



The WSFA Journal

March/April 2026

Edited by Samuel Lubell, Secretary



Bouncy Castle Portable Planetarium

2025 Readings (part II)

A Cat Being Beaten to Death with Bagpipes

Author Spotlight: Robert Silverberg

Learn Not to Hit Your Head!

Magic Schools in Fantasy

I'm Upright, and That's a Win!

Bouncy Castle Portable Planetarium

Attendance: Jim Thomas, Madeleine, Elizabeth, Carolyn, Grig, Garry Blog, Bob, Michael I, Frances, Kathi, Mark, Cathy Green, Judy N, Kim, Sam S, Marc Brir, Greg, Bill, and Sam Lubell

The first WSFA Meeting in 2026 (01/02/26) began with Bob calling the meeting to order at 8:15. Sam L. read the minutes. Treasurer Zenlizard was not here but left a message that the amount did not change (so still \$\$ in various accounts). There was a brief discussion about dues. \$25 a year after you attend three meetings. Capclave Present was not here. Courtni for Capclave Future said she just got back from a trip and will meet with Perianne this week. Sam L. gave the schedule for the committee to Talk SF. Mark asked if you have to have read the book to discuss it at book club. Sam L. said no, but we will discuss the book so there will be a lot of spoilers. So definitely try to read the book first. Grig for Website said he is still waiting on 2023 Journals and needs access to the website for Capclave. Cathy said she thought she had sent the Journals to the webmaster and then dumped the files to save space.

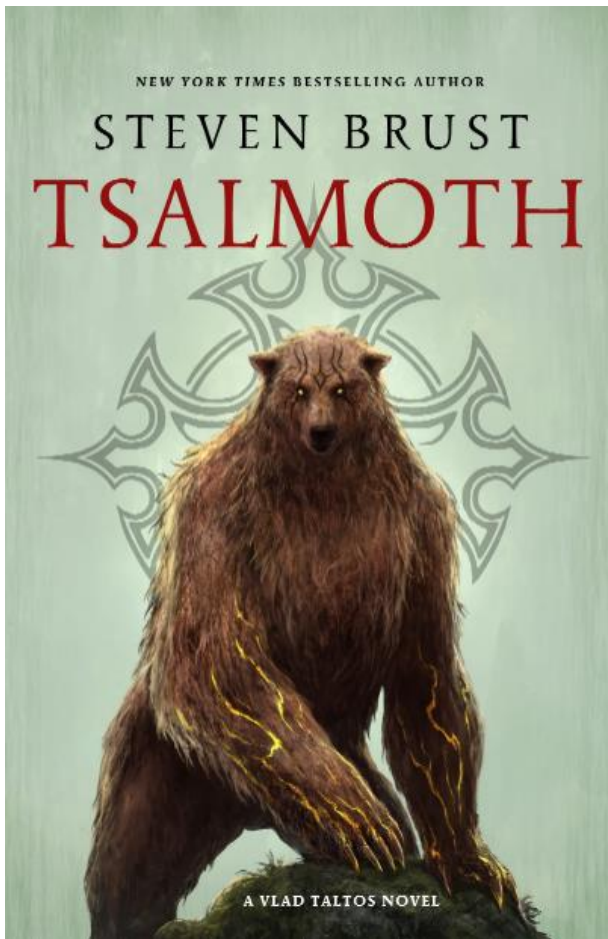
Entertivities, Marc said the Washington Monument presentation was political with no slavery or Indians. Stranger Things ended. Here for his first time was Marc Brir who likes hard sf and math and physics but does not like audiobooks. He works in cybersecurity and found us through Meetup. There was a discussion of our meeting schedule and our email list.

No old business. No new business. Announcements: Jim is hosting a travel roundtable at the Sandy Spring Museum at the end of January; Kathi announced new shows at the Planetarium. They are looking for volunteers to take the portable planetarium (like being in a bouncy castle but project planetarium shows inside) to events. Meridel Newton has a book launch for her second novella. Meeting adjourned at 8:44.

2025 Readings (part II) By George Shaner

31. McAuley, Paul: *War of the Maps*. There was a period from the mid-1990s to about 2010 when a new work by Paul McAuley would go to the top of my TBR list. After that, McAuley lost distribution in the United States and I wasn't concerned enough to buy his novels as imports. That brings us to McAuley's second-most-recent novel, which I was fortunate enough to get access to. Set in an ultra-far future version of our universe, Humanity may have shuffled off to wherever cultures that achieve effective godhood go, but our servants remain, and there are still individuals who are motivated by honor and integrity. This is as one Thorn the Lucidor seeks to bring a war criminal to heel; a possible last act in their own life. I was reminded of what originally attracted me to McAuley's writing in terms of clever world-building and intricate plotting. I was also reminded of his relatively tepid characterization, though his worlds are often bigger than those characters. Be that as it may, I found this story to be worth my time and I look forward to hunting down some of his other novels that I missed while living in Virginia.

32. Scalzi, John: *When the Moon Hits Your Eye*. My initial response to when this book was announced was essentially blank incomprehension, closely followed by the thought that 'you've gone too far this time, Scalzi'. Having just wrapped this story up the best way to regard it is as a fable (a word Scalzi uses in his afterword), as the reader is presented with the incomprehensible and Scalzi works through the personal consequences, until arriving at some moments of real poignancy towards the end; before springing his final surprise. I actually liked this novel, but just liked, not loved. I can now go back to seeing what insane development the real world is presenting us with on a daily basis.



33. Brust, Steven: *Tsalmoth*. In finishing up this novel I've now back-filled all my gaps in Brust's long-running series; now it's just a matter of waiting for (presumably) *Creotha* and the climax of this epic. That isn't to say that this book started out smoothly for me, and Brust is, if nothing else, almost always smooth in his plots. That Vlad sounded more like one of the people that the Vlad of the early books would hire for some routine dirty work was somewhat off-putting, as though Brust was having some issues with recapturing the voice of his early books. Still, it all eventually modulates into a typical "Dragaera" story, and one appreciates the interplay between Vlad, Morrolan, and the rest of the high-powered magic users that Vlad was inexplicably associating with until explained several books in. It's been a good run. There are apparently two novels to go.

34. Valente, Catherynne M.: *Space Oddity*. My reaction to Cat Valente's *Space Opera* was that it was about as good a homage to Douglas Adams as one was going to get, really needed no follow-up, and if it had been one page longer it would have run on too long. This brings us to *Space Oddity*, the inevitable, but probably unnecessary follow-up. While I was happy to get more of Decibel Jones and company, there are a number of pit-falls here. The big one is that Valente apparently felt the need to explain what was really happening in the first book, when it really wasn't necessary; if you have to explain the joke then it isn't funny. Second, clocking in at 80 pages longer than the first book, this one overstays its

welcome a little. Three, you could argue that this book really isn't about our protagonists from the first book; it's really about the sore losers, and who cares about sore losers? With those caveats in mind I think this is worth reading if your feelings about *Space Opera* are still positive.

35. Jacka, Benedict: *An Inheritance of Magic*. Choosing to read this book was something of a roll of the dice, in that I was aware of that Jacka had a good reputation on the basis of his "Alex Versus" books, but that was about it. The back of the book cover description also didn't impress me, as it sounded like just another wish-fulfillment story. In the process of reading this book I learned that there is a sub-genre of fantasy called LitRPG, where the processes of an RPG game are mirrored in the building of the story, and that seems to be the case here. Protagonist Stephen Oakwood basically has been launched into the process of grinding up from raw potential and not much else. A process that has to be accelerated as he has been dragged back into the affairs of his estranged family; a group of great power and great aggravation for Oakwood. He'd just as soon not have been bothered. If I sound underwhelmed, I wasn't cutting Jacka much slack for basically writing *Succession* with magic. However, I like the character of Oakwood well enough, and set-piece climax of the book (and its immediate consequences) is great. And to be fair, the first book in such a series is going to be heavy with world-building elements. Will I be reading more? Probably; though I don't feel the urge to rush right out and read the immediately available books.

36. Ashton, Edward: *The Fourth Consort*. Of Ashton's novels I've read so far, I found *Mikey7* to be mildly interesting, and really enjoyed *Mal Goes to War*; *The Fourth Consort* falls in between. Dalton Greaves, one-time soldier, and semi-expendable first contact agent for one of two competitive interstellar alliances is a good character, the dialogue is consistently snappy, and the overall set-up seems intriguing. My problem mostly boils down to the treatment seeming a little shallow, though it's to be admitted that this is a fairly short book. However, this story feels open-ended so hopefully Ashton will further expand on this setting; I think the potential is there.

37. Aaronovitch, Ben: *Stone & Sky*. At certain point in a long-running series one has to start asking one's self whether what you're reading is holding up a candle to what has come before, and there were some diminishing returns for me in this book. This is as there were points in this installment where I'm wondering if Aaronovitch, in an effort to keep up with current marketing trends, was trying to make a seriocomic police procedural have elements of coziness and romantasy. In the end I was satisfied, and there are more hints that there is a sharp inflection point is to come, but we're not there yet. The saving grace is that the characters continue to change over time, and don't feel as though they're living the same day over and over again.

38. Lakshminarayan, Lavanya: *The Ten Percent Thief*. That I picked up this book is a commentary on how I remember it getting good press when the British publication occurred, my continuing interest in what African and South Asian authors are doing with the old tropes of Campbellian science fiction, and because it was convenient! Levity aside, I was concerned over whether Ms. Lakshminarayan would rise above those old tropes, as I wasn't that interested in reading about some far-future Robin Hood figure. I also wasn't enjoying the "mosaic" approach to writing a novel, as I didn't yet have the confidence that it would all come together. However, it turns out Lakshminarayan does have a taste for the jugular, as she cheerfully tears to little shreds her far-future elite who live and die for the algorithm, and their comeuppance is quite satisfying as the climax comes together. Going forward, I am now much more interested in the lady's new novel. *Interstellar MegaChef* is not the most auspicious title, but I now appreciate that satire is a big point of Lakshminarayan's writing.

39. Stearns, R.E.: *Barbary Station*. That it's taken me this long to get to this novel in regards to its publication date is probably a commentary on my suspicion that there is no way that it could be as cool as the high concept of it all: Lesbian pirates in space! This is reinforced by the sense that this novel mostly didn't find an audience when the iron was hot. Moving forward from 2017 to 2025, my suspicion is that this story fell between stools of communities of readers: Too nuts-and-bolts for people looking for a found-family story, too much relationship building for those wanting a crisp thriller. As for what I think this novel really needed that might have been another POV character to act as a foil to Iridian and Adda, our wannabe space pirates; maybe the pirate captain, maybe the leader of the mercenaries sent to deliver retribution to the hijackers. The best thing that Stearns had going for her is the arc of dealing with the AI defense systems that are preventing the denizens of said Barbary Station from escaping, as that is where the really interesting developments happen. How those developments play out is what makes me interested in the follow-up books.

40. Hur, Anton: *Towards Eternity*. What one has here is essentially a meditation on whether the human spirit can transcend a time when immortality is achieved by becoming an artificial copy of one's self. Hur tries to make a positive argument, and their prose is very polished, but I'm not really buying it. Again, perhaps if I was in a different mood I might have found it an easier sell.

41. Kowal, Mary Robinette: *The Martian Contingency*. To be honest, I wasn't excited for this novel, and mostly saw it as a chore to get out of the way; at a certain point diminishing returns had set in for me. That said, I continue to like a lot of Kowal's interrogation of the classic space exploration epic with the more malignant Campbellian norms inverted in favor of collective action by people rising above their faults and limitations to achieve great things. I mean, what's not to like? This is unless you're the sort of reader who is suspicious of their fiction being too "woke." However, one of the drawbacks about how this series has been structured is that the antagonists to the notion of getting Humanity off Earth in the wake of the meteor strike at the start of this epic have never really had their day in Kowal's court, and this becomes an issue with the disaster that threatens the early days of the Martian colony. I know that Kowal isn't writing a thriller, but a well-drawn antagonist can really give a story depth, and lack of depth is something of a problem here. Still, at the end of the day, this quartet is a great achievement, and Kowal gets points from me for seeing the exercise through. My understanding is that another book set in this milieu is forthcoming, and I really don't see the point, unless Kowal seriously grapples with the off-stage antagonists.

42. Greene, R.W.W.: *Mercury Rising*. To be honest, I found this exercise to be more interesting than engaging, as Greene gives you an epic slice of gonzo alternative history with a two-bit schlub as his main character. However, as someone who can remember the 1970s, Greene's alternative 1970s has the same shabby quality as ours did, where one is experiencing the backwash of the grand promises of the New Frontier, which only resulted in the Rust Belt

and a justified sense of betrayal. Seeing as this appears to be mostly one half of a long novel, I'm somewhat suspending judgement on the hero's journey of Brooklyn Lamontagne. Maybe it will be a case of close, but no cigar, or maybe I'll wind up being very impressed. The jury is still out.



point. Though the fight with the "Mountain" Clan will merely go on to the next stage, we are given a hint of a counter-balance to the magic-using "Jade" clans beginning to coalesce at the tail-end of the novel. It'll be interesting to see what Ms. Lee does with this, though I'm not very hopeful that Lee is going to do much to develop the geopolitics of her world. She already has too much on her plate to bring this story home.

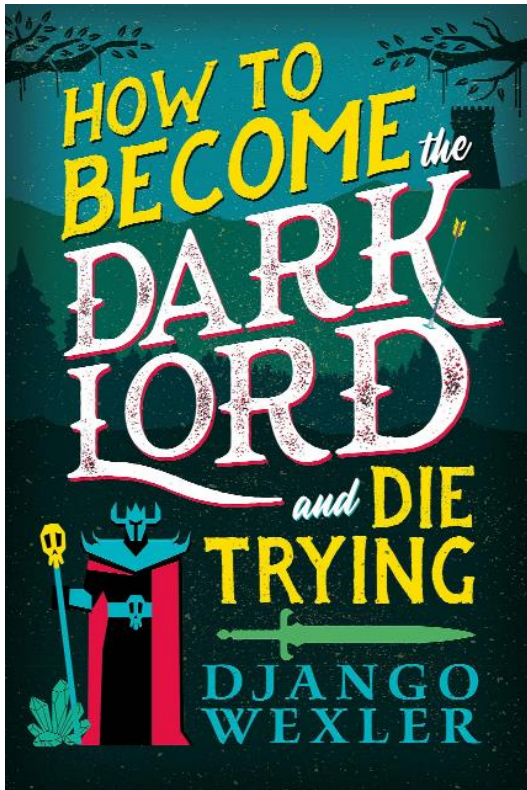
44. Stross, Charles: *A Conventional Boy*. File under: Interstitial. The plot overview of this novella has been highly telegraphed (long-time detainee of the Laundry goes to a gaming convention and gets caught up in occult mayhem), so the real interest comes from the afterword, where Stross lays out his rationale for creating this story. I liked it, but it's only good "Laundry," not great "Laundry." As is reflected by the inclusion of the short story "Down on the Farm," which I had not read until this point, and is a good example of why people came to love this series.

45. Ashing-Giwa, Kemi: *This World is Not Yours*. If one has done enough reading in a given genre of fiction, at a certain point it can be turned into a drinking game, or, if one is being more polite, a contemplation of what works the story in question is in conversation with. After a while I started thinking about classic "New Wave" downer stories such as "The Genocides" by Theodore Disch, or "We Who Are About To..." by Joanna Russ; real "affirmations" of the human spirit; not! The contemporary twist on the deeply pessimistic vein of a certain flavor of sociological science fiction that Ashing-Giwa is mining, is the lesbian couple that is at the core of story. Yes, it is a love story, if one defines love as being deeply obsessive and jealous, as the negative waves coming off Vinh and Amara are intense; and wearying. These two turn out to be quite the piece of work. So, is this novelette worth of effort? On the whole, yes, though that isn't clear until Ashing-Giwa goes into her attack trajectory on the way to the climax.

46. Moore, Alan: *The Great When*. Had I ruthlessly implemented the "50-page Rule" I would have tossed this book aside after said fifty pages, as what I was reading mostly seemed like blather. Not to mention that the conceit of books being wrapped up with an alternate, metaphysical, London isn't all that fresh at the moment. Having said that, this novel does come into something of its own the deeper that you get into it, and there is some very nice writing that almost offsets the continuing periodic hemorrhages of word salad. The conclusion does manage to be poignant. However, despite not being a total throwaway, I find it hard to imagine four more books of this stuff being produced. The impression I'm left with is of the sort of vanity project that a successful writer cashes in their accumulated chips to push forward with, when cooler heads might have suggested caution.

47. Brennan, Sarah Rees: *Long Live Evil*. Although the cover of this novel seems to promise a rollicking "Isekai" adventure, there is little that is laugh-out-loud funny about the author's scenario, nor should there be, considering that Brennan's protagonist Rae goes from a terminal cancer ward to a death watch for their own execution in a crap-sack fantasy world; dry irony might have been the tone Brennan was seeking. The basic issue for me then becomes that I'm not much of a consumer of epic fantasy in general, or of romantasy at all. Such being the case, I feel that just about any critique I might offer is going to be too off-base to be useful. I can say that Rae is an interesting character, as she grasps for any sort of personal meaning that might redeem the desperate situation that she finds herself in, stuck in a world of walking archetypes that might as well be robots; at least the secondary characters mostly felt like robots to me. And yeah, I do feel like I was missing the point of the whole exercise at times. Still, I was sufficiently intrigued that I do plan on reading the follow-up, and I hope that the whole experience of writing this novel was cathartic for Ms. Brennan (a cancer survivor herself).

48. Moore, Christopher: *Anima Rising*. "Klimt, Freud, and Jung meet the Bride of Frankenstein" sounds like the set-up for a bad joke, and though this novel has its moments, it is basically a long bad joke, elevated by Moore's efforts to give agency back to the real-life women in this story, in the environment of extreme male sexual privilege that was pre-1914 Vienna. Though considering that abuse of sexual privilege has become a matter of contemporary high politics, it's arguable that this novel is very relevant; I'm still mulling over whether it's actually all that good. It does kind of end on a whimper.



49. Wexler, Django: *How to Become the Dark Lord and Die Trying*. Can you say Isekai? You know, where some average person gets dumped in a fantasy dimension and finds themselves stuck (typically) with some epic quest to perform. Welp, Davi, our protagonist, is in that position and she's heartily sick of trying to do good, only to have lived centuries of pain and death in a "Groundhog Day" time loop, and she's just done with it; and she has a new agenda. This is my first introduction to Django Wexler, and I mostly like what I read; liked, not loved. The basic issue is that the joke goes on for a bit too long, and I can see where people found Davi too shallow of a character. I suspect that the real character development is going to come in the second half of what is really one novel; at least I hope it does.

50. Yang, Neon: *Brighter than Scale, Swifter than Flame*. Not the story from Yang that I was looking for, but since that is what's on offer I decided to give it a try. Equal parts fable and court romance, what impressed me most is that Yang worked really hard at offering the reader very polished prose, and those who really like this sort of thing ought to be very happy about it. As for myself, I thought it did come together in the end and don't regret the time invested. Was the ending too telegraphed? Maybe. But the denouement was not obvious. Yang also seems to intend this as a gauntlet back in the face of those who want queer folks to just return to the old closet and stay

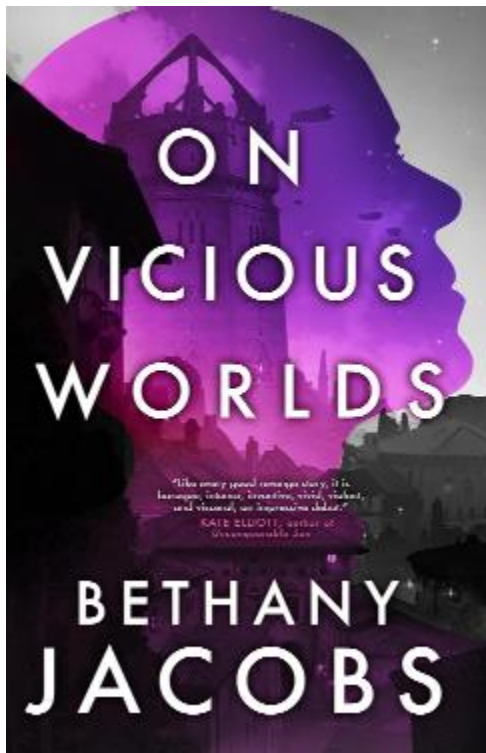
there.

51. Cornell, Paul: *Who Killed Sherlock Holmes?* Right up front I have to admit that I found the third book in this series somewhat unsatisfactory compared to what has come before. Much of this has to do with an immediate story arc dealing with an escalating series of murders that mirror the "Sherlock Holmes" stories. This plot line seemed increasingly less-than-convincing, and the big suspect reveal left me underwhelmed. I can see why the series got dropped two books short of completion. This is a shame, as Cornell revealed a lot more of his bigger game, and I would have liked to have seen those books; even if they turned out to be problematic.

52. Tidhar, Lavie: *The Circumference of the World*. File under: Interesting, but just interesting. This is essentially an interlinked set of novelettes that really didn't hang together for me, as Tidhar considers the nature of reality on one hand, and conducts a somewhat nostalgic throwback to the "Golden Age" of Science Fiction on the other. I think folks who are already fans of Tidhar will get something out of it, to one degree or another. If you were thinking of making this your first exposure to Tidhar, I think you'd be better off reading *The Violent Century* or *Unholy Land*.

53. Stronach, Sasha: *The Sunforge*. My response to this novel was diametrically the opposite of the first book in the trilogy (hopefully). *Dawnhounds* easily passed the "50-page Rule," and then ended (at least for me), on a rather confused note, as I was trying to figure out the nature of Stronach's world, and what was really going on. In *The Sunforge*, despite some well-wrought passages, one spends the first fifty-pages or so in that continuing state of confusion, with a large dollop of flash-back plot "structure" on top, and the whole confection was simply not working for me. Forced to skip to the end to see if I wanted to continue with this work, I finally got what I really wanted; a clear explanation of the nature of Stronach's setting and what the higher conflict in play really is. This made the flashback structure seem much more appropriate. I still think the shallowness of most of the characters is the weakest portion of this story, but I'm now interested to see how Stronach sticks the landing.

54. Bear, Elizabeth: *Machine*. Once I found myself wondering whether it was worth continuing with this novel, as for me it had turned into a slog, I went back to my review of *Ancestral Night*, the first book Ms. Bear set in this milieu. Yep, the same virtues and faults are still evident, most notably the enervating internal blather of the sole POV character which saps all narrative drive. Matters are further not helped by the really stupid conspiracy at the core of this story. Yet again though, Ms. Bear manages to stick the landing and gives the reader some emotional satisfaction, but if I do give her next book a chance, the hook will be really short. Matters are not helped that this is the third book I've read this year where the setting is a space station where all events are going straight to hell, but Taran Hunt's *The Immortality Thief* and R.E. Stearns' *Barbary Station* I liked better to varying degrees. A lot of it coming down to how their stories didn't grind along in second gear for way too long.



55. Jacobs, Bethany: *On Vicious Worlds*. My reaction to the first book in this trilogy was that I generally liked what I was reading, but found it a little over the top; particularly when it came to a case of hidden identity that seemed a little improbable. This time out the story is all about repercussions, as yes, our protagonists did save a community of people under threat of genocide, but it doesn't mean that these people are grateful for the means of their salvation. Not to mention that the authoritarian governing complex that was orchestrating that exercise in oppression has not yet thrown in the towel. I'll be interested to see how Jacobs wraps this whole show up. I'm a little surprised that this novel wound up this far down on the list, but the improbabilities annoyed me more and more over time.

56. Zieja, Joe: *Communications Failure*. One thing I had not realized when I read *Mechanical Failure* is that Joe Zieja had been a contributor to the "Duffel Blog," which attempted (and apparently still does) to be to military affairs what "The Onion" is to general news. This time out, our much put-upon Capt. Rogers is still trying to get a clue about how the hell he is supposed to execute his position, while his opposite number, Alandra Keffoule, is also trying to get to the bottom of why interstellar war has broken out for the first time in over two hundred years; could it have something to do with the losers from the last war? Anyway, the jokes from the first book are almost as funny the second time around,

and this is made up for by the way Zieja has widened his net. It wound up this far down the list because it feels increasingly slight.

57. Hair, David: *World's Edge*. Although epic fantasy is not one of my great enthusiasms, the author's *Map's Edge* gave me enough entertainment, particularly in the contest between the protagonist Raythe Vyre, in a state of internal immigration in the wake of his nation's fall to a rising imperial power, and Toran Zorne, a servant of that empire. This is as Vyre floats an expedition to seek a deposit of a material that strengthens magical power, and Zorne is in hot pursuit to bring Vyre to heel. It made for a good plot, particularly since Zorne is drawn as being more than a shallow thug. That brings us to this book, which is apparently the second book of a trilogy (Hair had previously mostly written quartets), and which badly suffers from the Middle Book Blues. Although this work does climax in another battle, that fight involves events set in play by Vyre's arrival amongst an unknown people. However, this fight does not involve Vyre versus Zorne, and that leaves me with a case of not really caring, as you know a bigger fight is to come. Also, I found some of Hair's world-building less convincing than in the first book; particularly his efforts to channel H. Rider Haggard. I'll probably read the concluding book *Sorcerer's Edge* eventually, but I'm not feeling very eager at this point in time.

58. Burke, Sue: *Semiosis*. At the time this novel came out I was mildly interested, but not enough to actually pick it up and read it. Then one day I noticed that a third book set in this milieu was being published and I decided that maybe the time had come to give it a try. While it's hard to beat the novel for high concept, a world where plants are the dominant species, I didn't find the execution that impressive. Yes, this story passes the "50-page Test," but with its mosaic plot structure and increasingly clunky dialogue, it was a struggle to make it to the end. It also didn't help that the colony itself resembled one of those communities from "Trek Classic" with just a few people and no visible means of support (though these folks know they're on their own). To be honest, I might not have been giving Burke as fair a chance as she deserved, but I had just read much more impressive novels before Burke's, and there were more attractive books waiting for me. I'll probably give Burke another chance with the second book in this trilogy.

59. Rambo, Cat: *Rumor Has It*. I've reached the point with this now apparently open-ended series that I'm wondering what Rambo's over-arching climax really is. This is after having been set up with a cliff-hanger with a fair amount of menace in *Devil's Gun* only for that threat to kind of fade out in this book. Most of the folks who seem enthusiastic about these novels really like the "found-family" trope and the setting. However, seeing as half as many people apparently read the second book as the first, and that trend is continuing with the third, my sense is that Rambo better have a real good wrap-up in the cards for the fourth book. This is too bad in that some of the secondary characters, particularly Atlanta (one-time spare royal heir and now paladin starting their quest), are finally starting to have an identifiable arc to follow, but I'm rather doubting that Rambo is going to get to tell that story, at least as a major-imprint series. To be blunt, Becky Chambers does this sort of thing so much better.



60. Sagas, L.M.: *Gravity Lost*. File under: I might be the problem, not the book. First up, I must compliment Ms. Sagas on pulling up her game a few notches, particularly in regards to her descriptive depth. However, and here's where some personal truth-telling is necessary, I'm not a big fan of the "found-family" trope which is a foundation of so much adventure fiction these days. I also have to admit that I found the plot machinery a little too contrived, though admittedly all novels are contrivances to one degree or another. That said, if you thought "Firefly" was the best thing ever, this book was written for you. Going forward, I hope Ms. Sagas continues to rise above her influences. If I wanted to be nastier I might also note that there is a young male character in these books who mostly comes off as being an idiot.

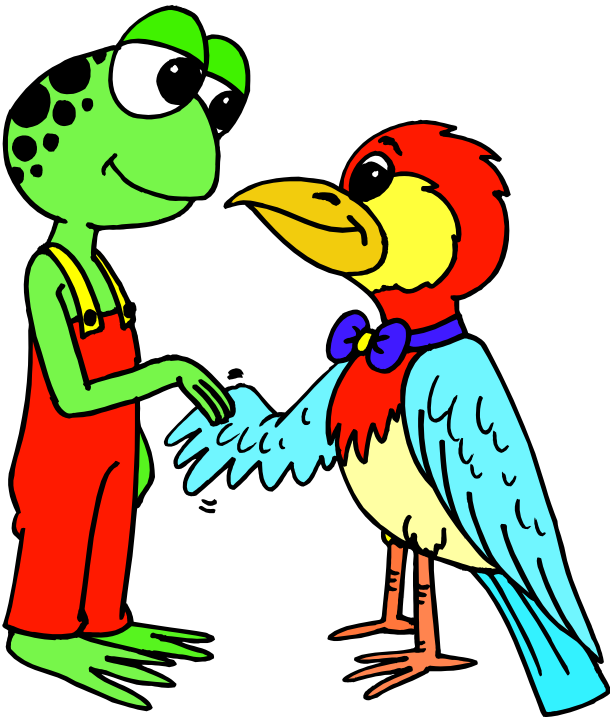
A Cat Being Beaten to Death with Bagpipes

At Mark's house – Mark, Bob, and Sam. Online – Kim, Jim Thomas, Perianne, Rodger, Michael I, Zenlizard, Grig, Paul, Frances, Sam S, Ruth Pitt, Carolyn, Greg Key, Sarah Mitchell, Kathi Overton, Judy Newton and Michael Taylor.

WSFA Meeting January Third Friday: The second meeting in 2026, January 1/16 Third Friday, was called to order at 8:15. Sam L read minutes. Treasurer Zenlizard reported \$\$\$ in various accounts. A few new people paid dues, only XX. One can pay by check or by PayPal \$25 to Capclave@yahoo.com. Can do credit cards. Say annual dues.

Capclave Present – Rodger said “Capclave is sort of moving along. Our biggest blockers right now are related to website stuff, so Paul Haggerty, good to see you. I would like to catch up with you after the meeting regarding both status of getting a basic Capclave website online, and then seeing if we have any blockers relating to setting up a programming database for this year.” Kim and Cathy G. will table at Farpoint, from January 30th to February 1st. Rodger said anyone who knows of other events for tabling should email him. There will be a table at Boskone. Perrienne for Capclave Future said sent Courtnei a list of possible guests but have not met.

Committee to Discuss SF gave the schedule. We will discuss the December issue of *Lightspeed*. There was a discussion about whether *F&SF* is actually doing issues <as of September, the answer is no>. Only XX people showed up for book club so if we don’t start getting more, we will stop doing it.



Intertivities: Kim Hargan mentioned the Folger (library) book club which will discuss the history of Renaissance Fairs with Jen DeLuca, author of *Well Met*. Kim also mentioned a new Star Trek show *Starfleet Academy*. Perrienne mentioned Games with Trains at the B&O Railroad Museum. Judy Newton mentioned Chinese Opera at the Silver Spring Museum. Kim said Chinese Opera sounds like a cat being beaten to death with bagpipes.

Website: Grig said he is missing *WSFA Journals* for 2023. Cathy says she had deleted stuff so if Paul or Gayle don’t have them, then they’re gone. Paul said that he will look again. Grig needs access to the Capclave website. Paul said he will give Grig access. Grig Larson: said, “Excellent, because I know that Zen Lizard has been patiently waiting, because he had something, and, also about, like, you know, Roger, probably is gonna need some second person to do it. You know, and I’ll do whatever, you know as people need. I know that you have the website set up slightly differently. Over the years, I’ve seen it just gets forwarded to a new folder or something like that. I’ll just keep it to whatever you have.” Paul said that we got the 2026 Capclave site up and made it live. “I’m really looking

forward to giving Grig access so that we actually have a competent backup.” He will get the programming database cleaned up and ready, ASAP and get the online registration running as quickly as he can. “Alright, step two, steal underpants. Step 3, conquer the world.” Grig said “Profit!”

Bob asked about selling WSFA Press books. Paul said, “We have actually sold a couple, the... next thing I’ve got to do is do a full inventory of everything we sold, so we can get the finances straightened up. You know, how much do I owe the club for the books that got sold? How much does the club owe me for the hosting things? We’ll get that all out and get it all official, close out the year.” He did get the manuscript from Sheri Renee Thomas for her book, *Roots Touch Sky*, which was originally scheduled for a couple years ago. It will take time to clean it up. Ruth offered to help since she has professional expertise. “I had 10 years as a technical editor with the American Geophysical Union and the National Research Council, and then I had 25 years with the websites at the SEC.” She and Karl Pitt are friends of the Zipsers and have been to Capclave a few times. Paul pointed out that we are putting out the book in a limited press run of 250.

Carolyn for the Small Press Award said it was announced Monday. Paul updated the website. First story came in on the 12th but since then nothing. We're watchful waiting. It may be computer issues. Paul said he checked the Bluehost control panel and nothing there. She asked Sarah to promote it on social media.

Old Business. Both meetings in February, or at least right this moment, scheduled to be hybrids.

New Business. There is a Fifth Friday this month. Sam L. offered to host a Zoom Fifth Friday. Ruth Pitt is here for her first meeting. Various technical issues were discussed.

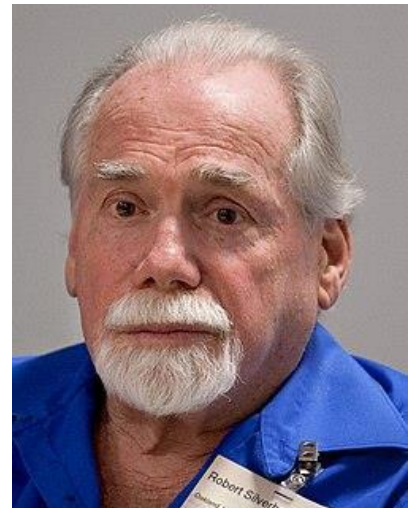
There were no announcements so meeting adjourned unanimously.

Author Spotlight: Robert Silverberg

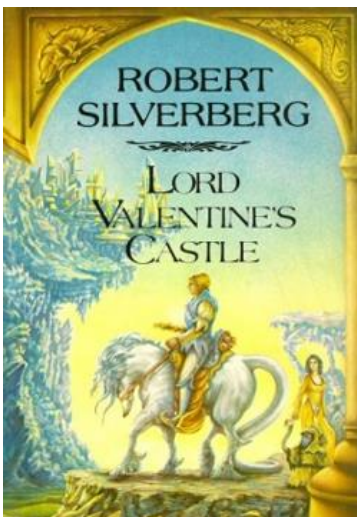
By Samuel Lubell

Robert Silverberg is currently the oldest surviving major writer of the Golden Age of SF. Although there are a handful of writers older than him, he was published while still a teenager and arguably has had the longest career. Or, one could say Silverberg has had four careers in science fiction.

Born January 15, 1935, he began sending stories to magazines while still a teenager and wrote for fanzines. He edited *Spaceship*, a fanzine, from 1949 to 1955. He became professionally published in 1954 with "Gorgon Planet" in *Science Fiction Adventures* while a student at Columbia University. His first novel *Revolt on Alpha C* came out in 1955. He quickly became an extremely prolific writer, producing million words a year, not just of science fiction but anything someone would pay him to write, including porn. He used so many pseudonyms that even he does not know all of them. For instance, he frequently collaborated with Randall Garrett as Robert Randall. In 1958, he had 80 stories published. In the 1960s, under the influence of Fred Pohl, he launched his second career when he discovered he could make more money in the long term by slowing down and improving the quality so that his work would be reprinted. His work grew more experimental and sophisticated, often dealing with his characters' psychology. In 1975, he announced his retirement from writing, but in 1980 he began the third stage of his career with the blockbuster novel *Lord Valentine's Castle* and its sequels (the Majipoor cycle).



His last novel was *Roma Eterna* (2003), although this was a fix-up novel of earlier published stories. However, he has had a fourth career as an elder statesman of the field and continues to appear at Worldcons which he has attended every year since 1953 (although a couple of times remotely). He writes the non-fiction *Reflections* column for *Asimov's* (originally for *Galileo*).



He won his first Hugo Award, for best new author, in 1956 and won Best Novella in 1969 for "Nightwings" and in 1987 for "Gilgamesh in the Outback." He won Best Novelette in 1990 for "Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another." His fan writing received a Retro-Hugo in 2001. He won the Nebula Award for best novel in 1972 for *A Time of Changes*, Best Novella in 1986 for "Sailing to Byzantium," Best Novella in 1975 for "Born with the Dead," Best short story in 1970 for "Passengers," and Best Short Story in 1972 for "Good News from the Vatican". He has far too many nominated works to list here.

See

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_awards_and_nominations_received_by_Robert_Silverberg

Silverberg has written at least 500 books (including many non-fiction works) with at least 130 SF and Fantasy novels and nearly 500 identified stories. In addition to

writing, he edited the Science Fiction Hall of Fame, nine volumes of Alpha, 12 volumes of New Dimensions, and many other anthologies.

Readers new to Silverberg should look at *Dying Inside* about telepaths, *The World Inside* about overpopulation, *A Time of Changes* about a rebellion against a culture that forbids the first person singular (I), and of course *Lord Valentine's Castle*. A good one volume story collection is *The Best of Robert Silverberg: Stories of Six Decades* from Subterranean, which is unfortunately out of print. A 1976 *Best of Robert Silverberg* can be found in used bookstores. The more recent *Voyagers: Twelve Journeys through Space and Time* is still in print. Project Gutenberg has 42 of his early works, although these are not his best. Subterranean Press published his collected stories in eight volumes (and the ebook versions are cheap, just \$2.99).

Learn Not to Hit Your Head!

Attendance: Jim Thomas, Perrienne, Madeleine, Michael I, Bob, Zenlizard, Kim, Carolyn, Rodger, Gary, Ann, Frances, Paul Haggerty, Alex, Judy N, Sam L, Frances, George Guay, Paul H, Sam S. Michael T, Elizabeth, Bill L, Marc Bril.



WSFA Meeting Feb First Friday 2/6/26: Prez Bob called the meeting to order at 8:15. Sam L. read the minutes. Treasurer Zenlizard said our accounts had swelled, well had a minor increase. We have \$\$\$ in various accounts. He paid the submission fee for the Gaithersburg Book Festival, and has applied to have a booth there. It will be in the middle of May. The Gaithersburg Book Festival will notify us by mid-February if approved. There will be something like in the realm of \$\$ fee for the table, if and when that is approved. We do not have registration up on the Capclave site. This needs to be a priority. Paul said, "I need to activate the PayPal section, and I need some help with PayPal in order to get that done. But we should move very quickly." Grig said he just got access to the Capclave site and can edit text. He will put info on our GoHs. Paul said he was given very little info. Ann suggested that the Guest Liaison could reach out and get the press packet they want. Kim was appointed Guest Liaison and said he would take care of it.

Capclave Present. Rodger said that much of the outstanding business has been just previously discussed as part of Treasury and Secretary.

Other than that, the main thing looking forward to is spinning up programming. It is not going to immediately require access to a programming database backend, but the sooner we have it up and running, the less we have to try and transfer over from analog systems. So, understand that registration is the first priority. Getting better guest and public-facing information is a second priority. Would like to make sure that the programming database does not fall off, as we'd like to get that up and running, and get the programming. Grig asked about software. Rodger said it is a database software called Zambia, which was developed by the Bosco and NESFA teams. We've run it a few times in the past. It's... we've had some issues recently with trying to get some of the most recent email-related tools up and running with it, and I think we potentially have workarounds if we are running into issues installing the latest and greatest package. Bob told Rodger that it is time to reach out to your hotel liaison to get the... so that she can contact the hotel to get the hotel page up. Zen said Rodger should get together with him to work up a budget and timeline.

Perrienne said she will get together with Courtnei now that she's feeling better and make plans.

Grig for websites says he has access to the Capclave website and will tinker with it. Paul said he slipped on ice and had a concussion that put him out of business for a while, but did get the Registration system up and get PayPal working with it this weekend. "And, you know, for some strange reason, they won't let you just put money in willy-nilly. You actually have to prove that you own the account, so I gotta... I can work with the treasurer a

little bit to get that handshake put in place. Hopefully we'll move that down this weekend as well." Paul said the concussion was a learning experience. Bob said, "Learn not to hit your head!" Paul said, "See, see, this is the thing. See, whenever I go out, Gail says, be very careful on the ice, and pretty positive that, despite being very careful on the ice, it didn't do any good at all. The thing is, I have no memory. I don't know how I slipped. All I know is I walked out the door; I was making the plans for what I was doing. And then when I was outside. And lying on my back with no memory." Elizabeth Twitchell said, "What we've learned is that head injuries are bad, and the more you are over 30, the badder they are. Also, your chickens are trying to kill you." Madeleine suggested he get an automatic chicken feeder.

For the Small Press Award, Rodger said he will bake cookies for those who nominate. Carolyn said they had only gotten XX stories. File 770 did not cover it so unsure if the email announcement went through. Normally have 50-60 stories by this point. So please let everyone know. Sam L. said the Committee to Discuss SF will discuss a rather good issue of Asimov's and gave the schedule for the future. The Book Club is discussing the new John Scalzi book, *The Shattering Peace*.

Paul for WSFA Press said there is a WSFA Press book for this year. Gayle sent an email to the committee with how much the artist wants for permission to use the cover, but she did not get any replies back, so did anyone get that email from her? She needs chief permission from the committee, from the publication committee, to move forward. Sam L said he did not see the email. Paul said he will ask her to resend it.

For Intertivities, Perrienne said new Marvel series, *Wonder Man*, on Disney+. This is not your normal Marvel superhero series. It is really about how hard it is to be an actor in Hollywood. The two leads are really good. Ben Kingsley plays the mentor of the, of the Wonder Man guy. Some people really loved it, and I was sort of indifferent to it. It was okay. It was short, so that's good. You know, you can binge the whole thing in an afternoon and be done with it. Sam S liked that it was not your normal Marvel series. Perrienne also said there is a new, Westeros series, *Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* on HBO Max which is really, really good. They dropped this week's episode early, I guess, because they didn't want to compete with the Super Bowl and the Olympics. But this week's episode was particularly excellent. Ann R said there's an article in *The New York Times* today, that, John Scalzi is interviewed about IT, along with Cory Doctorow and just his basic attitude about the "shitification" of the internet. It's kind of dense, really, but it's interesting. Sam S. said the new *Muppet Show* is on Disney+, which is also sort of genre-adjacent. If you like the Muppets, it's a lot of fun. Grig highly recommended it. Perrienne Lurie said it was actually on ABC or something the other night, but it's available on Disney Plus whenever you want to watch it. Elizabeth Twitchell said John Scalzi had a big thread over on Blue Sky about what science fiction would you recommend to actual 15-year-olds born in, like, 2010. And had a bunch of really good suggestions of some relatively modern books. And it's a good thread, and some good recommendations. And then, while we're recommending TV, Apple TV did *Pluribus*, which is from the guys who did *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Sal*, Essentially almost all humanity gets turned into an alien hive mind, except for, like, 10 or 11 people. And one of these 10 or 11 people is a very grouchy author who lives in Phoenix. She is a middle-aged woman who's just not here for this. "I have never felt so seen by a character on TV, I can't explain it. But it's incredibly good, I actually watched the entire thing all the way through, and if you know me, you know I never do that. So, *Pluribus*." People had a brief discussion about the Dresden Files and the new book.

Old Business. We discussed the locations of upcoming meetings. No New Business.

Alex Stall was here for his first meeting. He likes Fantasy and SF especially Tolkien and Brooks. He got into SF through Star Trek and checked out other great shows. He's looking to socialize more. He lives in Silver Spring. He found us on Meetup.com. George Guay is also new. He lives in Centerville. Moved down to the area about, 8 years ago for fun and games, academia style, at George Mason University. His attachment to science fiction,



besides the usual juvenilia from the 60s, settled on the classics. You know, how can you not like Robert Heinlein, if you're a kid growing up in the burbs, late 60s, early 70s. And stayed with that, of course, and still listened to it. "There is a meetup that meets in DC once a month. And, part of the appeal to me of the group is introducing me to people I've never heard of. A chance to... a poor person's way to find out who the new writers are, what style it is that I'd like to hear. There's also a strong impulse to make sure that it's not only men's voices that get heard, but women's, since I think the world's a lot more nuanced than that. There is another meetup group that I participate in about writing science fiction. It meets every two weeks. Again, the benefit comes from, to me, hearing other people's voices in terms of their perspectives."

"As I'd found in the classroom, people say stuff about things that could never have imagined in a thousand years. So, I like to hear people's talk about things, especially that they feel passions about." He attended a few Boskones, a Boston Worldcon, and a stint at the Clarion Writers Workshop in the early 80s, where one of the authors was Orson Scott Card. *Ender's Game* was still just a short story at that point. "So... Interesting to follow his paths in terms of what he does with his characters. What I liked about the *Hatrack Rivers* books is the alternate history type, threads, and the ways in which he found them to be opportunities to make certain kinds of points. Maybe one of these days I'll write a science fiction novel, a complete one. I've got a lot of first drafts, which don't mean too much, but for me, science fiction is a way to, delve into things explore things, and it has more to it than perhaps the other things that I read." He's also interested in the Ghost Bikes, white bikes placed where a bicyclist has been killed. He has photos that he wants to turn into a picture book. He found out about us on meetup. He hasn't gone to local conventions because was busy at GMU, but now has more time. He was involved in comic book fandom in his youth.

There was a discussion of Balticon hotel and possible foreclosures. The meeting adjourned at 9:06.

Magic Schools in Fantasy by Samuel Lubell

Harry Potter has become so ubiquitous that too many people assume that J.K. Rowling invented the magic school novel and that Hogwarts was the first magic school. Not so. The idea was actually common in fantasy. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), the first book in the *Earthsea* series by Ursula K. Le Guin, the main character, Ged attends the School of Wizardry. An even earlier example, "The Wall Around the World" by Theodore Cogswell (1953) has magic a part of ordinary life so naturally is taught in school, but this is a short story, not a novel. The Strugatsky Brothers had a Russian example, the "Scientific Research Institute of Sorcery and Wizardry" in their novel *Monday Begins on Saturday* (1964), but this was not translated until 1977 so probably did not influence Le Guin. A little later, *The Worst Witch* (1974) by Jill Murphy, had Miss Cackle's Academy; this seems to be a more likely ancestor of Hogwarts since it became a series of popular television movies in England starting in 1986. Terry Pratchett's *The Color of Magic* (1983) may have been the first to have a magic college. While Lovecraft's Miskatonic University is older (appearing in the 1922 story "Herbert West-Reanimator") it is not meant as a school to teach wizards and witches, although students find their way to summoning unspeakable horrors anyway. One of this year's Hugo finalists, *The Incandescent* by Emily Tesh is the only example I have encountered to focus on the teachers and other faculty in a magic school.

Before these works, most magic users either learned their powers through a one to one apprenticeship with a great wizard (sometimes the Devil) or learned it from books and magical objects. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" sequence in Disney's *Fantasia* movie is actually very faithful to the 1797 poem "Der Zauberlehrling" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In many of the King Arthur legends, Merlin the wizard teaches his magic to Nimue/Viviane who then uses this magic to trap him.

There are several reasons for the popularity of magic school books. First, since everyone has been a student, it is easy to relate to books about students. Books about boarding school also makes it easy to have adventures since the children spend all day together with only a few adults, compared to those living at home with two parents for every 2.5

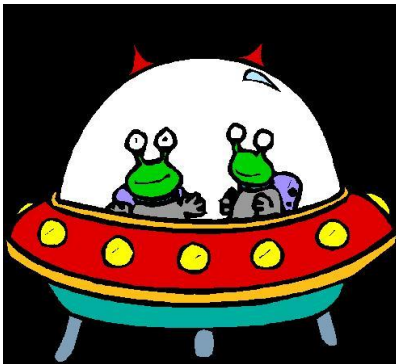


kids. It is also logical that something as complicated and magic would need to be taught in the same way science is.

I'm Upright, and That's a Win!

At Mark's House: Mark, Cathy, Sam L., Bob, Kim. Online: Jim Thomas, Zenlizard, Rodger, Perriane, Madeline, Sarah M, Greg, Michael I, Courtni, Judy N, Grig, Paul, Frances, Bill, Apurva, and Carolyn.

WSFA Meeting February Third Friday: Bob called the 2/20 Third Friday meeting in February to order at 8:15. Sam L. read the minutes. Grig said the issue with PayPal was resolved. Zenlizard said he made a math error. We have \$\$ in the various accounts. Madeleine suggested investing in Bitcoin. People said no. Formerly, we had a PayPal account that was set up as a personal account. In order to proper interface with the Capclave registration webpage we had to change this to a business account. The advantage of a business account is that it makes things work a little more smoothly in general with other business stuff. The disadvantage to it, and the advantage of a personal account, is that we can no longer send things with the friends and family discount. If we send or receive money, there is going to be transaction fees involved. He updated the square account so can use square on his phone. Now can pay dues via PayPal, check or call Zen to do a credit card transaction over the phone. Dues are \$25. Hosts do not need to pay dues. We passed that rule before the pandemic. The Capclave web site is up and tested. P.O. Box address is... P.O. Box 83032 Gaithersburg, Maryland, 20883. The PayPal account is Capclave at yahoo.com. There are one or two new Capclave registrations using the website.



Rodger for Capclave Present said, many thanks to, Paul and Greg for work on the website, getting, registration up and live. Very grateful to see that. I'm looking forward to getting more information about our guests of honor, and getting our programming up and running, hopefully with website assistance, offline if necessary, depending on the time frame. Also, thanks to Cathy for following up on table sitting and such with the club, and I believe we have a table looking forward, potentially for AwesomeCon. I expect to be available for that. If other people who are able to assist with tables and such, please coordinate with Cathy. He has not yet heard back from the Gaithersburg Book Festival.

Capclave Future: Bob said he was glad to see Courtni has recovered. Courtni said, "I wouldn't go that far, but I'm upright, and that's a win. So Perriane and I are, back up and running. We are working on some leads for our guests of honor.) And doing that groundwork, and then we're also thinking through our committee as well. If there are folks that are either looking for something to do for Capclave, or switching it up for the things that you usually do, let us know. We're at a stage where we're open to ideas, and it's a good time for that as well, because if you want to do something new, then you can shadow somebody that is doing this year, and it won't be so scary."

Carolyn for the Small Press Committee thanked Cathy who sent info to File 770. She is now getting 4-10 stories a day. Cathy said Google put me in Gmail jail for a while, so my mass email didn't actually get sent. I do, in batches of 100, send out emails saying, hey, WSFA Small Press Award is open, and this year, it decided I was an evil spammer and, like, shut down my Gmail account for 24 hours, and it still won't let me do, like, group emails on my main account. So I was using a Yahoo account and, like, 2 other Gmail accounts to send the stuff out. But I didn't realize. Maybe do 50. Carolyn said she has sent 45 stories to Paul and has another 20 to process. Last year at this date we had XX stories. Now we have around XX. On the positive side, it means there'll be fewer stories for everybody to have to read. They run 60/40 between publishers and individuals. And it's actually running about 50-50 in terms of fantasy and science fiction, which is nice. We've got a lot more science fiction than we normally do. We have stories from two WSFAns. She will help WSFAns as long as they can get her somewhere she can find the story. The deadline is the end of March. The form includes certification that the story was not written by AI. Sam L asked if Analog and Asimov and SF count as small press since they are no longer published by a big conglomerate. Cathy said the legacy magazines are not small press.

Paul for the website said XX stories have been put up that Carolyn sent. He got the other X or X, but they'll go up this weekend. Thanks to Zenlizard for fixing the problem with PayPal, so we get the registration page up. He is working on Zambia and hopes to have that up and running this weekend. Paul, for the WSFA Press book asked for the official go ahead of the officers to spend money. The cover is \$\$, and then another \$\$ to do the book jacket. Cathy said we already have sunk costs. Sam L. said we should do the book but not print as many copies as we usually do. Paul said we will do 250 copies for a very limited edition. Paul expects to XX on the book. The officers approved. The Committee to Talk SF gave the schedule and the book club will discuss *All that We See or Seem* by Ken Liu. Kim for the Committee to Get People had nothing to report. Courtnei for the trustees want volunteers to run for office. For Entertivities Perrienne said the Knight of the Seven Kingdoms aired its last episode for this season. The House of the Dragon is coming soon.

Old Business: Both our March Meetings will be hybrid. For new business Rodger said that Zoom has AI features, we have not been using it. It is possible to turn it off for all meetings. Cathy asked if the AI is separate from captions and transcripts. Rodger said he thought it was separate but was not sure. Cathy said to find out what it can do. Bob said more research and see if it will disclose what it does. Carolyn said we need transcripts and captions. Roger said he will see what he can find out. Mark said he will look into it. Sam L said we have turned it off for our meetings. Bob said and it has not affected transcripts. Still, look into it. Roger said it would be reversible. No more new business.

Announcements: Carolyn said Balticon's old hotel is up for sale. Zen said Don Stallone died. He was active in the fan music scene including Clam Chowder. He died on February 19, 2026. Meeting adjourned 9:01.

