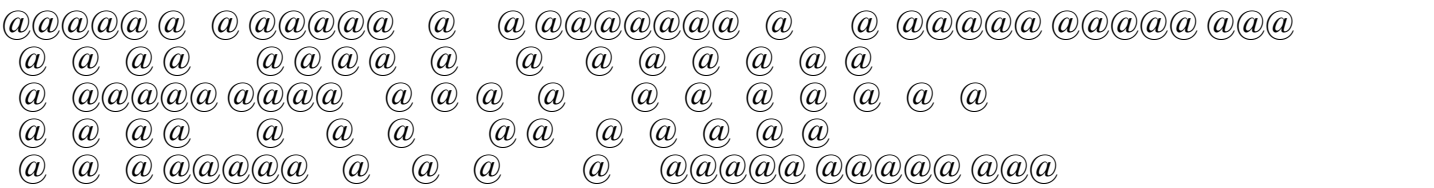

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 06/28/96 -- Vol. 14, No. 52

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in the Middletown cafeteria Wednesdays at noon.

DATE	TOPIC
07/31	Hugo Ballots due

The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

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Backissues available at http://www.mt.lucent.com/~ecl/MTVOID/backissues.html
or http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/MT_Void/.

1. URL of the week:
http://www.metu.edu.tr/~www69/users/gokce/sf_defn.html. It may be impossible to define "science fiction," but that hasn't stopped people from trying. This page has several dozen atempts. [-ecl]

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2. We have heard that there is a new bookstore in Red Bank, The Book Pit, at the back of 17 Wallace Street (at back of the Dorn's Photo building), that specializes in SF (mostly used paperbacks)

and horror. Their flyer says that they are open from 10 AM to 8 PM seven days a week. [-ecl]

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3. I once had a supervisor, back when I worked for Burroughs, back when there was a Burroughs, who was studying to be an accountant. And why accountancy? He told me that accountancy was really where it all was at. In America today the people with the real power are the accountants. They control the corporations, they control the museums, they control everything. It all comes down to money and the people who really control the money are the accountants. He was studying not to be a clerk, he was to be admitted into the ranks of the all-powerful, the accountants. But he had to be wrong about that. I picked up a copy of MBA Magazine at one point and discovered who really runs it all. It is the business administrators. America, I was told, is run by corporations and the people who keep them alive and vibrant are the business administrators. MBAs are on the forefront. They are the prime movers of the country. It is not the politicians, regardless of what it looks like when you read the newspapers, regardless of the commotion over elections. The people who really keep things going forward are the MBAs.

Louis B. Mayer, the man who ran MGM Studios during its heyday, knew that it was really the film industry that counted. He at one point said that one of the great living classical musicians and composers was a failure. When asked what he meant by that Mayer said "Well, he doesn't write for the movies, does he?"

The universe is a big place. If we really could see the size of the whole thing and the size of our planet, and our own size within the planet, the true realization of how small we are would shock us. It would completely destroy our egos. We have to inflate our value and the value of what we believe in to be THE IMPORTANT THING IN THE UNIVERSE because if we realized how small and unimportant we were we could not function. The is the reason so much of humanity feels that they themselves have the secret of the ONE TRUE RELIGION. I mean there are people who think that their variant of

their religion--synod of 1946 or some such thing--is really what God had in mind all along. He was just waiting for the convocation of 1946 for it all to be revealed. I should probably stay away from religion here since the reader may well have just such ideas. Really what inspired this discussion is not religion but Shakespeare.

I saw in a double feature on a Sunday afternoon film versions of JULIUS CAESAR and HAMLET. (Ah, the video revolution. I doubt that the Globe Theater ever had double features. It was impossible in his day to see two plays back to back if you were not royalty. Even Shakespeare probably never saw two of his own plays performed back-to-back. And you know, he might have been better off.) Each of these plays and HENRY V show that Shakespeare had the same prejudice of inflating the importance of his particular avocation. Shakespeare was among other things and above all else a wordsmith. He may have been the greatest wordsmith of his day and perhaps of

many of the days since. But he sure thought that the real power in the world was in words. Look at these plays. In Hamlet the play is the thing wherein to catch the conscience of the king. Claudius has committed the perfect crime. He has killed the king and taken his place. Now months later he betrays himself. And how? Well he gets so taken up in a play that he forgets himself and starts making incriminating comments. Words are a powerful weapon. In JULIUS CAESAR Brutus has given his speech on the death of Caesar to the people of Rome and they are eating out of his hand. A few words and all suspicions are allayed. What a wordsmith! But he makes a mistake. He lets Marc Anthony speak after him. Anthony is bound not to say anything against the conspirators. And even within that restriction, Anthony turns the crowd. When he is done with his speech the crowd is ready to kill Brutus and all the conspirators. It probably is not realistic, but in Shakespeare's plot at least the best wordsmith is the man who has true power in this society.

Then there is HENRY V. Henry has a motley crew of soldiers facing a formidable enemy. But Henry has a secret weapon. It is a Killer Speech he has been saving for just this occasion to unleash on the French. He gives the St. Crispin's Day speech and army goes wild.

In a killing frenzy they go out and give England one of the great military victories it ever had. The figures quoted are 10,000 French and 29 English killed though more recently it has been estimated that the figures were closer to 5000 and 200 respectively. In any case, it clearly was a great military victory. It must have been a great speech. Well, perhaps not. This was the battle of Agincourt, the first--or at any rate one of the first--battles in which the longbow was brought into play. The English could create a rain of heavy arrows and the French very obligingly bogged themselves down in the mud so they could not move out of the way. It was a slaughter. And words had very little to do with why. But wordsmiths do not generally give credit to the value of strategy or technology. They want you to think that words are the real key to power. More recently we saw this approach used in the recreation of the Battle of Stirling (a.k.a. the Battle of Stirling Bridge) in last year's winner of the Best Picture Oscar BRAVEHEART. Rather than recreate William Wallace's strategy to use the bridge to cut the English army in half, which would have been more expensive to film, Mel Gibson apparently chose to tell it having Wallace give a really inspiring speech and a brute force attack without a bridge in the sequence at all. So we are still giving wordsmiths credit where the credit should go elsewhere. But it has a noble heritage going back at least to Shakespeare, who comes off having the same sort of vanity that my supervisor at Burroughs had. [-mrl]

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4. WAR OF THE WORLDS: GLOBAL DISPATCHES edited by Kevin J. Anderson (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-10353-9, 1996, 288pp, US$22.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This certainly seems to be the year for pastiches. First there was the anthology RESURRECTED HOLMES (edited by Marvin Kaye), which is a series of Sherlock Holmes adventures purporting to be written by various famous authors. And now there is WAR OF THE WORLDS: GLOBAL DISPATCHES, a series of accounts of the Martian invasion first described by H. G. Wells, mostly purporting to be written by

various famous authors and other personages. (A few are satisfied merely to use famous people as their main characters.) Interestingly, while there is a story in RESURRECTED HOLMES credited to Wells, there is no story here credited to Doyle. (Then again, there have been earlier Holmes "War of the Worlds" stories, notably Manly Wade Wellman's SHERLOCK HOLMES'S WAR OF THE WORLDS.) The only overlapping "authors" between the two volumes are Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. P. Lovecraft, which may seem odd considering that Holmes and the invasion were contemporaneous, but while the invasion stories are written by or about the participants, the Holmes stories are described as having merely been composed by their authors on the basis of notes sent to them, so the authors there tend to be from a later period.

The first story in an anthology is normally the strongest, but here I suspect that it is more that Mike Resnick is the biggest draw. "The Roosevelt Dispatches" by Resnick, while amusing enough, is hardly a strong story, centering mostly around a rather obvious (if not predictable) ending. (It also seems to assume the Martians had landed only in Cuba. I don't object to the stories contradicting each other, but they shouldn't blatantly contradict Wells.)

Kevin J. Anderson's "Canals in the Sand" has Percival Lowell trying to signal the Martians in response to what he believed were canals on the Martian surface. It is more a "pre-invasion" story, and ends just when things start to get interesting, though readers familiar with the original story should have no difficulty filling in the rest.

The main character in Walter Jon Williams's "Foreign Devils" is the Dowager Empress of China and Williams manages to give us a glimpse into a very different world than the other, more Western-centered stories. Because of this, it is one of the best stories in the anthology, with Williams adding interesting and even somewhat alien characters and outlooks to the familiar invasion story. That this happened to be a very interesting period of Chinese history helped, of course, but Williams seems to have been the only one to think of it.

Daniel Marcus's "Blue Period" centers around Picasso but seemed rather flat. Someone who knew Picasso's life and work better than

I might have gotten more out of it. This is the major drawback of this book--for many of the stories, a knowledge of the main character's life and work is necessary. The result is that the market of people who will enjoy or appreciate all or even most of the stories is smaller than one might think, and considerably smaller, I fear, than the number of people who will be attracted by the theme of the anthology.

"The Martian Invasion Journals of Henry James" by Robert Silverberg is perhaps the best-written piece in the book--not surprising when you consider Silverberg's talent. It is also the least original, however, in that Silverberg follows mainly to the story as told in the original, but with Wells and James as participants. (This story should possibly have been placed first to give readers a good solid background for the other stories.)

Janet Berliner's "True Tale of the Final Battle of Umslopogaas the Zulu" has both Winston Churchill and an H. Rider Haggard character in a way that is not entirely convincing or satisfying. Perhaps it's that having three foci (with Wells's Martians being the third) makes the story just too elaborate.

Howard Waldrop's "Night of the Cooters" was not, apparently, the inspiration for this book, though this 1987 tale of the Texas Rangers versus the Martians certainly predates everything else here and is in fact the only story not written specifically for this volume. (Several other stories have appeared in magazine form before the book came out, but were nonetheless written for the book.) In any case, Waldrop should get a few extra points for originality, even though that originality is not obvious here. (There have of course been other stories inspired by the Wells novel, but Waldrop's is probably the best-known.)

Doug Beeson's "Determinism and the Martian War, with Relativistic Corrections" has Albert Einstein thinking about inertial frames of reference while the Martians invade, and "Soldier of the Queen" by Barbara Hambly has Rudyard Kipling meeting the Martians in India.

George Alec Effinger's "Mars: The Home Front" takes a completely different approach than the other stories. Rather than being the story of the Martian invasion of Earth as told by yet another Earthly eyewitness, it is the story of what was happening back on Mars, as told by John Carter. Because Effinger is not describing the same events that everyone else is, this story is a welcome change from the similarity of all the others, and proves that even when given an apparently limiting set of constraints, a good writer can still break out and write something new and fresh.

"A Letter from St. Louis" by Allen Steele, featuring Joseph Pulitzer, is a return to the idea of a fairly standard retelling of the story.

Mark W. Tiedemann's "Resurrection" is primarily a letter purported to be written by Leo Tolstoy. There is more of alternate history feel to this than to most of the others (with the possible exception of the Williams), since the framing story is set in an alternate world from the one we live in.

"Paris Conquers All" by Gregory Benford and David Brin (Jules Verne) is an attempt to tie a Vernian technological solution into the story that did not work for me. "To Mars and Providence" by Don Webb is a reasonably decent attempt to combine the "Elder Gods" of H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos with the Martian invasion. But while Daniel Keys Moran and Jodi Moran try to evoke Mark Twain in "Roughing It During the Martian Invasion," they don't quite succeed; you get a story with a riverboat and some snappy asides, but no real Twain spirit. (Maybe I'm just too familiar with Twain, having read just about everything of his in print, including JOAN OF ARC and CHRISTIAN SCIENCE.)

"To See the World End" by M. Shayne Bell is purportedly by Joseph Conrad and is another story that, like Tiedemann's "Resurrection," has a much stronger alternate history feel than the rest of the stories. Most of the stories seem like stories set in the fictional world of Wells, while these two seem as though they are set in our world in the midst of a Martian invasion.

"After a Lean Winter" by Dave Wolverton is set in the far north and told from the point of view of Jack London. It seems to be a good copy of his style, but it's not a style I'm particularly taken by.

I usually like Connie Willis's work, but her pseudo-academic work, "The Soul Selects Her Own Society: Invasion and Repulsion: A Chronological Reinterpretation of Two of Emily Dickinson's Poems: A Wellsian Perspective" wears out its welcome rather quickly. With forty numbered and twelve unnumbered footnotes in its eight pages, it may be more appealing to academics. I found my eyes glassing over after about three pages. The again, that may be the intent.

An afterword by Benford and Brin again in the voice of Verne concludes with a plea that we go to Mars. [-ecl]

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5. COLD COMFORT FARM (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

> Capsule: Thomas Hardy meets P. G. Wodehouse. This BBC/Thames TV co-production is a remake production of Stella Gibbon's 1932 novel lampooning the Gothic rural novels. In the 1930s a modern young woman goes to live with relatives on a bleak farm with deep, dark

> secrets. Rather than being pulled into the melodrama, she pulls her relatives out of it. This is really a one-joke film, but the production values are high, the style light, and the pace is rapid. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4)

With the death of her father, the thoroughly-modern Flora Poste (played by Kate Beckinsale) must find some other relatives off of whom to live. Little knowing what she is letting herself in for she chooses to live with her Aunt's family at dark and mordant Cold Comfort Farm. She hopes to collect enough experience to write a novel. The farm is a queer and moody, dirty place with many a dark secret left too long to fester. And as the smoky vortex of black emotion reaches out to engulf the poor, innocent Flora, with a knowing smile she effortlessly stamps it flat. The plot, based on the 1932 novel by Stella Gibbons, is basically one elaborate joke. It says that all the Gothic evil as described in the old potboilers is no match for the spunk and pluck of a modern woman. Nevertheless, though it is obvious early that that is where the film is headed, it does tell its particular joke with a great deal of style and wit. The film is a co-production of the BBC and Thames television, a remake of the BBC's memorable 1971 production which starred a terrific Alastair Sim as Amos Starkadder, the apparent master of Cold Comfort Farm and self-styled hellfire preacher of the local sect of "Quiverers." In this version no less an actor than Ian McKellen takes the role, but sadly falls considerably short of (at least my memories of) the original

performance. The real head of the Starkadder household, however, is Flora's Aunt Ada (Sheila Burrell) who stays hidden, never leaving her room, as she broods endlessly about an incident in her youth when she saw "something nasty in the woodshed." That incident and the effect it had on the Starkadder family hangs over the entire film. There is clearly a collision course shared by this iron matriarch of the household, determined to maintain her power, letting nothing change and her young niece Flora determined to set the household right, at least right by her own definition.

This is a somewhat surprising film to come from John Schlesinger, best known for directing thrillers like MARATHON MAN, THE BELIEVERS, and PACIFIC HEIGHTS. Here he has great fun poking holes in the melodrama created by writers like the Brontes and Thomas Hardy and even by his own film, FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD. On the other hand, his high society London scenes smack a little more of the elegant vacuity of the upper crust in P. G. Wodehouse's stories. Notable also in the cast are Eileen Atkins as Ada's perpetually fretful daughter Judith and Rufus Sewell as her handsome and overly-lusty son Seth Starkadder. Even on the wide screen, this film has the look and feel of a television production and it has it even more so for having already been produced by the BBC once before. Nevertheless, it feels like a quality TV

production and Schlesinger manages a wry wit throughout. American audiences may have some trouble understanding the thick British accent in which most of the dialog is spoken. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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It is easier to fight for one's principles
than to live up to them.--Alfred Adler