

The WSFA Journal

NOVEMBER 2004

**The Official Newsletter of the Washington Science Fiction Association -
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Please direct all correspondence to editor@wsfa.org. Please put either "for publication" or "not for publication" on the subject line. (It MUST contain one or the other, or else your email may be deleted unread by spam filters.) I can also be reached by snail mail at 220 Cedar Lane #62, Vienna VA 22180-6623 USA.

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Courtesy on the Email List

by Secretary Keith Lynch

Some WSFA members are unhappy about the several recent arguments on the email chat list. It was strongly suggested (offline) that we need to establish a set of formal rules for content, and either moderate the list (appoint a moderator, and hold each message for the moderator's inspection and approval before it's shown to the other subscribers) or empower someone to suspend the list membership of anyone deemed to be abusive.

I hope we don't have to resort to either. Moderation really slows down a list, and changes its character. Also, the moderator would inevitably be perceived as being biased and taking sides, especially if he is party to the debate that gets out of hand. There's no polite way to say "I'm kicking you off the list for two weeks".

It's important to remember that email doesn't have the body language and tone of voice cues that moderate face-to-face communication. To avoid "flame wars," if an email seems offensive, try re-interpreting it with a different tone of voice.

Could it have been intended lightheartedly and offhandedly? Could it have been intended as a joke? Even if it's phrased "you did this task wrong," try interpreting it as a constructive suggestion that the task might better be done another way. If it makes you angry, please wait until you are no longer angry before replying. If you feel you simply have to write some kind of response, go ahead and write something, but don't send it.

If there's one person whose messages consistently annoy you, see if your email program will let you selectively block all messages from that one person.

Before sending any message try reading it out loud in the gruffest and rudest voice possible, and consider that your recipient may interpret it in that light. And don't forget that discussions of politics and religion are especially hazard-prone, as is any message which can be interpreted as personal criticism. Please phrase any suggestions as "perhaps it would work better if we did things this way" instead of "the way you did it is wrong, stupid, and bad". Best of all, if you have an idea for how to do something better, volunteer to do the task yourself.

Obviously, a message which says "you are a bad person" or "you are lying" or "you are a criminal" will lead to nothing but trouble, even if you replace "you" with the name of another WSFA member, e.g. "WSFA member Joe Fhan is dishonest". Such messages have long been off limits in the WSFA Journal, and I hereby declare them off limits on the WSFA chat list as well. Criticize ideas, not people. (Ok, the list is WSFA's, not mine, so I can't unilaterally make this declaration, but I will make a motion at the next meeting, and I will be astonished if it doesn't pass. Until then please behave as if it had already been passed. Thank you.)

I'm not going to ask that politics be banned from the list, but please keep in mind that there are plenty of better political pundits than anyone in WSFA, and if they haven't caused someone to change his mind, you're not likely to. Also, by the time you read this, the election will be over, so nothing you say to anyone can have any effect on whether Bush or Kerry wins in 2004. (We can worry about 2008 later.)

Unless your message is obviously innocuous, or is urgent, consider letting it sit unsent for a few minutes or hours, then look at it again before sending.

If you've been exposed to the rough-and-tumble verbal interchange of the rec.arts.sf.fandom newsgroup, or, far worse, the alt.peeves or alt.flame newsgroups in which more than half the messages are insults, please keep in mind that many WSFA members are not comfortable with that sort of discourse.

If you sincerely believe a WSFA member is dishonest or criminal, discuss it in private with WSFA officers whom you trust. Any such person not only shouldn't be on the email list, but shouldn't be in the club at all. There is a mechanism to expel members, though as far as I know it has never been used. I hope it never has to be.

President's Ponderings: Why Run Our Convention?

by President Sam Lubell

Capclave 2004 is over. It was a lot of fun but a lot of work too. So why do we do it? One could argue that times have changed and fandom no longer needs small local conventions as much as it once did. Once, conventions were the only way for fans to meet and talk about ideas. Now, there are LISTSERVs, rec.arts.sf.written, and lots of other conventions. At one point, there were few SF books published and many were not available at the small bookstores that served most of the country, so dealers' rooms made sense. Today, though, there are more titles than could be read in a year; bookstores have evolved into superstores providing far more SF books than the meager two bookcases yesterday's small bookstores held; and anyone with a computer, Internet connection (or library access) and a credit card can access more merchandise than even a Worldcon can offer. And no one really needs an excuse to throw a party.

So is there a need for Capclave, our little convention in the fall? Is there a need for a small, relaxed convention at all? Does our convention do anything for fans that can't be done just as well by waiting a couple of months for Philcon or a few months for Balticon? If attendance is dropping, than does that mean that people don't want it, don't see the need for it, and could care less if it died a natural death?

Or, instead, can we figure out how to reinvent Capclave as a convention for the 21st century, recognizing that it needs to

be a different creature than the old Disclave, and come up with ways for it to serve a valuable function. We aren't Balticon or Philcon, big enough to have many different attractions to please a range of separate groups. Nor do we wish to turn ourselves into something that is sure to be popular, like an all-anime convention or all-Harry Potter convention, but that takes us too far away from our roots.

In the past we've excused our low attendance by citing our status as a new convention, bad luck with timing (terrorists, snipers, tornados and the like), our mobility (never the same hotel on the same weekend), and problems with advertising. Yes, we need to fix all of these and be able to tell one year's attendees when and where the next convention will be. But after four Capclaves and dropping attendance from a high that was never so high to begin with, just doing a few things better may not be enough. We need to sit down and think about what we want from Capclave. What are other small conventions doing that makes them successful and are there things we can learn from big ones that don't require us to triple in size overnight? We need to define Capclave in some way that makes it distinctive, some answer to the question "what is Capclave?" that makes people want to attend.

Personally, I like going to conventions, hearing ideas, and talking with other fans. Working at Capclave (and volunteering at other conventions) helps pay back the other fans who run conventions for me to attend. Moreover, many fans, myself very much included, are introverts who easily can spend a whole enjoyable weekend never leaving home with the books, computer, TV, and stereo. A convention provides a reason to go out and mingle. Also, Capclave not only can help fund WSFA (when it makes money) but it provides something for the club to do and a reason for it to exist. And Capclave is a DC convention, a chance for us WSFAns to put out our ideas of what panels to be run, what authors to invite, and what other activities to perform.

For these reasons and many others, I think it is important that Capclave continue to exist. But to reverse the shrinking attendance we need to establish a purpose for Capclave that gives people a reason to attend. Yes, having fun is the main reason, but people can have fun in many ways. Perhaps, in this Internet age, it is no longer enough to be a relaxacon with a bit of programming, an excuse for parties and gathering. We need to think about what it means to be a small convention in the 21st century. We need to do this if we want Capclave to thrive.



Melissa Pollotta, Lee Gilliland, Nick Pollotta, Colleen Cahill, Michael Walsh, and Elspeth Kovar at Capclave

First Friday Minutes

Note that there's a [brief summary](#) at the end.

The regular First Friday meeting of the Washington Science Fiction Association was called to order by President Samuel Lubell at 9:20 pm on October 1st, 2004 in the basement of the Gillilands' in Arlington, Virginia, the usual First Friday location.

In attendance were President Samuel Lubell, Vice President Cathy Green, Secretary Keith Lynch, Treasurer Bob MacIntosh, Trustees Barry Newton and Steven Smith, 2004 Chair Lee Gilliland, 2005 Chair Michael Walsh, 2006 Chair Elspeth Kovar, Drew Bittner, Colleen Cahill, Alexis Gilliland, Charles Gilliland, Paul Haggerty, Scott Hofmann, Eric Jablow, Judy Kindell, Jim Kling, Bill Lawhorn, Ernest Lilley, Nicki and Richard Lynch, Wade Lynch, Keith Marshall, Cat Meier, George and Michael Nelson, Judy Newton, Kathi Overton, Michael Pederson, Larry Pfeffer, Rebecca Prather,

Sam Scheiner, Gayle Surette, Michael Taylor, Elizabeth Twitchell, and Madeleine Yeh. 37 people. Someone wrote in Ivy Yap and John W. Campbell, but neither were seen by the secretary.

The president asked the secretary what business had been done at the previous meeting. The secretary replied:

- A proclamation from the club was read and handed to Erica, thanking her for hosting WSFA for nearly twelve years.
- We advanced \$1000 to Capclave '05 to spend on publicity at this year's World Fantasy Con in Arizona at the end of October.
- At the next meeting we were to discuss setting aside \$10,000 of our money as untouchable without a supermajority.
- Capclave 2003's workers will be fully comped for Capclave 2004. So will Wade Lynch, if he sleeps in the Dealer's room.
- Colleen will invite SF authors who are at the October 9th Book Fest on the Mall to a WSFA-sponsored social event in Arlington that evening, either at the Gillilands' or at a restaurant.

Lee said that the comping of Wade was unofficial. Elizabeth said "but it's paid".

POST-BOOKFEST DINNER:

Cat said she talked to "the restaurant," and they can't give us reservations. Sam said we need a restaurant that has a private room available on Saturday night, and asked whether the writers were going to "Fast Forward" before or after. Colleen said probably before, and that Arlington would be best for a restaurant. Cat objected that most Arlington restaurants are either too expensive, too small, or not Metro accessible. She suggested either Hunan Number One near the Clarendon Metro station in Arlington, or Yenching Palace near the Cleveland Park Metro station in DC, both of which have private rooms.

Colleen said that Patricia Wrede, Lois McMaster Bujold, and Connie Willis have tentatively said "yes". Neal Stephenson, Fred Pohl, and Ben Bova are definite "no"s. Neil Gaiman and Catherine Asaro are definite "maybe"s.

Sam asked for a show of hands of who would be interested in attending such an event. 16 people raised their hands. We will make a reservation for 25. Colleen pointed out that Patricia Wrede is vegetarian. The idea of doing it at the Gillilands' is definitely out. Elizabeth will contact the Yenching Palace restaurant. [As of four days later, we have reservations for 7 pm October 9th at the Yenching Palace.]

Colleen said we can't put out fliers at the October 9th Bookfest on the Mall, though we may be able to do so next year. Sam pointed out that we can hand them to people in person, so long as we aren't obnoxious about it.



CAPCLAVE '04: Sam points out it's just two weeks away. Cathy needs volunteers. See her after the meeting. Lee says we have the final program. Of course there could still be last-minute changes. All guests have confirmed. Badges have been produced. [One was shown.] We don't officially have most of the space until 3 pm on Friday the 15th, but volunteers are needed for setup starting at noon, especially those able to help move stuff into the dealers room and art show, and to help assemble the art show hardware. We have made our room block, but more are always better, so people should continue to reserve rooms, making sure Capclave gets the credit. If the hotel claims not to have heard of Capclave, immediately contact Lee or Elizabeth. The AAA rate is lower, but only three rooms are available at that rate, and all three have been taken. Elspeth claimed that this must be wrong, as she knows of more than three people who have reserved at that rate. Mike Nelson said that the rate being offered on the Internet, not just the AAA rate, is lower than the Capclave rate. Volunteers are needed, not just for setup, but also for teardown, and for sitting behind the registration, volunteer, and information tables. Judy had talked with Covert Beach about getting art show hardware down from the BSFS clubhouse. Elizabeth still needs someone willing to sleep in the dealer's room on Saturday night. She will pay for the membership of that person. She has already paid for Wade's, since Wade will be spending Friday night in the dealer's room. Someone asked for a ride from Ballston. Elizabeth responded that the hotel runs a shuttle bus from the West Falls Church Metro station, and said she'd send details

on this to the email list. Someone asked about Metrobus lines. Keith Lynch said that all the Metrobus lines that serve the hotel are listed on the Capclave website, with links to the bus schedules. There was to be a Capclave concomm meeting upstairs in the dining room immediately after the WSFA meeting.

CAPCLAVE '05: Mike Walsh said fliers will be available at Capclave '04. Keith Lynch asked what the point in fliers is, especially the ones that will cost us \$1000 to distribute at World Fantasy Con at the end of the month, if we don't yet have a hotel or a weekend. Mike Walsh replied that they're worthwhile even without that information. He is not sure whether he'll be ready to sell memberships at this year's Capclave.

SMOFCON: Mike Nelson said things were going smoothly. There's a special membership rate for WSFA members. See Bob by the end of this month to buy at that rate. Progress reports are to be mailed tomorrow. Keith Lynch confirmed that there's a link to SMOFcon's web page from WSFA's web site.

WORLDCON BID: Mike Nelson reports that the DC in '11 bid got \$300 at the party at Noreascon, more than paying for the party. There will be a party at 9 pm on Saturday the 16th at Capclave.

TREASURY: Bob MacIntosh reports we have \$17,785.59 in our main account, plus over \$20,000 in the World Fantasy account. Lee objected that "over \$20,000" is not a number.

WORLD FANTASY '03: Mike Walsh says he has not yet done the final billing, and will not be doing it soon, as he has to leave for Frankfurt in two days, and won't be back until the 11th. Sam said he'd like to get the money before they forget about it.

OLD BUSINESS:

The secretary summarized the "supermajority" discussion and motion from the previous meeting. Sam asked what would keep a simple majority from later overturning the supermajority requirement. Several people said nothing would prevent that. Keith Lynch moved that in that case, and because nearly all our votes are unanimous or close to it, that we forget the whole thing. It was seconded, there was discussion, then Elizabeth moved that we table "the whole thing" until November or December. Rebecca said she wanted to know how much Capclave, WSFA meetings, insurance etc., cost, and moved that we set aside enough money for one Capclave and five years of operating expenses. Sam said that Elizabeth's motion was on the floor. Elizabeth's motion passed with only one member voting against, and one abstention. [It's not clear to the secretary whether we tabled the original motion, or the motion to forget the whole thing.]

ENTERTAINMENT: Alexis mentioned Capclave.

ACTIVITIES: Lee read from the following letter, forwarded from Keith Lynch:

Date: Wed, 29 Sep 2004 15:13:10 -0400
From: "Ivory Zorich"

Dear Washington Science Fiction Association:

I handle the promotions of films in the DC area for THINKFilm, and am currently working with them to promote the film PRIMER, which won the Grand Jury Prize at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Since the plotline evolves around an engineering breakthrough, I am contacting science organizations in the area to see if they would be interested in distributing advance screening passes for the film to their members. Please see below for screening information and for the film's synopsis. If you are interested in receiving screening passes, please let me know, and I will be happy to send them to you for distribution.

Tuesday, October 12, 2004
7:30 pm
Landmark's E Street Cinema
555 11th Street, NW
Washington, DC

Wednesday, October 13, 2004
 7:30 pm
 Loews Georgetown
 3111 K Street, NW
 Washington, DC

PRIMER (opens in DC on October 15th)

Winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival and the Alfred P. Sloan Prize for advancing science and technology in film, PRIMER is a mesmerizing and unique experience that introduces us to a gifted new filmmaker, Shane Carruth.

PRIMER is set in the industrial park/suburban tract-home fringes of an unnamed contemporary city where two young engineers, Abe (Carruth) and Aaron (David Sullivan), are members of a small group of men who work by day for a large corporation while conducting extracurricular experiments on their own time in a garage. While tweaking their current project, a device that reduces the apparent mass of any object placed inside it by blocking gravitational pull, they accidentally discover that it has some highly unexpected capabilities--ones that could enable them to do and to have seemingly anything they want. Taking advantage of this unique opportunity is the first challenge they face. Dealing with the consequences is the next.

A mesmerizing thriller, PRIMER was written, directed, produced by and stars Shane Carruth. The film is rated PG-13 by the MPAA and has a running time of 82 minutes.

Best,
 Ivory

Allied Advertising, Public Relations
 1100 - 17th Street, NW, Suite 401
 Washington, DC 20036
 202-223-3660 ext. 3005
 Fax: 202-223-2164

She had also been sent several small posters for the movie, which she showed. Lee asked how many people would be interested in going Tuesday the 12th, and how many Wednesday the 13th. More preferred Tuesday, so Tuesday it is. Ten people plan to go. [Three days later it was changed to Monday the 11th.]

AUSTERITY: Sam asked if this committee was still needed. Eric conceded "probably not," but added that Justice Scalia found a new way to raise money -- orgies. Alexis reminded us that there's a hat upstairs for donations.

BOOK:

Ernest said we have a rough slate of authors for the Future Washington Anthology. We have stories from David Brin and Steven Sawicki. He has rejected Robert Sawyer's since it was previously published. Kim Stanley Robinson has agreed to let us print a chapter from his upcoming sequel to *Forty Signs of Rain*. There will be Alexis Gilliland cartoons. The book should be ready by July, so that there can be a wine & cheese reception at Readercon [which will be in Burlington, Massachusetts, July 8-10, 2005].

Keith Lynch reiterated that he and Wade have volunteered to copy-edit and proofread the book for free, and said that while neither of them had prior professional credit, he challenged anyone to find any errors that a copy-editor or proofreader could have caught in any of the four WSFA Journals that they had produced. Ernest said he'd prefer more than one person to copy-edit and proofread. Keith responded that he and Wade were more than one person. He will run the idea by his committee, which will meet in the dining room upstairs as soon as the Capclave committee is done meeting there.

PUBLICATIONS: September and October WSFA Journals are available. [7 Septembers and 16 Octobers were taken. 11

Septembers had been taken at the previous meeting.] The past 25 years of WSFA Journals are available online.

NEW BUSINESS: Eric asked if we need a parliamentarian. The consensus seemed to be no. [Such an office had been suggested in Joe Mayhew's proposed club constitution of January 1980.] Sam said that that's the secretary's job. [Actually, by Robert's Rules of Order, it's the president's job.]

NEW TRADITION [as it used to be called]: Sam asked if anyone was here for their first, second or third time. Nobody spoke up. [The newest person had been here seven times according to the secretary's records.]

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The secretary made the usual first announcement: Announcements should be submitted in writing, or by email, or by email to the chat list.

Lee made the usual second announcements: Use toilet paper, not paper towels, in the toilet. The cats should remain indoors. She also announced an upcoming Horatio Hornblower convention the week before Worldcon, and an upcoming Titanic convention in DC. She's working on both cons, and is on the committee of the latter. Volunteers are needed.

Sam announced that our next meeting would be at Capclave. First Friday in November will be here at the Gillilands'. Third Friday, and all subsequent Third Fridays until further notice, will be at the Madigans'. In response to a question from the secretary, Lee clarified that the meeting at Capclave would be open to everyone, not just Capclave members.

Michael Pederson announced that all WSFA members are invited to a party at his home in Stafford, Virginia, on October 30th at 7 pm. This is a combination Halloween, Fifth Friday, and double anniversary party. It's his first anniversary, and the Gillilands' eleventh.

Colleen announced that Bud Webster would be speaking at the Library of Congress at noon on Friday the 15th. [This was already on our calendar of upcoming events.] Lee said he will also be at Capclave.

Jim Kling asked if there was a notary in the house. [There wasn't.]

Mike Walsh has books for sale upstairs. He will be going to a book fair in Frankfurt in a couple days. He clarified that he means Germany, not Kentucky. Judy Scheiner is his backup as Capclave Dealer Room person while he's away. He will be back before Capclave.

Rebecca was giving away Mensa newsletters.

Steve said his wife, Kit Mason, has the complete voting record of all members of Congress.

Madeleine had sugar-free chocolate bread.

Barry is an election judge in Maryland.

Mike Nelson is responsible for the ink on the star on the front of the new \$50 bill. Someone asked if he was giving away free samples of the new bill. [He wasn't.]

Lee made the usual last announcement: Chairs should be moved to the sides of the room after adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:08 pm. 48 minutes.

It was temperate and mostly cloudy, with little wind and no rain.

The last people left shortly after midnight.

Summary of 10/1/04 meeting:

- We will be hosting a dinner for Bookfest authors at the Yenching Palace restaurant at 7 pm on Saturday the 9th.
- We will be attending a free showing of PRIMER at 7:30 pm on Monday the 11th at the Landmark's E Street Cinema. Talk to Lee.
- Capclave starts on Friday the 15th. Volunteers are needed starting at noon. Our Third Friday meeting will be at Capclave.
- Fifth Friday on Saturday is at Michael Pederson's home in Stafford at 7 pm on Saturday the 30th.
- Discussion of setting aside some of our money as touchable only by a supermajority is postponed until November. There was no other old or new business.

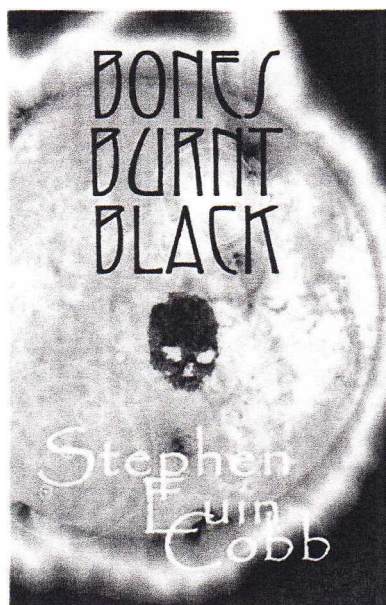
Bones Burnt Black

by Stephen Euin Cobb

Aiken, SC: August Press, 2004

A review by Colleen R. Cahill

From SFRevu, August 2004



Science fiction and mysteries are a good mix. These two flavors of genre, if blended right, can complement and even bring out different elements of each other. Stephen Euin Cobb has achieved an excellent cross-genre work in *Bones Burnt Black*, where an isolated space ship holds a maniac bent on revenge.

The *Corvus* is in a tight spot: the ship has been damaged and is now tumbling end over end through space. The Captain is trapped on the ceiling of the command deck, slowly being crushed by the growing g-forces from the ship's increasing spin. Kim Kirkland, one of the ship's crew, has been thrown away from the ship while trying to make a repair and although she survived, she is miles from the ship with no means of returning ... and a slight case of amnesia. Meanwhile, back on the ship, one of the passengers is dead and it is clearly not suicide. The remaining eight people are facing the reality that the ship has been sabotaged and one of them is a murderer.

Mike McCormack eventually finds that he is in charge of the drifting ship. Not only does he have to get the remaining people to a safe part of the ship, but also has to figure out how to divert the ship from traveling too close to the sun. There are no other ships nearby to help, no fuel, and more explosions on the ship make it clear that someone does not want to see the ship or its passengers survive. This is much like an Agatha Christie plot, with a stalker hunting down the victims one by one and Cobb

handles this very well. The passengers are a colorful set of characters, from the beautiful and demanding Tina Jennifer Bernadette, to the stocky and competent Gideon Yehoshus, but one of them is homicidally insane.

The plot is not all a murder mystery, as the space ship is more than just a setting. Kim uses an interesting method to return to the ship and issues of events on a rotating spacecraft are addressed in full. As in either of these genres, however, it is the characters and their interactions that make the story. Many of the passengers are suspicious for different reasons: Zahid Mohammed Kaseem is a nervous fellow, while the seemingly mild mannered Akio Yamaguchi could be acting to cover a more violent nature. The most mysterious is Nikita Petrov, a beautiful redhead who has very little documentable past.

Bones Burnt Black is a mystery, it is science fiction and it is a great page turner. If you enjoyed books like *Caves of Steel* or movies like *Ten Little Indians*, you should read this book. You will find that science and murder can be a powerful fusion.

This Month in History

From the Secretary's Archives

November 1994: \$2224 in the Treasury. The addition to Rebecca Prather's house, started last January, has finally achieved a certificate of occupancy. Joe Mayhew sold a cartoon to Dell, and will receive a cartoon contract. John Pomeranz found a house in Falls Church. Lee Strong attempted to resign from being club secretary. Mike Nelson was elected Disclave '97 chair.

November 1984: No minutes were taken. The November/December 1984 WSFA Journal had a review of "2010: Odyssey Two". Somtow Sucharitkul announced the formation of The Washington Alternative SF Association (which didn't last long).

November 1974: I can't find any minutes from this month. Two double issues of *The Son of the WSFA Journal* were published by Don Miller: 165-166 and 167-168, each with 22 pages. There hadn't been a new *WSFA Journal* since the 140 page #83 in April.

November 1964: First Friday, November 6, at Ms. Cullen's: 14 people attended, including Peggy Rae. Treasury \$110.15. Jack Chalker announced that an issue of *Mirage* will be out in January. He also gave a report on the upcoming Philcon. New member Pam Wilkerson borrowed four books from WSFA's library. Banks Mebane asked if we were going to have a Disclave in 1965. (We did, he chaired it, and 83 people attended). Third Friday, November 20, at Ms. Cullen's: 17 people attended, including Dick Eney and Joe Haldeman.

November 1954: First Sunday, November 7, at N. Troy St.: 11 members present, including Ted White. A copy of Walter Karig's book review of two weeks ago, mentioning WSFA, was passed around. The secretary recounted the story behind the mention. (This story is presumably now lost forever.) "The treasurer reports more than \$13.00 in the treasury." Bob Jones can no longer host meetings, since he's moving out due to annoying neighbors. Radio station WEAM wants to interview a WSFA member, preferably a government employee. Future meetings will be at Dot Cole's -- members not present will be notified by cards. An auction was held by Joe Vallin. Third Sunday, November 21: 8 members and 4 dogs present. (What, no cats?) Ted White proposed a party when Magnus is in town from Baltimore over Thanksgiving. Ted was appointed head of the publicity committee. There is also a membership committee and a program committee. Bob Jones read selections from Taurasi's *Fantasy Times*.

Signings, Book Fest, and Time Travel, Fake and Real

by Keith Lynch

Over the four-day Columbus Day weekend, I went to several events, all via Metro's Orange Line.

On Friday October 8th I went to two events.

First I went to a signing by Neal Stephenson at the Courthouse Olsson's in Arlington. He read from, answered questions about, and signed copies of, *The System of the World*, the third and final book of his baroque cycle. He spent about half an hour reading a fictional letter by Gottfried Leibniz that was part of his novel, then he accepted questions from the audience. He was willing to sign any baroque cycle book, and to sign one other book per person per baroque cycle book. WSFans Drew Bittner and Judy Newton were there. Barry and Meridel Newton arrived just as he finished reading. I gave my seat to Meridel, and spent a few minutes listening to the questions and answers while digging through the store's galvanized steel tubs of inexpensive classical CDs. After Neal answered Drew's question about research, I left, took Metro two stops east, then walked one mile north, to the second event.

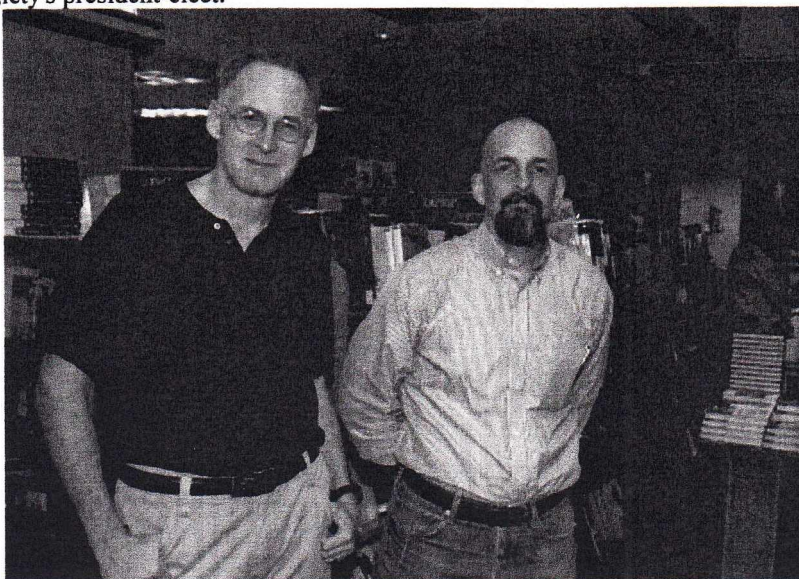
(Ernest arrived at the signing shortly after I left. Here's a picture of him with Neal Stephenson at that event.)

Metro was working smoothly, for a change. But perhaps this was only because I was avoiding the troublesome Red Line, which passes much closer to my destination, which was near Dupont Circle.

The second event was a talk by Robert Ehrlich, a professor of physics at GMU, at the Philosophical Society of

Washington, on "Seven Reasons that Neutrinos May be Faster-Than-Light Tachyons". I arrived just in time. I was disappointed that no other WSFAns were there. Bob Hershey, who is known to some WSFAns, and has been to one Fifth Friday, was there, and is the Philosophical Society's president-elect.

Neutrinos are difficult-to-detect fundamental particles, capable of going through thousands of light years of lead without stopping. They were postulated in 1931 to make an equation balance, were actually detected in 1955, and were eventually learned to come in three flavors, each with its own anti-particle. Until 1998 they were believed to be massless and travel at the speed of light. It's now generally believed they have a tiny mass, and go slightly slower than light. Ehrlich believes they have a tiny *imaginary* mass, and go slightly *faster* than light. He concedes that this would in principle allow causality violations, e.g. you could send a message back through time. This would certainly be convenient, as it would allow me to print the minutes of each meeting in the WSFA Journal distributed at that meeting. However, it could lead to various paradoxes that all SF readers are familiar with.



His reasons included:

- In Supernova 1987A, neutrinos were detected 4.7 hours before the light from the event. The light took 170,000 years to reach us. The neutrinos apparently were about two miles per hour faster, implying a neutrino rest mass of about 23 times the square root of minus one electron volts.
- All neutrinos spin the same way. If neutrinos go slower than light, that implies that you could overtake one, and see it spinning the wrong way. If such a "left-handed" neutrino is possible at all, they ought to occasionally get produced, and observed. But none ever have been.
- There are apparently neutral high energy primary cosmic rays. We know they're neutral because they're directional (e.g. ones seen only when the pulsar Cygnus X-3 is above the horizon, with a period equal to that pulsar's period), and the directions of charged cosmic rays get scrambled over cosmic distances. Presumably they consist of neutrons. But free neutrons have a short half-life, so they must have decayed from protons, via a transition that's only possible if neutrinos can have a negative energy. (I objected that there's nothing special about the frame of reference in which the protons are going very fast, since an observer could ride along with them and see them at rest, so if a fast proton can decay into a neutron, then so can protons on earth. But protons on earth don't decay into neutrons. He replied that whether they are emitting negative energy neutrinos or absorbing positive energy neutrinos depends on one's frame of reference, and that there is a background sea of neutrinos with a particular preferred frame, analogous to the background sea of 2.7K thermal microwaves.)
- There's no "GZK cutoff". Charged cosmic rays with more than about 10^{20} electron volts ought to rapidly lose energy through interaction with the 2.7K cosmic microwave background, in less time than it takes for them to get to us. So we ought to seldom see such cosmic rays. But we see plenty of them.
- There have been direct measurements of the square of the neutrino mass, for the three different kinds of neutrinos, by seven different labs. All 21 experiments give a negative number as a result. (However, the error bars exceed the value, i.e. they extend through zero into positive (slower than light) values.)

There are alternative explanations for each of these. So just one or two of the above wouldn't be very persuasive. But all of them? People have been sent to death row on flimsier evidence. On the other hand, many of them turned out to be innocent. So are neutrinos guilty of speeding? Remember: 299,792,458 meters per second: It's not just a good idea, it's the law. This isn't a trivial issue. If neutrinos go even the tiniest bit faster, then we can build a genuine, no fooling, time machine.

The presentation was good, marred only by Ehrlich's infatuation with some of the worst features of PowerPoint. It was distracting seeing graphs littered with dancing penguins and flying bees, and seeing a brightly colored spinning object intermittently superimposed on an old black & white photograph. And by his leaving very shortly after the end of the

presentation, rather than hanging around to converse with audience members. But then these events always break up shortly after the end of the formal presentation. For \$65 annual dues (not counting parking fees) one would expect something better than a social hour that lasts much less than an hour, and refreshments that always consist only of cheese, crackers, beer, and ice water.

On Saturday morning, I once again took the Orange Line, this time to the Smithsonian Station. I figured that would place me close to the National Book Fair. In fact, it put me right in the middle of it, a few paces from the Science Fiction & Fantasy tent. (More of a canopy, as it had no walls, just a roof.) Neal Stephenson, the second author of the day, was speaking. Over the course of the day, I saw at least part of each author's talk in the tent, except the first author, Ben Bova. The other authors, in order, were Neal Stephenson, Catherine Asaro, Frederik Pohl, Neil Gaiman, Lois McMaster Bujold, Patricia Wrede, and Connie Willis.

The tent had about 300 seats. Some of the authors had standing-room-only audiences. The Capitol dome could clearly be seen out the front, and the Washington Monument out the back.

The first person I saw whom I recognized was Jon Singer. I soon ran into Barry and Judy Newton, Ernest Lilley and his wife, and Colleen Cahill. Colleen was helping to run the event. I was surprised to see Bob Hershey there. He asked Neal a question. I also saw Frank Forman, whom I know from the quarterly Transhumanism dinners.

Lois Bujold was sitting unobtrusively in the back during Catherine Asaro's talk. The next time I glanced back, Adrienne Ertman was sitting next to her, and Cat Meier was approaching.

Fred Pohl has another sequel to *Gateway*. It's called *The Boy Who Would Live Forever*. It was not yet available in bookstores (it is now), but was available for sale at the Book Fest, in another tent.

Michael Dirda of the *Washington Post* introduced each author in the SF tent. He has been to Disclaves, and has written a letter and two articles which were published years ago in the WSFA Journal. The *Post* is one of the sponsors of the Book Fest, along with First Lady Laura Bush, and the Library of Congress.

I wandered over to the book signings, which were at the far end of the Book Fest, about half a mile to the east. (The Book Fest was a large event, with 16 large tents, plus numerous smaller tents, buses, etc., stretching from 7th to 14th streets, and spanning the whole width of the Mall.) I saw Paul Haggerty, Gayle Surrette, and Matthew Appleton in the line for Connie Willis. (Matthew Appleton attended about a dozen WSFA meetings from 1999 to 2001.)

Back at the SF tent, I saw Sam Lubell, Scott Hofmann, Nicki Lynch, and Carolyn Frank. Sam and Scott were wearing the new black WSFA t-shirts. Carolyn was chatting with Bob Hershey. Nicki was looking for her husband Richard. (Later I saw the two of them, and Cathy Green, in the Mystery & Thrillers tent.)

Toward the end of the event, I saw Jim Kling, Meridel Newton, and Madeleine Yeh. Jim mentioned that he and Ivy Yap will be moving to Washington (the state, not the city) in December.

Although the Book Fest lasted until 5, the last event in the SF tent ended an hour earlier. After that, several WSFAns sat chatting in the otherwise empty SF tent, killing time until it was time to head to the Yenching restaurant for the 7 pm dinner with several of the authors. I left at 5:30 and entered the Metro station which was adjacent to the tent. People had been pouring non-stop into that station for the past hour, but trains evidently weren't running any more often than normal. The train platform was absolutely packed. People were crashing into each other at the bottom of the escalator, as there was no room. Fortunately, an Orange Line train pulled in immediately, and an opening between me and a train door magically appeared in the crowd. The train had been nearly empty as it entered the station, so I had no trouble getting a seat.

That evening, instead of going to the Yenching, I had dinner with my mother and Wade to celebrate Wade's birthday (which was actually five days earlier). During dinner he was reading from one of Stephenson's baroque cycle books, not at all bothered that he had missed not one, but two local Neal Stephenson events. (Three if you count his Book Fest talk and signing separately.) Neal seldom if ever appears at cons, nor does he participate in newsgroups, email lists, or blogs.

On Monday the 11th I went to the Landmark's E Street Cinema near the Metro Center station to see *Primer*. WSFAns had been given free passes to see the show. Alexis and Lee Gilliland, Tracy Kremer, Rebecca Prather, Sam Lubell, and Jim

Kling were also there. After the movie I walked back to Metro Center along with Sam and Jim. As they fiddled with their farecards, I showed them how I could enter the station hands-free, by having my SmarTrip card in my front right pants pocket.

Wait... I seem to be forgetting something in this movie review. Oh, right, the *movie*. It was a very low budget movie, with grainy film, washed out colors, marginal sound, no big-name actors, no music, and no special effects. All of which is fine with me. Perhaps because I'm not a very visually oriented person. However, there were more serious problems with the film.

In the first third or so, four guys incessantly speak technobabble to each other, often all talking at once, as they are building something. They seem to be regularly selling some kind of circuit boards to someone, but I can't be sure of this.

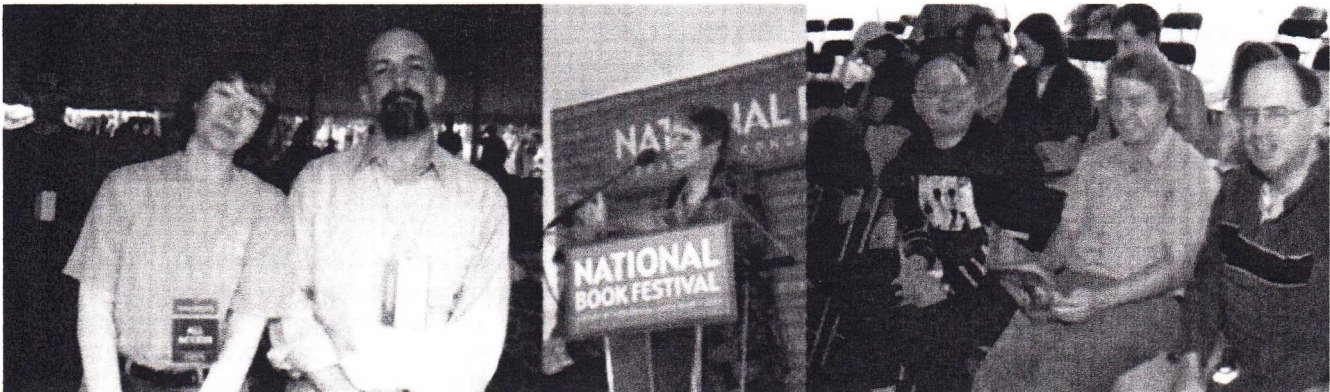
One of them becomes very excited, and shows someone what he claims is the most momentous thing anyone has ever seen -- which turns out to be some kind of commonplace fungus. Eventually it becomes clear that what's important about it is that he grew several years worth fungus in a matter of hours. They try it again with a watch. So what they have is some kind of time accelerator? But they seem to think the most important thing is that it's always an *odd* number of minutes which pass in the box.

Somehow the time accelerator suddenly becomes a true time machine, in which it's possible to go back in time. Two of them are built and installed next to each other in a self-storage facility. Two of the guys (what happened to the other two?) either plan to become rich by playing the stock market, or do so, it's not clear which. Something happens offscreen involving a shotgun. A murder? They argue about going back to change whatever happened. It's not clear to me whether they did so. There's a third time machine elsewhere in the same self-storage facility. Someone, it's not clear to me who, uses it, or plans to use it, for a longer trip. There's talk of enclosing one time machine in another, though I don't see the point -- it would not allow someone to go back to a time before either machine was built, as I think was implied. The two people become upset with each other, and one of them is either very tired or sick. The End. Huh?

None of the other WSFAans could make any sense of it either, so it's not just me.

My day at the National Book Festival

by Gayle Surrette



Colleen Cahill, Neal Stephenson, Lois Bujold, Sam Lubell, Jim Kling, and Keith Lynch at the National Book Festival

Finally, I managed to get to the annual National Book Festival on the mall in DC. I understand that this is the first year that they have had SF authors.

The book festival was awesome. It was really well run. They had the tents for Mystery/Thrillers, Science Fiction/Fantasy, Children, Home & Family, Fiction and Imagination, Information, etc. all well marked. Each tent had a big sign outside that listed the time and name of the speakers in that tent. The signing area had a kiosk with a list of the authors and when and where they would be signing. There were even two bookstore tents with only books by the authors available so you could do a last minute purchase to get it signed. They also gave away free bottles of water at the information tents so that attendees wouldn't dehydrate while standing in line in the sun. October is the perfect time; it was in the mid-70's with

lower humidity than usual for DC so it was actually comfortable.

My husband, Paul Haggerty, wore a T-shirt with a two integral equation. Integrate between 10 and 13 $2x dx$ - integrate between 0 and 3 $3x^2 dx$. The answer is 42 (69-27) which is the answer to life the universe and everything (*Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams.) Seems like every 5th person stopped him to ask about the equation and what it meant.

This is the first year they've had a science fiction/fantasy segment for the festival. I didn't make it to Neil Gaiman's talk but it was packed with the crowd spilling out of the tent. Every talk seemed to be videotaped. I asked at the information booth but the volunteers didn't know if the tapes would be available and suggested we keep checking the Library of Congress site for the Book Festival and see if anything shows up.

Rumor has it Gaiman signed books for over 4 hours. They had to find space and re-schedule him again after his first session because the line was so long and he wanted to make sure everyone got a chance to get their books signed. This puts him up a few notches for me since I heard from people I talked to standing in line that some of the other authors were out of there the minute their scheduled time was over no matter how many people were in line. There didn't seem to be a limit on the number of books you could get signed but I noticed that a lot of the authors with really long lines sent staff people down the line to announce that there was a three book maximum. When Patricia Wrede was $\frac{1}{2}$ hour over her signing time they announced a 1 book maximum per person. This only seems fair since I can't imagine signing my name over and over for an hour. I hardly use a pen now and get cramps when I hand write short notes.

I went to Holly Black and Tony DiTerlizzi's presentation in the Children's tent. They did a great job. They began by talking about their series (Spiderwick) and how one of the characters had the "sight". Then they asked what having the "sight" meant and took answers from the children in the audience. They asked questions about faerie and responded to the kids. The children were really excited about being a part of the talk rather than having to just listen. Then Holly and Tony read a chapter from their most recent Spiderwick book. Tony did the funny voices and Holly read the narration. Suddenly the sound system died and they had a much harder time interacting with the audience and had to repeat (very loudly) whatever anyone in the audience asked or said.

I got them to sign my books and while standing in the very long line spoke to several of their young fans who filled me in on why they liked their books and who their other favorite authors were (J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling mostly). The young fans liked that the books didn't talk down to them (my interpretations of what they said). They also seemed to like characters that they could relate to or at least understand. Many seemed to be very Internet savvy and often visited the sites of their favorite authors.

Also, I sat in on the talk by Lois McMaster Bujold. She talked a bit about what authors have influenced her and her reading when she was young. She read most of the classics by Asimov, Pohl, and the others but she also mentioned Georgette Heyer (this is the third time a SF author has mentioned her so she's on my to be read list now) and some of the non-fiction books that she read while in her omnivorous stage of reading. The audience also asked what she reads now and she mentioned that she gets every Terry Pratchett book when it comes out. But she finished *Going Postal* because she couldn't wait for the plane trip to the festival.

Bujold said that most writers learn by writing and that when she was young she wrote a lot of stories that were essentially continuations of the stories she'd been reading. She said she still has the Tolkien homage written in Spenserian verse (to keep her humble). She then opened it up to audience questions that mostly asked how she came up with her world(s) and characters. She said that for her, world building was a virtual just in time sort of thing, and that most things don't exist until her characters run through them. As for her characters she felt that great gifts usually need a balance of flaws or the characters don't develop and grow. (I'm not getting her exact words here but what I remember and have interpreted them to mean.) Someone asked her about her themes in her books and she felt that most of them were about identity.

The lines were very long for the SF authors. But we managed to get books signed by Connie Willis, Lois McMaster Bujold, Patricia Wrede, Holly Black, Tony DiTerlizzi, and Dana Stabenow. Dana Stabenow is a mystery writer but she has written SF. She recently edited a book of mystery stories with a fantasy base. I love her mysteries which are set in Alaska and she's on my watch and buy list.

My husband and I attended the WSFA dinner that night. At the dinner, Paul and I sat at the table with Patricia Wrede and Catherine Asaro. Asaro speaks quite softly and so while I was closest to her I couldn't really hear her. I did pick up that she was a college professor of physics before she became a full time writer. Her grounding in science has been very

helpful in her writing of science fiction. Her husband, who also attended the dinner, works at Goddard Space Flight Center. So we did chat with him a bit about the place since Paul's computer equipment is in building 32 and we used to work in building 27 (all very interesting if you've ever been there but boring to everyone else I'm sure.)

Patricia Wrede, who I could hear well, talked about the craft of writing and we asked a lot of questions. She feels that the only way to learn to write is to write, and while classes in English covering grammar and punctuation are useful, classes in creative writing can be deadly. We spent most of the time talking about the editing processes. This included the fact that the key problem is to finish the book or story first and then re-edit. She talked about a friend who writes chapter one and then re-edits and writes chapter two. He then re-edits 1 and 2 and goes on to three and so on. Then when he finally finished the book he again edited from 1 to the end. Then he sent it out. He started the next book and wrote chapter one. Then proceeded to edit the first book from the beginning and sent a new copy to the publisher. You can probably see where this is going. Wrede's suggestion was to set aside a time once a week or once a month to revise. She suggested that you do whatever it is that you have to do to finish the book and limit the things that will hold you back (such as revision) until you finish. When you finish the book you'll be a better writer than when you started and that's the time to revise. You'll improve with every chapter that you write but you shouldn't stop to revise between every chapter or it will take forever to finish. If you think you only have one book in you then take all the time in the world but if you intend to write for a living find a way to work that allows you to satisfy your perfectionist tendencies and yet "write".

Holly Black talked with me about how difficult it is to write to a deadline. She said when she first got the contract for the book she'd written and then several that hadn't been written yet she thought "well, this is how writers really work" and thought she'd finally made it. Now she's thinking she'd rather write the book and then sell it rather than sell it and then write it. Having the deadlines over your head makes life really crazy. She also thought it was easier to break in with a novel rather than with short stories because fewer people actually finish a novel and the competition is a bit thinner especially if you can coherently put together a plot with characters using proper spelling and punctuation. She highly recommended Teresa Nielsen Hayden's blog at <http://www.nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/> for writing information and tips.

I didn't get a chance to speak with Connie Willis or Lois McMaster Bujold at the dinner unfortunately. Perhaps I'll get to meet them another time. (cross my fingers)

All in all it was a great day.
Gayle

Third Friday Minutes

Note that there's a brief summary at the end.

The regular Third Friday meeting of the Washington Science Fiction Association was called to order by President Samuel Lubell at 9:03 pm on October 15th, 2004 in the McLean room on the 2nd floor of the Tysons Marriott, at Tysons Corner, Virginia, in conjunction with our annual convention, Capclave. (This was the room used for panels, not the con suite.)

In attendance were Capclave chair Lee Gilliland, President Samuel Lubell, Vice President Cathy Green, Secretary Keith Lynch, Treasurer Bob MacIntosh, Trustees Barry Newton and Steven Smith, Colleen Cahill, Alan Batson, Chris Callahan, Joni Dashoff, John Dittmann, Carolyn Frank, Larry Hodges, Scott Hofmann, Eric Jablow, Dan Joy, Tae Kim, Brian Lewis, Patricia Lin, Nicki and Richard Lynch, Wade Lynch, Candy and John Madigan, Keith Marshall, Cat Meier, Walter Miles, Michael Nelson, Judy and Meridel Newton, Neil Ottenstein, Kathi Overton, Don Pauley, Michael Pederson, Larry Pfeffer, John Pomeranz, Rebecca Prather, George Shaner, Diana Swiger, Madeleine Yeh, and Beth and Mike Zipser. 43 people, plus several who didn't sign in. Ivy Yap was not present.

The president explained that WSFA was the group that hosts Capclave every year, thanked everyone for attending, mentioned that we meet twice a month, on first Fridays at the Gillilands' in Virginia and on third Fridays at the Madigans' in Maryland, and said that if you enjoy our cons, you'll also enjoy our meetings.

CAPCLAVE '04: Lee said to have fun, and that Capclave needs volunteers. Volunteers should see Cathy Green, who Sam explained is Capclave's volunteer coordinator and also WSFA's vice president. He also introduced Keith as the secretary. [Cathy, Sam, and Keith were seated at the table. Everyone else was seated or standing in the audience.]

CAPCLAVE '05: Michael Walsh was not present. Sam directed everyone's attention to the Capclave '05 signup form on the last page of the program book. Colleen said it was \$25 if you register at this con. Someone added that that would also get you a voting membership in WSFA. Sam corrected that misstatement, explaining that there's no longer a connection between convention membership and WSFA membership.

CAPCLAVE '06: Mike Nelson said Capclave '06 Chair Elspeth Kovar is with Capclave '05 Chair Michael Walsh, conspiring to overthrow Capclave '04 Chair Lee Gilliland.

SMOFCON: Sam explained what, when, and where SMOFcon is, and said memberships can be purchased at the information table.

ENTERTAINMENT: Alexis was not present.

ACTIVITIES: Lee said Capclave needs volunteers. Sam said we had recently gotten free passes to an advance screening of PRIMER, which several of us had attended. Ted White added that there was a review of PRIMER in the *Washington Post*. Sam also mentioned that WSFA had recently hosted a dinner for authors, the evening of the National Book Festival on the Mall, which WSFA member Colleen Cahill had helped organize, and that someone left an orange bag at the dinner.

PUBLICATIONS: The secretary said there were September and October WSFA Journals available on the table, that the past 25 years of WSFA Journals are available online, and that we were looking for Don Miller WSFA Journals, issues 80, 82, and 85. Also, there's a sign-in sheet circulating, and everyone should sign in so that they'll be on file forever.

AUSTERITY: Not present.

OLD BUSINESS: The secretary reported that we had voted to table the motion to set aside some of our money as untouchable except by a supermajority until the first meeting in November.

NEW BUSINESS:

Rebecca complained about the plan to spend \$1000 at World Fantasy Con later this month to publicize next year's Capclave. She suggested we revisit the issue if it's not too late, and that otherwise we do something to get some measure of how effective that publicity is. Cathy said she thought it was too late, since World Fantasy Con is in two weeks, and pointed out that the goal is more to attract pros than fans. Sam suggested seeing how many program participants at next year's Capclave had been at this year's World Fantasy Con but had not been at any previous Capclave. Lee suggested asking all program participants at next year's Capclave how they heard of Capclave. Mike Nelson suggested doing so for all members, not just for program participants. Sam asked Walter to ask everyone who approaches him about being on next year's Capclave program how they heard about Capclave. (Walter is in charge of programming for next year's Capclave.) Richard said we could use more transparency to how money is spent. Cathy responded that we had discussed the \$1000 at both a Maryland and a Virginia meeting.

Keith Lynch moved that the club congratulate the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society on their 70th anniversary later this month. The motion passed unanimously. John Pomeranz accepted the congratulations on behalf of LASFS. Madeleine asked whether he had the authority to do that. Mike Nelson moved that we send them a card. Motion carried. [The secretary later sent them a card. A couple of LASFS members mentioned having seen it at their 70th anniversary meeting (at which Forrest J. Ackerman was present).]

TREASURY: Bob MacIntosh had no report. Sam asked him to email the number to the secretary. [No number received by press time.]

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The secretary said announcements should be submitted in writing, or to the email address on the WSFA website or on the cover of The WSFA Journal.

The con chair said volunteers are needed.

Walter said that Dan Joy had co-written a book, *Counterculture Through the Ages*. It will be in bookstores on November 2nd.

John Pomeranz reminded people to vote on November 2nd.

Rebecca asked if Capclave members not staying at the hotel were allowed to use its swimming pool. Lee responded that Rebecca should speak to her after the meeting. John Pomeranz said just don't change clothes in the hallway.

Lee said there will be a party in room 262 that night, at which alcohol will be served. It will be a closed private party to which all Capclave members who can prove they're at least 21 are invited.

Mike Pederson said there will be an Nth Degree party tomorrow night in room 236, and that he's hosting a party at his home in Stafford, Virginia, on Saturday October 30th at 7 pm, a combination Halloween, Fifth Friday, and double anniversary party. It's his first anniversary, and the Gillilands' eleventh. Carpools will be arranged.

Eric asked if this was anyone's first WSFA meeting. Several people spoke up:

- Patricia Lin, formerly from Portland, Oregon.
- Tae Kim, who has lived in the area for seven years.
- John Dittmann, who has lived in the area for eight years, had a membership in the cancelled 1998 Disclave, previously lived in Boston, is a member of NESFA, and worked on Noreascon 2 in 1980. John Pomeranz, speaking as a supporting member of NESFA, thanked him. Sam pointed out that our dues are just \$10 a year, compared with NESFA's \$16.
- Alan Batson, who has lived in the area for about forty years.

It was Joni Brill Dashoff's second meeting.

Keith Lynch announced that R.A. Salvatore would be signing his latest book *The Two Swords* at the Tysons Corner Borders Books, which is right across the street, at 7:30 pm on Wednesday.

Sam announced that the next meeting will be at our regular First Friday location, the Gillilands' on November 5th, and that the meeting after that will be at our new regular Third Friday location, the Madigans', on November 19th. There was discussion of whether to hold First Friday at SMOFcon. Someone moved that we do so, and that that meeting would be open to everyone, not just members of SMOFcon or of WSFA. The motion carried. The secretary then announced that it's already listed as such on our website.

Meeting unanimously adjourned at 9:28 pm. 25 minutes.

There was a thunderstorm early that evening, but the secretary doesn't know what the weather was like during the meeting, as the McLean room has no windows. It was cold and windy later that night.

Summary of 10/15/04 meeting:

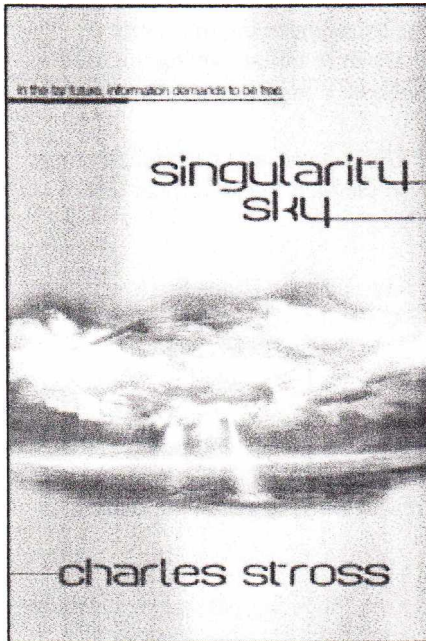
- Discussion of setting aside some of our money as touchable only by a supermajority is postponed until November.
- Walter is directed to ask people who ask about being on Capclave '05's program how they heard about Capclave.
- December's First Friday is at SMOFcon.
- We sent a card to LASFS congratulating them on their 70th anniversary.

SINGULARITY SKY

Written by Charles Stross

Ace Paperback Edition July 2004

Reviewed by Nicholas Sanders



Charles Stross is the next “big thing” in SF. Don’t take my word for it; Michael Swanwick says so right on the front cover of Stross’ book: “Read him now and find out what all the fuss is going to be about” he orders. On the back cover, James Patrick Kelly declares “Charles Stross owns the cutting edge of science fiction.” Gardner Dozois, peripatetic doyen of all things science-fictional, proclaims Stross to be “unmatched anywhere in the field for audacity, ambition, daring, conceptualization, and dazzling brilliance of imagination.” (Methinks there needs to be at least one exclamation point in that sentence. Two would not seem excessive, given Mr. Dozois’ effusive praise.) Locus, SFRevu, and the usual SF book reviewers also have nice things to say about Mr. Stross, albeit with more restraint.

Apparently, kudos and superlatives rain down on Stross’ head like wastepaper at a ticker-tape parade. Can it be deserved? Note that all of this praise is being showered on an author who has published heretofore only short SF. *Singularity Sky* is indeed his first novel. Personally, I can’t remember any other author who received a similar early anointing at least since the last next “big thing” in SF. Was it MacLeod or Reynolds? I forget.

But lest you think I’ve come to savage Mr. Stross and his first novel, be reassured. I had read some of his short stories, including “Antibodies” (which I consider to be the finest example of short SF to be written in the past decade) and was looking forward to his first novel. I was not disappointed, nor will you be if you run to the bookstore and grab it right now.

Stross has created a complex future in which humanity has been dispersed to the stars by intervention of a super-intelligent, nearly omniscient, and apparently omnipotent being called “the Eschaton”. The intervention, known as the “Singularity”, came without warning, instantly depopulating ninety percent of Earth’s ten billion inhabitants. The forced immigrants were resettled using an Eschaton-based logic that took into account an individual’s psychological makeup, philosophical outlook, and other factors, such that each resettled planet is taking an individual evolutionary path. The Eschaton provided each resettled planet with “cornucopia machines”, wonderboxes of nanotechnology that can produce anything desired, given a template and the necessary raw materials to aid in their development. To complicate matters, worlds more distant from Earth have had more time to evolve than the closer worlds (for reasons that may make sense to a physicist, but not to me). Suffice it to say, when two human “clades” subsequently come into contact with each other, friction tends to result. Thus, the setting for the story and the series (second book already published in hardback).

The Eschaton has permanently carved in stone three commandments/statements/operating principles on each settled world. The Third Commandment is simple: Thou shalt not violate causality within my historic light cone. Or else. Humans being humans (or close approximations thereto), occasionally some person or planet attempts to violate the Third Commandment, which results in Eschaton interventions such as large-mass kinetic-energy strikes, anti-matter explosions, and sudden local star supernovae. Collateral damage is unfortunate, but apparently unavoidable. The United Nations of Earth, the only remaining government-like entity on the home world, attempts to prevent violations of the Third Commandment so that the Eschaton won’t have to.

The New Republic is one of the more repressive post-Singularity societies. Think Czarist Russia meets Victorian England. Lots of “your Lordship” this and “humbly beg your leave” that. Much pompous pomp and too much circumstantial circumstance. You get the point. Critically, advanced technology, including use of cornucopia machines, is forbidden on pain of death, except to the uppermost aristocracy and its secret police and to the New Republic military, which is willing to use whatever technology it can buy or steal to conquer its neighbors.

The book begins when one of the New Republic’s recently conquered planets, Rochard’s World, is visited by The Festival, a mysterious clade who wants stories, information -- anything entertaining -- and is willing to trade literally anything in return, including providing the world’s downtrodden workers and serfs with their own cornucopia machines. Within days, the economy of Rochard’s World is in ruins and the aristocratic tyranny suddenly has become obsolete. The lower classes, led by the hilariously serious revolutionary Extropian Underground, lasered themselves free from their chains and immediately became the bourgeoisie. Feeling understandably threatened, the home world spins up the New Republic

battle fleet and prepares to avenge the unprovoked attack, even though it knows little about The Festival or its military capabilities.

Martin Springfield, a post-Singularity Earther, has been hired by the New Republic to conduct last minute engine upgrades to its military spacecraft. Rachel Mansour, also an Earther, is an UN intelligence agent trying to prevent a causality violation. Together, or separately, they must prevent the New Republic military from time-traveling in order to gain an advantage in the upcoming battle, lest the Eschaton intervene. At stake are millions, if not billions, of lives.

It's a great concept, eminently believable and well-told. From the opening sentence ("The day war was declared, a rain of telephones fell clattering to the cobblestones from the skies above Novy Petrograd.") to the final line, it is clear that Charles Stross is worthy of his reputation. He actually may be, in fact, the next "big thing" in SF.

Stross is clearly the offspring of heretofore unknown sexual congress between Mack Reynolds and Bruce Sterling, partaking of both and adding a whimsical sense of humor as well as an understanding of the hard sciences. His action is sharp and his plotting straightforward, without displaying the maximum velocity plot jumpshifts of, say, Alastair Reynolds.

Stross handles the military part of the book wonderfully, eliciting the crisp professionalism of the New Republic military and describing war at super-relativistic velocities with precise terminology that creates a tangible feeling of realism. His focus on getting the military part right creates a delicious frisson of irony, when the reader starts to get an impression of just how alien The Festival really is, and how it defends its turf.

But sometimes his use of precise terminology gets in the way of his story telling. Take the following passage, for instance: "Deep in the planetary biosphere, vectors armed with reverse transcriptase and strange artificial chromosomes were at work. They'd re-entered over the temperate belt of the northern continent, spreading and assimilating the contents of the endogenous ecology. Complex digestive organs, aided by tools of DNA splicing and some fiendishly complicated expression control operons, assimilated and dissected chromosomes from everything the package's children swallowed. A feedback system -- less than conscious but more than vegetable -- spliced together a workable local expression of a design crafted thousands of years ago; one that could subsist on locally available building blocks, a custom saprophyte optimized for the ecology of Rochard's World."

When faced with the challenging techno-speak, the reader can keep on reading, hoping to glean the essential meaning from context, or else pause in order to consult a good dictionary. In any case, the storytelling spell is broken. So Stross is not perfect. In addition to the above densely packed technophile language, his protagonists seem to learn things without the reader being aware of just how they learned them (such as the true nature and purpose of The Festival). But those are relatively minor quibbles.

Somehow Stross has created a universe in which anything and everything can happen. Normally, I would expect the old axiom to control i.e., "When anything can happen, nobody cares what does happen." But Stross pulls it off and makes us like it -- a lot. Highly recommended.

One final quibble, almost more of a postscript. Credit for interior text design is given to Kristin del Rosario and I think she owes Ace some serious salary repayment. Ace has picked a futuristic, funky, lowercase typeface for the paperback front cover, and I'm okay with that, where the font size and color contrast make it easily legible. Unfortunately, though, Ms. Rosario decided to use the same typeface again inside the book to start chapters and sections. Inside the paperback the funky typeface is unnecessary (the chapters already have titles and the sections are properly spaced) and more than a little distracting. The font size is much smaller and there's no color contrast to aid the reader. Several times I found myself stopping to re-read and decode the first three words of the chapter or the section. When the typeface gets in the way of the story, it's time to stop. Please stop it, Ms. del Rosario.

Now go get this book.

Halloween Party Review

by Keith Lynch

Michael and Cate Pederson hosted a Halloween party on Saturday, October 30th, starting at 7 pm. It was attended by about 20 people, including Ernest and Mrs. Lilley, Drew Bittner, Alexis & Lee Gilliland, Sam Lubell, and I. Bill Lawhorn arrived at about 10:30 pm. Their huge dimly-lit home in Stafford was filled with Halloween-themed decorations, food, drink, music, and movies. Movies included Friday the 13th, Freddy vs. Jason, Poltergeist, and of course Rocky Horror at midnight.

It doubled as an anniversary party. It was our hosts' first anniversary, and the Gillilands' eleventh. It tripled as a belated Fifth Friday party.

The party extended over all three floors, and out onto the front porch. The temperature reached 75°, unusually warm for this time of year.

Sam drove me there and back. On the way there we got lost for 20 minutes in the Springfield Interchange ("Mixing Bowl"). When he asked me for assistance, I helpfully explained that it had been designed by H.P. Lovecraft, and everyone who fully understands its layout goes mad.

There's only one more Fifth Friday this year: New Year's Eve, which as usual will be hosted by Kathi Overton and John Pomeranz. After that, none until April.



Hello, Lemuria, Hello

Written by Ron Goulart

Published New York: DAW Books, 1979

Reviewed by L S*******

Good bye, Lemuria, and good riddance! In another review, I... er, ah, fellow reviewer Lee Strong stated that pseudo-science can be turned into entertaining stories. This isn't one of them.

This dreadful little novel by satirist Ron Goulart purports to reveal The Awful Truth about the Shaver Mystery and the Death of Elvis Presley. What it reveals is that Mr. Goulart is definitely an acquired taste.

In 2022, well-known secret agent Jake Conger is targeted for assassination by fiendish abnors attempting to suppress the Truth about the really lost continent of Lemuria. He teleports around the wacky United States of 2022 encountering wacky robots, wacky cyborgs, wacky aliens, wacky politicians, and, of course, wacky abnors.

Dodging wacky... er, ah, deadly kllbeams and stupid stereotypes, Jake uncovers the wacky... er, ah, nude... er, ah, naked Truth about the Conspiracy of Evil and the Alien Alliance of Good. Along the way, he does important work like converting an amorous female agent from eating sugar coated sugar snacks to partial vegetarianism. Good Triumphs Over Evil Including Bad Diet.

I rate Hello, Lemuria, Hello as * on the five star scale. -- LS

Upcoming Events

This is excerpted from our online calendar of upcoming events, at <http://www.wsfa.org/calendar.htm>. I recommend you check it frequently, in case of last minute additions or corrections. This is a regular feature of *The WSFA Journal*.

If you plan to take Metro's Red Line to any of these events, please allow extra time due to chronic delays on that line.

Thursday, November 4th: Climate Change on Mars

Talk by MIT professor of geophysics Maria Zuber at the Carnegie Institute, 1530 P St. NW, near the Dupont Circle Metro station on the Red Line, at 6:45 pm. Free. 202-328-6988.

Friday, November 5th: WSFA First Friday Meeting

Regular WSFA meeting (at the Gillilands' as usual). Newcomers welcome. Email me for directions.

Saturday, November 6th: Used book sale

Used book sale from 10 until 4 at the Patrick Henry Library in Vienna, VA.

Wednesday, November 10th: Verlyn Flieger speaks at LoC

Verlyn Flieger, Professor of English at the University of Maryland and author of *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faerie and Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* speaks at the Library of Congress, Madison Building, 3rd floor, Pickford Theater, at 12:10 pm. No reservations are needed: open to staff and the public.

November 13 - 14: Galaxy Con II

A media convention, at the Sheraton College Park, in Beltsville, Maryland. The same hotel as Capclave '01.

Friday, November 19th: Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany speak at Smithsonian

Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany speak at the National Museum of Natural History's Baird Auditorium, at 7 pm. Free event. First-come, first-served seating.

Friday, November 19th: WSFA Third Friday Meeting

Regular WSFA meeting. At the Madigans, not the Ginters. This is our new regular Third Friday location.

December 3 - 5: SMOFcon

WSFA is hosting 2004's SMOFcon, at the Wyndham Washington at 1400 M Street NW, Washington DC, near the McPherson Square station on Metro's Orange Line.

Friday, December 3rd: WSFA First Friday Meeting

Regular WSFA meeting. At SMOFcon at 9 pm. Open to everyone, not just members of SMOFcon.

December 10 - 12: Philcon 2004

The Philadelphia Science Fiction Society (PSFS) brings you another Philcon. In Philadelphia.

Friday, December 17th: WSFA Third Friday Meeting

Regular WSFA meeting. At the Madigans, not the Ginters. This is our new regular Third Friday location.

Friday, December 31st: New Year's Eve party

At The Fabulous Bungalow in Arlington Virginia starting at 8:00 pm. All WSFAans are invited.

Coming next month...

The deadline for December's issue is Thanksgiving. Earlier if possible. As always, I eagerly solicit material. Especially entries for our very own fan gallery. If you missed seeing the fan gallery on the third floor of the Hynes at Noreascon, it's available online at <http://scifiinc.net/scifiinc/gallery/list/>. I'm looking for material similar to that. Ernest Lilley is willing to take pictures, but I'll accept entries without pictures if you prefer. Or just pictures with no text if you like. I'll never print anything about anyone without their permission.

Also in the December issue I'll have another review by Lee Strong, more Alexis cartoons, a review of Stephen L. Antczak's *Daydreams Undertaken* by Colleen Cahill, a review of John Varley's *Red Thunder* by Nicholas Sanders, and of course the regular features: meeting minutes, December '4 in history, upcoming events, and what to look forward to in the January issue. I may also have a report on the WSFA web site, or I might save that for the next issue.