

WSFAns Pass IQ Test

The 8/6 First Friday was held at the Ginters in Maryland and opened with David Hines yelling "Meeting Time". Once that got people's attention Judy said, "It's 9:17 and I'm starting the meeting." "What, again!" complained Joe Hall.

Secretary Sam said that there was no old business but everyone here passed the WSFA IQ test by coming to the right house.

The treasurer reported, \$3,369.35. It gets smaller each time. The entertainment committee told a literary joke about Faust and Ulysses. Disclave 2000 said that he spent all but \$20,000 of his original appropriations but the government gave him another 100K. He does know how to spend it. <Better not get used to that kind of money for when you do your Disclave> Mike Nelson said, "The picnic went great. If you didn't go, tough."

John had handouts with the Smithsonian Associates announcements. We get to attend at the member rate and will let other SF groups attend at the discount too. Seniors among us get a lower rate. The Smithsonian wants to deal with all publicity. We should do a press release but not send it out until they approve. If someone can do the release and a flyer but not send it out yet. Fast Forward filmed a segment outside the Smithsonian so it will be seen by both of Fast Forward's regular viewers.

It's not con prices but you get to spend the day with all these fascinating people. It probably will be held in the Ripley Center, the underground space next to the Castle. If hundreds and hundreds of people sign up, it will be moved to bigger space. But that's our goal. It would be helpful if people made a list of people to send the press release to. (People began to yell out names). It would be even more useful if you emailed those names. Mike Dirda will attend, those of you who are literate will know him from the *Washington Post Book World*. There was a debate over the proper pronunciation of Pulitzer.

The Committee to Have Events at Libraries has Nov, December and June open.

Sam Lubell made a motion for an Austerity budget committee. Erica, Mike Walsh, and Eric Jablow volunteered to join. Erica made the suggestion of having a bake sale or something like that. She has stacks of books so we could consider a yard sale, "We might sell most of it to each other but the money could still go to the club." Bob pointed out that, "Hey, it would be easier than getting dues from people." Eric suggested an volunteer refreshment fee.

Joe said that the backyard at Bill's was a good idea. He suggested to Judy that the club grant him a T-shirt for being so good to the club. This was done by affirmation. A motion that Bill be made an honorary club member was dropped because there is no such membership category.

Erica told the story of an Eclipse in Cornwall, England. The Eclipse Czar laid out his plan but the city council objected, "The timing is bloody awful, can't we change the date?" The club laughed. "Is anyone here named Joshua," asked Sam.

Lee Gilliland has flyers about her art show in the central library. Sat the 4th of September will have a reception at 4 o'clock at her house and will carpool to the library. Lance got 7 Eurocon members at Rivercon. Eric Jablow has relatives who will see the eclipse. But he'll be watching the last new MST3K this weekend.

The Library of Congress will have Kate Elliot in August, Helen Hunt (a real space scientist) in September. Diane Duane and Tara Harper in October, Robert Sawyer in November, Kurt Warm in December. Next year they will have Michael Friedman, Connie Willis and others. Mike Walsh read some letters sent to him as editor of John Hopkins Press. Talk to Joe if you want more WSFA shirts. Judy thanked the readers of the SF contest stories.

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:51

Attendance: Pres. Judy Kindell, Sec. Samuel Lubell, Tres. Bob Macintosh, Trust. Lee Gilliland, Trust. Steven Smith, Trust Michael Walsh, 2000 Chair Covert Beach, Bernard Bell, Alexis Gilliland, Erica and Karl Ginter, David Hines, Eric Jablow, Winnie Lim, Nicki and Richard Lynch, Joe Mayhew, Candy Madigan, Michael Nelson, Barry and Judy and Meridel Newton, Lance Oszko, Evan Phillips, John Pomeranz, Dick Roepke, George Shaner, Colleen Stumbaugh, Michael Taylor, Madeleine Yeh, Andreas Trageser (bearhug@radix.net), Joe Hall (Joehall13@aol.com), Daniel Horne (grall@mindless.com), Kit Mason.

Inspector Gadget

review by Steve Smith

OK. Let's design a Disney movie. Start with a gormless hero, a pretty girl for the hero to get a hopeless crush on, and a slimeball villain. Add a cute kid, a cute dog, and some bumbling thugs. Don't forget lotsa neat special effects, sight gags, and pratfalls. Finish with throwaway lines and clever references to other movies to keep the adults interested.

This describes Inspector Gadget to a "T". John Brown (Matthew Broderick) is a security guard at Bradford Research, run by robotics expert Artemus Bradford. His one great ambition is to become a cop. He also has a crush on the boss's daughter Brenda (Joely Fisher). Sanford Scolex (Rupert Everett) breaks into the lab, steals the Great Invention (a robotic foot), and kills Artemus Bradford. (No provocation -- cold blooded murder. One of the things that got this movie a PG rating, I'm sure.) In trying to chase down the killers, Brown gets blown up pretty thoroughly. Brenda, feeling responsible for his condition on one hand and needing a guinea pig for her Big Project on the other, rebuilds Brown into Inspector Gadget.

Meanwhile, Scolex has built a robotic Inspector Gadget as a prototype of the Soldier of the Future and sends him out to destroy the city ("Have fun while you're doing it!"). Scolex lost his hand in the same explosion that got Brown, and now wants to be known in the ranks of evil- doers as Claw. ("Hook" being already taken.)



It's right down the middle of the formula. So why does it fall so flat? A number of reasons. First and foremost, timing. Timing is the essence of comedy, and has been since Gop the Caveman had 'em falling out of the trees with the story of Og the Mighty and the big pile of mammoth poop. Inspector Gadget is so full of MTV cuts and quick takes that the humor never has a chance to build. Lotsa gags, but they almost never go anywhere. In the few places where the humor *is*

allowed to build, the results are totally hysterical, like where Penny (the cute kid) is captured by Sikes (the Head Thug). There are many places where they could have gotten the same effect, but just dropped it for another quick cut.

Second, for comedy (or drama, for that matter) to be effective, the characters have to be at least minimally believable. IG falls totally flat on this count for both the hero and the villain. In Disney movies in this genre, the hero is a quiet, unassuming Everyman who achieves greatness of some kind. Here, John Brown wants to be a policeman. He is so wishy-washy that I can't picture him in

any kind of police situation at all -- giving out parking tickets would be too confrontational. Indeed, he is such a zero that I can't picture him keeping his job as a security guard. For example, as the villains are breaking into Bradford Research, he yells at them for speeding but doesn't notice them blowing a hole in the wall. You want this guy as a cop??

Scolex is so slimy that he almost leaves a sticky trail behind himself. However, in five minutes oozing conversation, he has Brenda ready to give up her own company and move into an office that he is providing. This is simply a matter of bad direction; all they would have had to do to fix it is turn down the slime a bit.

Brenda Bradford simply isn't much of a part. Joely Fisher does a perfectly adequate job playing a scientist; much better than Elizabeth Schue in "The Saint" but not as good as Jodie Foster in "Contact". (Aside -- if she really did design the Gadgetmobile, her mind is a *lot* more warped than comes across in the movie.)

The bit players do a great job, however. Dabney Coleman as the grouchy police chief and Michelle Trachtenburg as Brown's niece Penny are quite good. In Trachtenburg's case, this is despite some truly horrible dialog. (Note to aspiring scriptwriters -- if you write dialog for kids, go listen to some real kids the age you are writing. Kid actors and actors' kids are not real kids.) D. L. Hugley as the voice of the Gadgetmobile is very good, as well as having some of the best lines. The Mayor (can't find the actresses name) was very close to the borderline of offensive ("Gidget on LSD"), however, as a not-very-bright, grandstanding politician.

Overall, however, everybody in charge of making this movie should go back and watch reruns of "The Absent- Minded Professor" (Fred McMurray version) and "The Shaggy Dog" (the top movies in this genre, in my opinion) until they figure out what they did wrong.

Conclusion -- it's fine for the kids, who won't be as critical, but no more than mildly amusing for adults. Definitely not one of Disney's better flicks, although it's certainly not bad. It gets its PG rating from some gratuitous violence and (supposedly) light sexual innuendo (I musta missed it) and gratuitous product placements.

PS --

It just struck me how easy it would be to rewrite IG into a horror film. Reluctant cyborg vs. robot

Notes from the Austerity Committee

- I. Get more money
 - A. \$2 per meeting donation
 - B. A one-time \$25 donation
 - C. Sell WSFA press books on E-bay some are very nice
 - D. Get an anthology of DC-area authors, WSFA has ISBNs for 6 books. Use Lightning Press to get the money down
 - E. Hold a yard sale in Erica's driveway or through E-bay. Last yard sale net \$100
 - F. Virtual Disclave. Sell memberships give a badge and maybe a couple of other things.

- G. Do an "If I ran the Zoo" Disclave edition with things happening at Disclaves.
- H. WSFA Celebrity Auction. \$100 for tutoring by Dr. Jablow.
- I. Threaten club members with appearance in Chalker novel if don't pay up.
- J. Raffle with 50/50 split
- K. Pun/joke fund
- L. Link to Amazon with a % going to WSFA (BSFS does this)
- M. Selling old computer parts

II. Save money

- A. Bring your own snacks – Erica likes this better than a bring your own drinks policy. Karl thinks either would be inconvenient
- B. Bring your own drinks
- C. Make Journal web-only

Book Review *Patriarch's Hope* by David Feintuch

This is the latest and hopefully the last book of the "Hope" series by David Feintuch. The hero from the previous books, Nicholas Seafort, is now Secretary General of the United Nations and the most important figure on Earth. However, he still has problems, lots and lots of them.

He is fighting with the General Assembly, the Navy, and the Church. To save time, he is fighting them all at once. A strong faction in the Navy wants to use force to keep the various colonies subject to Earth rule. The leaders of the Reunified Church think the colonies should follow their church and pay it taxes. Earth's economy and environment have both been ravaged by time, stupidity, and the attack of the alien fish. The major political parties are fighting over preserving the environment or industry.

The Reunified Church threatens to excommunicate him. The various political opponents try for a vote of no confidence. A terrorist group attacks the Navy academy and a bomb attack leaves Nicholas paralyzed. The rest of the story has Nick trying to deal with this, rebellious teenagers, his estranged son, and to top it off, a conspiracy and a mutiny in the Navy.

This is a very good read. It goes fast, it's enthralling. It's done in the first person so we really come to understand Nick's emotional and mental anguish. However, I bought and read this in spite of my better judgment. I don't like or believe in that universe. There are so many things that seem needlessly cruel or stupid or just unbelievable. Our hero is autocratic, hot-tempered, and somewhat stupid. He often wallows in self pity.

But as an adventure novel, don't examine it, just relax and read; it's surprisingly good. Nick is a very good hero. He will do what he thinks is right, regardless of personal consequences. The love of wealth or power or personal salvation will not prevent him from doing the right thing. Not only does he do the morally right action, he's also pretty good in derring-do adventures.

Bankrupt by the Millennium

The 8/20 Third Friday was held at the Gillilands due to the switch. Judy banged the gavel at 9:17, "Let's have a meeting. The treasurer has left the country. I'd be more worried if we actually had funds or if he had done it last year when he had access to real money."

Disclave 2000 was asked how to spend \$1.5 million. Unfortunately this was in his day job. The Entertainment Committee took credit for nothing but Joe said Candidate Bush is squirming. He only inhaled. Clinton was better, at least he lied.



Eric Jablow reported for the Austerity Committee (with Mike Walsh, Sam Lubell, Erica Ginter and Karl Ginter as honored guest.). "If we don't do something soon we'll be bankrupt by the end of the millennium. It costs \$190 a month to run meeting plus special costs like the annual house cleaning [by special vote, put in Lee Gilliland]. By Jan 1, 2001 we'll be bankrupt.

Immediate ideas: Having people donate a special assessment, people bring in their own snacks (which Erica thought better than bringing their own drinks). We also talked about gaining money by selling the Cadigan and Shiner WSFA Press books on E-bay or holding a WSFA swap meet.

Judy said we will print the list of things in the *Journal* and discuss it at the third Friday meeting when people come back from Australia.

Joe made a motion that, starting in November 1, WSFA buy only soft drinks for meetings [leaving it for people to bring their own snacks and beer]. John made an amendment that a group be created to arrange that the load is shared and people don't all bring chips. This amendment was withdrawn.

Lee Gilliland said now the hosts have free reign over what to buy. If we cut it down to pretzels and beer it would save money. Joe said this was not a friendly amendment.

Joe explained his reason for his proposal, "Currently, WSFA has no reason to exist. We have to revitalize ourselves. Otherwise we just get together to eat and drink at someone else's expense. We could go to people and request contributions and people would respond. The problem is that if Covert does a Disclave he won't have money to front it. I did a con without money but that had support and good will. His won't have it."

Judy said that we have some ideas about how to get front money. She asked that the club postpone Joe's proposal until people come back from Australia. Alexis said, "I don't think we can do this without people here. The discussion would be valuable."

Joe said, "I mentioned it as taking effect in November. We need to do something, not just talk. WSFA is a dysfunctional family but always had common interests. Now it is very thin. We are doing things like Lee's and John's events. If we want to raise money, We need to do something real. I'd like to postpone discussion on this." Judy tabled this until Third Friday.

John said he has updated the Web site. David did a flyer (John didn't know who had done it) but it wasn't sent out because it needed some edits. Sam did a press release. John said that "October 22nd is the busiest day in the universe. The President is doing a forum on philanthropy." He asked that people don't publicize the event until the Smithsonian has approved our materials. The Smithsonian is afraid of getting publicity it hasn't approved.

Lee's Arlington Library Committee said the library is waiting until the other two people go through it.

The secretary was asked to make his usual announcement. Instead the club recited it in unison. John added, "Who says we don't do things as a club anymore." Lee announced that the reception for her art show is 4 o'clock on the 4th at the Gillilands. She'd love to see everybody there. It is a chance to critic all the awful things she's done in the last three years (in jewelry she added.). Richard and Nicki Lynch have a new issue of *Mimosa*, their 24th and second to last. It has a wrap around cover. They will have an event at NaSFic. Nicki added that Lisa Aston got a Grandmaster in beads and costumes at the local county fair, "Now you know what to do with an old WorldCon costume."

David Hines said, "I finally did the research on H. Beem Piper for the article I promised the Lynches. I have a rubbing of his grave." He showed it. "It looks a Little Fuzzy" said John. "They got his birthdate wrong on the headstone. I bumped into someone who knew him and heard a story. He was the head of a college honor society. The school's historical group moved armaments from a building to be demolished. Piper showed them how to care for the weapons. One of them was a century gun. Piper looked at it and said, 'There's no reason this thing couldn't fire.' He lit it and it went off. The honor society took it to football games and lit it off at every touchdown."

Steve Smith said that the first of the Y2K bugs will go off tomorrow as the counter in the Global Positioning System will go off. Winton said that he attended the Kate Elliot reading at the Library of Congress. There will be 2 more volumes in *Crown of Stars*. And if you want to use the Library of Congress web page wait a week. Its new integrated library system is lousy.

Lee Strong said he had a case of déjà vu. Alexis had a cartoon about three reorganizations equaling one coup de tau but not as much fun. His organization is on its tenth reorganization in six years. Judy feels his pain.

Joe had his 57th birthday. The club sang.

John Pomeranz announced that Peggy Rae Pavlat and John Sapienza are no longer living in sin but are in a higher tax status. Peggy Rae is waiting until she comes back from Australia to change her name to Sapienza due to slow passport problems. Elspeth Kovar is dropping Burgess from her name but this won't be official until February. Her brother is in Australia because an American tourist tried to bike across a desert. She warned WorldCon folks to stay away from deserts.

A move to adjourn unanimously at 10:15.

Attendance: Pres. Judy Kindell, Sec. Samuel Lubell, Trust. Lee Gilliland, Trust Steven Smith, 2000 Chair Covert Beach, Bernard Bell, Elspeth Kovar, Gail Dood, Alexis Gilliland, David Hines, Doug Houts, Eric Jablow, Keith Lynch, Winton Matthews, Joe Mayhew, John Pomeranz, George Shaner, Lee Strong, Michael Taylor, James Uba, Robin Hanson.

Scientific Ignorance and Creationism By Samuel Lubell

Americans are remarkably ignorant about science. A 1997 Gannett poll found that more than 27% of the population doesn't know that the Earth revolves around the Sun and three out of four don't know why it is warmer in summer than winter. A 1998 NSF study found that only 48 percent of Americans know that the earth goes around the sun once each year. Perhaps influenced by memories of *The Flintstones* being a documentary, only half of Americans rejected the statement that "the earliest humans lived at the same time as the dinosaurs." Three out of five agreed that lasers work by focusing soundwaves. Two out of five think radioactive milk can be made safe by boiling it. [Science and Engineering Indicators 1998]

Global warming is the
great challenge to us.
Abominable snowmen.



So in one sense it is not surprising that nearly half (44%) of Americans think that God created humans in the last 10,000 years [Gallup poll, 1999] or that two thirds (68%) think that creationism should be taught along with evolution in schools. But science is not subject to popular vote. The Earth still makes its annual orbit around the sun despite Americans' ignorance. Yet our leaders seem to feel that the

contents of America's science classes should be determined by beliefs, not science. Not one of the presidential candidates objected to the recent Kansas decision to exclude evolution from the list of topics tested by the state (Although the state did not outlaw the teaching of evolutionism, most students and teachers focus on the required areas, so this decision will reduce the coverage of evolution.) The state also dropped material on the age of the earth and the big bang.

The four states in the survey that did not specify the teaching of evolution in the curriculum are California, Missouri, Mississippi and Louisiana. On the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress in science Mississippi and Louisiana scored the lowest among the 50 states (Guam and D.C. scored lower) and California was the fourth lowest. This is almost certainly no coincidence. In places where people do not understand the difference between science and religion, where unprovable religious ideas are seen as equivalent to scientific theories, and where schools do not adequately teach the basics of science, it is not surprising that evolution is seen as competition for God.

Steven desJardin has a Web journal at <http://www.sff.net/people/sdj/journal/index.htm>

A Meditation on the WSFA Austerity Proposal

by
Alexis Gilliland

Taking note of the fact that without income from Disclave, the WSFA treasury will soon be running on empty, Joe Mayhew suggested (moving and tabling the motion) that WSFA might perhaps wish to save money by not buying beer for our meetings, while Eric Jablow, heading up the ad hoc austerity committee, read off a number of expenses which the club has incurred over the years. Perhaps I missed it, but one of the expenses that Eric didn't mention was bidding on Worldcons. I expect that the club treasurer could confirm my impression that since Discon II, back in 1974, an activist faction in WSFA has spent substantially more money on Worldcon bids than was ever spent on beer. However, it seems superfluous to make a motion to refrain from spending money WSFA doesn't have, on the grounds that you can't get blood from a turnip. If the money isn't in the club treasury, WSFA's aspiring con-runners and activists must necessarily seek their funding elsewhere.

The problem is that WSFA is going to run out of money. The reason for the problem is not that we are spending too much, but that, without Disclave, we are earning too little. Joe's proposed solution, to cut spending (never mind for what), will not solve the problem, but only put off the evil day. Joe's argument for putting off the evil day is that WSFA will need money in the treasury to serve as front money for some unspecified future convention that will make the club solvent again. Examining that argument in detail, we see that Covert Beach, the Disclave 2000 Chairman, does not presently have a hotel so that no front money is needed; if Covert finds a hotel in the next few months, the front money will still be in the treasury; if Covert should find a hotel and make money on his con, the question becomes moot. The impending crisis Joe seeks to cope with is still quite a ways off in the future.

What will happen if we do not act on Joe's motion and let the money run out sooner rather than later? Consider first the issue of front money; if a hotel is found, and a convention is in prospect, but the WSFA treasury is substantially empty, what then? One possibility is that the con chair will spring for these expenses out of his own pocket, expecting to reimburse himself from the con's profit. Related possibilities would be sharing the risk with the con committee, putting a special assessment on the club, or simply passing the hat. It should be noted that selling advanced memberships and huckster tables is a time-honored method of getting early money to meet early expenses. Recently it has become traditional to fund Disclave through the club treasury, in part to keep track of the money, but less formal methods are possible and may even be desirable. To state the obvious, WSFA's cons of the future will be different from our Disclaves of the recent past. If, as seems likely, those cons of the future will be smaller, the front money required will also be smaller, and therefore more easily managed.

A more interesting question is how we WSFAns would cope with the onset of austerity. One possibility is to raise the dues to cover the club's expenses. WSFA's dues have been nominal because Disclave was a money spinner, bringing in enough revenue to support the club's several activities. If the club wishes to continue those activities, the club must find some other way of funding them, and the most direct approach would be to raise dues. Are there other approaches? Absolutely yes. WSFA has always enjoyed a certain amount of volunteerism, people bringing in a birthday cake or homebaked cookies. The International Cookie Conspiracy started in 1968 with half a dozen people working to solve the problem of a hotel restaurant closing at nine, and by 1981 the ICC generated a hundred kilos of cookies coming in from all over the country. Given this history, it would seem possible to keep the dues nominal while enhancing the parties with voluntary contributions, as indeed WSFAns have done in the past. Of course volunteerism is hard to legislate; like carbonation, it springs from the bottom up.

My conclusion is that Joe's proposal addresses the symptom and not the cause, and for that reason it should remain tabled. In the normal course of events, WSFA either will muddle through as the club changes to adapt to its shrunken treasury or... it will disappear. I expect WSFA to survive. I hope it survives, but I am not wise enough to say what those changes might be.

