



The WSFA Journal

July 2008

Steve Smith, Editor

Comments? Contributions? Contact editor at wsfa dot org!

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July 4 2008, First Friday

Meeting called to order at 4:04 PM in John Pomeranz and Kathi Overton's front yard.

Treasurer's report: Same as last time.

Capclave Present: There will be a meeting at the Scheiner's tomorrow at 1PM

Capclave Future: The dodo cups have arrived. The rest of his energies are going into Worldcon.

Capclave Far Future: Was changing tires.

Entertivities: The committee needs a new chair; Sam Lubell volunteered.

Publications: Nothing to report

Awards: So far, only 38% of WSFA has voted on the short stories. This is far away from chocolate.

The Committee to Actually Discuss Science Fiction: Reiterates that the First Friday discussion will be of F&SF and the Third Friday discussions will be of Asimov's

Trustees: No report

Rules: There are rules.

Old business: Sam got a card for Ally Parsons.

New business: None

New people: David Grimm attended his first WSFA meeting.

Announcements:

- Lee Strong announced that, in new movies, *Hancock* is good if gross in places, *The Happening* is "ick!" and *Wall-E* is good.
- Bill Lawhorn has rooms at Worldcon for the Capclave parties. They're on the 22nd floor of the party hotel.

Meeting unanimously adjourned at 4:10 PM.

Attendance

Charles Abel, Christine Abel, Mike Bartman, Will Frank, Cathy Green, David Grimm, Bill Lawhorn, Sam Lubell, Michael Nelson, Christopher Neumann, Barry Newton, Judy Newton, Bob Macintosh, Sandra Marshall, Sarah Mitchell, Mike Palmer, George Shaner, Judy Scheiner, Steve Smith, Lee Strong, Ivy Yap.

July 18 2008, Third Friday

Meeting called to order at 9:23 PM at the Madigan residence.

Treasurer's report: 10675.41

Capclave Present: No report

Capclave Future: Harry Turtledove was at the National Press Club Tuesday; Cathy sent him a message asking if he wanted to come to Capclave parties at Worldcon. Bill Lawhorn displayed one of the Dodo cups. They're 12 oz – big enough, for a reasonable amount to drink, but small enough to refill. The sex of the dodo was questioned. [If you can't tell, does it matter? – sgs]

Capclave Far Future: no report

Entertivities: Lee Strong gave some quick movie reviews. *The Dark Knight*: Very powerful story that combines a classic superhero battle with a meditation on the effects of terrorism on society. The climax includes possibly the most outstanding display of heroism ever depicted. *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*: Very good fantasy story. The climax is very strong but the anti-climax is incredibly weak and illogical. *Journey to the Center of the Earth 3D*: An adequate

remake of the Jules Verne novel and the 1959 movie. Lee did not like the 3D effects because it seemed as tho things were being poked or dripped into his eyes.

Publications: Had time management issues, but no journals. [sorry about that – sgs]

Rules: The rules for the mailing lists all translate as “Don’t be a jerk”. The Secretary will circulate rules to the mailing list and post them on the Yahoo group.

Awards: nothing official. Voting is closed but there are no official announcements. There was a discussion of how to pry information out of them.

The **Committee to Actually Discuss Science Fiction** will discuss F&SF at First Friday. The Third Friday will conflict with Worldcon.

Trustees: No report on our work to get right with the Federal government. Our expert, John Pomeranz, is waiting to hear from the Feds. Regarding elections, our next exercise in democracy is the election of 2 members of the Literary Awards Committee in November. Since there is a Capclave between now and then, please be thinking about candidates now and suggest them to the Trustees (Colleen Cahill, Judy Newton and Lee Strong). Only members of the club in good standing can nominate or serve. Candidates must agree to the nomination. There were some jokes made about our member Crystal Pepsi.

They have to read all of the submissions and pick finalists. The Award is getting good press; we got twice as many submissions this year as last year.

Old business: None

New business: There are Fifth Fridays in August and October; Labor Day and Halloween. The Call for Volunteers was made; there was no response.

New people: Sarah Katz, who was at Capclave and knows Judy Kindall, was attending her first meeting.

Announcements:

- From the Hosts: Standard announcement: The white bunny bites, no chocolate for the dogs, leave change on the floor. Nonstandard announcements: Candy is off vending tonight; this means that Kindra is making the cookies. They have a new bunny named Butterball.
- Brian Lewis’s contract on a condo fell apart., but he’s settled on a new condo. He paid money and everything. It’s Annandale/Alexandria area off Little River Turnpike. He’s looking for recommendations for somebody to work on the kitchen and bathroom.
- Barry announced that the Capclave rate has been extended to the end of this month; he has fliers.
- Cathy brought Capclave fliers to distribute.
- Bill Lawhorn announced Worldcon parties. They’re on the 22nd floor of the party hotel. Four nights, six parties. He may survive.

Meeting unanimously adjourned at 9:45

Attendance:

Charles Abel, Christina Abel, Mike Bartman, Drew Bittner, Adrienne Ertman, Carolyn Frank, Erica Ginter, Cathy Green, Sarah Katz, Bill Lawhorn, Brian Lewis, Sandra Marshall, Walter Miles, Sarah Mitchell, Chris Neumann, Barry Newton, Judy Newton, Steve Smith, Laura Somerville, Terry Somerville, Lee Strong, Ivy Yap



Reviews

Hancock

Twentieth Century Fox, 2008

Directed by Peter Berg

Reviewed by Lee Strong

This film certainly is an original take on the superhero trope. Not too many “heroes” are as sleazy and foul mouthed as the villains they fight.

It’s just another day in crime ridden Los Angeles including disastrous interventions by boozy superhero (?) John Hancock (Will Smith). Every citizen seems to hate their foul mouthed savior and he seems to return their collective opinion. Enter struggling advertising man Ray Embrey (Jason Bateman) who wants to save the world and his wife Mary (Charlize Theron) who wants to save her marriage. He treats Hancock like a person and gradually wins the latter’s respect and commitment to be a better person. The mysterious superman is still violent and prone to slipping back to his antisocial ways but now he’s trying. But wait! Just as Hancock seems to have won the respect of the community, a sudden twist reveals his past and a startling new menace! Will Hancock regain his memory and defeat his 3,000 year old nemesis?

I found this film to be adequate but somewhat below average. First of all, it was very foul mouthed, which is not my cup of tea. Much of the language seemed to be appropriate (?) given the situation but I still prefer my superheroes to limit themselves to “Blast!” and “Holy road wheels, Tankman!” More seriously, part of Hancock’s time in prison includes a VERY graphic scene depicting someone’s body part going “where the Sun don’t shine.” Fortunately, there’s some warning so you can either avoid it or memorize it as you prefer. The cinematography was also surprising weak with the camera getting much too close to people’s faces much too often. In addition, I did not find Hancock’s nemesis to be very impressive and their battle seemed more than a little contrived. On the more positive side, the story is very strong with an excellent plot twist redefining the film partway thru. The characters were well drawn and acted.

I therefore rate *Hancock* as 2.5 stars on the 5 star scale. – LS

The Happening

Twentieth Century Fox, 2008

Written, produced and directed by M. Night Shyamalan

Watched, reviewed and critiqued by Lee Strong



“You know you’re in trouble when you’re losing a battle of wits with a head of cabbage.” – Dr. Anonymous

This film wastes no time getting underway. People start dying of a mysterious “event” that causes them to first become disoriented and then suicidal, often in *very* disturbing ways. (The term “The Happening” is not used in the film.) Our heroes, science teacher Elliot Moore (Mark Wahlberg), his wife Alma (Zooey Deschanel), their neighbor Julian (John Leguizamo) and his daughter Jess (Ashlyn Sanchez), flee Philadelphia for the increasingly remote Pennsylvania countryside only to find that the event is following them. In the best scientific tradition – plus a giant clue from a friendly farmer – Elliot gradually works out the event’s parameters and a possible cause for the wind borne toxin but can the Moores find safety before it’s too late?

I found this movie unappealing on almost all fronts. The cinematography was good but almost everything else wasn’t. I consider the Big Plot Device and the supporting speculative gobbledygook to be religious – specifically the Living Planet Gaea Hypothesis – rather than scientific. Since I don’t agree with the Hypothesis, I found the movie’s core idea to be ultimately foolish rather than fearsome. While the principal characters do employ some scientific analysis in order to understand the event, they seem to get as far as they do by sheer dumb luck rather than anything else. The multiple suicides demonstrate some ingenuity of presentation but they’re certainly nothing that you should want to see within 24 hours of eating. And neither is the acting of the live characters, all of whom seem to be limited to various degrees of helplessness. Just because people like these exist in the real world doesn’t mean that you should spend 90 minutes with them.

I therefore rate *The Happening* (2008) as 1.5 stars on the 5 star scale because of an implausible plot supported by wooden acting. – LS

Wall•E



Disney-Pixar, 2008

Directed by Andrew Stanton 1.0

Reviewed by Lee Strong 3.0

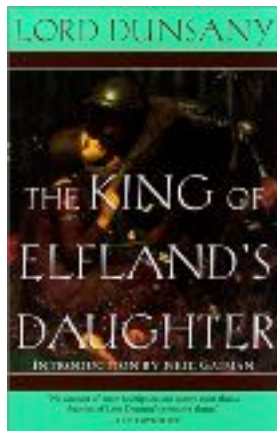
If you wait long enough, anything will come back into fashion once again. Here we have a delightful 1930s slapstick story of an upper class girl meeting and falling in love with a lower class guy. The difference is they’re robots.

It’s just another day on the job for our hero, Wall•E, toiling diligently away to clean up Earth after the mess left by humanity. True, humanity is 695 years overdue for their scheduled return from a 5 year stellar vacation but orders are orders. Since he’s the last functioning robot on the planet, Wall•E keeps himself going physically by scavenging parts and emotionally by watching reruns of *Hello Dolly*. His dutiful bachelor existence is interrupted when a female robot, Eve, arrives to scan the desolate

planet for life more advanced than Wall•E's pet cockroach. When her spaceship shanghai's her back into space, our hero stows away and eventually arrives at the super space liner *Axiom* where slug like humanity waits, 700 years into their 5 year tour. Eve's findings trigger a dusty plan to recolonize Earth but only over the dead hardware of the master robot Autopilot whose secret orders have kept the *Axiom* and its blubbery passengers and crew in orbit for centuries. It's a battle of the robots and humans for the destiny of our planet and two species!

This is probably not the greatest science fiction movie ever animated but it is fun. The characters are well drawn (literally!) and certainly engaging. Their various quirks and conflicts derive from logical electronic and social programming. The major conflict, ultimately, was not about good versus evil but about two concepts of good – a more subtle and interesting theme. I especially liked the way that the sluggish humans rallied and recovered their destiny when their faithful robots revealed the wonders of the universe and the recolonization plan. The camera work is good and various planetary and spacecraft backgrounds beautifully done in their separate ways. The back story is swiftly and appropriately sketched in with various devices. I found the dialog particularly clever. The whale-like humans speak normally but most of the robots use sentence fragments, non-linguistic sounds, facial gestures and body language instead. Neither Wall•E nor Eve ever speak a complete sentence, for example. Instead, thoughts and emotions are conveyed by actions and music. Some of the apparent software programming can be criticized but I'm willing to allow the scriptwriters some dramatic license. And, after all, machines that stay on mission 700 years after their warranties expire deserve some leeway!

I rate *Wall•E* as 3.0 stars on the 5 star scale. And the next time you see a janitor dong his job, say "Thank you." – LS



The King of Elfland's Daughter

Ballantine Books Editions, 1969, 1977

Written by Lord Dunsany

Reviewed by mortal Lee Strong

"A fantasy novel in a class with the Tolkien books!" – L. Sprague de Camp

I must respectfully disagree with Mr. de Camp on this one. I generally find Dunsany's fantasies to be only mildly interesting and this was no exception.

The parliament of the tiny principality of Erl wants there to be magic in their mundane little realm. So they ask their Lord, Alveric, to obtain some. Mindful of their wishes, he first obtains a magic sword from the local witch and then enters the timeless realm of Elfland, which, it seems, is a short distance east of Erl. He wins the heart of Lirazel, the eponymous princess, and returns with her to Erl where she gives him a son, Orion, while trying to fit into the mortal world. Her father sends a magic rune after her and she returns to Elfland. Alveric begins a years long

quest to return to Elfland but the wily king causes it to recede from mortal lands when Alveric is near, thus preventing his son-in-law's reentry.

This classic novel does contain the elements of a fantasy story but in such small doses that the book becomes an emotional energy sink. The characters seem to be mere stock figures of almost no emotional depth and color is applied to the situation and landscape in only the palest of hues. The plot lacks drama and Dunsany's lackadaisical execution and convoluted sentence structure drain what little tension there is. I liked the resolution where Elfland engulfs Erl but that was an exception to the generally boring slog thru this leaden tome. Robert E. Howard could have written the same story in 10 pages and make it sing. Lord Dunsany spends 242 pages and makes it sink.

I rate *The King of Elfland's Daughter* as 1.5 stars on the 5 star scale because reading it became a dreary task rather than an exploration of wonder. – LS

WSFA History

Ten Years Ago

July 1998

There was much excitement over the upcoming *Bucconeer*.

The Journal also had a collection of computer error messages redone as haiku. Example:

A file that big?
It might be very useful.
But now it is gone.

Twenty Years Ago

July 1988

Secretary Mary Morman included a "Sex Role Identification Survey" in the Journal, trying to figure out just how weird we all are.

Letters

From the Editor

Sorry about the lateness of the last couple of issues. Like I said above, time management issues.

-- Steve Smith, Editor, *The WSFA Journal*