

THE WSFA

JOURNAL

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Drew Bittner, Editor / Gayle Surrette, Assistant Editor

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Winner of 1847 Upwell Bequest for "Revealing That Which Man is Not Meant to Know"

CONTENTS

- From the Editor
- Media Reviews: *Ardneh's Sword* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*
- Minutes of August Third Friday Meeting
- Events
- In Memoriam: David Gemmell
- And Now for Something...

FROM THE EDITOR...

Hello, all!

Well, it's August in the District, which means... bleh. Nothing to do but enjoy Congress being out of town and hope the mosquito population doesn't outnumber the residents more than 80 to one. Time to take in a movie, you say? Hey, we have just the review for you, courtesy of, well, me.

Anyway, stay cool and think pleasant thoughts of Worldcon—coming soon!

Later!

Drew



MEDIA REVIEWS:

ARDNEH'S SWORD

By Fred Saberhagen

Review by Drew Bittner

(first published, SFRevu.com, August 1, 2006)

In **Empire of the East**, Fred Saberhagen told the tale of Rolf, a human pitted against the Emperor and his demons. Living in an age when science is myth and magic rules, Rolf's only hope lies in finding the Elephant and helping the demon-hating entity Ardneh overcome the Emperor and the archdemon Orcus.

In The Swords series, Saberhagen picked up the story of that distant Earth a long time later. A dozen magical Swords -- each with its own unique power -- set human kingdoms at war in a game played by the gods. Heroes, villains and mostly-innocent bystanders were swept up in battles to control the power of the Swords...with one Sword fated to reign supreme.

Now, he bridges these two series in **Ardneh's Sword**, a tale that answers many questions...

Chance Rolfson is the lineal descendant (many generations removed) of Rolf, legendary human partner to Ardneh, an entity worshiped as a god but which has been dead since his battle against Orcus. Now, Chance is part of an expedition to find (and exploit) Ardneh's Workshop, a treasure trove lost in the vast wilderness.

One night, a talking owl named Mitra drops a small charm necklace on Chance--but the mysterious item literally melts in his hand, until later revealing itself to be the key to Ardneh's Workshop. Chance learns this through encounters with two strange, red-headed children dressed in silvery armor-clothing of the Old World. Lack of tangible evidence (the Key disappears when Chance is not in danger) and a reputation for dreaminess ensure that nobody in the expedition--Scholar Jervase, Captain Horkos, or even magic-wielding Lady Ayaba--believes him.

He also encounters the "grandmother" of the children, shortly before a bandit attack drives the expedition to the dubious safety of Ardneh's Servants. This religious enclave works to heal whoever is in need; however, the bandits are a danger they cannot overlook--or expect to survive--so they guide the expedition to a sheltered cave. There, the Servants' leader's daughter Abigail proves herself magically talented...and discovers that the "grandmother" Chance encountered is in truth a djinn named Zalmoxis. Zalmoxis seeks to become human, a task that has left it frustrated and jealous of humanity for over a thousand years, but it believes that success lies in helping Chance.

Beset by bandits and mistrustful of all offers of help--except that of the Beastlord Draffut and Abigail--Chance works his way toward Ardneh's Workshop, unsure of what the ultimate treasure, Ardneh's Sword, might possibly be...or why the bandits' demonic ally Avenarius is so keen to acquire it. Will they even recognize this treasure when they find it? And what will it mean for the world when it is unleashed?

Saberhagen returns to his fantastic future Earth in this tale, which bridges the **Empire of the East** trilogy with the *Swords* multi-novel epic. The upside is that several secrets of the latter series are revealed here, some of them merely seeds planted for those other stories. The mysteries of Ardneh, Orcus and the *Empire* stories are thoroughly plumbed elsewhere, and are not revisited in

this book (nobody really understands what Ardneh is, for instance), but instead tends to focus on the fact that Ardneh has been gone for ages but his final gift to mankind endures. (Sharp-eyed readers should also take note of the name of one Servant in particular as, if I remember correctly, "Benambra" resurfaces in another context in the *Sword* novels.)

The downside is that Chance is, unfortunately, a passive and rather unengaging hero. Given the Key, he spends his time hiding and running, rather than growing toward heroism. He bemoans his destiny as the Key's unwilling holder and relies rather heavily on Abigail's magic to wring answers from the recalcitrant and sly djinn. Similarly, he is powerless to resist the blackmail of Avenarius, who threatens him with impunity, and cannot even break free with help from Draffut. All in all, he is a very problematic "hero" and does the story little good.

However, on balance, the book does well in spanning the gap between these two sets of books. Fans of Saberhagen's work will be well-rewarded, though other readers, unfamiliar with the setting, should probably begin with **Empire of the East** and work their way forward.

Recommended.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN'S CHEST

Directed by Gore Verbinski

Review by Drew Bittner (courtesy SFRevu.com)

Jerry Bruckheimer Films, Walt Disney Pictures

This tale finds Jack Sparrow (Depp) compelled to settle a blood debt to Davy Jones, infamous captain of the ghostly Flying Dutchman. Faced with a cursed afterlife of servitude and damnation, Jack is also being hunted by Will Turner (Bloom) and Elizabeth Swann (Knightley), who must bring back Jack's magical compass if they're to be wed... and escape the gallows for their part in helping Jack. But if Jack can find his heart's desire--or even discern what it is--perhaps there's a way to turn the tables on the otherworldly Davy Jones.

Cast: Jack Sparrow - Johnny Depp * Will Turner - Orlando Bloom * Elizabeth Swann - Keira Knightley * Norrington - Jack Davenport * Davy Jones - Bill Nighy * Stellan Skarsgard - Bootstrap Bill * Naomie Harris - Tia Dalma * Tom Hollander - Cutler Beckett

In **Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest**, Will and Elizabeth are placed under arrest by Beckett (Hollander), an old enemy of her father's (Jonathan Pryce). He has the authority of the King to find and arrest Jack Sparrow--but what he really wants is Jack's compass, which points the way to a literally priceless treasure.

If Will and Elizabeth hope to escape a death sentence, they'll return with Jack's compass.

As for Jack, he has problems of his own: an old debt is finally called due. Jack, who bartered his soul to Davy Jones in order to captain the *Black Pearl* for thirteen years, must pay up. Visited by the sea wraith Bootstrap Bill in the hold of his pirate ship, Jack learns that his time is up; he will be taken to join the crew of the *Flying Dutchman*. Needless to say, this is a fate he desperately hopes to avoid but he cannot argue his way out of it. Instead, he'll have to fall back on a rather desperate scheme...

Will finds his way to Jack, coming to an island of cannibals where Jack *seems* to be the new king. It doesn't take long for the truth to emerge: Jack's to be the guest of honor at a very special feast, and is in need of rescue no less than Will.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth has stowed away aboard ship, disguised as a boy, and finds herself in Tortuga, notorious home port for countless pirates. There, she discovers Norrington, her onetime beau, who has been cast out of the British Navy for allowing Sparrow to escape justice. They form an unlikely partnership and continue the hunt for Jack and Will...and the treasure.

In this case, the treasure is not gold or gems. It is an object... and whoever holds it can control Davy and the kraken, a colossal undersea beast. To say that this object is greatly desired by these diverse parties is an understatement.

Suffice it to say, lest we spoil the ride, that <B< Man?s> is a nonstop rollercoaster of a movie, one that is loud and moves fast and doesn't let up for more than a second here and there. Like all amusement park rides, it keeps your attention... but after the second hour, it begins to wear somewhat. Depp is reliably odd and cunning as a rat in his persona of Captain Jack Sparrow; he is much the same as before, except that now he is rethinking his life and seems uncertain of his heart's desire.

Bloom and Knightley reprise the young lovers, but the course of true love does not run smooth. Not only is their wedding disrupted and their lives threatened, but Elizabeth learns that she has a bit of a pirate heart, while Will's reckless risks push him closer to being a genuine hero. Elizabeth does a couple of shocking things here-- and will certainly pay for them in the third movie.

Bill Nighy is, as ever, a marvel. Even under a CGI squid-mask, he breathes menace and heartfelt emptiness as Davy Jones, bringing depth to what could have been a thankless, cartoony role. Hollander is a sturdy villain as Beckett, while Pryce is ever more the doting father as Gov. Swann. Skarsgard brings unexpected pathos to the role of Bootstrap Bill, offering no apologies for his life as a pirate to his son Will, but showing that he has grit and fierce paternal loyalty when it counts.

The crew of the *Dutchmen* deserve comment as well. With the passage of years, they take on aquatic qualities-- a starfish dominates Bootstrap Bill's face, while others have literally merged with the ship in horrifying ways-- until they are subhuman monsters. The effects that bring these creatures to life are spectacular accomplishments in prosthetic makeup and CGI both.

The kraken makes an appearance no less than four times, which is probably two too many. By showing its horrific power early on, Verbinski squanders the chance to impress the audience later when the heroes are threatened more directly. Likewise, the protracted sword battle in the waterwheel and the doings among the cannibals (which are woefully under-explained) give the plot a scattershot feel.

While this installment works well enough as a bridge, the last segment will have to be pretty strong to make the entire trilogy effective. Otherwise, this will end up another *Matrix*: pretty, loud and colorful but ultimately empty and unsatisfying.

Much like a very long carnival ride, this movie leaves one feeling breathless, somewhat exhilarated, nerves a-jangle and slightly queasy. For an action blockbuster, that about fills the bill.

Recommended.

WSFA MEETING MINUTES

Third Friday
Madsen's home
July 21, 2006

Meeting convened at 9:14pm.

Secretary: Drew read the minutes of the July 7 meeting.

Treasurer: Bob reported that we have \$9200 in our general account and \$15,522.01 in CDs.

Capclave Present: Elspeth reported that membership is rising although not at the rate we would like to see. Room pickup is okay. The convention was publicized at Midwestcon, and the dodos have made the rounds. Mike Nelson has come up with Capclave business cards. The WFC website, she noted, was acclaimed for its good local area info; we should try to replicate that with the Capclave site. Help will be needed to make this work. The budget this year is \$1500, a bit less than last year. As of third Friday, we have 160 paid registrations, and need 250 to break even. The room pickup needed is 50. Elspeth would like all to note that ANYONE AND EVERYONE CAN RESERVE A ROOM.

Capclave Future: the convention is looking at a date range in October, complicated by the hotel's ongoing commitment to hosting sports teams during the football season. A firm date may not be known by *this* Capclave. The prospective GOH has been notified and will be asked to hold a date or two. Colleen hopes to have a contract by August.

Capclave Far Future, DC 2012 and WFC: no report.

Publications: a new Journal will be posted for August 4. Drew does not expect to be in town for the First Friday meeting in August so there will probably not be a physical Journal available at the meeting. It was also mentioned that the new issue of *Asimov's* includes a positive review of *Future Washington* by Peter Heck. As Ernest (who had edited the book) had just arrived, he was quite pleased by the news.

Entertainment: Alexis stated his intention to host WSFA at his home until November 2007, so that it would fulfill 40 years of hosting the club.

Activities: there were no advance tickets available for *Snakes on a Plane*.

Rules Committee: No report. Since we have reviewed 17 of the 20 years to be researched and found no policies restricting the administration of Disclave/Capclave, the Capclave chairs are probably safe in assuming that there are no restrictive policies. The Committee will finish its research and deliver a final report.

Trustees: No official business. On the lighter side, we are now being spammed by "I am looking (tilde) for love dot com" which has some nice display advertising.

Committee to Talk About Science Fiction: the group will be discussing the American Civil War (despite loud and insistent calls to consider the War of the Roses, the Spanish Civil War or even STAR WARS) and its singular place in alternate historical fiction. The group would also choose a new topic for the next meeting.

Old business: none.

New business: Sam and Cathy took steps to move the first Friday meeting from the Gillilands' home to the Scheiners'. The issue resulted in some controversy. After extensive discussion and consideration of diverse aspects of the situation, it was decided that a vote should be held. As 31 members were present at the time, it was determined that not only a quorum of WSFA but a majority of members were present and a vote would be binding. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of moving the First Friday meeting to the Scheiners house. Directions will be put on the website.

Announcements: send email announcements to Drew. Ivy reminded all not to let the rabbits out, because she didn't want to be chasing them at midnight... and the white one still bites. Madeline announced that she has new armor and it's very exciting. There was also to be a Civil War reenactment in Manassas (okay, Middleburg, but same thing.) Ern described the horrific events that led to the end of his Passat and the acquisition of a nearly identical (and newer) version of same. The Fringe Festival in DC was announced, as was the upcoming appearance of Spider Robinson and Sharyn McCrumb at the DC Book Festival this September. Chuck Divine said that he is now the chair of the industry collaboration committee for the Governor of Maryland's Workforce Investment Board. Also, the Baltimore "Artscape" street fair is in progress at the Meyerhoff.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:43pm.



EVENTS

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

Oddly, we seem to have no events this month either. Klaatu made a surprise appearance in DC in late July but in the crush of other news dominating the headlines, it appears to have been overlooked. However, we have late-breaking word that Robby the Robot will do a breakdancing exhibit on the National Mall sometime in late August.

IN MEMORIAM

DAVID GEMMELL

Obituary offered by Bill Lawhorn

British Fantasy author David Gemmell died July 28th, 2006. He was 57 years old. His stories were frequently best sellers in the UK and his popularity has been growing in the US. He had heart surgery two weeks prior and seemed to be on his way to recovery.

His best selling series of books is set in the Drenai universe, but he also wrote the popular Rigante, Stones of Power, and was starting out his Troy series. His greatest heroes were named Connovar, Druss, Waylander, Jon Shannow, and Skillgannon. The larger than life characters in his books often had a similar flavor. His heroes were often far from perfect. They were powerful but flawed. They were loud, obnoxious, cowards, or drunks; but when push came to shove they rose above their individual flaws to become something more. The stories were their stories, how they fell and how they rose.

It is difficult to sum up any one man in a few words. Let me share a story instead. I was going through a difficult time in my life and found comfort in a few "old friends", you know those books that help you when you need it. I picked up my copy of *Legend* to enjoy it one more time, and thought to myself, "I wonder where he gets his inspiration?" As I searched the web, I came across a story he related at the 2000 World Fantasy Con in Texas. The story can be found here, <http://www.booksattransworld.co.uk/davidgemmel/home.htm>, and it helps to show why he was able to write characters to which his readers could relate. After reading this tale, I felt better and gained a new focus. I am not sure why, I just know it happened. Of course, life is that way sometimes.

In *Legend*, Gemmel tells of the great Battle on the Walls of Dros Delnach. The walls were each named to fit the mood of the defenders as they prepared to defend against the barbarian hordes.

1. Eldibar: The Wall of Exultation
2. Musif: The Wall of Despair
3. Kania: The Wall of Renewed Hope
4. Sumitos: The Wall of Desperation
5. Valteri: The Wall of Serenity
6. Geddon: The Wall of Death

In a way the wall names also reflect how we as individuals will face life, tragedy, and eventually death. May we all spend more time on Eldibar with Geddon many years away.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING...

We have nothing completely different for this issue so perhaps we'll just close by wishing everyone a happy St. Eukaniphrides Day (Patron Saint of Wayward Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers) and we'll see you back here next time!