

The WSFA Journal

The Official Newsletter of the Washington Science Fiction Association

March 2006 – ISSN 0894-5411

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From the Editor...

This issue is a bit rough around the edges, but between my travel and working on other WSFA projects it got a bit shortchanged. Which is not to say I had trouble filling up its pages. With regard to that all I can say is that once a WSFAn starts writing, it's hard to get them to stop. Well, when one considers the alternative, I'd have to say that's not really a bad thing. You'll have to judge for yourself.

Though we didn't make my goal of getting the Waldrop Capclave chapbook out, that's only because I wanted one more change to the layout. That's probably just as well, as it means I can make sure it gets done well, not just done.

Ernest Lilley – Editor



Essays, Letters and Other Musings

In Memoriam: Octavia Butler

by Samuel Lubell

Science fiction writer Octavia Butler died February 25, of a stroke.

She is a rare example of a science fiction writer who achieved enormous critical acclaim outside the science fiction world, including the MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" yet who never left the genre. She also won two Hugos and two Nebulas. Her work makes an excellent case for the need for more diversity among science fiction writers; it is hard to imagine a white male writing *Wild Seed*, about a African shapechanging woman who challenges a body-snatching immortal's breeding program or her *Kindred*, about the interactions between a time-traveling modern day African-American woman and her white slaveholder ancestor. Also notable among her works are the Xenogenesis (aka Lilith's Brood) series about the relationship between humans and human-alien hybrids, the *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* novels about the founder of a new religion in a post-breakdown United States (a third novel was in the works and with her death readers may never know how it would have turned out), and her recent *Fledgling* vampire novel.

Her work is notable for the emphasis on the humanity of her characters – be they half human hybrids, world-ruling telepaths, or future Messiahs. Genetics is also a common theme. Many of her recent books have come out from

Four Walls, Eight Windows, a small press, rare for an author of her stature.

Readers unfamiliar with her work would do well to start with her Hugo and Nebula award winning story "Bloodchild" (online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/bloodchi.htm>) and the Xenogenesis/Lilith's Brood series.

Mike B's Guide to Email Listing

By Mike Bartman

Here's Part Two in Mike's review of email list options. There's a lot of good info in here, which deserves to be considered as we make our way forward. As Mike says at the end, the goal is to get the best result for the club, however we decide to do this. My goal has been to make sure all our voices are heard while we sort it out, so hopefully these pieces will add to that agenda.

Recap

If you remember all the way back to last month, I covered the basics of mailing lists and associated concerns. This month we look into specific options WSFA has available for meeting our e-mail list needs, and some of the tradeoffs involved. Our choices fall into three broad categories, with multiple options in each. The categories and some of the options are:

- Free Hosting Services (Yahoo Groups, Google Groups)
- Commercial Hosting Services (Lyris, ListPlex, Listserv.com, Frontpages)
- Private Hosting Service Using Free Software (Majordomo, Mailman, Listserv Lite)

There are differences between each of the specific solutions in each category, but in general the options in each category share similar characteristics. The listed examples are not the only ones in each category, but they are representative.

Free Hosting Services usually place ads in or around messages to pay for the service. They make no guarantees that the service will remain available, and termination of service may be without warning and archived messages will not be preserved. Some may lay claim to perpetual right to use the content posted to the list (Yahoo Groups does this for public lists, such as our current Yahoo Groups list). Most retain the right to bar service to individuals for violation of the Terms Of Service (TOS), and these terms are generally very broad, interpretation is up to the

service, and there's no appeal, so any member who runs afoul of this will not be able to participate further. A list may be removed for the same reason, without notice. None that I could find support plain text e-mail users...all allow such messages, but do not restrict MIME messages, so you must be able to deal with MIME if anyone on the list posts it. Those are the common downsides. The upside? They are free, generally have good features, have excellent availability, let you have as many lists as you like, and are usually available through both e-mail and web browsers for reading and posting messages. Some have good or bad features peculiar to that specific service. More on this later.

Commercial Hosting Services cost money. Some are affordable, some less so, but most will charge more if the list's mail volume goes up. The TOS are generally not as all-inclusive or broadly limiting of liability for the provider as with free services. None of the services I looked at support non-MIME users much better than the free services, though some do support plain-text in the digest mode. Most, but not all, offer several lists as a package, which would be good for WSFA, since we want an announce list, a chat list and perhaps lists for Capclave use. Features vary widely, and some companies are more oriented toward e-mail marketing than discussion lists of the sort we are interested in. If we decide to go this route, we will need to do a very thorough investigation and comparison of the offerings. Some of these services run the same software that we can get free...which leads to the last major category.

The Private Hosting Service Using Free Software option is what Keith was providing, and still provides, though not through the WSFA domain name any longer. There are several e-mail list programs available at no charge. Some are easier to run than others, but all are within the capability of several WSFA members to set up and operate, and some are the equal of the software used by the commercial providers...or even identical. Since the source code is available for these, we could customize them to do exactly what we want done, including support for plain-text users without restricting the ability of others to stay with MIME in their mail. This is not an option we have with any other solution I found.

With private hosting we would have the option to backup and keep copies of our list archive to allow settling of disagreements, academic research, or just nostalgia in future years, and the service would be around as long as we care to keep it going. No risk of it evaporating overnight at the whim of strangers, and we can determine our own policies for who can use it,

who can't, and how you switch between these states. Cost could be anything from zero to a couple of hundred dollars a month or more, depending on how we set it up. The major downside and expense for this option is that WSFA would have to have use of a computer with an internet connection that is always up to run the software on, and someone would have to take on the task of doing so. Keith did this for years at no cost to WSFA, so it's not beyond the realm of possibility that we could find another member willing and able to do the same.

If a member owns a broadband link with spare static IP addresses, and is willing to park a WSFA machine at their home or business, this would keep the cost very low...perhaps even free. That person wouldn't have to handle management of the server or its software...that could be a different member accessing it over the net as needed (though an occasional reboot might be needed). Physical security of the machine, and power outages would be issues with this solution.

Another option is to "co-locate" at an ISP site. This is at the "more expensive" end of the cost spectrum, but we could use the same computer for our website as well, or even rent space on it to other groups and share the cost. It is still likely to cost more than the other options, except perhaps some of the commercial services' higher end options, but security and backup power are generally taken care of well in these setups, and in some cases, backups as well.

That's the layout of our options at a general level. Now for some specific details. Only things which vary from the generic descriptions already given will be covered here.

Free Services

YAHOO Groups

Yahoo is the current WSFA list provider. It has a number of things to recommend it, but the lack of plain-text-only options is a problem that is currently limiting participation for some people. It can also be confusing to new users trying to subscribe and has a number of understandable, but still troubling, items in its TOS. For instance, Yahoo may permanently bar anyone from service for violation of the TOS, including such offenses as not keeping all account info updated, true and complete, as well as for other reasons.

Yahoo has servers in various countries around the world. These servers are subject to the local laws in those countries, which may affect the privacy of personally identifying information and supposedly private lists' content. Some Yahoo users in China, for

example, have been arrested for what they posted on the service, and there are people who have objections to Yahoo's role in this and therefore to use of the service. The main point here is that some people won't, or can't, use Yahoo, and US law doesn't necessarily govern the service's operation.

In addition, Yahoo uses "web beacons" to track users' use of the net for their own purposes, and on behalf of unspecified others. A "web beacon" is a small (often 1 pixel) image link embedded in a web page or MIME e-mail message that results in access to a remote web server. This web server gets certain information along with the access, such as IP address, time, cookie information previously stored, etc.. This is the same sort of information any web server can get from your browser, but it can happen just because you open a MIME e-mail message. This is all made clear in the TOS and Privacy Policy documents on the Yahoo site for anyone who cares to read all the details. Some people have ethical objections to such things and won't use a service that employs them.

All of these objectionable practices and features can add up to less than full participation by the club membership, and inclusiveness should be one of our top priorities for the list, just as it is required by the bylaws for meetings.

Google Groups

Google Groups is a new entrant, and their offering is currently in beta test. Google has the same foreign law issues as Yahoo, but so far has not resulted in anyone going to jail that I know of. Google Groups has features to allow masking of e-mail addresses when they are viewed on the web, to make it harder for spammers to harvest addresses. What MIME conversion or restriction features the service provides could not be determined...documentation is quite limited at the moment. Sexually explicit material is allowed, but restricted to marked areas of the service. No other restrictions on content are noted, other than the usual restriction on illegal materials...but given the foreign law issues, content that is harmless in the USA might well be a violation somewhere and the TOS just says that you must avoid illegal activity, not just that which is illegal where you are.

Pay Services

Lyris

Lyris is a commercial provider of list software and list services. Their features are good, but they don't allow filtering or conversion of MIME in e-mail. They do provide text-only digests to those who want them, as well as MIME digests, and also serve the mail in a

format usable by newsreader software. They also provide "out of office" blocking capability, to avoid the entire list seeing such messages. Lyris appears to be a US-only company, so foreign laws shouldn't be an issue. I think their prices rule them out for us though. Their "basic discussion list package" costs \$200/month, with a \$100 setup fee. The cost also varies with the volume of mail served.

ListPlex

ListPlex is even more expensive than Lyris...\$500 setup and \$300 per list, per year, with another \$2.50 for every 1000 message deliveries (that's 10 messages on a list with 100 subscribers). They have anti-virus support, web-searchable archives and other good features, but no MIME filtering or conversion. They run on Listserv software, which they own but which is also available for others to run...more on this later.

Listserv.com

Listserv.com is more reasonably priced than the other two discussed so far. The price for the service we'd need is \$15 to \$35 per month, billed annually. Messages are limited to a maximum size of 65K, which is a pretty big text message, but easily exceeded by some MIME formats (pictures or sound for instance). The max size can be raised for extra cost (doubling the size raises the cost by 50%). Archiving is available, but costs an extra \$60/year. There is only a 15 day grace period after bills are issued before service is stopped according to the TOS, which could be an issue for us. They are located in Virginia, so USA and Virginia laws apply to content.

FrontPages

Frontpages is also within reason price-wise. Their deal is \$12 to \$185/month with a \$40 - \$100 setup, depending on what plan is chosen. The one that's \$35/month and \$40 setup should meet our needs. That gets us up to 5 lists, with digest capability. There's an extra charge if enough messages are sent, but this cuts in at 50,000 messages a month, which should be well above our usage level. It's unclear from their web pages if archiving is offered or included, or what other features they have.

Private Hosting Service Using Free Software

Majordomo

Most people who've been using listserves for very long have probably had experience with a Majordomo list. It is limited in the web-features department, but there are add-ons available to allow account management and archive searching with a web

browser. It is adequate, but I'd suggest looking at Mailman instead.

Mailman

Mailman is free software under the GNU General Public License. It has a web interface for account and list management, and for archive access. It has automatic bounce processing, which limits the workload of the list administrator, and can support content filtering or conversion. It supports digest mode, spam filtering, and has support for multiple languages. There are options available to deMIME messages, and users can filter topics using Regular Expressions (really fancy wildcarding). The source code is available and it runs on Linux or Unix, both of which are available free as well.

Listserv

LISTSERV Free Edition is a freeware version of LISTSERV Lite, limited to a maximum of 10 mailing lists with up to 500 subscribers each for non-commercial use. It is available for people who want to run hobby or interest-based email lists and do not derive a profit, directly or indirectly, from using the software. This is similar to the software used by the commercial ListPlex service. It is free, but source code is not available as far as I can tell, so it is a "use it as it is" deal.

Summary

Those are the general options we have, and some examples of each. Having the list under the club's full control is best from a number of standpoints, if we can find a way to host it and someone willing to put in the time to run it again. The commercial hosting options tend to be expensive, especially when compared with free, but may have smaller long term risks than the free services. Yahoo Groups obviously has the benefit of inertia at this point, but despite its good features, does have some seriously worrisome aspects, and problems with usability for all.

Please think about this stuff, do whatever additional research you think is needed, and perhaps discuss it at upcoming meetings. Leaving things at status quo may be ok with the club as a whole, or not, but an informed decision is always better than the alternative. There may well be additional options that I've overlooked, and if so, please check into them and write your own article. The goal is to get the best result for the club, whatever that is.

Rambling thoughts on this year's Hugo Nominations by Cathy Green.

So it's that time of year again. And I'm eligible to nominate because I'm going to LAConIV (and going to SF beforehand to see my brother and his family. Now that I have family on the west coast it's so much easier to justify transcontinental trips)

As usual, I'm not in a great position to discuss most of the categories in a particularly in depth way, but I'm going to impose my thoughts upon WSFA anyway, both because the Journal needs content and in the hopes of generating some discussion related to things SF and possibly getting some feedback in the Journal thus creating more content.

Best Novel:

Category in which I'm always the least well-versed due to being too cheap to buy lots of hardcovers and the DC Public Library's lack of interest in building a huge science fiction collection to my specifications. As always, there are certain (prolific) people who almost always get nominated. I assume Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Hallowed Hunt* will be nominated. I am a big fan of her *Chalion* series, so I certainly expect this one to be on my list. Likewise, I will take it as a sign of the apocalypse if Neil Gaiman's *Anansi Boys* is not nominated. I've been a huge fan of his ever since he wrote the *Black Orchid* comic book miniseries. I have the original 75 issue run of *The Sandman*. I buy his books in hardcover. I plan on nominating *Anansi Boys*. I know this book has not been without criticism, and I admit to being nearly completely uncritical of his work (not a big fan of *A Study in Emerald*, although I will certainly concede he got the style right). I do not consider *Thud* to be one of Terry Pratchett's better books. I think the politics tended to overwhelm the writing and characterization at points, although the part where Vimes co-opts the accountant *Vetinari* sent to plague him is quite amusing. However, given how huge the legion of Pratchett readers is, I would expect *Thud!* to get a nomination (unless *Cow Goes Moo!* gets the nomination instead). No idea whether Pterry will turn down the nomination again this year. I would not be surprised if Kim Stanley Robinson's *Fifty Degrees Below* gets nominated. It would certainly be in Capclave's best interests if he's one of the five nominees (not so subtle hint). The book was well received and KSR had an extensive book tour so I expect a decent number of those who are eligible to nominate are familiar with the book. I haven't read it yet, but I enjoyed the version of the first chapter that was featured in *Future Washington*.

At this point I am getting into books I haven't read, but their authors fall into the "highly regarded usual

suspects" category. (1) *The Big Over Easy* by Jasper Fforde. The *Thursday Next* series has a lot of fans, and this book was favorably reviewed (at least in the *NY Times* and *Washington Post*). (2) *The Family Trade/The Hidden Family/Accelerando* by Charles Stross. Stross had a prolific 2005 and he is an often nominated author. The fact that all three books are potential nominees may cause them to cancel each other out, since many people may not want to nominate 3 books by one author and therefore no one of his books might get enough votes to make the cut. (3) *Son of a Witch* by Gregory Maguire. Sequel to the very popular *Wicked* with some timely political commentary. However, based on the reviews and things friends have said, it may not be all that well written or hold together all that well as a coherent thematic whole, which could hurt its chances of being nominated. (4) *Pushing Ice/Century Rain* by Alastair Reynolds. Both books were well received and got decent coverage in both mainstream and fannish press. (5) *Olympos* by Dan Simmons. Sequel to the Hugo-nominated *Ilium*. (6) *Spin* by Robert Charles Wilson. Received a very favorable review in *Emerald City*. Several books by the author have been past nominees. (7) *Learning the World* by Ken McLeod. The author has multiple Hugo nominations, a big fanbase, and is GOH at Boskone this year.

Best Novella:

This is a category I often have a problem with, but not for lack of reading material. Here, the issue for me is I often don't know when I'm reading either a novella or a novelette because I don't have a very good sense of the word count. Also, I only subscribe to *Asimov's*, although I occasionally pick up an issue of *F&SF* or *Analog* if there's a piece by an author I'm obsessive about, which is why I picked up the Sept./Oct. issue of *F&SF* since it contained the much anticipated (at least by me) Peter S. Beagle novella *Two Hearts*, a sequel to *The Last Unicorn*. It's easier to spot and distinguish the novellas and novelettes in *Asimov's* and other magazines because the table of contents helpfully says whether the story is a novella, novelette or (long) short story. Of course, I'm somewhat limited by the fact that except for the occasional anthology, the only regular source I have for this category is *Asimov's*. Not that the material that appears in *Asimov's* isn't Hugo-nomination-worthy, but it's a fairly narrow range on my part.

I have not decided whether I should nominate *Two Hearts* by Peter S. Beagle. It's a nice piece and well written, but I'm not sure it qualifies as being a great work. *Inside Job* by Connie Willis is another possible nominee. Her novella "Inside Job" was in the January

issue of Asimov's. I also liked "The Little Goddess" by Ian McDonald (also in Asimov's), which combines cutting edge computer chips with the Nepalese Kumari Devi.

Best Novellette

I believe "Helen at the Stork club" by Esther Freisner falls in this category. It's a wonderful story of Helen of Troy and her life in present day New York City. It was in the Sept./Oct. issue of Fantasy & Science Fiction. I'm not a big fan of Michael Swanwick's Darger and Surplus stories, but they always seem to get nominated, so I expect "Girls and Boys Come Out to Play" from the July Asimov's will snag a nomination.

Best Short Story

Gene Wolf's short story "The Card" from the March Asimov's is an elegant little dark fantasy or horror story that would be a worthy nominee. Ian Watson's "Lover of Statues" from the April/May issue of Asimov's might get a nomination. It's a deeply weird story about an alien that comes to earth to have sex with a statue. I can honestly say I've never read anything like it and probably never will again. Of course, unique does not have to translate to nomination-worthy. James Van Pelt's "The Ice Cream Man" from the June Asimov's is another possibility. "Killing Time" by Kristine Katherine Rusch and "Waking Chang-Er" by Samantha Ling, both in the July Asimov's also are on my list of possible nominees. The former is about a woman nearing the end of her life who needs to decide whether to have a medical procedure that will allow her to live out her past days literally reliving her memories (in other words, pain free but unaware of her true state) or to die fully in the somewhat painful present. The latter is an interesting retelling of a Chinese fairytale. There is also a story in the Sept./Oct. F&SF that I found amusing in which Zeus goes to a sex addicts anonymous meeting and ends up seducing the counselor. I don't remember the title due to the F&SF issue still being in the possession of my mother.

Best Dramatic Presentation Long and Short Form.

Here we truly have an embarrassment of riches this year. Or possibly an embarrassment of tarnished riches. Or possibly just a lot of stuff we should be embarrassed about.

Long Form:

I will be very surprised if The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe is not nominated. Likewise, I will also be surprised if Harry

Potter and the Goblet of Fire is not nominated. Mike Leigh did a good job of adapting an extremely unwieldy book into a not overlong movie. King Kong is also a potential nominee. Opinion is mixed on Peter Jackson's remake, but enough people were favorably disposed that I would expect it to get a nomination. Serenity is also a possible nominee. Firefly and Joss Whedon have a loyal and fanatically devoted fanbase. I thought the movie was good but not great and there are quite a few more worthy movies out there, so it won't make my list of nominees. Howl's Moving Castle is another possibility. Miyazaki's animation is always brilliant, but a number of people felt it didn't do a good job of capturing Diana Wynn Jones' book, which could hurt its chances as a nominee. Also in the animated category, I think Tim Burton's Corpse Bride and Wallace and Gromit and the Curse of the Were-Rabbit both have a good shot at nominations. I didn't think Corpse Bride was as good as Nightmare Before Christmas, but it was still impressive and I didn't feel ripped off paying \$9.50 to see it. I loved Wallace and Gromit. It was funny, had a coherent script, good voice acting and had some nice homages and references to classic films such as King Kong and Harvey. Sin City by Roberto Rodriguez and Frank Miller. Not sure this qualifies as either fantasy or SF. Brilliant adaptation of the graphic novels, but it's more of an over the top ultraviolent dark-humored noir thriller than it is fantasy or SF, except for the fact that it's clearly unreal. Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy -- good but not great. I would have liked to see better use of the Guide itself and I was not fond of the new Marvin. However, the planet factory looked spectacular, and I did find a significant amount of the movie to be amusing. And the late Douglas Adams has a lot of residual good will. I expect it to be nominated. Batman Begins -- I didn't get a chance to see this in the theater and it's currently in my Netflix queue. Opinion was generally favorable, but in such a crowded field, it may not make the cut.

Star Wars episode III: Revenge of the Sith. A badly acted, plotted, and directed, awful mess with really nice special effects. Hopefully everyone will have the good taste not to nominate it. Whatever residual good will I had left over from Star Wars and The Empire Strikes Back certainly didn't extend to the new trilogy, even if I did give George Lucas more of my money. Fantastic Four came and went. Lots of money spent on sfx and none on plot. I do not expect it to be nominated. War of the Worlds by Spielberg. No one I know liked this movie. I do not expect it to get nominated.

Short Form:

I expect Dr. Who and Battlestar Galactica to own this category. While Dr. Who will not have its U.S. premiere until this March, new season featuring the 9th Doctor was broadcast in the UK and Canada and Australia and New Zealand and a number of other countries as well. A number of folks in the U.S. saw the CBC feed via broadcast, cable or satellite, and much illegal downloading of episodes was done. There were a number of stories that could potentially be nominated – Dalek, Father’s Day, The Unquiet Dead, The End of the World, the Empty Child, The Doctor Dances, Bad Wolf, and The Parting of the Ways. Actually, any of the 13 could be nominated, those are just the ones I think are most likely. Dalek for the return of everyone’s favorite hysterical homicidal pepperpots probably has the best chance. I thought The Unquiet Dead, and The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances had a nice creepy gothic feel to them, as well as pretty good writing. Father’s Day is another solid potential nominee, a story where the Doctor, who should have known better, takes Rose back to the day her father dies. Of course, she can’t help intervening and chaos ensues. Sentimental and a tear jerker but well done. I think most of the BSG stories that aired in 2005 are nomination worthy, but I think Pegasus is the most likely to get the nomination.

Stargate SG1 and Stargate Atlantis are both potential nominees as well. SG1 has improved after a couple of weak seasons (although that may be my Farscape love of Ben Browder and Claudia Black talking). I do not think Stargate Atlantis is a very good show, but it is very popular. But given that one of the most common phrases uttered about it is “but she’s been a good actress in most other things I’ve seen her in,” I just can’t see it getting nominated.

The network shows are much more doubtful for nominations this year. I do not watch either Smallville or Charmed and the latter appears to be on its last legs. While I liked the concept behind Supernatural, using urban legends such as the Hook Man and Bloody Mary, for the basis of each week’s show, the show is on the WB and is aimed at people half my age. I do not think either of the leads is much of an actor (and I don’t think they’re all that cute either, and they were probably cast for their looks). That said, the show is well shot and while dumb, often manages to be creepy, and doesn’t take itself too seriously. Threshold, which was on CBS, is already cancelled. I’m disappointed by the cancellation, as I thought it was the best of the 4 new network SF shows. It certainly had the best cast, with Charles Dutton, Peter Dinklage and Carla Gugino. The premise was an alien invasion via a sound wave that

rewrites the dna of people to give them a triple helix and presumably turn them into aliens. I liked this idea because it would certainly be easier to invade that way, rather than send a huge number of ships and people and the supplies needed to support them. Unlike The X-Files, where Scully and Mulder were fighting the vast conspiracy, on Threshold, the main characters were the conspiracy, trying to contain and fight the alien invasion without letting the public know what was happening. And they were losing. In one episode, an alien infectee was going to broadcast the signal from a major Miami radio station, and to prevent that from happening, the Threshold team had to set off an EMP over Miami. Also, during the initial contact, three of the team members were partially exposed to the signal, so there was always the unspoken worry that they could turn at any moment. Unfortunately, I seem to have been one of the few people who liked the show, given its early cancellation. Because it had a two hour premiere episode, it could get nominated in either the long or short form categories. The other two network shows are still on the air, and also had 2 hour premieres and are therefore also eligible for nomination in both categories, although I thought both premiere episodes were bad enough that I didn’t bother to continue watching regularly (and I’ve seen every episode of Jason of Star Command), so I do not expect either Surface or Invasion to snag a nomination in the long form category. Although, since both shows got a full season pick up, my opinion clearly is not a majority one. Invasion basically retells Invasion of the Body Snatchers, except set in the Florida Everglades. I have been told it improved since the first episode, so it might snag a nomination. Surface is just horrible, but very fast moving. Giant sea lizards and their offspring are running around destroying subs and eating fishermen and the government is trying to cover it up. It doesn’t help that the lead, played by “actress” Lake Bell, who is horrible, is possibly the world’s stupidest marine biologist. I’m not expecting Surface to get any nominations.

Anyway, those are my thoughts on this year’s field.

Media Reviews:

Night Watch (Nochnoi Dozor)

Chapter One of the Night Watch Trilogy
Bazelevs Production and Ch. One Russia, 2004
Directed by Timur Bekmambetov
Review by Lee Strong

I wasn’t too sure what to expect since I am a big Light and Darkness fan but not a big vampire fan.

To my pleasant surprise, *Night Watch* proved to be a powerful and moving story about people making choices, accepting responsibility, and living with the consequences of their decisions. The dark toned flash and bang merely highlighted the underlying humanity of the film.

The overarching story is a slow motion confrontation between Light and Darkness, governed by a Truce in which the two sides police each other. Both sides are composed of supernaturally endowed but very human Others, who are the witches and sorcerers of mundane history. The Light Others of the Night Watch include a seer, a healer, and a couple of shapeshifters while the Dark Others of the Day Watch are mostly vampires.

The story includes two prequels and two major plots that the Light Others try to resolve simultaneously. The first prequel sketches in the overarching concept and outlines the origin of the Truce and the opposing Night and Day Watches. The second prequel brings the conflict into the world of 1992 Russia as a young husband asks a sorceress to abort his wife's child via magic and encounters the Night Watch for the first time. The two major plots take place in 2004, forcing the Light Others to try to solve both simultaneously. In one, the cursed Virgin of Byzantium appears in modern Russia, triggering a nicely depicted vortex that blacks out Moscow and threatens to tear the world apart. The solution to the problem is well foreshadowed and far more subtle than the usual slam bang special effects fest or plug-in plot device that many American films relish. In the other plot, the Light Others try to protect a young boy from a vampire that they themselves have licensed. This is more of a traditional vampire story but Mr. Bekmembetov's story is skillful, powerful, and full of original interpretations.

The relatively original takes on the classic Light/Darkness and vampire tropes are one of the great strengths of this very good effort. One subplot that I particularly enjoyed was the two neighbors who maintain a friendship despite their opposing philosophies. A very human thing to do, and very original within the well trodden vampire genre. The production values are far

below the standard for American movies – very dark, gritty, and episodic. The fast moving plot, shadowy settings, and original interpretations mean that you have to pay close attention to the events – certainly not a bad thing for a literature of the imagination. And the Russian language dialog with English subtitles are not something most Americans are accustomed to. However, a little attention to this thoughtful and moving epic will well reward the diligent Watcher.

I rate *Night Watch* as 3.5 stars on the 5 star scale for its original interpretations of a well known genre, powerful plot and deep humanity. It is the first chapter of three. I'm looking forward to the next two. – LS

MirrorMask: A Film You May Have Missed Review by Michael Nelson

Running Time: 1:40

Rating: PG (For Some Mild Thematic Elements and Scary Images) Story by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean Directed/Designed by Dave McKean

I just watched the MirrorMask DVD, which was released on Valentine's Day. If I recall correctly, it premiered the same weekend as *Serenity* and I didn't get around to seeing it in the theater. Which is a shame, because this is definitely one of those movies where special effects rule over storytelling. The story by writer Neil Gaiman and director/designer Dave McKean is fairly basic, but the blend of makeup, costumes, puppets, blue screens, and CGI that are tossed together to create this amazing dream world is astonishing.

I'm not saying that the story writing was bad. It just wasn't as interesting as the world creation. But it does give Jim Henson's Creature Shop and the other special effects companies a satisfactory foundation on which to build their fantasy world. Speaking of Jim Henson, I believe MirrorMask will remind you of another Jim Henson production, *Labyrinth* -- mixed in with a goth retelling of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Trying not to give anything away: a teenage girl believes her behavior has caused harm to a family member and she finds herself on a quest (which may or may not be a dream) to save them.

It's been reported that the budget for this film was under five million dollars. If so, MirroMask is an incredible achievement and is quite worth seeing. I'm going to add this DVD to my collection because I think it's one of those movies that reveals new wonders and layers of meaning with each viewing.

WSFA Meeting Minutes

First Friday – February 3rd, 2006

Location: The Gilliland's

Started at: 9:15 PM - Ended at: 10:22 PM

Officers: Sam Lubell (President). Cathy Green, (Vice President). Bob MacIntosh (Treasurer), Ernest Lilley (Secretary)

Trustees: Elizabeth Twitchell, Lee Gilliland, and Barry Newton; Colleen Cahill (Capclave Future)

Members: Elaine Brennan, Alexis Gilliland, Paul Haggerty, Scott Hofmann, Bill Lawhorn, Don Lundry, Nicki Lynch, Rich Lynch, Judy Newton, Kathi Overton, Rebecca Prather, Jennifer Rosenbaum, Judy Scheiner, Sam Scheiner, George Shaner, Steve Smith, Bill Squire, Lee Strong, Gayle Surette, Elizabeth Twitchell, Madeleine Yeh

President Sam Lubell called the meeting to order at 9:15 by his watch.

The Secretary read the highlights of the last meeting. The Treasurer reported a current cash balance \$5617.64. Cathy Green wondered if we should be rolling our CDs over or should we cash one out in anticipation of Capclave Current's need. Bob felt that we should have more than enough in cash on hand. Sam reported that he had had email correspondence with Mike Nelson to the effect that the chapbook was still in progress and currently waiting for paper approval by Mike Walsh, after which it had to go to Howard Waldrop (05 GoH) for signing. This was the same state it had been in at the previous meeting, and concern was raised about the lateness of the project. It was noted that Gardner Dozois had expressed skepticism that it would get done. Sam pointed out that we owed it to the people who had signed up for it, and that we needed to get it done to maintain our reputation. Other people chimed

in that we were getting inquiries. A progress report by Mike Nelson on the web was requested.

It was agreed to appoint Elaine B. liaison with Mike N. to pester him about a progress report and to give the club updates.

Capclave Present: Sam recapped Elspeth K.'s announcement at the last meeting that she would be sending reports to First Friday meetings via a liaison. As of this meeting, none had been appointed, though Elaine Brennan, whom EK had indicated she would use was present, but had not heard from EK. EK had also stated an intention to hold committee meetings at Cathy Green's, but none had been scheduled yet. Though there has been some traffic on the Capclave site, it did not appear that EK had contacted any of the committee since the meeting, with the exception of Barry Newton who had been asked to remove non-committee members from the Capclave list.

Ernest mentioned that he had sent several emails to EK which had not been responded to. Colleen inquired if room rates had been established and expressed a concern that it was something that needed to be addressed very soon. Ernest expressed concern that since he was not in the group he could not directly access the flyer files, and Elaine B. and Cathy Green promised to make sure he had his materials for the upcoming trip to Boskone. Cathy Green also asked for volunteers for a Worldcon Fan Table for Capclave and found a number of folks.

Capclave Future: Colleen reported that Jan Price, her hotel liaison, had found out that she was going to be laid off of her job in 60 days. If she needs to leave the area to find another job, she might not be able to help with the Con. While she is in the area she's happy to help with hotels.

World Fantasy: Sam has tried to contact Mike Walsh repeatedly and has not heard back from him. Bob Macintosh reported that Mike W had sent him copies of the requests for payment that we are owed, noting that Mike has sent it three times, but that the first date sent was in December of 04, a year after the Con. He does not think we are likely to get a response at this date. At this point, Bob counsels, that we are unlikely to get paid short of using a collection agency. These are

major publishers, it is noted. The total amount is a bit less than \$7000.

Motion: Ernest moved that we forgive and forget the debt on the grounds that we were unlikely to get any sustainable portion of them. The motion was seconded, but failed 2 for, 20 against, 3 abstentions. Discussion: There was discussion about what the club members could do to assist through individual contacts at the publishers that had outstanding debts. It was noted that we neither wanted to earn the animosity of these companies, nor let them off the hook, both of which would set a bad precedent. Bob I. pointed out that Mike W. had sent him the contact information.

Motion: Barry moved that Bob Macintosh be the person to lead the effort to reclaim the monies, and that any one who wanted to assist do so through him. It was seconded and passed without opposition.

Entertainment Committee: Lee Gilliland was back unexpected early from her trip to Egypt, where she run ins with local customs and scorpions convinced her to return ahead of schedule. She related tales of local politics and fish control in the Suez Canal.

Publications Committee: Ernest reported on the progress of Future Washington. Nancy Jane Moore, one of the authors had given a talk at the LOC where some paperbacks were sold (\$50), it was noted that the book was on Locus' list of significant books for 2005, and had been chosen of the book of the month for the Politics and Prose Futurist Discussion group. Ernest promised to get out to local bookstores and promote the title. He read a report from the distributor which listed .

He also plans to talk to Ellen Asher of the Science Fiction book club about taking the title on. Cathy Green asked if that was covered in the contract, and Ernest said that there was specific language to cover payment and other issues.

Ernest urged people to read Mike Bartman's article on email in the previous issue of the Journal and noted that while the Yahoo groups were doing ok and had some traffic on them, the

question of how to manage the club mailing list was still in play.

Committee to Actually Talk about Science Fiction: Kathi Overton said folks should meet upstairs after the meeting to discuss the February Asimov's SF Magazine.

Activities Committee: Lee has gotten access to a sneak preview of the Russian Vampire movie. She handed out promotional items and took a count of people interested (15) in going. It will be at the Cineplex Odeon on Wisconsin Ave. in DC. (Tuesday 02/21/06 at 7:30pm).

Lee also told the club that she had gotten an email from Grant Kruger who is working on an update of the Southern Fandom Confederation Handbook. They are interested in us contributing something about the club history. Rich Lynch volunteered to put something together with the assistance of members who had been around longer.

Old Business: There was no old business, as far as the secretary remembered. Ernest noted that we tend to cover it in the committee reports.

New Business:

First Friday in March will be held at the Madigan's since Lee G. will be in England that week.

Sam pointed out that there was a fifth Friday of February convention tradition, and that in 2008 the necessary alignment of the planets would occur. He was told he was rushing things and a motion to table was put forth.

Motion: To table discussion of the February Fifth Friday 2008 convention for a year (or so). Accepted without vote.

The club received a letter from the attorneys (Weinberg and Jacob) that were used to set up the club, which notes that our last recorded corporate minutes were dated 1989. In the interest of confirming and preserving our corporation, they requested that we send them any and all minutes of prior meetings. It was agreed that we should be able to refer them to our website where minutes are on display. This occasioned the realization by John Pomeranz that our status with Maryland has (again) lapsed. As this is an area of

law he is familiar with, he will deal with it. (note: this will come up as old business next meeting.)

Judy Lynch had no new business.

Sam Scheiner reiterated that they would be holding Fifth Friday in March at their house.

Sam pointed out that “an issue had been raised that it was hard to find some of our important motions from meetings” especially ones dealing with Capclave, and it might make sense to put them up on the website for easy reference. There was discussion as to whether there were official rules within the club for con running.

Motion: Colleen moved that the past minutes of the club be reviewed for motions and looked at. Sam added a friendly amendment that we look not just for Capclave related motions and comments, but for anything related to running the club. Barry noted that Disclave era comments should also be included. Sam put out twenty years as a limit for how far to go back. Others suggested fewer. Colleen agreed the head a committee with Sam Lubell, Elizabeth Tuttle, and others who were interested.

The motion was favored by many, opposed by one, and there was one abstention as well.

Guest Search: Will Maynard back again, after attending the third Friday meeting last month. Will pointed out that he had been wrong when he said he'd attended a meeting 25 years ago, since on reflection he realized it was actually 30 years. Sam pointed out that this was then his third meeting and he was not eligible to join.

Announcements:

The Hostess and Secretary made the usual announcements, or tried to.

Colleen: Benjamin Rosenbaum is listed as coming to the LOC on the 17th, but is actually coming on the 24th of February. In March Ed Carmien (another Future Washington author) will be coming to the LOC. Date to be determined.

Kathi Overton: Fast Forward will be running Kim Stanley Robinson interview on their show and website (www.fast-forward.tv/). They now have a podcast version available as well. A video podcast version will hopefully be available soon.

Steve Smith: An exhibit of paintings and drawings by his wife Kit, will be on display at the Savory Café (Savory Cafe Cafe / Restaurant 7071 Carroll Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912) all month.

Rebecca Prather noted that there was a ‘curious similarity between a heading in the current MENSA journal and one in the WSFA journal. The WSFA Journal editor responded that he never read the MESA journal, not being smart enough to be considered for membership.

Rich Lynch has written a short history of the early days of Science Fiction Fandom at the request of the Nippon 2007 Con Com for their progress report. He will see if it can be republished in the WSHA Journal.

Lee Strong announced that he had seen the re-organization chart for the government agency he works for and that he still has a job if he wants to move to Southern Illinois. He is eligible for retirement two months after the move, and is saving up vacation time.

Lee opened channel D to report that her “Man From Uncle Convention: will be sponsored by the Spy Museum, and that David McCallum will be their special GoH.

The meeting was noisily adjourned at 10:22 pm.

Third Friday – February 17th, 2006

Location: The Madigan's

Started at: 9:15 PM - Ended at: 9:32 PM

Officers: Bob MacIntosh (Treasurer), Barry Newton (Secretary for a Day)

Trustees: Lee Gilliland, and Barry Newton;

Members: Mike Bartman, Adrienne Ertmann Carolyn Frank, Alexis Gilliland, Erica Ginter, Nicki Lynch, Rich Lynch, Candy Madigan, Will Maynard, Walter Miles, Judy Newton, George Shaner, Steve Smith

Bill Squire, Ivy Yap (not seen), Madeleine Yeh

Treasury: \$5, 617.64 in checking
\$15,295.90 in CD's

It was a very short business meeting. Bob MacIntosh presided. Though Ernest tried to call in from Boskone to read the minutes from the previous meeting, which he had synopsised on a napkin, we were unable to maintain comms, so

we gave it up as a bad deal With so many officers and committee members away at Boskone (The President, The Secretary, Capclave, Old, and Present) there were no reports, no old business, and no new business. There was something amusing from Alexis; a comment from Lee (Entertainment) that she had the tickets for "Night Watch", coming up this Tuesday, though not a whole lot of people wanted them, as most of the interest happened at the first Friday meeting. We had a quorum and then some. We should have done something provocative.

Sightings, Events, & Announcements



Please email upcoming events to editor@wsfa.org with the word "submission" in the subject line for consideration.

Event Past: 02/21/06 The Night Watch Theater Party Reported by Lee Strong

"Everyone's lost but me." – Indiana Jones in *Indiana Jones and Last Crusade*

And that's what it seemed like the night I attended the Washington premiere of *Night Watch* with a few of my closest friends – none of whom happened to be WSFAnS! Activities Committee Chair Lee Gilliland's instructions plus some help from MapQuest and friendly Washingtonians got me to the theater. To my surprise, no other WSFAn appeared. I later learned that they had been thwarted by the evil Dark Other ushers and migraine magicians.

Having had some experience with the difficulty of getting things done in Washington, D.C., I allowed 3 hours to Metro from work to the theater, eat dinner, and stand in line. That worked out well and I arrived at the theater an hour before show time. There was already a long line but it moved quickly once the evil ushers opened the velvet rope.

While I waited for my WSFAn friends to appear, I chatted up the other Night Watchers and made a couple of new friends including the ladies who paid for my admission. I invited one or two to WSFA. One guy from the Washington Psycho-

tronic Film Society was hot to visit our Arlington, VA meeting at the next opportunity but I steered him to our Website rather than giving out addresses casually.

The theater was largely filled especially since a large block of seats were reserved for the working press. I thought about claiming that I was a reporter for "the Journal" but decided not to. Still, there were seats available when show time rolled around especially since the manager threw open the press section when it became obvious that it was not going to be packed solid. Before the show, the manager entertained the audience with trivia questions and free stuff. I hollered out the first correct answer to the cost of the movie (US \$3 million) but the manager ignored me, hidden in the Gloom as I was. More Dark Other influence obviously.

The film started on time but we had an unplanned intermission when the projectionist ran the second reel upside down and backwards. The audience informed the projectionist of his error by using a few foreign words and the latter stopped the show for about 20 minutes while he reran and reset the reel. It was getting late and several people left during the unplanned intermission. Eventually the projectionist got things straightened out and the epic story of the *Night Watch* unfolded. After the show, the audience gave a polite although not overwhelming round of applause. I got home very late and overslept the next morning for the first time in years.

Upcoming Events:

03/03 - First Friday Meeting: Gillilands' (VA)

For a change of pace, we'll be meeting in VA for third Friday.

03/17 - Third Friday Meeting: The Madigan's (MD)

and then we'll be back in MD for the next. For a change of pace, we'll be meeting in VA for third Friday.

03/31 - Fifth Friday Meeting:

And quite frankly, I'm not sure where we'll be for fifth Friday.

April 5, 2006 Futurist Book Club Selection:

Future Washington (WSFA Press)

Politics & Prose, Lower Level, 5015 Connecticut Avenue, Washington D.C. NW 7:30pm-9:00pm