

WSFA Journal

July 2006

Winner of 1906 Whishtly-Berke Award for "Best New Publication in Scientifiction"

MINUTES- Third Friday, Gillilands' house, June 16, 2006

Meeting convened at 9:15pm.

Treasurer: There was no treasurer's report; Bob arrived after the meeting.

Capclave Present: there was a proxy report offered. A walk-through of the hotel was held, along with negotiations to finalize the space for two years. The number of rooms is also being negotiated. There are presently 137 members registered for Capclave.

Capclave Future: Lee has agreed to host the parties for future Capclave.

Capclave Far Future: negotiations for the hotel space include Capclave Far Future.

World Fantasy: no news.

DC 2012: there is no hotel that seems suitable.

Trustees: no report.

Rules committee: currently reviewing statements from 1986 and 1987.

Entertainment committee: the piano downstairs may be moved, thus depriving Bob of a desk.

Activities: Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest on July 8, Regal Gallery, 7pm (not a preview showing).

Publications: the May/June journal is available and online; Future Washington's domain has been renewed by Ern (who will continue to monitor it for WSFA and send reports on same to the WSFA secretary).

Old business: web hosting issues have been addressed by Paul Haggery; Blue Host may be the best bet at \$85 for two years. The club voted \$200 to Paul pursue webhosting for the official WSFA site.

Fifth Friday was not determined at this time.

The club's corporate status has lapsed, but John and Bob are working on it.

New business: none to report.

Announcements: send email announcements to Drew.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:49pm.

REVIEWS

CARS

Takes to the Open Road*

John Lasseter (Director)

Review by: Ernest Lilley

Official Site:

<http://www.disney.go.com/disneypictures/cars/>

IMDB:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317219/>

Opened: June 9, 2006

The sports car lead from *Cars* will set your teeth on edge at the beginning of this (ultimately) delightful story about discovering the roads less taken. That's OK, because he needs to have something to overcome, and his egotistical narcissism is a perfect reflection of the society he stands in for. It wouldn't be Disney if he didn't overcome those flaws, and you don't need a road map to know that scenic landmarks he'll drive by on the way, but it's definitely a ride worth hitching.

"Lightning" McQueen (Owen Wilson) is a hot young rookie race car out to win the coveted "Piston Cup" in his first season of big circuit racing. His sponsor, who embarrasses him, is a treatment for rusty cars, and he yearns for the big money and prestige of DynaCo, the top sponsor. The owners of the company are delightfully voiced by Click and Clack, The Tappet Brothers, from NPR's Car Talk, but I'm getting off the main road here. Just as McQueen is about to win the last race of the season and take the cup, victory is snatched away from his over eager grasp...and he finds himself facing one more race against the top cars on the circuit. Not that this bothers him. After all, he's the best there is even if he does say so himself.

An unexpected detour winds him up on the wrong side of the law doing public service (as a road gang) in the tumbleweed town of Radiator Springs, which was once a major attraction to folks driving the "Mother Road", but is now mostly abandoned except for a handful of crank-cases too stubborn to hit the road. Among them is an old Hudson, voiced by none other than actor/racer Paul Newman, who, unknown to the town, was once a famous racecar himself. "Doc" Hudson came to town long ago to lick his wounds, and seal himself off from the world, and the last thing he wants is for racing to rear its ugly head and disturb his melancholy.

Also in town to get away from it all is Sally Carrera (Bonnie Hunt) a Porsche who gave up her practice as an attorney in LA when she fell in love with the Southwest's beauty, and the folks she found there. Rounding out the core cast is a rusty old tow-truck named "Mater" (kind of like to-mater without the tow...) whose simplicity and openness does as much to save McQueen as anyone.

Will Lightning cut and run at his first chance? Will he fall for a fast German car with great curves? Will he make it to California for the big race? Well...duh. But that won't stop you from having a great time watching it all unfold. Of course, it's a perfect movie to borrow a kid to take along. I borrowed my 13 yr old nephew, who I had to tear away from LeGuin's Earthsea trilogy to see it, and evidenced no great enthusiasm before hand. On the way home though he was talking about how he was looking forward to getting his whole family to see it when he got home. That's a pretty good endorsement.

The roster of racing legends and notable actors that signed on for this film is as impressive as the CGI work by Pixar. Richard Petty, Mario Andretti, Darrell Cartrip, and Michael Schumacher are only a few of the racing legends that make this movie work on more than one level. You don't know who Michael Schumacher is? Sigh. Then you really need to see *Cars*.

What you'll never see is all the work that went into this film, because a lot of it is under the hood, so to speak. The cars were developed with input from Detroit designers using systems 1000 times faster than those used for *Toy Story*. The road takes a lot from real life as well. Director John Lasseter (*The Incredibles*) and his creative team spent a lot of time researching the dusty remnants of Route 66 before putting this southwestern sonnet together, and if you've been down that road at all, you'll recognize a number of the touches as having real world counterparts. If not, go take a trip on Route 66 and discover the real deal for yourself.

So, here we are living in the future, looking back at the past to see if we missed anything. As it turns out, we've missed, or misplaced some of the best parts...and *Cars*, the latest Disney Pixar release, puts them up on the screen for us to rediscover.

SUPERMAN RETURNS

By Drew Bittner

Bryan Singer (dir)

Official Website:

supermanreturns.warnerbros.com/

He's been gone for a long time, but Superman is very definitely back. The question is, was it worth the wait?

That's something individual viewers will have to decide for themselves, but we can tell you this...

Superman (Brandon Routh) has been missing for five years. Nobody knows why, except that he vanished immediately after astronomers thought they'd found Krypton in their skywatching. Turns out, yep, Superman went home. He returns in a fiery crash (doesn't his crystal ship have a steering wheel or brakes?), where his mom (Eva Marie Saint) recovers him from the wreck.

Once he gets back to Metropolis, Clark Kent finds that he's apparently barely been missed. Although Lois (Kate Bosworth) is first seen aboard a crashing jetliner—following a space shuttle's disastrous misfire—there's no time for anything but a dazzling rescue that reintroduces Superman to his home city. He catches the jetliner in a midair tug-of-war with gravity that is breathtaking.

Clark looks forward to “catching up” with Lois (no pun intended), but finds she is now a single mom and engaged to editor Perry White's (Frank Langella) nephew Richard (James Marsden). He's a good guy but he ain't Superman—per Jimmy Olsen (Sam Huntington), she's still sweet on the Man of Steel.

Meanwhile, Lex Luthor (Kevin Spacey) has returned to Superman's Fortress of Solitude to steal the advanced Kryptonian crystal-tech he saw in *Superman II* (yeah, this is a more-or-less sequel to the Donner movies of the 1980s). He's accompanied by Kitty (Parker Posey), who is a knockoff of Miss Tessmacher (Valerie Perrine) from the '80s films, but that's okay; a lot of his dialogue and mannerisms are recycled too.

The effects are great and Routh firmly establishes himself as the new Superman, but there are glitches that are hard to gloss over. Lex's plot, using the crystals in a new kind of land-grab, makes no sense and Spacey channels Gene Hackman liberally in his take on the bald supervillain. Bosworth gives it her all but there is some element lacking in her portrayal that keeps her from embodying Lois the way Margot Kidder did, while Huntington and Langella do credit to Jimmy Olsen and Perry White.

In all, the movie rates a solid B for entertainment value. Just don't think too hard about coastal real estate or the complexities of alien-human relations while you're watching...

IN MEMORIAM

Jim Baen, 1943-2006, publisher of Baen Books, of a stroke June 29, 2006.

The obit by David Drake (from Cory Doctorow's weblog):

James Patrick Baen was born October 22, 1943, on the Pennsylvania-New York border, a long way by road or in culture from New York City. He was introduced to SF early through the magazines in a step-uncle's attic, including the November, 1957, issue of *Astounding* with *The Gentle Earth* by Christopher Anvil.

The two books Jim most remembered as being formative influences were *Fire-Hunter* by Jim Kjelgaard and *Against the Fall of Night* by Arthur C Clarke. The theme of both short novels is that a youth from a decaying culture escapes the trap of accepted wisdom and saves his people despite themselves. This is a fair description of Jim's life in SF: he was always his own man, always a maverick, and very often brilliantly successful because he didn't listen to what other people thought.

For example, the traditional model of electronic publishing required that the works be encrypted. Jim thought that just made it hard for people to read books, the worst mistake a publisher could make. His e-texts were clear and in a variety of common formats.

LETTER OF COMMENT

Offered to us courtesy of Ernest Lilley, from Chris Garcia of the Bay Area Science Fiction Association:

You've got it right. I'm Vice-President of the Bay Area Science Fiction Association, and while y'all seem to have terms of service! In BASFA, we serve until you either miss 13 meetings or...well, that's the only way to get yourself off the hook. I've been VP for a year and the Pres has been for four or five years I think. It's rougher out here on the Coast.

I work at a museum and I'm always seeing exhibits that are new and exciting, and I miss the old days when most exhibits were like the one showing the Dodo bones. I used to work at the Smithsonian and would have out in the back of the museum of natural history and I've actually held Dodo bones before! Good times.

I see my pal Matt Appleton (editor of *Some Fantastic*), visited your First Friday meeting. Looking at your minutes makes me realize that BASFA is a much different group than WSFA. I'm really interested in discovering the differences between all us groups.

Nice to list *Who Killed The Electric Car*. I loved it when I screened it a few months ago on video. It won't be up here for a few weeks, but it's worth seeing.

Good stuff
Chris

And finally... an entry from our esteemed Entertainment Committee:

Morrie The Critic Discusses War By Alexis Gilliland

“You look pensive,” said Morrie, stirring sugar into his coffee. “What’s on your mind?”

“War,” I replied. “You look at history, and in the last million days you find only three when there wasn’t a war going on somewhere in the world. What does that tell you?”

He shrugged and sort of smiled. “That your historical record is only 99.7 percent complete, maybe?”

I counted on my fingers. “Shouldn’t that be 99.9997 percent complete?”

“Don’t let higher math get in the way of higher truth, Max. It is quite possible for the world to have several unrelated wars going on at the same time. Which suggests that the human race is predisposed to have wars.”

“Yes, but why?”

Morrie took a cautious sip of coffee. “Google “The Causes of War” and you come up with a whole library of books trying to sort things out. Listing this reason, that reason and the other reason, and noting that wars are more common between neighbors because of being more convenient. Which suggests that humans are territorial like other animals. Only nobody bothers to ask why humans have wars when animals don’t.”

“Didn’t Jane Goodall observe a kind of war between chimpanzees?”

“Uh, yes. The group she was observing split, and over time, like a year or two, the larger group hunted down the smaller group and destroyed it, so there was at least a vendetta, a blood feud, but I don’t know if what she reported qualifies as a war.”

“Why not, Morrie? No chimpanzee banners and primate parades? War is killing, after all, not all the theatrical paraphernalia with which we humans have embellished it.”

“Well.” He studied his coffee cup for awhile. “Well, yes, war is killing, only not exactly--I mean killing isn’t the whole of what war is, Max. See, banners, parades, and uniforms are all human-specific stuff, and what they amount to is a way for the group to elicit the cooperation of its members.” He put the cup down. “Because of language, humans cooperate--are able to cooperate--more than chimpanzees. So in the wild all sorts of animals fight to have reproductive success, like the alpha male getting to service the harem of doting females, but mostly they don’t cooperate.” A pause. “Well, okay, a pride of lions will get taken over by a crew of young male lions driving off the crew of older of male lions (do male lions ever get old except in a zoo?), so maybe there is a little cooperation. But humans, now, the group gets organized, and the group cooperates, and any conflict between a cooperating group and a non-cooperating group--a rabble--is no contest at all; the rabble loses every time, the men are killed and the women enslaved.” He cradled the cup with both hands before taking a sip. “When the groups on both sides are organized, now, when both sides are cooperating, then you have a war.”

“So what you’re saying is that for competition--fighting--to become war, both sides have also got to be doing some serious cooperation?”

“Yes,” Morrie took a swallow of coffee. “Yes, I think that would be pretty much the case. Any competition between groups, that’s fighting, like two anthills sharing the same crack in the sidewalk, but with humans, the size of the group--the effectiveness of the group--is amplified by its degree of cooperation. So war is . . .” The coffee cup rattled as he put it on the saucer. “Fighting is for reproductive success; that’s pretty much universal in the animal kingdom, and war is only fighting between cooperating groups--which is pretty much limited to humans. In which case the reproductive success is more like an abstract idea rather than a bunch of actual kids, though the veterans of World War II did themselves proud producing the Baby Boomers.”

“You’re arguing that humans fight wars because they are good at cooperation?”

Morrie shook his head. “Fighting, that’s competition, and in nature competition is pretty much universal. The male bird singing in the tree is proclaiming “This tree is

mine, God gave this tree to me," and if another male bird doesn't grab the tree off from him, some female bird will take up with him. In nature the fighting is mostly done by the young males who are expendable--or who have to wait their turn. So humans--a group of humans, a society--they have to organize their young males, most of whom enjoy fighting, anyway, in order to increase their efficiency."

"How do you figure that?"

"There's all sorts of anecdotal evidence that young men like to fight, Max."

I shook my head. "No, no. The organizing thing."

A sigh. "Look at them, the young males. All that testosterone combined with all that lack of judgment means the individual is subject to peer pressure when the peers in question are a bunch of adolescent idiots. If there's nothing to stop them they organize themselves into gangs and proceed to fight each other for the bragging rights to territory they don't own, and only marginally control."

"Hey, you have a bunch of adolescent idiots, how can they even get organized?"

"The alpha males do it for them, with a big assist from the young females."

"Ah, yes . . . Only it isn't clear why the young females would cooperate with organizing an army, Morrie. In nature the females pick the best mate they can, but they don't involve themselves in the male struggle for reproductive success."

"The young females are looking to find superior males to father their children, is why. The veterans, the guys who survive the war, they've been winnowed out from the herd so there is at least the presumption of superiority. But the uniforms and the parades and the bands, hey, even providing logistical support can be exciting, and a war provides the young females with an excuse--a socially acceptable excuse--for letting the young male have his way with them."

"Point taken, Morrie. Human societies compete by waging war, and a human society without women is unthinkable. So maybe the naturally forming gang is an army precursor, but how is it different? Could the gang be closer to the state of nature?"

"An army is what you get when a gang gets organized--when it evolves through a few wars by--you know, making changes to get rid of whatever it was that lost the last war. But gang and army are a lot alike. The local gang embraces the local youth and gives them something, some organization, to belong to. The local army--the national army, if you'd rather--does exactly the same damn thing, only because it has the resources of the whole community to draw on, it can feed them, clothe them, and pension off the survivors. The community cooperates to give its army the logistical and psychological support it needs, which is usually far better than what the gangs are able to come up with for their members--who tend to be estranged from the larger community."

"And incarcerated in jails, where they combine for mutual defense against rival gangs similarly incarcerated?"

"Yes, yes," agreed Morrie, taking a sip of coffee. "A fate not too dissimilar to being a career soldier, or a draftee in the mass armies of the twentieth century. As for rival gangs, General Patton corrected a subordinate who called the Germans the enemy: "The German army is our adversary, the US Navy is our enemy.'"

"So all right. Gangs are natural for human society, and when a gang gets organized--or assumes control of its society--whatever, it segues into an army. But does that mean that war is inherent in the genetic makeup of humanity?"

“Yes. At least it looks to be the way to bet,” he said at last. “Any given group has a hard enough time balancing the competing interests of its various subgroups. Freud thought that sons wanted to sleep with their mothers, and there are always in-law problems. Larger groups often have a weird history which makes things more complicated with inherited hatreds. Trying to maintain the status quo over time--as the population grows--leads to civil war. If you have several groups--like nations--in close proximity, balancing internal and external interests becomes just too hard, and those armies that everybody has--armies seek out wars in their institutional self interest, you know--war eventually is not only the easiest solution, but none of the alternatives are anywhere near as popular.”

“Because going to war is terribly exciting, yes, because of the reproductive subtext. But the people who know how terrible war is, wouldn't they try to stop it from happening?”

“Maybe, maybe not.” Morrie rested his chin in his hand. “Suppose for the sake of argument that they did? As peace goes on longer and longer, there are fewer and fewer veterans to speak out against war, and fewer and fewer people able to understand them from direct experience. Eventually . . .” A long pause. “Eventually you have new people coming up to make the same old mistakes.”

“You're saying war is inevitable?”

“Yes, but it's also cyclic. First war breaks out, and then after awhile peace breaks out. Why does peace break out?”

“The weaker side surrenders?”

“Well, no, not exactly, Max. Both sides are in agreement about their relative strengths, and both sides have--or should have--a pretty good understanding of what continuing the damn war will cost. So they cut a mutually satisfactory deal that lets them stop fighting.”

“And since war is cyclic, that starts the cycle all over again?”

Morrie nodded. “Something like that. Fighting between groups isn't war unless the groups are good at cooperation, and so far as we know, only humans are up to the levels of cooperation necessary for a fight to become a war. So humans fight because they are animals, and because they are animals they give their fighting all they got, and because they are human “all they got” means that their fighting becomes a war.”

I thought about that for awhile. “With uniforms and parades and martial music?”

“All of that good stuff,” agreed Morrie. “That's the human way to maximize cooperation. A spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down. And maybe the techniques of killing will change--the Macedonian phalanx hasn't been used for awhile, and neither has the Roman legion that replaced it--but humans will go on having wars.”

“And the superman--the next stage of evolution--them too?”

A slow sigh. “The superman will be an animal, I expect, just like us, so if they don't have wars, our successor race will go back to mere fighting. But.”

“But what?”

“Ah, Max. Unless we exterminate ourselves with those elegant weapons our well funded cooperation keeps turning out--so the cockroach is the successor race--nobody is going to take over from the humanity we know and complain about without a fight. Which means that if your hypothetical supermen ever do take over they figure to be better at war than we are.”