



## June 2009 Newsletter

### Nautical Nonsense

#### **That's Science Fiction**

Tuesday June 2, 2009 – 7p  
Panera Bread Restaurant  
165 Rt. 4 West  
Paramus, NJ 07652

#### **\*please note location change for tonight only**

This month's film is *The Hunt for Red October*. We move to Panera this month due to the length of the film. For more information click [www.paneranj.com](http://www.paneranj.com). We return to Hillsdale next month.

#### **Suspense Central**

Monday June 8, 2009 – 8p  
Panera Bread Restaurant  
165 Route 4 West  
Paramus, NJ 07652

This month's selection is a tie-in to That's Science Fiction! with *The Hunt for Red October* by Tom Clancy.

#### **Drawing A Crowd**

Wednesday June 10, 2009 – 8p  
New Moon Comics

This month's discussion will focus on Independent Comics & Webcomics.  
[www.newmooncomics.com](http://www.newmooncomics.com).

#### **Face the Fiction Carnival**

Saturday June 13, 2009  
1p start time. Movie @ 8p  
New Moon Comics ([www.newmooncomics.com](http://www.newmooncomics.com))  
Fun day of games, snacks, fun and a movie – winner of Best NJ Film @ US Super 8 Film & Digital Festival, **Haunted Hayride**. see website for full details.

#### **Films to Come: 4-Star Movie Group**

Wednesday June 17, 2009 – 7p  
Borders Ramsey - Interstate Shopping Plaza  
This group discusses new and upcoming genre and genre-related films, tv, books and current media happenings. If it deals with entertainment, our Master of Entertainment Moderator will cover it.

#### **Fantasy Gamers Group**

Saturday June 20, 2009 – 2:30p  
Todd's Place

directions available upon request/contact **Todd**  
Join us for terror, monsters, madness and more as GM BJ Pehush explores the city of Arkham MA with our monthly Call of Cthulu (Chaosium 6th edition) game. Books are available for order at New Moon Comics.

#### **Themes of the Fantastic**

Tuesday June 23, 2009 – 8p  
New Moon Comics

#### **Modern Masters**

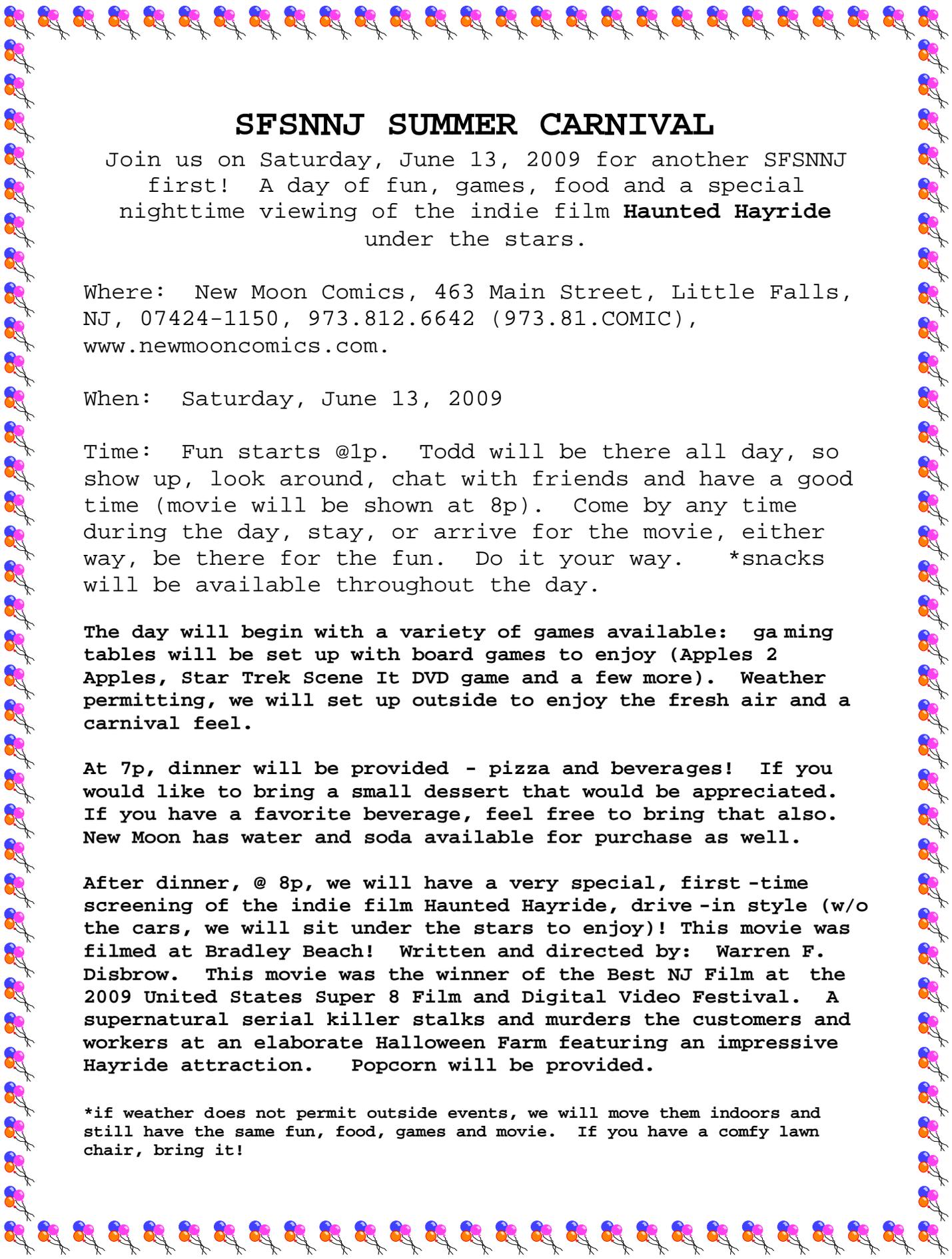
Friday June 26, 2009 – 8p  
Borders Ramsey - Interstate Shopping Center  
This month we discuss *Throne of Jade* by Naomi Novik.

#### **Infinite Chaos: A Temnia Campaign**

Saturday June 27, 2009 – 2p  
Todd's Place

directions available upon request/contact **Todd**  
Welcome to the Western Nations of Temnia, a brutal and vicious tyranny ruled by the Immortal Emperor, the illustrious Naram'tzin, your boss. This game explores life in the far West, where powerful Samurai serve demon worshipping madmen, and expediency and survival are balanced by honor and horror. A new day in the Yexhai Dominions is dawning, and the peaceful nations of the East should beware!

please visit [www.sfsnnj.com](http://www.sfsnnj.com) for full details



## SFSNNJ SUMMER CARNIVAL

Join us on Saturday, June 13, 2009 for another SFSNNJ first! A day of fun, games, food and a special nighttime viewing of the indie film **Haunted Hayride** under the stars.

Where: New Moon Comics, 463 Main Street, Little Falls, NJ, 07424-1150, 973.812.6642 (973.81.COMIC), [www.newmooncomics.com](http://www.newmooncomics.com).

When: Saturday, June 13, 2009

Time: Fun starts @1p. Todd will be there all day, so show up, look around, chat with friends and have a good time (movie will be shown at 8p). Come by any time during the day, stay, or arrive for the movie, either way, be there for the fun. Do it your way. \*snacks will be available throughout the day.

The day will begin with a variety of games available: gaming tables will be set up with board games to enjoy (Apples 2 Apples, Star Trek Scene It DVD game and a few more). Weather permitting, we will set up outside to enjoy the fresh air and a carnival feel.

At 7p, dinner will be provided - pizza and beverages! If you would like to bring a small dessert that would be appreciated. If you have a favorite beverage, feel free to bring that also. New Moon has water and soda available for purchase as well.

After dinner, @ 8p, we will have a very special, first-time screening of the indie film **Haunted Hayride**, drive-in style (w/o the cars, we will sit under the stars to enjoy)! This movie was filmed at Bradley Beach! Written and directed by: Warren F. Disbrow. This movie was the winner of the Best NJ Film at the 2009 United States Super 8 Film and Digital Video Festival. A supernatural serial killer stalks and murders the customers and workers at an elaborate Halloween Farm featuring an impressive Hayride attraction. Popcorn will be provided.

\*if weather does not permit outside events, we will move them indoors and still have the same fun, food, games and movie. If you have a comfy lawn chair, bring it!

## May Meeting Recaps

### That's Science Fiction! – Tuesday, 5/5/09 – City of Lost Children

This is Not Necessarily Normal month, and thus to demonstrate our lack of normality we started off with the Jean-Paul Jeunet masterpiece *Cite des Enfants Perdus*. Before the film, Chris and Gene asked me to give a synopsis of the story. As those who watched the film for the first time last night can attest, it is a hard film to define. My first attempt to define the movie was comparing it to *Frankenstein*, but where *Frankenstein* kept making monsters to use as lab assistants, and eventually they rebelled and cast him out. My second attempt was to simply say: imagine Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* meets Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*. Yeah, sounds freaky, right?

OK, so the film starts off with Krank (whom Mike Piazza dubbed 'the Vulture') experimenting on children in an attempt to learn how to dream. Krank, it turns out, was an experiment by a scientist who was born without the ability to dream and has thus aged very rapidly. Krank is supported in his efforts by the Little Princess, a beautiful little woman who is Krank's exact opposite, the six clones of the original scientist who are so much alike as to be indistinguishable, and the enigmatic Uncle Victor (a mollusc shaped like a giant brain in a fish tank that listens with Ear Trumpets, speaks with an old radio speaker, and sees with a lens from an old fashioned camera). Uncle Victor seems to be plotting against the misguided and insane Krank through his manipulation of the idiotic narcoleptic clones and the little princess. Uncle Victor tricks one of the clones into believing that he is the original scientist and gets him to send a dream message to the real original using one of the little children and Krank's dream device.

Meanwhile, a circus strongman named One (Ron Perlman) has his adopted little brother, D'Anglais, kidnapped by a bizarre cult of blind people who use electric eyes to see the world and amplifiers to hear everything around them (like *Daredevil* only weird). D'Anglais is a voracious appetite on two feet who spends the entire film either eating or looking for things to eat. One runs afoul of some children who are apparently master safe crackers under the direction of a pair of evil Siamese twins, and is eventually required to participate in a heist, as he is strong enough to carry the safe full of jewels. Miet, the young girl in charge of the little thieves, becomes attached to One and tries to help him recover Little Brother. Over time, One adopts Miet calling her Little Sister and gets a tattoo declaring his love for the little girl after the two are captured by the cult of the blind and nearly killed in a very *Batman* TV show type of assassination scenario involving planks, fish, and seagulls. Luckily, they are saved by a crazed former circus performer and his mind-controlling fleas (no I am not making this up). The evil Siamese twins attempt to use the mind control fleas to get One to kill Miet, but the tables are turned when one of Miet's tears sets off a chain of events that leads to a ship smashing into the pier and nearly killing the sisters (who are eventually dispatched by the circus performer and his retrieved mind control fleas).

Back at the lab, Krank attempts to convince the children that he is not evil by pretending to be Santa Claus. This does not go well. The Clones are forced to caper about to cheer the tykes up. Little Brother steals Krank's dinner, and Krank realizes that Little Brother is the only one who is not afraid of him, as he is naught but a voracious appetite in the guise of a child. Miet, One, and the original scientist all end up at the Lab and a strange sequence of events leads to the death of the little princess. Miet saves Little Brother and defeats Krank, and the original scientist, who has gone more than a bit crazy blows up the lab and himself while Uncle Victor, the idiot clones, One, Miet, and the children escape. The film ends with One, Mite, and Little Brother all happily united to make a happy family. Little Brother's commentary on the whole affair is to belch loudly.

After the film, Gene, Liz, Chris and I went to the Seville for dinner where we discovered that their hours and staff had been pared down to the bone. **(Todd)**

**Addendum:** A great Not Necessarily Normal write-up -- of a \*very\* Not Necessarily Normal film -- to kick off Not Necessarily Normal Month, Master Todd!

Believe me folks, Todd's more than capable and competent synopsis doesn't even begin to do the film justice - it really must be seen to be believed. "*Brazil*" meets "*Pan's Labyrinth*" just barely scratches the surface. The stunning fantasy visuals, the adorable children, the spectacular CGI, Ron Perlman, the bizarre environments; it sure was a lot to take in - as well as being a grand feast for the eyes.

This sums it up for me: Mike P. commented on a scene in which multiple creepy Santas sing to the children (and in the process inadvertently terrorize them) " Those kids are going to be scarred for life." My response was, "I think \*I'm\* scarred for life!" So if you want to see a cool, freaky film that \*may\* scar you for life, see "*Cite des Enfants Perdus*"! **(Gene)**

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**Face the Fiction – Saturday, 5/9/09 – Michael Flynn**

Our May Face the Fiction guest, Michael Flynn had a very nice turnout Saturday, 5/9/09 at Borders Garden State Plaza Mall. Being a prize-winning bestseller, Mr. Flynn had fans in the seats long before his scheduled 8p presentation! we had to ask the store for more chairs.

Michael Flynn is an American statistician and science fiction author. He was also quite humorous and poked fun at himself and fandom. The majority of Mr. Flynn's work falls under the category of hard science fiction. Much of his short fiction has appeared in *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*. He was shocked when only three or so hands went up when he asked who reads Analog. He then promptly told those who were not familiar with Analog that they could not listen to the answer - lol.

Mr. Flynn discussed his beginnings with much humor thrown in. He told us about his break into writing (he got into a magazine - that he was editor of - lol). When asked how he would have felt if he had gotten a rejection notice, he glibly answered, "I'd imagine not too good. That would've been bad."

He discussed his journey to prize-winning author by going through his book in chronological order (I'll list his works at the end of the recap). He talked about each book. He told us what he liked or changed and how when trying to break into writing, you'd have to learn how to edit - a lot. He explained the emotional links to your work and that you have to be prepared for rejection/editing and comments. It's what makes your work better.

At one point, Mr. Flynn stopped to tell us about his grand-daughter who had just won first place in a writing contest. He then very proudly pointed her out as she was trying to discreetly look at manga. She hid, but very proud grandpa's work was done!

Mr. Flynn opened the floor up to questions and was promptly flooded with them. Bill and Mr. Flynn had a nice chat about Pennsylvania (we were told that there are actually three PAs - Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and *the rest*). Steve Rubin, Steve's father and Paul also lot of questions and came prepared with books for the author to sign (Paul had a huge bagfull!). Mike P had some questions pertaining to writing. Mr. Flynn had an hour and half ride home, so he wrapped up, signed books and thanked us. We can't thank him enough! Thanks to Mr. Flynn for being such a great guest and for the awesome books he provides us.

Big thanks to Steve who was responsible for this guest! Thanks Steve.

Mr. Flynn headed home while we headed off to the diner where they were having free bread night ;) Chris H stole the bread out of a poor starving individual's mouth. Aurelia wrapped bread to keep it away from Chris. Jo pocketed bread sticks, but not the broken bits of crackers. We also had Bill showing his pictures and regaling us with his stories. All in all, much fun.

#### **Short fiction (chronological order)**

- ?? "Eifelheim" (1986) (nominee for Best Novella Hugo Award, 1987)
- ?? "The Forest of Time" (1987) (Hugo Best Novella nominee, 1988)
- ?? "The Adventure of the Laughing Clone" (1988)
- ?? "From the corner of the eye" *Analog* 113/13 (Nov 1993)
- ?? "Melodies of the heart" *Analog* 114/1&2 (Jan 1994 (Hugo Best Novella nominee, 1995)
- ?? "The promise of God" *F&SF* 88/3 [526] (Mar 1995)
- ?? "Southern Strategy" (2002) Published in the collection, *Alternate Generals II*, 2002, ed. Harry Turtledove, Baen Books
- ?? "The Ensorcelled ATM" (2005) Published in the anthology *The Enchanter Completed*, 2005, ed. Harry Turtledove, Baen Books
- ?? "Dawn, and Sunset, and the Colours of the Earth" (Asimov's Oct/Nov 2006), Hugo nomination 2007
- ?? "Quaestiones super caelo et mundo" *Analog* 127/7&8 (Jul/Aug 2007), Sidewise Award for Alternate History
- ?? "Sand and iron" *Analog* 128/7&8 (Jul/Aug 2008) : 86-100

## Novels

?? *In the Country of the Blind* (1990, revised 2001) (Prometheus Award and Compton Crook Award)

?? *Fallen Angels* (with Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle) (1991) (Prometheus Award, Seiun Award)

?? *Firestar* cycle

- o *Firestar* (1996)
- o *Rogue Star* (1998)
- o *Lodestar* (2000)
- o *Falling Stars* (2001)

?? *The Wreck of The River of Stars* (2003)

?? *Eifelheim* (2006) (Hugo nomination 2007)

?? *The January Dancer* (2008)

## Collections

?? *The Nanotech Chronicles* (1991)

?? *The Forest of Time and other stories* (1997) (AM)

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### **Suspense Central – Monday, May 11, 2009 – Atrocity Archives by Charles Stross**

The universe contains more than is dreamt of in our philosophies, but none of us were prepared for what happened at the Borders Cafe that fateful night. Most people thought that we were having fun, little realizing that we had been driven insane by the cyclopean architecture and odd geometries of the Garden State Plaza Mall. We all looked fearfully around the room as the chanting from the nearby Children's Section rose to a fevered pitch, and the roar of the Espresso Machine dopplered upwards like the screams of the damned. Just as the horrors from beyond space and time were about to enter the book store a voice rang out, and in words that would stay with us for the rest of our lives, we heard those fateful, dread words, "Timmy, put that book down! I am not buying you a copy of the Necronomicon. Now come here and stop whining, we are going to be late to see Star Trek." Thus was the universe saved from the eldritch terrors that exist beyond madness.

This month is Not Necessarily Normal month, and in our desire to look at things that are just a bit out of the ordinary we selected a great book of modern day Cthulu concepts, *The Atrocity Archives* by Charles Stross. This is a story of spies and horrors from beyond the realm of human sanity. Bob Howard is an IT consultant for the Laundry, a super-secret organization in the British Intelligence community that deals with summoning creatures from other universe using math and computers, and his job is to make sure that your screensaver doesn't awaken the great Cthulu or attract the attention of demons from beyond. As it turns out, any sufficiently advanced technology really is magic. Put together enough vacuum tubes and lasers and you too can live the glamorous life of Charles Dexter Ward. Luckily, Bob is there to guard us from terrors from space and time as well as Islamic fundamentalists and Nazis from parallel universes.

The night itself started off with a great deal of jiggery-pokery and nonsense as Chris H read from his handouts and Todd read an interview with Ernst Stavro Bloefeld from the essay at the back of 'The Jennifer Morgue', meanwhile Aurelia tried to keep us on topic and Remi kept threatening to get nekkid (I kid you not, I have witnesses, it might have been the influence of Nyarlathotep) and somebody started passing around pictures of the author that looked surprisingly like Todd (which begs the question of why such a handsome devil is not pictured in his book). Ann Marie, ever the diplomat, tried to help Aurelia keep order, but we were having way too much fun. Todd and Chris alternated reading passages of the book and describing the plot for the curious onlookers (the guy in the back of the cafe with the laptop looked especially amused, and might very well have been relaying our every word to the great Dagon). The group, at least those who remained sane after reading the book, agreed that the book was very good, though a bit long on the techno babble. Barry then arrived, along with Azathoth, who brought a nice bundt cake made from the souls of sad goldfish, and they recommended that

we got to the Gotham City Grill. We ended up at the Tom Sawyer Diner after many trials and travails, where a crazed cultist used bizarre sciences to balance two forks on a toothpick on the edge of a glass. Azathoth was not impressed until Remi order that Naked Burger...but that is a story for another time!

Next month Suspense Central will do a classic Tom Clancey novel, *The Hunt for the Red October*, in conjunction with the film being shown at Chris H'sThat's Science Fiction at Panera. **(Todd)**

### **Drawing A Crowd – Wednesday, 5/13/09 – Virtual Insanity?**

A very nice crowd gathered at New Moon to discuss this month's topic of Reality in Comics – does reading comics warp reality? Create virtual insanity? The overwhelming evidence pointed to YES – lol!

Not really, but with some of the talk going around that room, we need an excuse, any will do.

The discussion opened with attendees talking about their personal favorites. It was a given that comics can only affect 'reality' in someone if certain personality traits were pre-existing. The old argument used for movies and songs being able to make someone kill, commit suicide, etc. fit here. An otherwise normal person won't read a comic and think they can fly. Someone already on the fringe however...

Haywood and Barry demonstrated their expertise and led the discussion. Barry brought several comics of interest to the table for discussion purposes and kept us on the path, one of them an awesome 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. Rob chimed in often. Haywood, Rob and Barry had a great discussion about various Marvel and DC characters, as well as cartoons currently on Cartoon Network that are well done adaptations. Barry and Rob then moved to upcoming theatrical releases that are comic book adaptations.

A discussion about Star Trek took up a large chunk of time, but no one seemed to mind and seemed intent on discussing the ins and outs of the film. Todd wanted to hate the movie and was very pleasantly surprised. Barry still maintaining his stance on the film as he has from long before its release.

The discussion swung back to comics and took quite a diversion – FIST, Big Man Thing; I won't even mention the rest! We had fun with it and that's all that matters. We wrapped up, blamed comics for our behavior and look forward to the June discussion that Barry has been kind enough to provide several titles for recommended reading for. Thank you Barry.

### **Films to Come – Wednesday – 5/20/09**

Last night Films To Come met at Borders in Ramsey. My apologies to the group members who attended and our moderator. I was on time for the meeting, but since I work in the store, some of my coworkers stopped me to talk.

At any rate, I made it to our circle of chairs as Barry was reviewing the April movies. He went around the circle asking who'd seen what. I think Gene and Chris take the prize for having seen the most of them.

Next came the May movie round up. Barry organizes the films by release date. He lists the director of the film and his/her other films. On the list, the genre films (according to *The Maltin Guide*) are underlined on the list. Since Chris brought his own copy of *Entertainment Weekly*, Gene and Chris took turns reading the *EW* blurb on each of the upcoming films. Then, Barry had Mike P and Todd take turns reading the descriptions of each director's genre films from *The Maltin Guide*. On occasion, Barry would read a movie description from his electronic version of *The Maltin Guide*. Todd learned a few things from this exercise, including one thing from me -- and he didn't even push me! I think it was only because he was sitting too far away from me! lol!

Todd (and the rest of us) learned that Billy Bob Thornton cowrote the screenplay for the Sam Raimi film *The Gift* with Tom Epperson. The screen story for *Spiderman 2*, also directed by Raimi, was cowritten by bestselling author Michael Chabon (author of the novels *Summerland* and *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, among others). But the most important piece of trivia Todd learned last night came from ME! See! I do know stuff!

When we came to *Angels & Demons*, directed by Ron Howard, we were discussing the differences between the Ron Howard film, *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* and the Chuck Jones' animated cartoon. Bill pointed out that it was Boris Karloff who narrated and gave The Grinch his voice in the 1966 animated short. Then, I threw out that it was Tony The Tiger who sang the song "You're A Mean One, Mr. Grinch". Barry clarified that the song was sung by Thurl Ravenscroft -- the longtime voice of Tony The Tiger (who also sang the song, "No Dogs Allowed" from the Peanuts' *Snoopy Come Home*).

Next came, J.J. Abrams and *Star Trek*. Chris (aka the brown-noser and Old Timer with Cheese) brought several reviews of the film which brought on quite a lengthy discussion about the movie, the *Star Trek* franchise, opinions on what was good and bad about the film, time travel, Captain Pike, The Menagerie (and The Cage), etc. Liz and I were the only people who hadn't seen it. I think Barry was the only person who wasn't crazy about the film's premise. Deb asked if he would have preferred if it were a Starfleet Academy story with new characters. Todd's uncle was just happy to have seen it in the US, since he's seen the other *Star Trek* films at home in Italy and they were dubbed! (Jo)

### **Modern Masters – Friday – 5/22/09 – Thirteen by Richard Morgan**

Modern Masters met on Friday, 5/22 to discuss author Richard Morgan and his book *Thirteen*.

Chris opened the meeting by passing out handouts he had provided on both the author and the book. Richard Morgan is a British SF writer. His books have a common theme in that they all take place in a dystopia. This is one jaded guy with a dark sense of humor, which makes for some good reading.

Chris asked if anyone had read any of Morgan's other books. David had read his other works and specifically commented on *Altered Carbon*. He provided a nice summary of the cyberpunk story. Next, Chris moved to *Thirteen*, the selection for the night.

*Thirteen* is described as a futuristic techno-thriller and SF masterpiece. This book had it all - well-written, action, in-depth characters, plot. The main character, Carl Marsalis, is a hired gun. He also happens to be a hybrid engineered by the US government to be the perfect weapon. The government realizes the danger in their perfect weapons and wants them back - to kill them all. Bad news if you're a 'Thirteen' - very bad. Marsalis becomes a man without a country, a man without a planet. Great if you're a bounty hunter - he makes big bucks helping to hunt down the other Thirteens on the run.

Marsalis swipes a space shuttle and has some interesting dining experiences on said shuttle - think frozen TV dinners of people! Yuck. Marsalis accidentally wakes up from his cryogenic sleep too early and takes advantage of the 'sleeping' crew and passengers. Disturbing.

Chris passed the baton to Todd who led an in-depth discussion about the book. David and Todd both enjoyed the book and gave details and explanations. Kathleen enjoyed the writing and thought many of the passages beautifully written but found the political babble hard to follow and a bit distracting. Chris enjoyed the book and told Kathleen he also got bogged down by the 'babble' and chose to read around it rather than letting it ruin the story for him.

Liz got a kick out of Marsalis thawing crew members, cutting up the poor crew member with surgical precision, and then sticking them back in the drawer for a snack. She remarked, "you mean like a frozen TV dinner?! Swanson-in-space." Mike P felt that a bit disturbing as well. Barry, true to form, sat twirling his thumbs whistling innocently muttering, "hey! What happened to the crew? Do you know what happened here?" "ummm, what are you talking about? I don't know what you're talking about." Lesson here - never go on a long-distance space shuttle flight with Mr. Barry.

Todd and David talked about *Thirteen*, Chris and Kathleen chimed in frequently with likes and dislikes. It was discussed whether or not this would make a good film. Todd wrapped up about 10p so we could continue the evening in the café chatting. Talk moved to *Star Trek* and the on-going battle to sway Barry-the-Impenetrable - yeah, that'll happen. I sit back and laugh.

Good job Chris and Todd. Fun meeting. Join us next month for *Throne of Jade* by Naomi Novik

### **Themes of the Fantastic – Tuesday – 5/26/09 – Looks like SF, Feels like SF, but is it?**

Moderator Bill Wagner led an interesting and lively discussion for the topic *Looks like SF, Feels like SF, but is it?* He even provided a handout for the topic he chose this month. Bill explained the concept of the topic and then opened things up. He went around the table asking attendees for input.

The concept Bill had in mind was movies/books/TV series, etc. that were not classified as SF but had an SF feel (even if only on occasion). He provided *The Lazarus Man* (TV), *Q.E.D.* (TV), *No soap radio* as examples. Chris gave us *Altered States* and *Watership Down*. Gene gave us *Mission Impossible* and *Harvey*. Jo tossed out *Scooby-Doo* and *X-Files*. I mentioned Special Agent Pendergast from the Douglas Preston/Lincoln Childs books (i.e. *Cabinet of Curiosities*). Todd offered *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, *Red Storm Rising*, *Nowhere Man*, and *Legend* (TV). Todd also gave us *Southern Gothic*, which Barry delicately pointed out was actually *American Gothic*. We made Todd feel better by telling him his cable was different from ours. He took it in stride.

Bill, Chuck and Steve R added *Flashman* and told the group about this show. *Sherlock Holmes* was added to the list.

Great answers abounded. Some answers were funny – ask Todd next time you see him about [Julius Shakespeare](#) and the all Queen soundtrack for Metropolis [↗](#)

Bill went around the table a few times until we exhausted the topic – which we amazingly stayed on until 9:45! Bill then led a discussion about various items of interest. We had almost gone a complete meeting without one ERB shout out until Barry did it! It was a free-for-all after that. We knew it was too good to be true. Even more remarkable was the point of origin for the ERB comment came via a Rocky trivia question – Barry, stop watching the movies so closely. Bill brought the meeting to an official close and we headed out. Join us next month for Island Hopping SF – SF that takes place in, near, close to, under the water.

## **SFSNNJ Member Movie Reviews**

### **Star Trek: First Look**

**Todd Ehrenfels** - \*\*\* Caution, Spoilers \*\*\*

Abandon all preconceptions, ye who enter, for within be dragons! Maybe that is just a wee bit melodramatic, but if I am to be honest, it is kind of an important thing to keep in mind. For myself, it is advice that I have been foisting on the endless complainers throughout the past few years, and it is something that I have had to continually remind myself. It wasn't easy, but I braced myself for a rocky road and tried to keep an open mind about everything, and boy was I well rewarded.

I will not go into a plot synopsis here (you want to know what the film is about, go read the Wikipedia and IMDB articles), but suffice it to say that the story benefitted from all of the lessons learned from decades of franchise history as well as the superlative talents of Mr. Abrams. The story itself is fairly simple, makes sense, and has an implacable pacing that does not immediately scream "Look at me, I am an Action Movie!" This simple fact of good writing was noted by one theatre-goer who yelled at the end of the film "This was no Star Wars!" in a complaining tone. He was right, this was a GREAT movie. Why?

1) Tone: The film definitely has a more action/adventure story feel than some of its predecessors, however that feel is tempered by a no-nonsense tenor that grabs your attention. I feel that Captain Christopher Pike really embodies the sort of mercurial mood of the piece. While the film has somewhat of a steely reserve, much like Captain Pike, it can grin and crack a joke at a moment's notice or suddenly plunge in to despairing and angry defiance at a whim. The story definitely has its grim moments, but they are leavened by love, humor, and the bonds forged in crisis.

2) Appearance: Somehow this film really manages to look just right. Nothing (other than the Starfleet uniforms) looks anything like the classic Trek (either TOS or Movie era), but somehow it really looks like it belongs in the Trek universe. Lots of visual references to Star Trek staples are found throughout, but here they are subtly different. Sure the actors do not look like their predecessors, the ship looks different, and even the hand-held phasers are different (I love the piece that flips around when it goes from Kill to Stun and back again), but they all work really well.

3) Dialog: In spite of the inclusion of the standard panoply of Trek clichés, the dialog in this film was simple, direct, and intelligent. It seemed obvious that the writers went out of their way to ensure that this Star Trek would not fall prey to the kind of cornball hackneyed dialog that has been endemic to science fiction film franchises of the past few years (yes, I am looking at you Star Wars), falling back on speech patterns from the older series. Gone is the signature techno-babble made popular by Star Trek: The Next Generation, and gone too is the over-dramatic speechifying of captains like Picard and Janeway. Everyone in this story speaks well, has sensible dialog, and seems to fit into the proper patter of the original Trek.

4) Acting: Everyone was fantastic! I had my doubts that Tyler Perry would pull his role off with a straight face, but even he was good for it (as Grand Admiral of the Fleet). Christopher Pine seemed a bit shaky as Kirk in his earliest appearance, but settled in nicely. Karl Urban was absolutely fantastic as Bones (and we finally get a reason for his nickname other than the traditional and archaic sawbones). Zachary Quinto played a Spock that not only reminded me of Nimoy's TV portrayal of the Vulcan, but also brought some new concepts to the role. Scotty, Uhura, Sulu, Chekov, and Pike were all magnificently done, and for those who did not think that "Harold" could play Sulu: I laugh in your faces.

5) References: This is a reboot of a franchise, but it is a franchise that has entered the lexicon of the American public. Even people who don't watch Star Trek know some of the tropes and tricks from the show like McCoy's various bantering lines, Kirk's sleeping with green skinned women, and the red shirt getting killed to show how the monster or weapon works (all of which are present). It was truly great to see the loving attention to these references that Abrams lavished on this one.

6) Score: We have only a few hints of the classic score scattered throughout the film, and no fanfare and travelling song until the very end of the film (and I will say that it was a mistake to let Nimoy do the 'Space, the final frontier' bit as it should have been Pine). The music itself was really well put together and fit the mood of the film quite well. Michael Giacchino weaves in some great orchestral movements with sounds of sensors and such to make it seem like incidental bits of the score. Very well produced feel in that regard.

Now, how does this fit in with the whiners who are complaining about the reset of the Trek franchise? Well it should fit in well. They hammer you over the head with the fact that from the moment Nero shows up, the Universe is changed in dozens of small ways. Spock (Nimoy) explains it to Kirk, but even Spock (Quinto) and Uhura figure out that the simple appearance of Nero has made theirs and alternate universe from the one to which Nero was native. This is very smart on the part of the writers and producers, as it means that they can always pull stuff over, re-do it, or just re-invent it and they are safe from the clarion cry of "It wasn't like that!"

Anyway, I really liked this film, and would recommend that you abandon all of your preconceptions and face the idea of a brave new frontier with open arms. As I will likely see this film a few times, I will revisit this review and let you know how it holds up. **(Todd)**

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Yeah, what Todd said. Much better than I thought it would be. As I've said before, plot, writing, acting are all important - but pace can make for a great experience. This has a great pace and feel to it. **(Chris H)**

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I pretty much agree. At least I can't think of a point on which I disagree that would not be petty nit picking ...

Spoiler to come: like "the 'grandfather paradox' should have undone the change in the time line." (That or by those temporal prime directive "cops" who kept popping up in "**Voyager**" and "**Enterprise**."

Or maybe **Spock** could have told himself that on stardate yada yada he should leave a day or two earlier in order to get to the super nova before it engulfs the planet. **(Alan John Polyniak)**

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I loved it, too!

One thing, though. About Chekov. He says he's 17. That would make Kirk 29. It was established in classic Trek that Chekov was 22 when Kirk was 34. Therefore, unless the events at the beginning of the movie changed the timeline enough that Chekov's parents met earlier, and he was conceived earlier, then Kirk is 29. (gods, I'm such a geek!). **(Thom Purdy)**

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#### **X-Men Origins: Wolverine**

Well, it finally made it. Good news & bad news. The bad news is that the film has virtually nothing to do with the six part graphic novel I had bought from Rob at New Moon Comics, and the story that replaced it is pedestrian at best. The good news is that Hugh Jackman kicks ass more than ever. Plot / story, such as it is: C. Hugh Jackman as Wolverine: A. Grade: B. I'm sure Aubrey, among others, will have much more to say. **(Chris H)**

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#### **Angels & Demons**

Ann-Marie had loaned me the Dan Brown books *Angels & Demons* and *The DaVinci Code* a while ago. A&D was written before DaVC but they decided to make the movie a sequel. Didn't really matter. The movie's production values are great. As I was watching it, I remembered that Robert Langdon always was a step behind the bad guys. Nothing controversial here, but I didn't think DaVC was either. A good film. B+ and Aubrey will breathe a sigh of relief in that Tom Hanks' hair is back to normal. **(Chris)**

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#### **Seven Days In May**

Bill Wagner had posted a link that the Fort Lee Film Commission was going to show some films at the Fort Lee Borough Hall. Saturday Gene and I went to see "Seven Days in May" (1964) starring Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas. I had only seen it once a long time ago. Lancaster plays a general staging a coup against the US and Douglas has to try and stop him. Intense. **(Chris H)**

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