



# The WSFA Journal

September 2008

Steve Smith, Editor

Comments? Contributions? Contact editor at wsfa dot org!

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## Minutes

### First Friday, September 5, 2008

Meeting called to order at 9:16 PM, President Cathy Green presiding.

### Treasurer's report:

None

### **Capclave Present:**

Is looking for volunteers (as always). The hotel is still screwing up our reservations and “our” website; they think we’re the Washington Science Foundation. The good news is that we’ll make our room block with no problems. Barry announced that the attendance is up to 197, of which 149 are paid memberships.

### **Capclave Future:**

Is present and thinking.

### **Capclave Far Future:**

Needs a hotel liaison. Sam Pierce and Elspeth Kovar will train someone, but neither will do it this year.

### **Entertivities:**

Provided three televised cons, two in Denver and one in Minneapolis. All had significant science-fictional elements.

### **Publications:**

The Editor did not have the August journal ready. The Webmaster announced that all of the old journals are now online.

### **Rules:**

Nothing.

### **Awards:**

Nothing except the November election (not *that* one. The WSFA one.). Authors and editors will be coming to Capclave.

### **The Committee to Actually Discuss Science Fiction:**

Will discuss the November F&SF after the Capclave meeting. They may do Asimov’s at Third Friday; the Committee won’t be meeting in October because of Capclave.

### **Trustees:**

John Pomeranz was here! He and Judy have talked. Need to file more past tax returns; waiting until IRS puts in exemptions for our group. He needs to talk to the Treasurer to get income statements back to World Fantasy Con.

Lee Strong announced that the Trustees’ Candidates for the Award Committee (to be elected at the First Friday in November) are Charles Abel, Colleen Cahill, Paul Haggerty, and Sandra Marshall. (Nominations from the floor are, of course, welcome.) As there are two open positions, this will force us to actually have a real election for a change.

**Old business:**

Returned to the motion to give Peter Beagle \$250 to bring him even with current WSPA winners. The money will come from WSFA's general treasury. Lee Strong called the question. The vote was 2 against, 3 abstentions, everybody else for. Motion passed.

**New business:**

none

**New people:**

Emily Whitten was attending her third meeting. She used the traditional introduction to plug Discworld Con, which is September 4-6, 2009, in Phoenix (yes, the same weekend as Dragoncon).

**Announcements:**

- Our Honorable Host Sam Scheiner will officially be on sabbatical for a year. This will impact meetings from February to August next year, as he and Judy will be traveling. Cathy Green volunteered to host meetings at her apartment. *[This would be the first time in roughly 40 years that WSFA has held regular meetings in the District – sgs]*
- John Pomeranz announced that his supply of “natural male enhancement” was going away due to its distributor getting busted (so to speak). He also reminded everybody to vote in the other election in November.
- Sam Lubell notes that the Politics & Prose book group will be discussing *MultiReal*, by David Louis Edelman Thursday at 730PM.
- Barry Newton brought Danish beer.
- Mike Walsh displayed real copies of *Other Worlds, Better Lives*, his new Howard Waldrop collection. Copies are \$15 and no, he doesn't have change.
- Lee Strong announces that *Babylon AD* is SF, but the *Deathrace* remake pretty much isn't. He is going to his 35<sup>th</sup> college reunion, where he'll be getting free board.
- Bill Lawhorn met Elizabeth Twitchell in Chicago for 1960's Schlitz.
- Emily Whitten has an interview with Terry Pratchett on SFRevu.

Meeting unanimously adjourned at 10:00 PM

**Attendance:**

Drew Bittner, Adrienne Ertman, Cathy Green, Paul Haggerty, Bill Lawhorn, Brian Lewis, Ernest Lilley, Sam Lubell, Bob Macintosh, Sandra Marshall, Sarah Mitchell, Barry Newton, John Pomeranz, Rebecca Prather, Judy Scheiner, Sam Scheiner, George Shaner, Steve Smith, Lee Strong, Gayle Surette, Michael Walsh, Emily Whitten, Ivy Yap.

**Third Friday, September 19, 2008**

Meeting called to order at 9:20 PM, President Cathy Green presiding.

**Treasurer's report:**

\$10570.33 (active)

**Capclave Present:**

Hotel things are going on; in particular, they have more double-double rooms. Current attendance is 208 attending, 156 paid. There will be more cake and little dodos. Erica Ginter noted that she doesn't have a Sam's Club or Costco card, which may make getting supplies for the con suite difficult. The question was raised of getting a Costco corporate account; this was postponed to New Business.

There are flyers.

**Capclave Future:**

Bill Lawhorn is working on flyers for Capclave. It'll definitely be the third weekend in October.

**Capclave Far Future:**

Is still in the far future. Gayle Surette needs to work with the hotel liaison (whoever that may be).

**Entertivities:**

Book festivals! Next weekend, the National Book Festival will be on the Mall, Saturday 8AM-5PM. Questions about a WSFA dinner were left unanswered. Baltimore Comic Con is next weekend (Sept. 27-28).

**Publications:**

The August issue is on line. No paper copies were available, due to the Editor's printer going weird.

**Awards:**

The WSPA winner has been notified. Four or five of the nominees will either be present or have a representative at Capclave.

**The Committee to Actually Discuss Science Fiction:**

Will discuss Asimov's tonight. There will be a break next month for Capclave, and in November they'll have the double issues to discuss.

**Trustees:**

No change.

**Old business:**

None

**New business:**

Brian Lewis made a motion that we get a Costco or Sam's Club membership for WSFA and/or Capclave. It turns out that the yearly fee includes \$40 per card, and the cards are photo IDs. We'd need at least three (one per host plus one for Capclave). How many cards for business? Brian agreed to table the motion, as there are plenty of people in WSFA with Costco or Sam's Club cards who are willing to help out with supplies.

**New people:**

Victoria Abel was at her first meeting, even though she didn't sign the attendance sheet.

## Announcements:

- From Our Honorable Host, the usual announcements: The white bunny bites. Don't feed chocolate to the dogs. There is lost & found. The money on floor is supposed to be there. The bathroom is closer to completion but there's still no running water in the sink.
- Colleen Cahill reports that the South Dakota Badlands are on another planet.
- Lee Strong received a telephone call from his former employer this week. It seems that he is still considered the expert on a project he worked in 2002. Part of the problem is that 80% of the agency's employees are brand new. In many cases, people are recruited off the street and told at their new employee orientation that they are now the agency experts in their particular subjects. Your Federal tax dollars at play.

Meeting unanimously adjourned at 9:50 PM.

## Attendance

Charles Abel, Christina Abel, Victoria Abel, Drew Bittner, Colleen Cahill, Chuck Divine, Adrienne Ertman, Carolyn Frank, Cathy Green, Paul Haggerty, Bill Lawhorn, Brian Lewis, Sam Lubell, Bob Macintosh, Candy Madigan, John Madigan, Sarah Mitchell, Barry Newton, Judy Newton, George Shaner, Steve Smith, Bill Squire, Lee Strong, Ivy Yap, Madeleine Yeh.

## Reviews

### The Philosopher's Apprentice



James Morrow

(William Morrow/Harper Collins, \$25.95)

Reviewed by Samuel Lubell

The newest novel by Capclave 2008's guest of honor, James Morrow, is science fiction, quite possible his most science fictional novel, despite being published as mainstream. It is an actual novel, not a philosophical treatise. And, while there is plenty of satire here, the characters seem like real people, with real motivations, not just puppets of the author's message.

The book begins when Ph.D. candidate and budding philosopher Mason Ambrose, at his dissertation defense, is challenged by Felix Pielmeister, an anti-Darwinist on the dissertation committee with a personal grudge against Mason. When Felix asks if Mason's Darwinism means that God is dead, Mason criticizes "Dr. Pielmeister's presumably competent God" and talks his way into withdrawing from his Ph.D. Jobless he takes an offer to tutor the amnesiac late teenage daughter of Edwina Sabacthani, a molecular geneticist. Mason originally replies, "I'm a neo-Darwinist atheist, Dawson. The average American mother would rather fill the position with Humbert Humbert," but eventually takes the high paying job.

While teaching, he explores the island, eventually discovering two other memory impaired girls of differing ages, both of whom have similar tutors and who insist that Edwina is their mother.

Eventually, it becomes clear that the three girls are all clones of Edwina, grown in a vat and crammed with facts through a machine-human DUNCE cap. But all three girls lack a superego. Mason decides

the best way to give his student, Londa, a conscience is to present her with philosophical readings combined with acting out moral dilemmas. But he soon learns that his student is a literal *tabula rosa* who adopts each philosophy as it is presented. When taught about stoicism she begins to torture herself, when taught about the hedonists, who only seek pleasure, she attempts to seduce Mason. Eventually, Londa learns how to behave like a civilized women, or at least, Mason fears, how to mimic one. So finally, Mason teaches her Christian ethics and Londa decides that the world needs a Second Coming of Christianity.

When Edwina dies, each girl inherits a billion dollars and as Londa begins her career as a celebrity saint and Dame Quixote, Mason begins to live a normal life as a bookstore owner. He falls in love, marries, and almost has a child. But his wife's medical condition leads them to decide to abort. Then, months later, the couple is followed by a stalker who turns out to be an adult immaculoid constructed from the aborted fetus by radical anti-abortionists using the same process that created Londa. This brings Mason back into Londa's orbit and the two have a series of adventures as Londa's moral compass becomes even more skewed. This gives the author plenty of opportunities to skewer religion, philosophy, and politics, sometimes all at once. The book's climax, as Londa hijacks the *Titanic Redux*, forcing the billionaire passengers to become servants for the third class passengers, eventually leads Mason to face the real life version of the moral dilemmas he constructed for his student.

So is this science fiction? Absolutely. One of the classic forms of science fiction is to explore the implications and results of a new technology. Although usually such a plot would revolve around the scientific or physical implications, here the moral and philosophical implications are explored. Essentially, the entire narrative is devoted to the implications of the cloning, aging, and imprinting process. While animals have been cloned, we do not yet have a way of cloning humans, no way of artificially aging such a clone to a specific age, and certainly no way to artificially cram years of study into a person at once.

The book has a lot of philosophy of course, and the type of satire, sometimes over the top, that Morrow does so well. Of course, books like this are funniest if you agree with the writer's pro-Darwinist, anti-religious right views. But such readers may become somewhat worried as Londa takes these views to their logical extremes. Maybe, while having Londa clone religious and business leaders to present plays in which John Paul II becomes pregnant and Ronald Reagan denounces his support of death squads, Morrow is also satirizing liberal extremism just as much as its conservative counterpart.

*The Philosopher's Apprentice* and its predecessor *The Last Witchfinder* represent a major leap in Morrow's writing. Both novels are as good as *Only Begotten Daughter* and *Towing Jehovah* in their outrageous concepts and telling satire, but better in their characterization and more literary writing style. Highly recommended.



## The Dark Knight

Warner Brothers/Legendary Pictures/DC Comics/Syncopy, 2008

Directed by Christopher Nolan, aka The Reimaginer

Reviewed by Mr. Strong

“Some men just want to see the world burn.” – Alfred Pennyworth (Michael Caine), *The Dark Knight*.

This film is one of the best superhero movies that I have ever seen. It combines a classic story of good versus evil with a powerful meditation on the effects of terrorism on American society. It concludes with one of the most outstanding acts of heroism that I have ever seen depicted in film or reality.

Life seems to be getting better in corrupt Gotham City. The Batman – reintroduced in *Batman Begins* – has the Mob running scared. New heroes have emerged including the slightly oily Mayor Anthony Garcia (Nestor Carbonell) and Gotham’s own “White Knight” District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart). Unfortunately for the city, new and more dangerous villains have also emerged led by the psychotic Joker (brilliantly portrayed by Heath Ledger) who preys on mobsters and citizens alike and shakes the great city to its core with terror.

Our story opens with a brutal yet cunning bank robbery that introduces The Joker, his twisted brilliance, and his disdain for human life. Meanwhile, the Batman (Christian Bale) is busy rounding up some loose ends from the earlier movie, putting wannabee Batfans out of business, and keeping an eye on the new District Attorney and his lady love Rachel Dawes (Maggie Gyllenhaal) – who just happens to be Batman/Bruce Wayne’s “oldest friend.” D.A. Dent turns in effective performances as a trial lawyer and as an investigator and wins the admiration of Gotham’s beleaguered citizens including embattled police lieutenant James Gordon (Gary Oldham). The Mob chieftains (Eric Roberts and others) are initially very leery about the Joker, especially when he kills a couple of their own, but they warm up to the clown prince when Batman nabs their chief money launderer, Mr. Lau (Chin Han). Dent indicts scores of mobsters, the streets are cleaner than they have been in a long time, and it looks like Bruce Wayne can hang up his cowl. But faster than you can say “Zap! Powie!” the worm turns as the psychotic genius begins his reign of terror, corrupting Gotham’s finest, tempting the terrified, and murdering whoever stands in his way. “Some men just want to see the world burn.”

I found this to be a magnificent movie on all levels with great characters, plot, gadgets and setting. Batman/Bruce Wayne, Pennyworth, Dent, Gordon and the other citizens of the crime ridden metropolis large and small are well drawn and well acted. The new and old gadgets add many gee whiz grace notes to the human drama. That drama pits larger than life men and women against each other, not just in a physical contest but also in a moral contest for Gotham’s soul. Will the Joker succeed in bringing everyone down to his level of hell, or is the city full of people willing to believe in good? The answer is “some of both.” Some citizens fall into the pit, others rise to the occasion. We follow each character as he or she makes the ultimate choice to fight evil or to succumb to it.

The entire story gains heart stopping power from director Nolan’s gripping vision. In this film and its tightly connected prequel, Nolan makes Gotham City a typical American city (played primarily by Chicago) rather than Tim Burton’s 1989 nightmare of gloom and shadow. That makes the story all the more immediate as we realize that this, or something very much like it, could happen to us! Will an incorruptible superhero arrive in time to save us, or must we depend on fallible men and women? The multiple threads of the story are tightly woven together and reinforce each other as the epic battle unfolds in Gotham’s skyscrapers, underground streets, and the hearts and minds of all too human beings.

That said, this 159 minute epic is not without room for improvement. It is long and some of the subplots and scenes could be trimmed without harming the story. I could see some of the plot devices unfolding several minutes before the characters could. It’s always a bad sign when an amateur can outthink the professionals. And many will find the depiction of police and vigilante tactics uncomfortable. On the other hand, that’s both realistic and especially meaningful in our post 9/11 world. What would *you* do when terror is no mere abstraction but a clownish death’s mask leering over *your* loved ones?

I rate *The Dark Knight* as 5.0 stars on the 5 star scale because of its powerful examination of the effects of terrorism on society and the role of courage and constitution in fighting evil. – LS

## Babylon A.D.



Twentieth Century Fox, 2008  
 Directed by Mathieu Kassovitz  
 Reviewed by “Strong Man”

This film is an adequate examination of human courage set in a cyberpunk future world.

Our story opens with our unlikely mercenary point of view character Thoorop (Vin Diesel) trying to enjoy a meal of fresh cat when paramilitary thugs burst in and kidnap him for an interview with gang boss Gorsky (Gerard Depardieu).

The latter wants to hire Thoorop to escort a young woman, Aurora (Melanie Thierry), and her guardian, Sister Rebeka (Michelle Yeoh), from a Mongolian convent to New York City. The money’s good so our anti-hero agrees despite a creepy prediction that they will die in New York. The middle third of the film documents their cyberpunk journey across Asia and Canada imperiled by robot warplanes and their own sleazy traveling companions. When they get to sumptuous, clean and well lit New York City, all seems well in hand but double crosses multiply swiftly and the real reason why the High Priestess of the Noelite Church (Charlotte Rampling) wants the young woman is revealed in a blaze of weapons play.

I found this film to be not great but entertaining enough. The characters rise above their clichéd origins to show real courage and grace on their personal journeys. The cinematography ably realizes their cyberpunk future. Depicting New York City as the bright island of hope in contrast to decaying Russia was particularly well played since New York is usually the “Gotham City” in such pieces. I thought the interaction of science and religion shown here to be particularly interesting. Most science fiction simply pretends that religion doesn’t exist. Making a realistic if fictional church a major player in the world of tomorrow was a bold move and one with many layers of obvious and unobvious meanings. Different people will take different lessons away from this film but the final ending is full of hope for humanity.

I rate *Babylon A.D.* as 2.5 stars on the 5 star scale because its violence and deception are interspersed with futuristic technology, sociology, courage and personal development. – LS

## Short Story

### All Things to All People

By Lee Strong

The White House tour guide stopped so abruptly that two of her tour group bumped into her. She didn’t notice.

“M-m-mister P-p-president,” she stammered. “I’m sorry. I thought that you were at the Inauguration.”



The worthy thus addressed chuckled and said, “Well, I am. You forget that I can be in many places at once.” He stood up and walked around his desk to stand near the middle of his office.

He gestured expansively. “Come on in, Cherry. Bring your tour group. This office is for the American people, not just the President.”

Thus encouraged, Cherry ushered her charges into the Oval Office and arranged them in a semi-circle a respectful distance away from the Chief Executive. The seasoned President, tastefully clad in a conservative charcoal grey suit with white shirt, red tie and tiny American flag pin, waited, smiling at the future voters.

One of the latter whispered to another, “He looks just like the original President Reagan.”

“And he sounds like him, too,” replied her peer.

The worthy thus analyzed smiled and continued in his gravely Western accent. “Well, I’d certainly like to welcome you young ladies to the White House and to congratulate you on winning the 2044 National Girl Scout Cookie Selling Contest. It’s not every troop that can sell 228,562 boxes of cookies.”

A hand shot up.

“Yes, Melody?”

“Mr. President, how do you know how many boxes of cookies we sold?”

Another Scout jumped in without raising her hand. “And how do you know Melody’s name?”

The President smiled, particularly at the second questioner. “Well, Ziyi, that’s a good question. But you’re all bright young people. Have *would* the President of the United States know your names, hometowns and cookie selling records?” He waited patiently.

Another hand shot up. “Because you’re a hologram?”

The Chief Executive smiled and shrugged slightly, self depreciatingly. “Well, Teresa, that’s close but not quite it. Does anyone else have a guess?” He paused. “Sharon, you scored straight A’s in computer science. Do you have a guess?” He smiled encouragingly.

The youngster addressed drew in a deep breath and answered. “You’re really a software program running on a Department of Information computer somewhere. What we’re seeing is a hologram but the real *you* is a multitasking program accessing our Scouting, school and security records. You’re recognizing our faces from security cameras somewhere. That’s also how you can be at your successor’s Inauguration as well as here.”

The Presidential image beamed approvingly. “That’s right, Sharon. And that’s why I can’t offer to shake your hands as a gentleman should. I may look real but I don’t have a physical hand to shake.” He gave a wistful smile expressing his deep disappointment at this failing.

Another hand popped up. “On *Star Trek*, holograms can shake hands. Why can’t you?”

The President looked serious. “*Star Trek* has better special effects than the Federal Government does. Their holograms have lots of special powers that real holograms don’t have.” The young Scouts digested the difference between television and reality thoughtfully.

“Now, do any of you have any interest in politics?”

Several sets of eyes turned towards one young woman. Taking the cue, the President focused his attention and asked, “Victoria, you’re troop leader of Troop 392, class president and junior debate champion. Do you have what it takes to make a President of the United States?”

“I don’t know, Mr. President. I haven’t thought that far ahead,” she confessed. But an expression that the current Chief Executive knew quite well crossed her face.

“Well, don’t rule it out,” he encouraged. “But if you’re interested, you’ll need to get your computer science scores up. Maybe Sharon can give you a hand with the programming. The American Dream is still true: any boy or girl can grow up to write the President.”

Victoria and Sharon looked at each other. In the resulting pause, Cherry asked “Does anyone else have a question for the President?”

Another hand went up. “Yes, Cindy.”

“Mr. President, my father says that taxes are way too high. What do you say to that?”

Cherry looked aghast but the President gently waved her to silence. “Well, Cindy, as a Republican, I agree with your father. Taxes are too high. I have recommended that Congress cut taxes across the board to encourage economic growth and to allow American citizens to keep more of their own money.”

Before anyone else could ask a question, a commo chimed softly but clearly. The President looked at his wrist. “Well, if you’ll excuse me, it’s noon. President-elect Franklin D.R. Kennedy is taking the oath of office. So, it’s time for me to retire to private life. Good bye, everyone, and study hard.” He waved goodbye.

As the Scouts watched (and waved), the Presidential image shrank several centimeters but added several kilograms of muscle. His grey hair darkened, his face lost years, and a dimple appeared in his chin. His suit lightened in color and became more flamboyant in cut. The shirt became light blue and the tie dark blue. The pin changed from a flag to an earth globe and flower.

“The youth of America are always welcome in the People’s House,” said the President in a slightly nasal New England voice. “Cindy, let me say this about your question: we Democrats agree with your father, and, of course, your mother as well. Taxes are too high. Therefore, I will recommend that Congress give targeted tax relief to all Americans so that working people such as your father, and, of course, your mother can enjoy the same benefits as millionaires do.”

“Thank you, Mr. President.”

## **WSFA History**

### **Ten Years Ago**

#### **September 1998**

Along with the Minutes, the Journal contained a hard- hitting review of the “nightmarish fantasy” *The Cat in the Hat*, discussing its Freudian symbolism.

### **Twenty Years Ago**

#### **September 1988**

Much discussion of the possibility of WSFA buying a new computer. Much discussion of PC vs. Macintosh.

### **Thirty Years Ago**

#### **September 1978**

There was discussion of a theater party for the *Lord of the Rings* movie (the one that everybody would really, really like to forget about.)

Iguanacon II, the 1978 Worldcon was imminent, despite fears of its demise. Sue Wheeler passed on a suggestion to send kumquats to Iggy chair Tim Kyger. (One of the more popular fannish t-shirts at the con read "Not A Kumquat".)

## Letters

### From the Editor

As I've said before, I'm ~~a doctor~~ an editor, not a writer. The Journal content comes from those who submit it, not from me. If you would like to see something here, send it on in.

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

### Another Mystery Solved

Steve,

Thanks for publishing the August 2008 *WSFA Journal*. In that issue, you ask whatever happened to the Sturdy Woman... er, ah, Sturdy Wooden Cabinet? Answer: The club gave it to Joe Mayhew in 1992. The September 1992 Journal had an article to that effect.

Lee Strong