

THE F.A.C.T. SHEET

March 2009

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FROM THE NEW EDITOR

Greetings, from the new F.A.C.T Sheet editor. Not much to say here except that it's pretty clear that Jennifer Juday has been doing a bang-up job at this, and that I've got some pretty big shoes to try to fill. Luckily, it looks like you, loyal readers, are steady and helpful contributors to this publication. I look forward to working on this newsletter, and to working with all of you. Here goes.—Roxanne Bogucka

UPCOMING FACT EVENTS

Sat., April 11, 1:00-3:00 p.m., FACT Board of Directors meeting, Carver Library, 1161 Angelina Street, Austin TX

The monthly meeting of the FACT board of directors is open to all FACT members and other individuals who have business to discuss.

Wed, April 15, 7:00-8:30p.m., South Reading Group discusses *The Lies of Locke Lamora*, Pleasant Hill Library, 211 E. William Cannon

Tue, April 21, 7:00-8:00 p.m., North Reading Group discusses *The Lies of Locke Lamora*, A.T. Campbell's House

NEWSY BITS

Aaron Allston in Hospital

Texas writer Aaron Allston recently had multiple bypass surgery following a heart attack in late March. At press time, he was on the mend. For further details, please see his LiveJournal at

http://community.livejournal.com/allston_info/

New Book Notice

Carol L. Dennis' newest published book is *Guardian's Choice*. She writes:

It is noteworthy for several reasons: (1) It is the sequel to *Guardian's Gambit*. (2) The first chapter went through your con's writing workshop several years ago. How many from your workshop get published? (3) Both my husband and grandson wrote sections, so all three of us are listed as author. (4) It is my eighth published book. (5) You may buy it on <http://www.lar-reek.com> or Amazon.com.

Hugo™ Nominees

The 2009 Hugo™ ballot has been announced. Results are posted here:

<http://www.locusmag.com/News/2009/03/2009-hugo-awards-final-ballot.html>

Several nominees have a local connection. Nominees who were former major guests at ArmadilloCon include Charles Stross, John Scalzi, Neil Gaiman, Mike Resnick, Ellen Datlow, Stanley Schmidt, Gordon Van Gelder, Sheila Williams, Ginjer Buchanan, David Hartwell, Beth Meacham, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Bob Eggleton, John Picacio, and Brad Foster. Nominees who live or have lived in Texas include Lillian Stewart Carl, Bill Willingham, Guillermo del Toro, John Picacio, and Brad Foster.—A.T. Campbell

UPCOMING MOVIES

April 3—*Alien Trespass*

April 10—*Dragonball: Evolution*

April 17—*Crank: High Voltage*

April 24—*Mutant Chronicles* (limited)

May 1—*Battle for Terra*, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*

May 8—*Star Trek*

May 21—*Terminator Salvation*

May 22—*Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*

May 29—*Drag Me to Hell*

CONVENTIONS

Apr. 18-19: **InstaCon 8**, Crowne Plaza Houston Suites, Houston, TX. Con-running convention sponsored by the fine folks of ALAMO.

Registration \$50 Attending, \$20 Supporting.

<http://www.alamosf.org/instacon8/>

Apr. 24-26: **Conestoga 13**, Tulsa, OK. Literary FSFcon. GoH Robin Hobb, Artist GoH Real Musgrave, Toastmaster Frank Wu. Regular registration \$35, Golden Ticket \$55.

<http://www.sftulsa.org/conestoga/>

Apr. 24-26: **Delta H Con**, University of Houston Main Campus, Houston, TX. Gaming and anime. Registration in advance (until 4/13) \$25, at door \$35. <http://www.deltahcon.com/>

May 29-31: **A-Kon 20**, Sheraton Dallas, Dallas, TX. Anime. Anime, comics, cosplay, media, gaming. Preregistration \$40 (adults), kids (6-12) \$15. <http://a-kon.com>

READING GROUP REPORT—*Childhood's End*

Almost everyone in the group read this book initially more than five years ago, and reread it in time for the discussion. The consensus was that *Childhood's End* hasn't aged since it was written in 1950s, except some phrases in it were a little dated. Clarke's predictions about future technological changes seemed on track to most readers, especially those who grew up or worked with computers in the 1950s. Others disagreed: Clarke has not even dreamed of all the various gadgets we have now, and he didn't envision micro-miniaturization. Some also pointed out that Clarke also didn't foresee social change that has taken place since '50s. In one of the book's expository chapters it is stated that availability of contraceptive pills and easy, reliable paternity testing will wreak havoc on the ethics and morals of the future society. While this was mentioned only in passing, several readers pointed out how wrong Clarke was on this. Obviously, a moral breakdown hasn't happened, at least not because of

women's reproductive choices. Ironically, even as Clarke "predicted" this breakdown, he didn't really show it happen in *Childhood's End*. The protagonist George Gregson has an intact family. Gender role distribution (we can assume the Gregsons represent a typical family, since nothing in the book implies they were outside the norm) seems to be stuck in the '50s. George is the provider, his wife a stay-at-home mother of two children. In the utopian society brought about by the arrival of the Overlords, women still don't hold any prominent roles. Even as the world has achieved racial equality, gender equality is nowhere near in the picture, and is not even listed among the issues Overlords considered necessary to solve. On the other hand, one reader liked that the Overlords enforced animal rights, and the clever way they did it.

Regardless, the group recognized that the value of this book did not lie in technological predictions. This was, first and foremost, science fiction as literature of ideas. The main idea was that of humankind's transcendence, and it was all the more remarkable because this novel was written decades before the concept of Singularity became popular. But some readers found other, "secondary" ideas of the book even more thought-provoking. One reader in particular abhorred Overlords enforcing one world government. She recalled that in the 1950s and '60s it was hotly debated whether the U.N. was a good or evil thing. She thought it would be wonderful if people became so tolerant that barriers between nations would naturally dissolve, but to impose one world government on people would be a very bad idea. All the prejudice and intolerance would stay, it would just go under the surface and fester. Some people found it fascinating that the Overlords looked like the traditional image of the devil, and recalled other science fiction works where a devil-shaped being is actually a benefactor of humanity. Clarke put a novel twist on this theme, revealing that humankind's deeply ingrained fear of the devil was not caused by the Overlords' visit in a distant past, but instead was a "future memory." Without realizing it, humans had subconscious

knowledge of the end of the humanity, brought about by the Overlords; thus, their images were forever associated with evil.

Since this and several other plot points in *Childhood's End* depend on psychic phenomena, we had a debate whether Arthur Clarke himself believed in those phenomena. Some people thought he did at first, but changed his mind later. Others said he never believed in paranormal—hence the disclaimer at the beginning of the book that opinions expressed in it do not necessarily represent the author's opinions. According to some, Clarke was one of those writers who would base a novel on certain ideas he or she didn't necessarily believe, just to see where it could go. This is certainly more compatible with Clarke's reputation as an advocate of rational worldview.

Still, some thought Clarke took an easy way out by making Overlords and Overmind communicate with humanity and among themselves via ESP. This let him avoid explaining how Overmind spread throughout the universe. For a rational author, he left an awful lot of magic in the book.

Everybody liked the book, but had different views of it rereading it recently than they had when they read it first. At the first reading—usually when they were much younger—many people thought humanity's destiny, as portrayed in this book, was very exciting. Rereading it decades later, many of the same people found the book horrifying or sad. Some thought the Overlords took away from humanity a chance to reach a more enlightened state of existence on its own. To quote one reader, getting there isn't so important as the path to it, the striving for it. Some thought it was sad that humanity could only arrive at peace through an imposition of overwhelming force from outside. One reader found it a politically reprehensible point of view, and was glad for Clarke's disclaimer, which left her room to think Clarke didn't seriously believe it.

Some readers noted that Clarke's writing style, with its multi-page info-dumps, was typical of the bygone era of SF, but is too dry, even off-putting to a modern reader, who wants exposition to be integrated into action. "There's

so much exposition that reads like a 1950s-era history book. It's tedious," said a reader. Others were comfortable with Clarke's style, seeing in it precision of a scientist. In any case, most readers thought the book was also full of beautiful prose, powerful images and scenes. Among them were alien ships hovering over cities (well before we saw them in movies like *Independence Day*) and the scene where the U.N. secretary got a glimpse of the Supervisor, made even more powerful because we were not told what he saw. Events at the party, transformation of the Gregsons' children, sadness of a dog looking at the departed children, were other memorable scenes. Then there was the unforgettable episode where George Gregson reminds the Supervisor that the Overlords promised never to use their surveillance on humanity, and the Supervisor replies that they haven't violated that promise, because they're watching the *children*. The final scene of humanity's integration into Overmind, as seen through the eyes of the last man on Earth, was also thought by many to be powerful. Some pointed out Clarke described transcendence better than any other writer who wrote on this topic, even though *Childhood's End* was written long before SF writers started to ponder scenarios of Singularity.

—Elze Hamilton

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 2009 MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR THE FANDOM ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL TEXAS

The monthly meeting of the board of directors for the Fandom Association of Central Texas was called to order on Saturday, 14 February 2009, by Board Chair Brian Price at the Carver Branch of the Austin Public Library, 1161 Angelina St., Austin, Texas, at 1:09 p.m. Present in addition to the chair were FACT President Karen Meschke, Directors Kurt Baty, Elizabeth Burton, A. T. Campbell III, Jennifer Juday and Charles Siros, FACT Officers Marianne Moul and Eric Hollas and committee chairs and FACT members Kimm Antell, Renee Babcock and Matthew Duarte.

The secretary presented the minutes of the

January meeting. There being no additions or corrections, it was moved by Mr. Baty, seconded by Mr. Siros they be approved as presented. In the absence of objection, Mr. Price declared the motion passed with one abstention.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

OFFICER REPORTS

CHAIR

- ★ Mr. Price reported gaming was held at Ninja Pirate on the third Saturday of January. He noted he had to leave early but heard the consensus was that holding it in the store worked well. He noted he would like to change to a different Saturday, but several of those present noted that would conflict with upcoming conventions. Ms. Burton noted that is really irrelevant if the goal is to attract outside attendees, provided someone representing FACT can be present. The consensus is that a decision should wait till after the annual meeting.

PRESIDENT

- ★ Ms. Meschke noted she watched the Super Bowl, and that the North reading group is going well. She added she hopes to see everyone at Con DFW next weekend.

VICE-PRESIDENT

- ★ None

TREASURER

- ★ reported that as of 1/31/2009 the account balances were: ArmadilloCon: \$3,686.04; FACT: \$16,285.10.
- ★ Deposits outstanding: FACT: \$42.00; ArmadilloCon: \$135.00.
- ★ Debits outstanding: FACT: None; ArmadilloCon: \$272.96.
- ★ Mr. Baty inquired regarding an update on the outstanding payables for program book ads for ArmadilloCon 30. Ms. Juday advised she would provide Ms. Moul with the relevant information so a determination can be made.
- ★ Ms. Moul advised that she has filled Form 990-N for 2008 with the IRS.

SECRETARY

- ★ Ms. Burton advised she had nothing much to report, other than having

attended to regular FACT business.

REGISTRAR

- ★ Mr. Hollas reported active members numbered 58 as of the end of January. Expired memberships numbered 27, while inactive memberships numbered 73. Four reminder postcards were sent to those with recently expired memberships and 12 to those whose memberships are about to expire. There were three new memberships and seven renewals

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES MANAGER

- ★ None

HISTORIAN

- ★ None

MIS

- ★ Ms. Antell reported she finally has the Google Group running properly, but noted some people's spam filters are shunting posts to bulk folders. Ms. Burton noted it was possible set up a filter whitelist messages to the group address by using the To parameter rather than From.

PUBLICATIONS

- ★ Ms. Juday advised the January FACT Sheet went out, and none seem to have been returned. She noted she needs intent statements from anyone planning to run for the board.

QUARTERMASTER

- ★ Mr. Siros noted the contract for renewal of the storage locker will be coming up shortly.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

ARMADILLOCON

- ★ Ms. Antell reported the first meeting of the committee was well attended and much was accomplished. Committee members are working on their respective jobs. She noted she has been having problems contacting the artist guest, Mr. Martiniere, as she is not sure she has a valid email address. Thirty-six members have registered to date, the majority being pre-registrations from ArmadilloCon 30. She noted there will be a party at ConDFW, including another ice cream social.

- ★ Ms. Babcock posed a question regarding who is assuming responsibility for financing the various parties. Ms. Burton said she felt the cost should be assumed equally between ArmadilloCon and FACT, since both are promoted at the events, and the rest of the board concurred. For logistical simplicity, expenses will be paid from the ArmadilloCon account and reimbursed by FACT.

HOTEL COMMITTEE

- ★ Mr. Siros advised the committee is in place, comprising himself, Mr. Baty and Fred Duarte. They have compiled a list of preferred alternative venues and hope to have preliminary information on terms by the March meeting. Their goal is to have a signed contract by no later than the end of April.

BYLAWS COMMITTEE

- ★ The final draft of the proposed adjustments to the bylaws is completed and ready to be voted on at the annual meeting.

READING GROUPS

- ★ Mr. Campbell reported the North group met twice, first at their new library location, where they had 12 people, and then at his home as previously.
- ★ Ms. Burton noted the South group has one new member, and that she will continue to promote the group whenever possible.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

- ★ Ms. Burton apologized that she has not been able to convene the virtual meeting as intended, and has opted to present the situation at the annual meeting to see if there is any useful feedback.

OLD BUSINESS

1. **ArmadilloCon Account Access:** Other options having been exhausted, Ms. Burton presented copies of a resolution to be signed by Ms. Babcock authorizing her to act as FACT assistant treasurer with regard to the convention account. Upon her signing the resolution, Ms. Moul will turn over the checks for the

account to her.

2. **Listing of Active Committees:** The consensus was that the list of committees that appears on the monthly agenda will be considered the complete roster of all active committees.
3. **Bylaws Updates:** As previously noted, these are ready to be voted on by the membership
4. **Storage Protocols:** Mr. Siros advised these are pending. Mr. Price requested to receive a draft by no later than 28 February.

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Credit Card Receipts:** Ms. Babcock inquired whether it would be possible for credit card receipts to go directly to the ArmadilloCon account rather than the FACT account. She pointed out that ArmadilloCon is responsible for the majority of those receipts, and that having to have them transferred is inefficient. It was moved by Ms. Juday, seconded by Mr. Campbell, that the treasurer change the deposit account for the merchant account. Ayes: 4; Nays: 1; Abstain: 1
2. **SMoFCon:** Ms. Meschke advised that ALAMO will offer FACT discount memberships if an agreement to purchase same is received prior to the FACT annual meeting in March and if FACT agrees to purchase in bulk. Mr. Baty moved that an amount equivalent to two scholarship grants, which would be \$500, be used to purchase 10 memberships to be awarded without charge to FACT members using the established scholarship criteria. Ms. Burton suggested the motion be amended to state that board members who wish to obtain one reimburse the organization for the original cost, which amendment was accepted by Mr. Baty. The motion was seconded by Mr. Siros and, in the absence of objection, was declared approved by Mr. Price. Information regarding the availability of these memberships will be sent to the

members via the *FACT Sheet* and Google Group. Payment for the memberships are to be sent to ALAMO no later than the annual meeting March 14.

ALAMO will also be requesting the loan of conference equipment and supplies.

- 3. InstaCon:** The question was presented regarding whether FACT would offer up to a \$50 membership supplement/reimbursement for those

wishing to attend InstaCon. Mr. Siros moved that scholarships of no more \$50 be made available to no more than 10 individuals for a total of \$500 for reimbursement for InstaCon membership. Seconded by Ms. Burton. No one being opposed, Mr. Price declared the motion approved.

There being no other business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 2:03 p.m.