than rejected as they are now. And messages mentioning spammish words or African countries won't even be held, but will go straight to the list. Since HTML has been responsible for a lot more lost messages than mystery addresses, this will be a net win.

If anyone wants me to add any email addresses of WSFA members to the WSFA member whitelist, or wants me to add any names or addresses whatsoever to the general whitelist (of which the WSFA member whitelist is a small subset) please tell me. Note that having your email address on the WSFA member whitelist is not the same thing as subscribing to the WSFA email list. The WSFA member whitelist defines who can post to the WSFA email list, while the subscriber list defines who receives messages sent to that list. (WSFAns who choose not to subscribe can still read the messages in the online archives, at <http://www.wsfa.org/list/>, but those are often up to a week behind.) I've added every WSFA member name and email address that I know of to the WSFA member whitelist, but only subscribed those members who asked to be subscribed.

So what if someone new wants to contact us? More than a year ago, I replaced my email address everywhere it appears on the WSFA web site, with a pointer to <http://www.wsfa.org/email.htm>. That page currently lists the address wsfa@KeithLynch.net, and warns people not to send HTML email. I will soon change it to list the disposable address wsfa0402@KeithLynch.net, with a warning to bookmark the page rather than the email address if the sender doesn't plan to email us right away. Next month it will be wsfa0403, then wsfa0404 in April, etc. Anything sent to this month's address this month *will* get through to me, even if the sender isn't on my whitelist, and even if it's in HTML. Once it gets through, I'll promptly add the sender to my whitelist, after which he can use *any* KeithLynch.net email address to reach me, including obsolete disposable addresses.

My filters log all the messages they accept and reject -- the purported sender, the subject line, and where my filters filed it, e.g. "kfl/trash/china -> /dev/null" if it was from China. Three lines for each message. Those of you who were at Fifth Friday saw these in real time, about one message every three seconds, more than 99% of which were rejected.

I've saved these logs since the beginning of 2003. About four million messages for 2003, about one message every eight seconds. And about one million so far for 2004, about one message every three seconds. This allows me to

test my whitelist as if I'd had it running for the past year. I've identified several rejected messages that would have been accepted under the whitelist, and asked the senders to resend them.

Unfortunately, Panix only allows 75 megabytes for incoming mail, so it's not practical for me to save all the rejected messages, rather than just the logs. The logs are just three short lines per message, but the messages themselves can be any length. Some are the size of a Tom Clancy novel, meaning I could run out of disk space in less than five minutes if I were to try to save everything. If I were to run out of disk space, all subsequent messages, and logs, would be permanently lost.

I will also unconditionally accept all messages containing certain key phrases on the subject line, such as "wsfa meeting", "first friday", "third friday", "fifth friday", and "wsfa journal". This is strictly as a backstop, not something to be relied on. Unfortunately, it's not practical to accept everything mentioning "wsfa", "capclave", "meeting", or "party", as many spams have those words on the subject lines.

All of this is completely case insensitive. Wherever "ekovar" works, so does "EKovar" or "EKOVAR". Wherever "wsfa" works, so does "WSFA".

At Fifth Friday, I briefly discussed some of this. Elspeth suggested that someone else take over as email point of contact. I am open to doing this, but I don't think it's necessary. My concern is that someone will volunteer, and won't follow through. Or that they will follow through for a while, then let the mailbox sit unread for weeks after it becomes overrun with spam. In other words, it will become a less well controlled version of disposable email addresses.

I plan to phase in this change over February. Until March, I will be running the old and new systems in parallel, and no messages will be lost that wouldn't have been lost under the old system.

As I've mentioned before, I'd prefer wsfa.org email addresses, but our present host doesn't offer them. At Third Friday the club voted to stick with our existing host for at least another three months. However, I'd do the same things with wsfa.org email addresses as I plan to do with the keithlynch.net addresses.

While I like to hear from strangers, apparently that's no longer a universally accepted part of how email works. Symantec, a computer security company, recommends that people "don't open e-mail from an unknown source". Sigh.

Even though I will soon start accepting HTML email, I hope nobody will send it, since for people without matching software, it looks extremely ugly, and since numerous people are continuing to delete all HTML email unread. Also, I will still be blocking it from the chat list (since HTML can spread viruses to susceptible machines) albeit not by deleting it as I do now, but by manually un-HTMLing it and sending it on its way. If your mailer defaults to sending HTML, please see <http://www.expita.com/nomime.html> for instructions on how to turn it off. Thanks.

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