



Science Fiction Society of Northern New Jersey

## May 2010 Newsletter

### No Time Like The Future: Time Travel in SF & Genre

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

**Tuesday May 4, 2010 - 7p**

Hillsdale Public Library

*The Philadelphia Experiment*

\*Dining follows the movie.

#### **Face the Fiction**

**Saturday May 8, 2010**

**8 - 10 p**

Borders Books & Music

235 Interstate Shopping Center

Rt. 17 South

Ramsey, NJ 07446

SFSNNJ welcomes author **Benjamin Tate**

#### **Suspense Central**

**Monday May 10, 2010 - 8p**

Borders /Interstate Shopping Center

Rt. 17 South Ramsey, NJ

**Replay** by *Ken Grimwood*

#### **Drawing A Crowd**

**Wednesday May 12, 2010 - 8p**

New Moon Comics

Join moderator Tim Cook as he explores 'time travelin' fools'.

For additional information click

[www.newmooncomics.com](http://www.newmooncomics.com).

#### **Fantasy Gamers Group**

**Saturday May 15, 2010 - 2:30p**

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.

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

**Wednesday May 19, 2010 - 7p**

Ramsey Borders/Interstate Shopping Center

This group discusses the world of cinema and entertainment. Classic, current and upcoming genre and genre-related films, TV, books and media happenings are discussed. If it deals with entertainment, our Master of Entertainment Moderator will cover it. \*Dining follows this event.

#### **Rogue Trader: Wolves in the Fold**

**Saturday May 22 - 2p - 10p**

**Panera Restaurant Community Room**

**Ramsey, 1300 Rt. 17 North**

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 Yenxhai Dominions is dawning, and the peaceful nations of the East should beware!

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

**Tuesday May 25, 2010 - 8p**

Wayne Public Library

Aspects of time travel if SF and genre

[www.waynepubliclibrary.org](http://www.waynepubliclibrary.org)

#### **Modern Masters**

**Friday May 28, 2010 - 8p**

Borders Ramsey/Interstate Shopping Center

**Timeline** by *Michael Chrichton*.

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

# SFSNNJ Face the Fiction presents Benjamin Tate

**When:** Saturday, May 8, 2010

**Time:** 8p – 10p

**Where:** Borders Books & Music

- 235 Interstate Shopping Center
- Rt. 17 South
- Ramsey, NJ 07446, 201.760.1967

This month we welcome author Benjamin Tate.

Benjamin Tate was born in North-Central Pennsylvania and is currently a college professor living near Endicott, New York.

Mr. Tate is the author of *Well of Sorrows*, an epic tale of a continent on the brink of war, and a deadly magic that waits to be unleashed on an unsuspecting world.

Benjamin Tate, High Fantasy author of *Well of Sorrows*. Benjamin Tate's work has been well reviewed in a number of different media, and he pushes the envelope of Fantasy with his freshman effort in *Well of Sorrows*.

Amazingly detailed characters interact in a densely interwoven story of one family's fight for survival in a hostile land. From the Family Wars of Andover, to the unexplored plains and its vicious inhabitants, to the horrifying depths of the dark forest. As we journey through this landscape we will meet enemies both mundane and fantastical, but none so terrible as the ones we find in the heart of the people around us. Meet Benjamin Tate and learn more about this impressive series!

“Colin Harten and his parents had fled across the ocean to escape the Family wars in Andover. But trouble followed them and their fellow refugees to this new land, forcing them to abandon the settled areas and head into unexplored territory—the sacred grounds of a race of underground dwellers and warriors. It was here that they would meet their doom. Driven to the borders of a dark forest, they were attacked by mysterious Shadow creatures who fed on life force. Only Colin survived to find his way to the Well of Sorrows—and to a destiny that might prove the last hope for peace in this troubled land.”

## **April Meeting Recaps**

### **That's Science Fiction! – Tuesday April 6, 2010**

We started the month off well showing "Kiki's Delivery Service" (1989), which was produced, written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki. As so many of his features, it's lovely to look at and be involved in. Kiki is a witch who ventures off to find her place in the world. I believe everyone attending enjoyed it. A trip to the Seville Diner followed. **(Chris H)**

### **Face the Fiction: Jeff Somers– Saturday, April 10**

**Recap by Todd V. Ehrenfels:** Before I do anything else, I want to thank the hard working staff and management team of the Borders Books & Music at the Ramsey Interstate Shopping Center. They managed to get a good supply of books in with almost no notice, and they were so hospitable, helpful, and nice in helping us set up! Also, Thanks are definitely due to Jeff Somers for stepping up to the plate, and to his brother Sean and wife, Danette, for coming along for the ride to Ramsey and the event. I hope you guys had as much fun as we did!

Now, on to the event! I recorded the first hour of the event, again, and the audio is all muffed up, again.

Next event I am setting up a proper microphone! Still, if you turn your volume waaaaay up, you should be able to hear the author speaking. I apologize for this and have written a strongly worded letter to Creative, the makers of my Vado recorder.

Jeff Somers started the night off reading an essay he published in his personal 'zine, [The Inner Swine](#) about how he started writing. The essay, which posits two head injuries as the cause of his writing obsession, was quickly obviated by Jeff relating a story of watching an animated version of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* on TV and then seeing book and realizing for the first time that there was source material for the movie. He tore through the entire series, and then was upset by the fact that it ended, so he started to write his own version of 'what happened next.' The rest, as they say, is history.

At the Duchess' (Danette Somers) request, Jeff read Chapter 1 of *The Eternal Prison*, the third book in the Avery Cates series. Afterwards we found out a bit of trivia in regards to this particular scene, which was set in Las Vegas. Apparently the entire thing was inspired by a trip to Vegas forced on Jeff by the Duchess (much like *Dancing with the Stars*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *American Idol*) and during a performance by Cirque de Soleil he had an epiphany for this scene. Thus has the Duchess been able to continue forcing him on further vacations: they are inspirational!

After the reading, we moved on to questions and answers, in which we learned a lot of important things.

Number one, Jeff is a Pantser (a writer who flies by the seat of their pants) as opposed to a Plotter (a writer who puts together outlines and plans). Number two, while he likes music, he finds himself writing in silence more often than not these days, mainly to cut down on the distractions. We also found out that Jeff is not a schedule and maintain kind of guy, but rather prefers his day to move organically, like his writing or that case of broken beer bottles a fan sent him in the mail. Learning about prison 'zine pen pals was fun, but we kept turning our attention back to the protagonist with a heart of... lead?... Avery Cates.

There was a great deal of information flowing back and forth, like data moving through the networks at Westminster Abbey in *The Electric Church*, and for those of us in attendance, this was a rewarding and enriching experience. After we got our books signed (by the way Jeff, I am glad you wore pants as well) and wished the author and his family a safe ride home, many of us retired to the Stateline Diner to feast and gab about a variety of subjects.

While I did not eat (yes, I am still on the diet, and yes I am still miserable, and yes I am now only 40 pounds from my goal weight), I did have a great conversation with Paul and Kate and BJ at our end of the table. For those keeping track, that would be the Cool Kids end of the table! Those on the other end, while inferior on the cool scale, sounded like they were having fun as well. I know I heard both Gene and Chris laughing, and I am

pretty sure Ann Marie, Josephine, Emir, and Liz were joining in. Next time, I may allow more folks at the Cool Side of the table, but you will have to be nice to me! I demand this:)

**Additional comments: (AM)** Yes, kudos to Borders for being so helpful in getting those books - which almost all sold out BTW!! I didn't think the line to get books signed would end.

The meeting itself was fantastic. What a great guest Jeff was. His wife (referred to as the Duchess) was hilarious and his poor brother will never live down his role in the initial head-bashing incident that set Jeff on his path to writing. Danette and Jeff were like the Lucy and Ricky of the literary world. Not only did we get an amazing wealth of information from Jeff on any number of things from his humble beginnings to advice on how to get published, we laughed the entire night.

The night went very well and at one point we had standing room only with a crowd of over 30. A few people in the audience were fans of Jeff's that came to see him. Good for you Jeff! His presentation was as engaging as his books. Mr. Somers did not disappoint.

I enjoyed learning what went into the writing of *The Electric Church* and its sequels. I can't wait to read the next 4 books! I still maintain that I like Avery Cates and don't think he's a bad sort - I am happy to report that Danette agrees with me and thinks he's a good guy too. He's only doing what he has to...that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

What I particularly enjoyed was how Jeff interspersed personal details with how things came to the page. It was interesting to find out vacation locations showed up in the stories. It added to authenticity. It was even funnier to find out the Duchess could now work her way through a list of desired destinations because it does enhance Jeff's stories. Well...it does;)

Jeff read from the third book in the series, *The Eternal Prison*. I cannot wait to get to it. We found out there will be book 4 and 5 and that will complete the series. Everyone immediately asked would there be more possibly in the form of a prequel or in another universe or something - Avery is one popular guy.

When Jeff opened up to questions from the audience, hands shot up and didn't stop for close to an hour! Mr. Somers answered each and every question with thoughtful answers and made sure he had answered what was asked. He even answered the embarrassing questions with hysterical results. I asked if he had any particular favorite shows he watched. He replied that the Duchess had control of the remote so he often misses shows he might want to watch. Danette chimed in that they watch *Lost* - so far so good, Jeff was OK with that one...but then she added that they also watch *Dancing With The Stars* - Jeff's response was the very funny, "Ah yes, my humiliation is now complete." Gotta luv it!

We were sorry the night had to end. Thanks so much to Jeff, Danette and Sean! Great meeting, great time.

We then continued to Stateline where Todd mistakenly believed he was at the cool end of the table. The real cool end of the table did indeed have fun...driving Miss B, special needs and an odd assortment of things kept us misbehaving.

**Chris Hasselkus:** I too thought the event was great. Jeff Somers has to be one of the most interesting speakers we've had. I already had and read his book *The Electric Church* and bought *The Digital Plague*. I had them both signed, and am looking forward to the other three books in the series. Hopefully Jeff will be back as a part of a panel in the very near future.

**Eugene Reynolds:** Aloha. I attended a "Face the Fiction" meeting of the SF Society of Northern NJ tonight, where Jeff Somers, author of "The Electric Church", was the invited speaker. Mr. Somers is an affable gentleman, who is amused and bemused over his own success at writing. He has 2 published sequels to "The Electric Church", with 2 more on the way, along with assorted short stories, both in the universe of "The Electric Church" and more mainstream and genre mystery. His own inspirations come mainly from the hardboiled detective stories of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, with the iconic figure of the cynical loner making his way "down these mean streets". He does not think of it as cyberpunk, a term that he reserves for the works of William Gibson and Neal Stephenson. Within sf, he is a fan of Jack Chalker (even

realizing how much Chalker depended on repeated tropes) and Frederick Pohl (whose "The Cool War" has a similar near-future America struggling as its old infrastructure is replaced).

Mr. Somers is ambivalent about his main character, Avery Cates, who we labeled a protagonist (as he is not a hero). He recognizes that Cates is a thug, but he also grants that Cates is clinging to some basic rules of conduct, in an almost obsessive-compulsive manner, to maintain some moral grip on his world. On the other hand, Somers will punish Cates, subjecting him to a lot of physical and verbal abuse for the practice of his profession, assassin. Further, the overall story arc of the series is, in a sense, Cates's growing realization that he lacks the ability to control events and dictate even a minimal level of morality. Somers also prefers to maintain a realistic tone to his fiction, and so he strips out elements that more melodramatic works might choose to show, like not giving Cates a romantic interest as he feels it would be a bit hard to keep a relationship going when you are dragging through the sewers on a regular basis. On the other hand, he also likes to leaven in a lot of humor, often of the "gallows" variety, as in keeping with the hardboiled genre conventions. Also, he prefers to avoid the "infodump" style of exposition, though he did confess to resorting to it for brevity's sake and to not trying to hide it when he has to use an infodump. He confessed to "lampshading" (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/LampshadeHanging>) it in "The Electric Church" when the Techie cries out "Are you trying to tell \*me\* about the tech?" in response to Cates's blatant infodump on the security system.

In terms of writing methods, he admits to being a "pantser" (i.e., writing by the seat of the pants) instead of being a plotter. He will have a strong image of the opening scene, a good idea of the ending, and perhaps a hazy indication of some points in between. Otherwise, he is discovering the book as he writes it, which sometimes means tossing a month's work out if the direction of the narrative is not going where he wants or needs it to go. Similarly, secondary characters are often tossed out after he is through with them, to simplify the process of getting all the threads tied up and passed through the last plot point. He referred to it as the "Wizard of Oz" method of pulling the levers and then tossing them out afterward. While he sometimes thinks about other uses or scenes he would like to explore with certain characters, he realizes that the dangers of the plot demand some sacrifices be made or risk making the characters too indestructible to be believed.

In addition to his professionally published fiction, he also writes a semi-annual 'zine (amateur magazine), "The Inner Swine", that contains essays on various topics, from whatever interests him at any given moment, along with fiction that is more experimental and which is not likely to find a paying home. Starting during the 'zine upsurge of the early '90s, he reached 2,500 copies, distributed in a number of bookstores and by subscription. While much smaller nowadays, it remains very popular in prisons according to his wife, who also attended the meeting, and that fact explained to her just why he insisted on a post office box address for his correspondence. is available on-line at [www.innerswine.com](http://www.innerswine.com).

As for "The Electric Church" itself, I am not surprised that Somers is a fan of detective fiction, as the book is a classic "caper" tale (sort of "Ocean's 11"), with a crew of shady types coming together to pull a job, where our sympathies are engaged due to their targets being even bigger, meaner baddies. I would disagree with the author in that his work fits into the cyberpunk style very well, sharing much of the critical perspective of society coming from the down-and-out denizens of the streets that classic cyberpunk espouses. Also, I found that I did appreciate his basic honesty in depicting the dangers of criminal life and its expedient morality of survival first. Cates professes this, but it is driven home very neatly when he cannot save the kidnapped Vid 'caster from being murdered to keep her from having a chance to expose the team. On the other page, I did find it interesting that Somers can visualize himself as the Wizard of Oz, as the book tends to fall into the classic trap of caper plots, trying to keep the reader from looking behind the curtain at the little man pulling the levels by deploying an infinite number of curtains. Not that this strategy cannot succeed (Who is Keyser Soze?), but it needs to be done with a certain sense of misdirection that, alas, seems to be missing from "The Electric Church". The final reveal should make things seem obvious, in retrospect. But here, it feels more as though the contradictions (How did the Electric Church get to grow unhindered? Did they forget where they put the cyborged Councilors?) are merely pushed back into the prehistory, before the book starts. Similarly, I enjoyed the nifty invocation of the Asimovian Laws of Robotics to explain King Worm Dick Marin's restricted actions. But, then I wonder why his programmer forgot to put a "mod chip" inside him, too. Overall, I felt that the book was standard enough that I could only recommend it to people who are fans of cyberpunk game-based fiction, where the streets are plenty mean, even beyond the suspension of disbelief. Give it a '5' from me.

### **Suspense Central – Monday April 12, 2010**

Drama and mystery filled the air as we met in the secretive depths of Borders Books & Music in the Interstate Shopping Mall of Ramsey NJ... OK, maybe that is laying it on a bit thick, but seriously, how else can I set the tone for a discussion of a book like *The Electric Church* by Jeff Somers.

Many of us in attendance last night had been to Jeff's Face the Fiction appearance on Saturday and that event dominated conversation as we began discussing the book. Astoundingly the vast majority of us had read the book, leaving only Josephine and David as the holdouts (although to be fair, Josephine had bought the book and started it, and David bought the book that night with the intention of reading it). We gave a quick synopsis of the book and immediately started in with the critical eye of experienced book group members.

Both Kathleen and I wondered why the EMP device, which was used early in the book to capture one of the Monks for study, was not used during the fight in Westminster Abbey. Another question raised was why did all the coolest characters have to die?! Although we did think that it was very wise of Jeff not to fall into the cliché of having both twins die at the same time, the fact that Milton Tanner get killed was bothersome (we universally liked the little old Hippies).

Much conversation was focused on the strange case of Cainnic Orel. For myself, I posited that there was likely no such person, but it was more like a Dread Pirate Roberts situation. Others stated opinions that the original Canny Orel was either really retired or actually dead, but in the end, we all agreed that the Orel, who shows up, with his various aliases and personas, was more than enough of an entertaining criminal for us.

Discussion turned then to the Joint Council and the Undersecretaries, and many jokes were told of senile cyborgs and crazy geniuses. This, in turn, led to talk of the Monks themselves and their creepy plastic faces. It was pointed out by several folks that the Monks really would not last all that long as the organic brains would eventually cease functioning (even assuming they never need repair). I then read a section of the book in which a Monk is promulgating his faith, receiving a chorus of laughs as I did my Stephen Hawking impersonation when reciting the Monk's dialog.

All in all it was a great night, and I am looking forward to next month's discussion of *Replay* by Ken Grimwood!  
**(Todd Ehrenfels)**

### **Drawing A Crowd – Wednesday, April 14, 2010 – Todd Ehrenfels**

An exciting time is always to be had at Drawing a Crowd, thanks to moderator Tim Cook, but this month was exceptionally cool. In April, we started our meeting out with a presentation of gorgeous art by our good friend Haywood! Haywood explained that the art was part of a project that he was working on with his students, and combines hand drawn art with computer graphics, texturizing programs, and more. Truly there was a great deal of fantastic content, and for those who missed it, we will have to see if Haywood is willing to let us put up a slideshow some time in the future. You will HAVE to come in May, though, to see Tim's portfolio, as it promises to be absolutely fantastic!

We started the evening off talking about various comic books that we have all enjoyed and tying some religion in there as well. Tim was grossly offended that the Century, Marvel's psycho version of Superman, had literally ripped Ares, the Olympian god of war, in half. Chris quickly brought up Hellboy, being as that was the first religion-related comic that sprang to mind for him. We discussed the ins and outs of the latest Hulk series, as well as Atomic Robo, Buck Rogers, the fall of the Asgardians, why Norse mythology is a bit silly, and a whole bunch of other stuff before we got off onto side topics.

Rob, owner of New Moon Comics, chimed in with a few comments on the recent arc of Moon Knight which is one of his favorites, and lamented that Moon Knight is joining the Avengers, a move which makes no sense. In other news, we discussed V and a few other titles before we managed to wangle our way back on topic.

Barry brought up a recent Ian Rankin John Constantine title, which I (as usual) should have written down, and then moved the conversation back off topic with a long conversation about *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. We were so engrossed in our conversations that we hardly noticed the D&D game behind us,

and in fact were disrupting them as several members were trying to listen in our fun conversations!  
Hopefully we will see them all next month and they can chime in!

Join us next month as we explore Time Travel! **(Todd Ehrenfels)**

### Films to Come - Wednesday, April 21, 2010

What is the world coming to when most of our discussion is based around why Todd could not get to see any movies? Seriously, thank the gods that Barry Weinberger, Movie Meister Extraordinaire and Generalissimo of Cinematographical Excellence was there to pickup the pieces or I would have looked even sillier!

OK, so now you are wondering what I am rambling on about this time. We started up around 7pm with Barry and Bill asking Mike P. about his experiences at last weekend's Chiller convention. Mike mentioned getting autographs from Alice Cooper and all of the (surviving) members of the band, as well as the wife of the Bassist who was pictured in the book that he brought for signing. The non-surviving members did not attend the convention, but had they done so, would likely also have signed the book! Mike also saw the famous Zacherly, a few Scream Queens, and other folks whose names barely penetrated the haze of Seattle's Best Coffee that my brains were marinating in!

Speaking of Conventions and Festivals, Barry brought up this really cool Festival that Turner Classic Movies is running in Hollywood. We spent a great deal of time waxing nostalgic about films we liked and why, and pointing out the similarities to some of the line-ups done at the Lafayette Theatre's Big Screen Classics series. Liz B., Bill, and Barry recalled that the combo of *Robin Hood* and *Rabbit Hood* had been done in the past by the esteemed organizers there. You still aren't likely to see me getting my lazy butt there early enough to catch these films, but it is interesting nonetheless.

Next we turned our attention to the Hugos, Nebulas, and more such award-oriented conventions. Todd brought up the Scott Gemmill Award nominations online, and Barry turned the focus onto the Hugo Ballots for the upcoming Worldcon. Bill was fairly adamant about the idea that the *Star Trek* movie was likely to win, being popular with fans, though I still think that there is a chance that *District 9* could surprise us. Who are we kidding? We also noted the plethora of *Doctor Who* episodes nominated, and although I am hoping that the premiere of *Flash Forward* wins, I highly doubt it will. I also pointed out that Howard Taylor's *Longshoreman of the Apocalypse* was nominated and I was really hoping it would win.

Taking a look at the small screen, we discussed *Human Target*, *V*, *Fringe*, *Flash Forward*, *Caprica*, and *Stargate: Universe*. I explained a few things that were discussed during the [Caprica Panel at the Paley Center](#) and I gave a brief overview of the events of the evening. I also promised that if I win the Lottery I will definitely have an event there just to show off! Strangely we managed not to discuss SyFy's *Mega Pirannha* until we got to the diner much later. I cannot fathom why...

The \$100,000,000.00 box office mark was the next thing to go under the microscope, and we all made fun of Bill for being confused about how we determined which movies were in and out of the running. The idea was to guess the 5 movies that had grossed more than \$100 million domestically in the year 2010. Since anyone who is reading this can just as easily look it up on IMDB, I will not list the films, but I will say that Liz and I kicked butt, guessing all of them between the two of us. This is because we are totally awesome.

Turning our attention to the new and upcoming films, we proceeded to discuss films on Barry's Big List of Upcoming Stuff. This comprehensive list gives us films released by month, their director, and the director's previous films with Genre related titles (at least as determined by Leonard Maltin) underlined. We managed to get most of the way through May before ending the meeting, but the most important May release is obviously a film called *Best Worst Movie*, which examines Z-Grade Schlock-fest *Troll 2: Goblins* as its source of material. As Ann-Marie and Todd have been ridiculed about this film for years, we have determined that this WILL be a special

activity (special in this case meaning cruel and activity meaning torture).

The group, sans Bill who turned into a pumpkin around 9pm, repaired to the Stateline Diner for coffee, water, food, and discussions about topics ranging from *Archie* comics to Craig Hatler's work schedule, and back again. Much fun was had by all, and I am serious about the whole *Troll 2* thing! **(Todd Ehrenfels)**

### **Modern Masters - Friday, April 23, 2010**

Stephen Baxter and his book *Coalescent* were the topics at Modern Masters on Friday, 4/23/10. Both provided fodder for discussion that lasted over two hours! They also provided much humor - facial origami and face-folding, Chris and the 'castrati', and Aurelia wondering why CNN wasn't there to cover a story about a huge blast in the middle of Rome in the middle of the afternoon that left a big ole' crater - Aurelia pondered, "come on, no one heard anything? No one felt the ground shake?" Liz likened it to New York City.

Stephen Baxter is a British author of hard SF and a multiple award winner (BSFA Award SF Novel, Philip K. Dick Award, Sidewise Award for both Best Short Form Alternate History and Long Form Alternate History to name only a few). He cites SF pioneers H.G. Wells and Author C. Clarke as his influences. Baxter has been Vice-President of the international H. G. Wells Society since 2006.

Our focus was on Book 1 of the Destiny's Children series, *Coalescent*. *Coalescent* is set in two different time periods: modern Britain/Rome, where the story begins with character George Poole finding out he has a twin sister he did not know about while settling his father's estate; and ancient Rome around 400 AD with the character Regina and the ending of Roman rule in Britain.

The book consists of four distinct parts. Part one serves as the introduction of the characters - both in ancient Britain and the present. Part two gives the reader a first-person view of the The Order in Rome while following Regina's budding legacy centuries before. The Order is a mysterious society existing underground (more like creepy subterranean inbred cult). Part three shows us the increasing clash between George and Regina's legacy, The Order (creepy hive-like subterranean Steppford-like dwellers that are human but evolving *differently*). Part four gives a future view and the conclusion of George's present situation. Baxter does an excellent job of moving between the two times and setting the stage for how The Order came to be and still is.

It was unanimously agreed that the historical sections of the book were the favorites. Baxter's well-developed characters were so rich and fully realized that it was hard to put the book down. Liz made a great point that while the female characters were not likable and most definitely *not* maternal, they were still well written. Todd enjoyed the eccentric present-day character Peter. Aurelia added that even minor characters were well done and added to the story - she was fond of Uncle Leo and his war stories.

Liz felt that Baxter's concept of the 'hive' was a good one and felt that his description of the smells, pheromones and system of day-to-day operations were also good. Her complaint came with Baxter's taking some liberties with biology and evolution - too much suspension of disbelief would have to take place for his so-called evolutionary 'advances' to occur. One other criticism was that 'motivation' is never fully explained, and in some cases, completely overlooked. Why did Regina's mother abandon her? What went into George's parents' decision to send Rosa to The Order? Why keep it a secret? As Todd pointed out, some actions seemed antithetical to the storyline, while Kathleen wondered if she was the only one who thought she was reading a teaser for the next book when the story jumped to the far future. I also thought I had stumbled on a glimpse at the next book, and used this confusion to justify reading the ending first.

We enjoyed trying to figure out if one of the motto's of The Order - Ignorance is Strength - was the reason George knew nothing. It was decided by Aurelia that Mr. Baxter needed to read his own book and then explain to us some of the glaring inconsistencies. We agreed and began a fun fictional email opening with "Dear Mr. Baxter, Go read your book. In addition, you will never be a guest at our face the Fiction meeting. So there!" Darn that facial origami!



We rated the book on a scale of 1 - 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Most placed the book at 3 (except for Todd who said 6 before realizing the choices stopped at 5), with Liz and I giving it a 3.5. I enjoyed the historical parts of the book so much that I was able to overlook the gaps. Liz felt the same.

Overall we enjoyed the concept, the story, the characters and the book. We had fun coming up with conspiracies to explain the things Baxter did not - they ranged from "makes sense" to the inane. The inane gave us the most laughs. We wrapped up at 10:50 and headed out to begin reading next month's selection Timeline by Michael Crichton. (AM)

### **Themes of the Fantastic - Tuesday, April 27, 2010**

Master Bill began our discussion of Religion in SF/Fantasy/Horror last night with handouts on Robert Heinlein's *The Sixth Column* (a.k.a. *The Day After Tomorrow*) dealing with the "Priests of Mota", a religion set up by Americans to act as a resistance movement to the PanAsians that have taken over our country. After that, we went around the table citing other examples.

Chris H. chose William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*, Chuck chose C.S. Lewis's Space Trilogy (*Out Of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*), Todd mentioned the Thrint-worshipping cult from Larry Niven's *Man-Kzin Wars* series, and Steve Rubin chose *Hellstrom's Hive* by Frank Herbert. Chuck mentioned the Indiana Jones series, where a variety of religions are mentioned (Judaism, Kali ["Thuggee Cults are always fun", said Todd], Christianity, & Von Daanikenism [Chariots of the Gods]). Steve Rubin mentioned *Rosemary's Baby*, which Todd countered with Dean R. Koontz's *Servants of Twilight*, and I cited *Star Trek V- The Final Frontier*, with Spock's stepbrother Sybok and the search for God and Eden, or "Shakaree" in Vulcan, which led to Todd's Shatner impression and a brief sidebar discussion of Shatner (and Nimoy's)"musical" careers.

Bill and Todd then traded off on two different vampire hunter pictures. One of them was *John Carpenter's Vampires* which strangely features a Catholic Bishop (Maximilian Shell) who loses his faith and is seduced by the Vampire into completing the failed Exorcism that made it a Vampire in order to be able to walk in daylight as a Vampire. The other film was the cult classic *Jesus Christ Vampire Killer*, which prompted Chuck to bring up the film *Ultra-Christ* in which Jesus becomes a Superhero. Bill also mentioned Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series of Christian fantasy novels, which Todd said were "not up to standard". Todd mentioned Stephen King's *The Stand* in passing, and Chuck chose Wes Craven's *Chiller*.

Steve Rubin mentioned a novel dealing with the world running out of souls by 2050 and also mentioned Frasier's wife Lilith from Cheers being based on a Bible character. Todd & Steve cited book series from Simon R. Green (*Nightside* series) & John Varley (*Gaea* Trilogy) respectively, and I mentioned the afterlife discussion that takes place before the final battle in John Wayne's version of *The Alamo* (1960). Rubin also got in the movie *The Invention of Lying* and Scott Westerfeld's new book, *Leviathan*, while Todd cited Peter Hamilton's *Void* Trilogy.

At 9:00 p.m., Master Bill presented us with a second set of handouts dealing with *The Gods of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, from his Barsoom series that feature John Carter. Bill said that this story dealt with the Therns, a "white-skinned race of self-proclaimed gods" and stated that he heard that the John Carter movie being made by Disney would include parts of this storyline, and wondered why they were doing it in *A Princess of Mars* instead of where it belongs in *Gods of Mars*. Todd quickly pointed out that the film would almost have to be a pastiche project because the likelihood of sequels was near nil as the main audience that they would want to reach has probably never heard of Burroughs' John Carter books, to which Bill's witty rejoinder of "phfft!" was clearly heard by all (Chris H. wanted that in the recap). We continued this off-topic conversation with Steve Rubin mentioning that a film of Larry Niven's *Ringworld* would be cool, but essentially unfilmable, and Todd adding that *Enders Game* by Orson Scott Card would be easily filmable, and somewhat cheap to produce, but likely would not get done because audiences do not want to encourage children to be violent warmongers (pretty sure his tongue was in his cheek over that).

Next Chuck cited a short story by Andrew Castle called *The Perfectionists* in which adherents of the Perfectionist religion would go around telling you how much better they were than you, and Todd countered with recent guest Jeff Somers' *The Electric Church*. Chris H. mentioned a trio of examples: *The Omen* series, *Hellboy*, & the TV show *Supernatural* (on behalf of the absent Ann-Marie Brown). Chuck cited a "Benny Hill" sketch where Hill keeps yelling for his dog to HEEL and the patients at a convalescent home begin to

spontaneously HEAL as he shouts, drawing the anger of the doctors and nurses, and I mentioned the appearance of "The Supreme Being" in *Time Bandits*. Bill cited the Harlan Ellison series *Starlost* where a priest manipulates the "word of God", and Todd cited the Emperor from the *Warhammer 40,000* franchise who wipes out all religions during a massive crusade only to be deified by the survivors of the ensuing civil war after he is mortally wounded but kept alive through an arcane device, as well the concept of "The Force" from *Star Wars* ("Hokey religions and ancient weapons are no substitute for a good blaster at your side kid" – Han Solo). Bill then said the best Star Wars feature was Weird Al Yankovic's video spoof of Star Wars set to Don McLean's tune American Pie, entitled The Saga Continues.

Barry & Steve Rubin discussed the Cylons as monotheists in the new TV version of *Battlestar Galactica*, and Barry cited the recent films *Book of Eli* and *Legion* as we were wrapping up. Jim, who was silent for most of the meeting, asked me to mention the Rock Hudson film *Seconds*, where Rock meets a religious cult after getting a new body/identity, and Walter Miller's novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

See y'all next time!!!

**(Writeup by Stephen Spinosa)**

### **SFSNNJ Member Movie Reviews**

#### **How To Train Your Dragon – Chris Hasselkus**

As stated, I went Monday night. It was \$6, not \$5, but it was definitely worth it. The family in front of me had a daughter who was wrapped around her father for most of the movie because of its intensity in places. The flying sequences reminded me of the ones in *Avatar*. The storyline is nothing new: the son of a Viking has to prove himself and save everyone concerned - Vikings and dragons alike. Very well done indeed. My score: A.

## Upcoming Conventions

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### **Steampunk World's Fair**

<http://steampunkworldsfair.com/>

May 14 – 16, 2010

Radisson Hotel

Piscataway, NJ

A three-day expedition into yesterday's future!

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### **Balticon 44**

<http://www.balticon.org/>

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### ***The Maryland Regional Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention***

Memorial Day Weekend

May 28 – 31, 2010

Marriott's Hunt Valley Inn

Baltimore, MD

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## SUPERNATURAL



### **PARSIPPANY, NJ**

Fri., Sat. & Sun.

July 9-11, 2010

Hilton Parsippany Hotel/Creation Entertainment's  
East Coast - **Supernatural Convention**

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Albacon 2010

<http://www.albacon.org/>

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## STAR TREK

### **PARSIPPANY, NJ**

Fri., Sat. & Sun.

August 13-15, 2010

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### ***Twilight Convention***

### **PARSIPPANY, NJ**

Fri., Sat. & Sun.

Aug. 20-22, 2010

Hilton Parsippany

1 Hilton Court