



Science Fiction Society of Northern New Jersey

SFSNNJ Newsletter

Specters and Otherworldly Beasties

October 2008

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------|--|--|---|----------|--|---|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5 | 6 | 7 7p <i>That's Science Fiction</i> 13 Ghosts (1960) Hillsdale Library | 8 8p <i>Drawing A Crowd</i> <i>Haunts in comics/graphics</i> New Moon Comics, Little Falls, NJ *pre-mtg dinner @ Uno Chicago, 6:30p | 9 | 10 | 11 7p <i>Whispers from Beyond</i> 8p <i>Face the Fiction</i> Guests: Linda Zimmerman Bergen Museum |
| 12 | 13 8p <i>Suspense Central</i> <i>The Haunting of Alaizabel Cray</i> by Chris Wooding Fuddruckers, Rt. 4, Paramus Pre-mtg. @ Fuddruckers | 14 | 15 8p <i>Films to Come</i> 4 Star Film Discussion Borders Ramsey Pre-mtg. @ NY Steakhouse, 6:30p | 16 | 17 | 18 2:30p <i>Fantasy Gamers Group</i> Reality's Edge Game Store |
| 19 | 20 | 21 8p <i>Tripping the Write Fantastic</i> <i>Author Group</i> Brian Lumley - recommended reading <i>Necroscope</i> Borders Garden State Plaza *pre-mtg dinner: On the Border @ 6:30p | 22 | 23 | 24 8p <i>Modern Masters</i> <i>Renfield: Slave of Dracula</i> by Barbara Hamby Pre-mtg. @ Limani Blue, Mahwah | 25 2p <i>The Dawnhill Campaign</i> Ehrenfels Manor Rutherford, NJ |
| 26 | 27 | 28 8p <i>Themes of the Fantastic</i> Paranormal Investigators in SF/fiction/fantasy. Pre-mtg. @ Burger Deluxe, Rt. 23 North, Wayne. 6:30p | 29 | 30 | 31 | |

Face The Fiction Presents Linda Zimmermann

Event Name: Face The Fiction

Guest Speaker: Linda Zimmermann - <http://www.ghostinvestigator.com/index.htm>

The SFSNNJ proudly announces our guest speaker for October 2008 Face The Fiction: Linda Zimmermann. Face The Fiction is the SFSNNJ's monthly general meeting, which occurs on the second Saturday of each month. This meeting will be held on Saturday, October 11, 2008, 8p, at the Bergen Museum, The Bergen Museum of Art & Science, Bergen Mall, Route 4 East, Paramus, NJ 07652, (201) 291-8848

Earning a B.S. in Chemistry and a Master's in English Literature made it obvious early on that Linda had wide ranging interests. After working as a research scientist throughout the 1980s, she decided to pursue her real passion—writing.

Today, Linda is the author of 14 books, is a popular speaker, and has made numerous appearances on television and radio. She has received honors and awards for her books on American history, and has lectured at the Smithsonian, West Point and Gettysburg. Astronomy and the space program are also favorite topics for her books, articles and lectures. In addition, Linda has appeared at major science fiction conventions for her two novels. So, with all these varied achievements, how on earth did she ever start writing about ghosts?

Several years ago, Linda was giving a series of history lectures for the bicentennial of Rockland County, in southern New York's beautiful Hudson Valley. One evening, someone asked about local ghosts and legends, so Linda told the *one* ghost story she knew. A few days later, she received a call. The excited voice on the other end of the line said, "I hear you give ghost talks!" Linda then added a few more ghost stories to her lectures, word spread, and by the end of the series, more people were showing up to hear about the ghosts than the history.

"From that point, my research into ghosts took on a life of its own," Linda explains (pun most definitely intended).



What's Inside...

- ?? **September Meeting Recaps: 4 – 8** Read the Tripping the Write Author Group recap from Todd – not posted to the yahoo site!
- ?? **Peter Gutierrez: – *only available in the newsletter!*** This month we continue **The Cruel Mirror: When Horror Movies Are “Based on True Events” with The Evil Stepmother.** Next month brings us The Lady Vampire. We're also lucky enough to have *an exclusive interview with Hideaki Sena*, a prizewinning Japanese novelist. **p. 9 - 11**

Peter Gutiérrez

Over the past fifteen years, Peter's work in horror and other genres, in the form of short fiction, poetry, criticism, and comics, has appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals. Current publications: [Dark Territories Read by Dawn Volume 3](#) [Diamond BookShelf Withersin UnderGround Online](#) (UGO)

- ?? **Movie Reviews: Traitor/Gene McGrath, Mamma Mia** (like I need to tell you!) **p. 12**
- ?? **Taras' ½ Way Reviews: p.12 -14**
- ?? **Upcoming Conventions: p. 15.** PhilCon, UberCon, Gryphon Books

September Meeting Recap

That's Science Fiction! – Tuesday, September 2

Moderators: Chris Hasselkus & Aubrey Ward

Title: *75th Annual Academy Award Shorts/Robot Chicken Star Wars*

Recap by: Ann-Marie

That's Science Fiction! started our September Shorts month off with a great selection by Aubrey, **75th Annual Academy Awards Short Films**. Following the Academy Award Film Shorts was **Robot Chicken's Star Wars** (provided by Todd). Both were a lot of fun. We got a particular kick out of watching *Robot Chicken's* lampoon of *Star Wars* - there's something so wrong about Darth Vader yelling, "Ohh, yo momma fight! " between Luke and Palpatine.

Aubrey started the night off by showing the animated shorts from the **75th Annual Academy Awards** collection (he also did a nice job with popcorn and beverages for snacks. He even had the popcorn in separate little brown bags for everyone). The mix of shorts was eclectic, interesting and quite enjoyable. The room favorite seemed to be **Pixar's Mike's New Car**. This short had two *Pixar* favorite's, Sulley and Mike Wazowski, trying out Mike's new car. Every time poor Mike would tell Sulley push a button, things would go from bad to worse. The scene with Mike returning to the driver's seat after having been locked under the hood was great - his entire backside was leaving a trail of smoke. Todd enjoyed the comparison of Mike not being able to use his new car with me not being able to use all of the functions on my phone - notice I said Todd enjoyed - lol! **The Cathedral** (from Poland) left us a tad confused, but the imagery was beautiful. Also included in the 100 minute DVD: **The ChubbChubb**, **Das Rad**, **Atama Yama**.

After viewing the animated shorts, Aubrey showed the live-action winners. The burning question of the night was Bill's repeated query, "But, what happened to the dog?" after viewing **Inja**. We all did our best to placate him. The short about the wrong number was surprisingly dark, but good. Live action shorts: **Der Er En Yndig Mand**, **J-Attendrai Le Suivant**, **Fait d'Hiver**, **Inja**.

After once again trying our best to divert Bill's attention away from "what happened to the dog," we watched **Robot Chicken Star Wars**. Buffy fans know the director of *Robot Chicken*, Seth Green, as Oz (Willow's werewolf boyfriend). This entire short is hysterical - Palpatine finding out the Death Star has been blown up during a phone conversation with Darth Vader (he makes Vader cry - too funny), Vader being haunted by the even-more-annoying- in-death Jar-Jar Binks, the Yo Momma Fight, and there's a George Lucas cameo (voice). Nothing is sacred or spared in this parody.

Truly a fun time. Everyone enjoyed the offerings. We had to quickly vacate the library at 9p and brought the conversation outside. Once again, we did our best to answer, "but what happened to the dog?" Bill, the dog was fine. Mike P did a particularly good job of pointing Bill in another direction. Poor Bill - lol. Do not miss next month's showing of the original 1960 BW version of **13 Ghosts** - *should be nice and creepy*.

Suspense Central – Monday, September 8

Moderator: Aurelia Long

Title: *Hell with the Ladies*

Recap by: Ann-Marie

Suspense Central met on Monday, 9/8/08 to discuss *Hell With The Ladies*. In keeping with our September theme of 'shorts' the book contained three novellas by authors Julie Kenner, Kathleen O'Reilly and Dee Davis. Each story was about one of Satan's sons - Jack, Nick and Marcus. The meeting provided a very good time and some very creative uses for wood, a dais, fire and schlock.

As I stated above, each author wrote about one of Satan's sons. The idea of the book is that Satan is tired and wants to retire. He decides to test his sons, with LAME tasks, to find out which one is best suited to run "the family business" when dad goes off to gold in Boca. So far so good, then you read the stories - blech! Great prologue (yes, I read the prologue this time so I don't have to hear about it from Barry - lol) and great epilogue. It was the in between stuff that was..... lacking. Badly lacking. No plot, no story, the characters were wimpy and annoying. Did I mention blech? There was no suspense, just torturous stories, thankfully short, that were ridiculous even for a "bodice ripper" romance book.

In short, it was universally agreed that not one person who had read the book liked it - at all. As Liz B put it, "you didn't even care what happened to anyone, and the tasks were just stupid!" They were. Todd's imitation of a love struck goon, complete with overly batting eyelashes, was great and has us rolling on the floor. Aurelia's retelling of son number three, Marcus' adventure, as she grumbled to herself, had us laughing so hard we had to stop for a breath. "Now, they go up, down, in, out, all over the place, the floor caves in, there's bats all over the place, they dig through bones and who knows what else, and when they get there that old man is right behind them!! How?!" Todd, of course, did his Beloch imitation from *Indiana Jones* to explain the odd phenomena. Liz responded with, "You don't want to leave out the best part of the book. That old man was mean and I was waiting for him to get it." Liz followed this statement up with, "Hey! We haven't even talked about the boring, repetitive sex!" Remi kept saying, "it's not even cheap porn." The friends she brought with her were greatly amused.

We then had fun creating a dais, on wood, that would get warm - with fire. We continued to pan the book, then talked about TV and a few other assorted goodies. We left at 10 on the nose because the man with the sweeper kept walking past giving us the skunk-eye.

September Meeting Recap

Next month's book is *The Haunting Of Alaizabel Cray*, written by Chris Wooding. It's a Gothic, horror/fantasy/alternate history novel about Victorian London overrun by the wych-kin, demonic creatures that have rendered the city uninhabitable south of the river, and which stalk the streets after dark.

Drawing A Crowd – Wednesday, September 10

Moderators: Brian O'Dell & Abdul Makrinam

Topic: Independent Comics/webcomics

Recap by: Chris Hasselkus

The topic for Drawing A Crowd: independent comics / webcomics. I had generated two articles from Wikipedia. I read parts of them, they were discussed (especially by Barry), and then I read some more, backing up discussions. The meeting went very well as many comics other than DC or Marvel (the "majors") were brought to light (i.e. Cerebus the Aardvark). Todd particularly enjoyed discussing webcomics in that he reads quite a few of them (i.e. The Order of the Stick). Another term used besides independent was alternative. Examples of alternate comics publishers include Dark Horse and Image.

Face the Fiction – Saturday, September 13

Moderator: Steve Spinosa

Guest: Matt Kressel

Recap by: Jo, Ann-Marie & Steve Spinosa

Yes as Steve mentioned Whispers From Beyond/Face The Fiction was a good time (as usual). Matt began by reading his short story "The Bricks of Gelecek", from the upcoming Ellen Datlow-edited anthology, *Naked City: New Tales of Urban Fantasy*. The story has a creepy almost *Twilight Zone*-ish feel to it. After reading to us, Matt opened the floor up to questions. The questions were wide and varied. Everything from what he likes to read to what he grew up reading, how he came to publish his 'zine *Sybil's Garage* and how it got its name, etc.

The story of how his 'zine came to be known as *Sybil's Garage* is kind of an amusing story. He was out with some friends in Hoboken, near Steven's Institute of Technology and he remembered Sybil's Cave. Sybil's Cave was the location of the murder of Mary Rogers in 1841 which inspired the Edgar Allan Poe story "The Mystery of Marie Roget". Matt suggested calling the 'zine Sybil's Cave when one of his friends joked that since Hoboken is being built up and paved over everywhere, Sybil's Cave was probably a garage now. Matt adopted the name of *Sybil's Garage* for his 'zine. Joe Havasy confirmed that Sybil's Cave does still actually exist as a cave. He said the entrance to it is covered over to keep kids from the nearby skatepark out, but it is still there.

Matt brought with him two versions of *Sybil's Garage* 1, which featured short stories by his friends, and a copy of *Sybil's Garage* 2. *Sybil's Garage* 3, 4, and 5 were available for purchase as was *Paper Cities - an Anthology of Urban Fantasy*, all publications from Matt's company, Senses Five Press (www.sensesfive.com).

As Steve pointed out, Matt is a member of the Altered Fluid writing group and co-hosts the KGB Fantastic Fiction reading series with Ellen Datlow. In an email to me after his presentation, he reminded me to let everyone know that the SFSNNJ is welcome to come to KGB and if we do, he wants us to say hello.

We adjourned to Stateline Diner. However, Matt and his cousin (his ride) were unable to join us. They were off to meet up with our March guest and Matt's personal friend, John Joseph Adams who recommended us to Matt. **(Jo)**

I enjoyed Matt's opening of the Q & A segment: "Are you all familiar with the book *What Color Is Your Parachute?* Well, I had no parachute. I jumped without one - no plan, and I never thought of being a writer." He then went on to discuss how he became a writer (humble beginnings in a print shop) and editor. You can check out his Senses Five Press at www.sensesfive.com. He thoroughly answered all of the questions asked and had a great sense of humor. **(AM)**

We opened our Whispers from Beyond segment at 7:30 with Kate Landis reading a Jonathan Maberry story from a relatively new anthology (whose name escapes me at the moment), which had everyone mesmerized. Then we chatted for a few minutes before I introduced Matt Kressel to the group "promptly at 8:00 p.m."(thank you Brian K).

Matt proceeded to read his complete short story "The Bricks of Gelecek" which again had everyone mesmerized (especially Gene!). Matt talked about how he came to found Senses Five Press & publish the magazine *Sybil's Garage* (named after a cave in Hoboken which probably has turned into a garage by now, according to his friends), which he decided not to use to boost his own fiction writing (although he does contribute essays and interviews). He also discussed the writers group he belongs to & the Fantastic Fiction reading series he co-hosts. He said that writing is his first love but he enjoys the publishing end of it too. Questions were asked & Matt had a chance to sell & sign copies of his zine & the anthology *Urban Cities* before heading back to Brooklyn. The room was straightened up before folks headed off to

September Meeting Recap

the Stateline Diner to continue the evening.

Next month the SFSNNJ returns to "haunt" the Bergen Museum of Science at the Bergen Mall in Paramus with the legendary "Ghost Hunter" Linda Zimmerman. **(Steve Spinosa)**

Tripping The Write Fantastic - Tuesday, September 16

Moderator: Todd Ehrenfels

Author: Gardner Dozois

Recommended Title: *Year's Best Science Fiction*

Recap by: Todd Ehrenfels

Tripping the Write Fantastic:

It was a star studded night at the Borders Garden State Plaza, with special guests from all over to discuss Science Fiction Editor and Essayist Gardner Dozois! Making a special appearance was Films to Come's all-star moderator Barry Weinberger, wowing the crowds with his usual ease and grace as he read the Movies in Review section from *The Year's Best Science Fiction (2007)*. The Essay, which lamented the rise of Comic book heroes and the burgeoning Shrek franchise, complained that the only real SF movie of that year was *Sunlight* which was arguable mainly because of the loads of pseudo-science and strange plot twists.

Before we got on to the next leg of the discussion, moderator Todd Ehrenfels quickly brought up another Films to Come tie-in and advised everyone to read Maurice Dantec's *Babylon Babies*. From what I have heard of the movie (which I have not gotten to see yet) it does not follow the book at all, but is still somewhat entertaining none-the-less. Thankfully, Brian Keveney was on hand to tell us that he liked the film (as Brian has pretty good taste in film that means a lot).

We moved on then from the initial essay to a discussion between Barry, Liz, Chris, Craig, and I of the types of stories that Gardner tends to put in his anthologies. This was a fun discussion because we all look for different things in our literature, but we all were able to find some fun and interesting stories to talk about. This, I exclaimed, is the reason why I like anything edited by Gardner Dozois! Amongst the tales in discussion were *The Last Article* by Harry Turtledove, works by Alistair Reynolds, Ken MacLeod, Charles Stross, Kage Baker, and so many others. We had readings, stories galore, and so much more!

Next month: Brian Lumley with the novel *Necroscope* as the recommended reading. See you there!

Films to Come – Wednesday, September 17

Moderator: Barry Weinberger

Recap by: Ann-Marie

Films to Come opened with Todd reading a summation of 2007 TV from Gardner Dozois from *The Years Best SF, 25th Annual Collection*. Series, mini-series, cancellations and more were brought up. Todd threw his two cents in about several series and bypassed those he didn't want to read about. A brief discussion followed Todd's reading, and Taras threw his two cents in. Series covered included *Stargate*, *Supernatural*, *Saving Grace*, *Cave Men*, *SF's Tin Man* and many more.

This month, Barry changed the format of **Films** a bit; he began with films due for release in October rather than his standard format of beginning with current releases and films recently seen by attendees.

Before launching into the October releases, Barry took a detour and announced the Big Screen Schedule, SF Weekend and went through a list of Top Box Office Films - 17 top grossing films (to date for 2008):

1. *Dark Knight*
2. *Iron Man*
3. *Indiana Jones*
4. *Hancock*
5. *Wall-E*
6. *Kung Fu Panda*
7. *Horton Hears A Who*
8. *Sex in the City*
9. *Prince Caspian*
10. *Mamma Mia*
11. *Hulk*
12. *Wanted*
13. *Get Smart*
14. *Tropic Thunder*

September Meeting Recap

15. *Mummy III - Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*
16. *Step Brothers*
17. *Don't Mess With The Zohan*

How much each made, the fact that *Mummy III* made the list is Barry's fault, and some disbelief over some entries then took place.

On to October films - *High School Musical 3*, *Body of Lies*, Clint Eastwood's *Changeling*, Barry Levinson's *What Just Happened* (advance buzz not positive), a very special cameo from Guy Ritchie who explained why he makes the sordid movies he makes, like his upcoming *ROCKNROLLA*, Oliver Stone's *W*, *Max Payne* and even chocolate covered Chihuahuas (don't ask). Barry read excerpts from *Entertainment Weekly* to provide background for each film, as attendees discussed whether or not the film would be successful.

After wrapping up October, Barry quickly moved through September. Some films had opened - *Burn After Reading* (Taras saw it and said it was "marginally funny" with the emphasis being VERY marginal), *Righteous Kill* (Taras had also seen this one, he enjoyed and recommended it). Some films had not opened. A brief return to August to recap finished off the film segment of the meeting.

It was nearing closing time, so Barry very quickly pointed out several books he had brought to the table he thought were relevant or of interest. One interesting book was *Vertigo Encyclopedia* - very nice hardcover about DC comics. He felt the book relevant because several comics have been made into movies and it fit the topic well.

Once again our moderator proved his mettle. Thorough meeting, and well done. Kudos. We put chairs away and headed over to Stateline to continue chatting.

Themes Of The Fantastic - Tuesday, September 23

Moderators: Bill Wagner & Steve Spinosa

Topic: Short stories in SF, Fantasy & horror

Recap by: Steve Spinosa, Bill Wagner

Both Masters Taras & Chris brought short story anthologies to share with the group at last night's Themes meeting. Taras showed 4 Volumes of THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME Anthology series, along with SUPER HUGOS edited by Isaac Asimov, and SCIENCE FICTION MONSTERS by A.E. Van Vogt. Chris showed us his hardcover anthologies from H.G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe & Arthur Conan Doyle, one of which dealt solely with the "Professor Challenger" series. The discussion touched on many different authors and types of stories including Harlan Ellison, Chuck Beaumont, Henry Slesar, Damon Knight, Larry Niven, Verner Vinge and even noted conservative Russell Kirk! See Y'all next time! **(Steve)**

I snagged some anthologies that Taras brought as freebies and examples for the short story discussion and made off with my swag bag before the meeting ended because I was very tired. A good time was had by all until that point but I swear I heard cheering as the door shut behind me...**(Bill)**

Modern Masters - Friday, September 26

Moderator: Todd Ehrenfels

Title: 20th Century Ghosts/Joe Hill

Recap by: Ann-Marie

Modern Masters met to discuss **20th Century Ghosts** by Joe Hill. We had previously done Hill's first novel, **Heart-Shaped Box**, for Modern Masters. The book was well received, so this selection was a natural for September Shorts.

The meeting opened with a brief discussion about offspring of famous/well-known authors who cash in on mom or dad's name, but may not necessarily have true talent. Several people (Todd, Aurelia and Mike P to name a few) immediately tossed out Chris Rice (yes, mom would be Anne). Hill seems to be trying not to cash in on dad's name, but does have talent. We decided Stephen King must be proud. Hill not only does his dad proud, he can weave a truly eerie tale.

20th Century Ghosts is a collection of short stories that range from true ghost stories to simply disturbing tales of behavior. Chris provided a handout from Horrorscope that listed each story with a brief description and review. As Chris read each blurb, people who had read the stories discussed them. The store provided us with awesome treats all night long - samples of white mocha lattes, tons of cookie samples and more. Todd declared he would some day be killed by a cookie (Jo agreed). We snacked and started the discussion.

First up was the story *Best New Horror*. This story had an overworked, frustrated editor looking for the perfect story. As he tries to track down the elusive author, he becomes more and more intrigued. He finally locates the author in a creepy backwoods, middle-of-nowhere shack.... let's just say he wished he'd left the author alone. Last House on the Left anyone?

The title story *20th Century Ghost* deals with the ghost of a young woman who died in a theater during a showing of the *Wizard of Oz* -

September Meeting Recap

you don't want to see this ghost.

Others stories included Pop Art, about an 'inflatable boy' - an actual air-filled bubble boy. You Will Hear the Locust Sing, what would you do if you turned into a giant locust (very Kafka-esque). Abraham's Boys puts a new spin on the Van Helsing mythos - yep, that Van Helsing. The tale is about Van Helsing, vampire hunter, and his two sons. Creepy, The Black Phone, was reminiscent of an X-Files episode. The macabre Last Breath had Aurelia starting to read the book right then and there! She had not previously read the book and regretted it. Mike P pointed out how atmospheric the stories were. Gene read a chilling scene from The Cape - never give Gene a magic cape. Todd followed this by reading Dead Wood in its entirety (it was only 1 page).

It was unanimously voted that the collection was well done. Todd's favorite was You Will Hear the Locust Sing. Aurelia was still reading so she hadn't decided. Mike P liked the comic book feel of The Cape. Deena wondered where the cookie samples disappeared to - we weren't telling. We wrapped up the discussion of **20th Century Ghosts** and Aurelia showed us a list of over 13 books she was thinking of for Suspense Central. This led to a brainstorming session that was quite successful! Several themes for 2009 were decided on, many books, movies and the like were tossed out to. It was great having so many people involved - ideas were flying. I'll be adding the items to the calendar soon, so if you have any further suggestions, additions, etc. please tell me.

Genre News

Peter Gutierrez

The Cruel Mirror: When Horror Movies Are “Based on True Events” By Peter Gutiérrez

More than any other film genre, horror has a problematic relationship with the real. Sure, war movies are presumably based upon real wars, but although their political motives are sometimes questioned, their carnage is rarely viewed as in bad taste, let alone exploitative. Horror movies, on the other hand, cross some kind of moral threshold when they become “based on true events” since horror, especially in its paranormal mode, can clearly exist and be effective when completely divorced from reality. Yet when they venture away from fantasy, horror movies become both more sobering and somehow more intriguing as a result. Think about it. Remove the “inspired by” tagline from films as different as the fraudulent *The Amityville Horror* (1979, 2005) and the widely respected *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986) and how does your gut reaction to them change? Are the films inherently as compelling? To feed audience expectations by saying that what’s on the screen “actually happened” plays into the universally voyeuristic—some would say cruel—aspects of the medium itself: the photographic realism that helps cinema mimic life is heightened by claiming that the narrative itself is real. And on a kind of existential level, the moment we frame screen horror as residing in the same world that we do, the psychological assault on the audience becomes more pronounced: “This could really happen to you and yours because, check it out, it really happened to other folks just like you.”

To gauge the upside of establishing such real-world bonafides, one need only recall the entire class of horror films that try so hard to look reality-based even when they’re not. Obvious examples include *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Cloverfield* (2008) as well as, most interestingly, George Romero’s work, whether *Diary of the Dead* (2007) or *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), with its similar docu-vibe. By way of comparison, how many gangster sagas or rom-coms employ a vérité approach to evoke heightened first-person experiences?

However, for all its generic potency, in terms of horror’s cultural position, referencing real events is usually a losing proposition. While readers and creators of horror literature rarely get charges of sadism leveled at them by the mainstream, their counterparts in film frequently do, largely because non-fans equate screen violence with real-world violence. But when the film in question is purportedly reflecting something historical, the commonsense defense of “Hey, it’s not real, it’s just a movie” becomes greatly diluted. To put it bluntly, it’s hard to cheer on the body count when you know it’s a surrogate measure for corpses that *did* hit the floor at one point. Still, movies like the execrable *Copycat* (1995), with its brief but glib quoting of real-life tragedies, offend me far more than the graphic yet serious-minded approach of something like Jim Van Bebber’s *The Manson Family* (2003).

So bearing such issues in mind, let’s examine a few horror archetypes, their real-life embodiments, and the varying degrees of success that filmmakers have had translating them to the screen.

| The Archetype | What History Says | “Just the Facts, Ma’am” | Inspired By... | Distant Cousins |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| The Evil Stepmother | It might be stretching things to call Gertrude Baniszewski , who in 1965 supervised the ongoing systematic degradation, torture, and killing of sixteen-year-old Sylvia Likens , a “stepmother.” But emotionally it fits: she’d been entrusted by Likens’ parents, who were traveling carnival workers, to be a mother surrogate for their daughter. Moreover, Baniszewski’s supervision of neighborhood children in tormenting Likens clearly reinforces her “mother figure” status. | A hit at Sundance earlier this year and recently televised on Showtime, An American Crime scrupulously uses courtroom records to dramatize the harrowing events of the Likens case. With Oscar nominees Ellen Page and Catherine Keener as victim and monster respectively, this is clearly an A-level effort at doing justice to this notorious crime. Still, not everyone’s happy with the results. “No one ever even asked [me] about it,” Likens’ surviving younger sister has remarked bitterly. “[The movie] is their gain, our pain.” | To be fair, The Girl Next Door (2007) is not an attempt to dramatize faithfully the tragic story of Sylvia Likens. Instead, it’s a thoughtful film adaptation of a noted novel by Jack Ketchum which, like many of his works, uses an actual crime as a springboard for his considerable imagination. The movie’s depiction of children being manipulated to commit atrocities against one of their own is disturbingly realistic in psychological terms. However, upping the torture to include an almost unwatchable blowtorch scene left the movie open to charges of exploitation from some quarters. And of course the real Baniszewski was not killed by a youthful do-gooder but ended up | Transference of the fear of parents to “wicked” stepparents has long been the stuff of fairy tales and the movies made from them. The Stepfather cycle of films plays on this archetype after the original film is more of a straight remake of Hitchcock’s Shadow of a Doubt (1943) (while also being inspired by real-life family murderer John List). And perhaps the greatest horror-fantasy rarely acknowledged as such is also driven by the figure of the evil stepparent: Bergman’s Fanny and Alexander (1982). |

Genre News

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | -serving two decades in prison before being paroled. | |
|--|--|--|--|--|

This month Peter brings us another exclusive, an Interview with Hideaki Sena

<http://firefox.org/news/articles/1891/1/Exclusive-Interview-with-Hideaki-Sena-Creator-of-PARASITE-EVE/Page1.html>

Hideaki Sena is a [Japanese](#) novelist; his prizewinning debut novel, *Parasite Eve*, was adapted into a popular [horror role-playing game](#) by Squaresoft.

Interview

(Peter) 1. I believe you've experienced some criticism from fellow scientists because your novels mix fact with speculation. However, have they also been impressed with the number of lay readers you have now made interested in topics such as cell biology, genetics, and medicine? Has the scientific world started to see the long-term value of your literary work to society?

(Hideaki Sena) When *Parasite Eve* was released, the Japanese public was in an uproar over a religious cult's terrorist acts [i.e., Aum Shinrikyo's subway sarin gas attack -tr.]. The cult leader had incorporated SF anime, etc., into his religious doctrine in a distorted way, so at that time the Japanese public was highly sensitive about scientific imagery leading to actual horror. However, there were book reviewers who properly differentiated between fiction and reality and saw literary development in sublimating science as horror.

Even now, at the beginning of the school year, I receive letters from young readers telling me how *Parasite Eve* gave them an interest in the life sciences and decided their course of study. I am happy that my novel is helping to create the future of science.

Meanwhile, becoming a novelist has actually given me more opportunities to converse with scientists. I have been invited, as a novelist, to many conferences on the life sciences, robots and artificial intelligence, and both the scientists and I come away from them with new ideas that lead to new work. Such activities, I think, expand the horizon of both fiction and science.

Last year, The World Science Fiction Convention was held in Yokohama, Japan. There, I hosted a panel where Japan's top scientists shared the stage with Japanese and American science fiction writers, to the great delight of the audience. Later, each author wrote a short story based on the essential issues of science discussed during the panel. The stories were collected and published this summer along with research articles by the scientists. It's an unprecedented book that goes beyond categories such as nonfiction and science fiction.

Just as fans of horror fiction themselves have different tastes, not everyone in the scientific community will accept my literary work. However, compared with that period of great confusion when a religious cult had carried out an indiscriminate terrorist attack, the relationship between science and fiction is developing and maturing, I think, little by little.

(P) 2. Can you comment on the wonderful effects that can be produced when an author combines a sense of mystery and a solid working knowledge of science? For me, the way that your writing points to the depths of both what we know and what we don't know is one reason it's so powerful.

(HS) Scientific discoveries and a fresh sensibility in mystery writing both present new ways of feeling and looking at the world. Scientific discoveries, I believe, shake the common sense of humans accustomed to society, while a mystery sense points to new essentialities of the world. People who observe society and nature carefully are the ones who are the most deeply shaken, and they wish to understand better.

When you are combining a sense for mystery together with science, neither must be treated superficially; both have to be respected if the resulting work is to be profound. Personally, I take care that the idea at the center of a novel is an original one of my own. Just as ideas are the heart of science and engineering, in treating science as a writer I try to use original ideas to create narratives, and that's because I want to impact the scientific community as well as the community of readers. I couldn't be gladder if this way of writing is being termed powerful.

(P) 3. How has the global culture's attitude toward genre literature changed in the dozen or so years since you first became well known? Back then you developed a cult following in the U.S. even before your books were translated. Nowadays do you find that through movies, the Internet, and video games that your work has a larger "built-in" audience outside Japan?

Genre News

(HS) A recent trend in Japan: bestselling novelizations based on game and award-winning novelists often write manga, while novels written by game scenario writers attract wide readership as well. From before my debut, I was interested in manga and anime, and not just novels, so I asked my editors many times to let me novelize manga works, etc. Back then, many people held novelizations in low esteem, and writers who got their start that way were encouraged to move on to “more serious work.” But since my debut more than ten years ago, the situation has changed a great deal. Eventually, there will be more and more authors who transcend boundaries—not just between novels on the hand and manga and games on the other, but also boundaries between science and fiction.

(P) 4. As a follow-up question, how important do you think the horror genre is as a means of discovering our common humanity? That is, can people from different cultures learn something about each other by coming to understand the fears that they share?

(HS) At first glance, the primordial human instinct of fear and the scientific endeavor to understand the essence of nature seem miles apart. Fear *against science* has often been depicted in novels: the mad scientist who does something weird to plunge people into fear; the birth of some eerie new life form.

I believe, however, that our fearing hearts come from the same place as our religious and scientific impulses; all of them played an important role as the ancestors of humankind matured into *homo sapiens*. As living things, we've been born endowed with the ability to be scared, to fear, and to be in awe. Religion and science are the outcome of humans' social response to that fear.

Humankind is now separated into different cultures, each living with their own values, and there are a lot of religions and scientific fields. But the horror genre has the power to do away with many of those bonds and to confront us with the essential questions of religion and science, namely, how to face the world, what the self is, etc. Perhaps the horror genre can take us back to a more naked state of being and present us with a starting line from which to discuss the world with one another.

(P) 5. Do you feel that because of the direction that the world is headed, both technologically and politically, we will see more and more literature that is a hybrid of science-fiction and horror?

(HS) If fear is indeed the physiological root of science and religion, then literary hybrids between SF and horror will only become more common in an attempt to portray modern society.

What I often think about recently is this: if fear is the root, how do I depict hope? Thinking about the future; expectation; the drive for hope: they're probably the flip side of fear. If SF-horror hybrids merely depict technological and political *fears*, we can't be said to be facing what the world may bring. How the literary hybrid should depict human hope is a crucial topic, and I'm trying to engage it through accomplishments in neuroscience, robotics, man-machine interface technology, etc. I feel that the answer may already lie buried in our corporality, our social intelligence, and the novel form itself.

[Copyright © Peter Gutierrez, 2008.]

Genre News

Film Reviews

Traitor by Gene McGrath

I literally only got to see 1/2 (actually less than 1/2) of this movie.

I was at the 7:15PM show on Sat. 09/06 at the Garden State Plaza when the power went out and the fire alarms went off. Everyone just evacuated the mall, so I didn't get a chance to ask the theater personnel about a free pass to see the film again or a refund.

I liked the part of the film I saw, and I am a Cheadle fan, so I'm anxious to see the rest of the film when I get a chance.

Mamma Mia! By "He Needs Help Hasselkus"

Well, I just saw it for a fifth time. Brian & Ana had seen the play, as I did, and didn't think the movie was as good. I have to agree because the play was one of the greatest things I ever saw of anything. The fact that it was live was something the film simply couldn't duplicate. The ABBA music is what makes it all special.

Taras' 1/2-way Review

The Miracle of St. Anna - half-way review

Spike Lee's melodrama about Black troops in Italy in 1944. Starts out well enough, with a postman abruptly shooting a man dead who came to his window at the P.O.

Then we flash back to his experiences in Italy, starting with incompetently commanded Black troops led into an ambush, leaving one platoon trapped behind enemy lines.

It made me feel rather nostalgic: from the late forties through the middle sixties, Hollywood used to make dozens of films like this (with much fewer Black soldiers depicted, of course).

The high point of the film so far is a screamingly funny scene just before the battle, when "Axis Sally" regales the Black troops from a loudspeaker truck with promises of how well the Nazis will treat them if they come over -- a better educated soldier reminds the rest that the Nazis really think Blacks are subhuman. And the lavish meals they will get -- while the German soldiers curse the broadcast and complain that Berlin will send them crap like that but won't send them potato soup!

But after that the film pretty much grinds to a halt, as Spike Lee trots out all the cliches from all those old movies I mentioned.

Miracle at St. Anna - the rest of the way

Turns into a Saturday Night Live parody of a war movie by Spike Lee. I was laughing so hard during the supposedly tragic final battle, I thought I'd choke on my popcorn!

Picture this: Their racist commander finally shows up to rescue them and pick up the important German prisoner they're supposed to be holding. He's understandably incensed when he discovers the prisoner has been killed by a turncoat partisan. While one of the platoon was busy futtering a well-built young lady -- did I mention the "topless- hanging-the-laundry-on- the-clothesline" scene? -- instead of guarding the prisoner.*

And still more incensed when the Cliche Dim-Witted Giant refuses to leave behind, with all the women who are standing around doing nothing, a little Italian boy he rescued earlier.

When the (Black) lieutenant tries to detach the boy, CDWG picks him up and chokes him, while the simple townspeople marvel at the similarity of CDWG's profile with a local, mystical mountain -- did I mention all the mystical claptrap about the mountain and the little boy: this is a loooonngg movie!

While all this hugger-mugger is going on, nobody -- not the original platoon, not the relieving force, not the townspeople -- notices that the Germans have reoccupied the town and even had time to climb up to the roofs. From which they start blasting away ...

Many silly moments follow, as partisans jump out in the middle of the street to blast away at the Germans and be tragically shot down, instead of sensibly shooting from cover. And the civilians run up and down the streets of the town -- instead of ducking inside the nearest doorway -- until they, too, can be tragically shot down.

In a moment of delicious stupidity near the end, U.S. Army medics put the wounded protagonist on a stretcher -- without taking the German luger from his hand (given him as he lay there by the German general!!! Way too hard to explain) so he

Genre News

doesn't suddenly wake up and start shooting them; or removing the honking great, heavy stone head he has his other arm around (which Cliche Dim-Witted Giant had been dragging around because of its, yes, mystical powers). The script, you see, requires that the protagonist hold on to the luger and stone head, so they can mystify the NYPD 39 years later.

I commented to an usher, "This is the silliest war movie I've ever seen!" He nodded: "I've heard that."

Anyway, I left the theater with a big grin on my face. So can I recommend the movie as camp? Trouble is, there's a huge amount of dull stuff between the (unintentionally) funny bits. Maybe if you can time it so you watch the opening battle; go see another movie in its entirety; then come back for the tragic final battle.

*Evidently wartime Italy was the birthplace of silicone implantation.

Ghost Town - 4/4ths review

Lonely, misanthropic dentist (British comic Ricky Gervais) temporarily dies during a colonoscopy and starts seeing dead people. Including one especially pushy ghost (Greg Kinnear) who demands he break up the engagement of his widow (Tea Leoni) with an annoyingly saintly do-gooder (Bill Campbell).

Gervais' selfish character is hard to like at times - well, most of the time - but the film is funny and well written. Especially when Gervais and Leoni start to establish a rapport due to their shared weird sense of humor.

Burn After Reading - half-way review

Two cretins (Frances McDormand, Brad Pitt) find a computer disk containing the autobiography of a retired CIA analyst (John Malkovich), and try to sell it. Tilda Swinton is his unfaithful wife; George Clooney, the philandering Treasury agent she is being unfaithful with.

Comedy-drama, light on both comedy and drama, from the Coen brothers.

Burn After Reading - the rest of the way

A little bit funnier in the second half, but also much more violent. Two major characters are killed before our eyes, one with a bullet in the forehead, another with a hatchet in the brain.

Like the Coen brothers' much better film, *Fargo* (1996), the present movie plays human suffering and death for laughs. This time, though, it also plays treason for laughs: Frances McDormand's character offers what she thinks are valuable secrets to the Russians to get money for plastic surgery.

I can just imagine the Coens knee-jerk response: "How dare you call us unpatriotic -- just because we don't see anything very wrong with selling U.S. secrets to the Russians!" It probably never even occurred to them, when they were making the film, that some part of the audience might find this a little, well, repugnant. Their friends in Hollywood don't have a problem with it, after all.

SPOILER: In the course of her attempt at treason for money, McDormand's character also causes the deaths of those two I mentioned earlier, both of them nicer than she is. Yet in the end all her wishes come true.

Traitor - half-way review

A Sudanese-born American Muslim (Don Cheadle) rises in a terrorist organization, as an FBI man (Guy Pearce) tracks him.

I'm not a big Cheadle fan, but this film held my interest (though the trailers for the film gave away a bit too much).

Traitor - the rest of the way

Well-acted and well-written drama. If you liked *The Kingdom*, you will like this.

Not a funny movie, though based on a story by Steve Martin. But you will laugh out loud once, at an act of the sweetest poetic justice...

Pineapple Express - half-way review

Barely funny comedy about two dimwitted stoners (Seth Rogen, James Franco) who flee drug hit men and a corrupt woman cop (Rosie Perez) after one of them witnesses a hit. Amber Heard is charming as Rogen's barely legal girlfriend, but the film has little else to recommend it.

Hollywood is full of unattractive older men like Rogen with beautiful young girlfriends/ wives like Heard (or Katherine Heigl in



Genre News

Knocked Up), so it seems plausible to Hollywood filmmakers. Who forget that the real guys with beautiful women hanging on their arms are multimillionaires, not the losers Rogen plays.

