

July 2004 Meeting

Date: July 10th 2004, 2 PM (Although members tend to arrive early.)
Topic: Sasha's Art Show & Tell
Location: East Liberty Branch of Carnegie Library

PARSEC Tentative Meeting Schedule

August 2004

Date: August 14th 2004
Topic: Annual Parsec Picnic
Location: Bellevue Park

September 2004

Date: September 11th 2004
Topic: TBA
Location: East Liberty Branch of Carnegie Library



PARSEC

The Pittsburgh Area's Premiere Science-Fiction Organization
P.O. Box 3681, Pittsburgh, PA 15230-3681

President - Kevin Geiselman Vice President - Kevin Hayes
Treasurer - Greg Armstrong Secretary - Bill Covert
Commentator - Ann Cecil

Website: <http://www.parsec-sff.org>

Meetings - Second Saturday of every month.

Dues: \$10 full member, \$2 Supporting member

Sigma is edited by David Brody
Send article submissions to: sigma@spellcaster.org



SIGMA

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In This Issue:

Ferrier and
Walton Do Books

Hayes Goes
Over The Edge

Geiselman on
the Creative Moment





The View From the Top

The President's Column - Kevin Geiselman

Several months ago there was a burglary at a London art warehouse. Whether by design or accident, immediately thereafter a fire swept through the structure, completely destroying it and at least 100 works of contemporary art from the Saatchi collection. Oddly enough, reactions were mixed. Those with little appreciation of modern art seemed to react as if the world were better off without this trash. Even Charles Saatchi

whose works were the bulk of the collection, commented "We'll just do it again." Yet, to highlight the duality of people's feelings, in another interview Saatchi said that the works were "irreplaceable".

Now, while I can hardly categorize as art Tracey Emin's "Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995", which consists of a small tent with photographs on the interior, I can appreciate that art is a product of one's self. It represents a piece of one's soul made manifest and even if Emin went to Wal-Mart for a tent and taped up duplicate prints from the photo shop, it would not be the same. At least, not to her. Art is a product of the moment and, once the moment has passed, what comes about next will be inherently different.

We are all artists of one form or another. From Michelangelo cutting away excess stone to release an entrapped human figure to a kindergartener's finger paint; from computer animators creating mythical monsters for films to an Ice Age man leaving a red-ochre hand print on a cave wall. Dances, fireworks, songs, poems, photos in a scrap book, all these moments are expressions of ourselves and we all lose something when they are lost or, worst of all, destroyed by accident, malice or censorship.

So, after months of delay, we will finally have the chance to show off our own moments of humanity when Sasha presents our Art Show and Tell at this month's meeting. If you haven't already, contact her (neo_vero@yahoo.com) to schedule your own artistic expression.



Notes From the Maintenance Department

The Editor's Column - David Brody

As some of you may know, I'm an avid collector of recordings (mostly mp3's) of radio drama from the 1920s to the present. So it was that I found myself listening to a recent BBC adaptation of Oscar Wilde's horror masterpiece, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

For those of you that have lived all your lives marooned on a tropical island, the cursed painting in question takes on both Dorian's aging process and the effects of his unfettered debauchery, leaving him youthful and beautiful. During the scene in which he beats the creator of the portrait to death, I had a moment of profound revelation. At last the answer to a question I've had for years was made evident.

Who, like Dorian Gray, has conducted himself without regard for morality and yet remains seemingly untouched by the horrors his actions have brought about? Who has the same slightly put upon, slightly bored little sneer that he had when he came to national prominence as the governor of Texas?

Somewhere, perhaps in a shed or closet on the grounds of George W. Bush's Crawford spread, there is a hiding place that even the most trusted members of his Secret Service detail aren't aware of. In it is a painting. The face in that painting is of a drooling twisted monstrosity like something from a Universal horror movie, a latter day Dwight Fry. (My wife has suggested that a toddler throwing a tantrum might be likelier image to capture the essence of Buby's soul, but you get the idea.)

I can't imagine a better explanation for our unelected president's seeming indifference to the consequences of his barbarous behavior.

Have I made my feelings clear?

Speaking for himself alone, the editor of Sigma endorses John Kerry, the New York Mets, small dogs, Charles Dickens, the Apple Macintosh computer, and all things bright and beautiful.

In this issue PARSEC's decidedly non-monstrous President Geiselman discourses on lost art, JJ Walton comes through with three book reviews in addition to Chris Ferrier's contribution, and Kevin Hayes continues his musings on the social life at the Sharp Edge. Regarding Kevin's column, I have a slight bone to pick. (No, not with his politics.) While the Guinness brewery produces a famous extra stout that I believe to be the greatest beverage known to man, Harp is mediocre at best. What do you expect from a country whose favorite lager is Budweiser? For a great lager, I recommend the Czech Republic's Pilsner Urquell. Of course, it's all a matter of taste.

In the August issue Bill Hall will investigate the science fiction of politics, Ann Cecil will tell us whether Charles Stross' *Singularity Sky* lives up to the hype and we hope to have a summary of event's at Confluence 2004. We'll talk more then.

When Jack gets a much-needed contract from a large corporation to investigate the mysterious disappearance of a group of employees, parts of the puzzle do not fit together snugly. His dreams are filled with strange faces and odd symbols and he gets little cooperation from the people who hired him. After a few chance encounters and information from unexpected sources, it soon becomes apparent to Jack that Something Does Not Add Up.

Stein leads the stereotypical literary PI lifestyle. His apartment is run down, his clothes are dirty, he abuses legal stimulants, and he is always behind on his rent.

The city where Jack lives is called The Locality. It is a vast, constantly changing structure built by intelligent nano-machines. The forward part of the Locality, New, is recreated daily. The slums literally are in the other end of town. The posterior part of the city, Old, consists of buildings where the nanomachines are dead or dying and the maintenance programs no longer function. The farther one gets from New the cheaper the property. The Locality moves along the surface of the planet like a huge, hungry snake, devouring raw materials at the front, dropping decayed parts from the rear.

There is nothing new in *Wyrms*. The mystery isn't very deep and though the settings are exotic, with a few minor changes the story could take place in almost any time period. The requisite scenes take place on cue (abuse by bad guys warning him off the case, abuse by police wanting to pin a crime on someone, attempted seduction by a femme fatale) and Jack, despite all his alleged experience, wanders around dazed. The characters are one-dimensional, though serviceable and we are told rather than shown that one bad guy is Evil. The reader will solve much of the mystery before the PI does.

To be fair, Jack has a distraction: his newly acquired partner is an 11-year-old girl who, unfortunately, is wise and experienced far beyond her years.

Wyrms is Mr. Caselberg's first novel and a decent first effort. I found the book readable even when I was shaking my head at the ineptness of the main character. Hopefully Caselberg's future efforts will have a bit more depth and weight

Priam's Lens

by Jack L. Chalker

Del Rey, 1999, paperback, 422 pages

ISBN 0-345-40294-4

reviewed by James J. Walton

After discovering a faster than light speed drive, spreading out into the galaxy and filling hundreds of worlds with billions of people, the human race is threatened with extinction when a race of very enigmatic aliens appears and begin conquering the human worlds one by one.

These aliens, called Titans because of their godlike power, seem completely indifferent to the humans living on the planets they conquer. They transform the

9.6 million saw the original, which made a lot of money (2 million plus) and outperformed other films which had larger budgets (e.g., *Seven Samurai*) that opened that year. The American version cut out much of the original movie (98 minutes) so they could stick in Raymond Burr, who filmed all his scenes in one day. In April 1956 that film opened in the US, and grossed over 2 million.

This began an era in Japanese films where a number of monster movies were made, the Japanese versions chopped up and dubbed, and reshowed in the US, all to great success. In 1962 they made *King Kong vs Godzilla*; the first film co-produced by an American company, and the first in color, by Toho, as their 30th anniversary production.

In the American version, the script writers doing the English for the dubbing, tried to make it into a comedy, not realizing that it was already a parody of Japanese commercialism. Geis debunked the myth of two endings to this movie.

Mothra vs Godzilla was the next sequel; this was the first left almost intact when it was shown in the US. 1964 brought more giant monsters: King Ghidorah and, Rodan (Radon). There also was a campaign, and a redesign, a concerted effort to make *Godzilla* more kid-friendly. The films made then are 'wholly unremarkable.' Geis had a picture of the 'son of godzilla' which, as he illustrated, is chubby and dumb-looking. These were introduced in one of the worst films ever made.

But everyone forgot all that in the next film: *Destroy All Monsters*, which was a good movie and had an amazingly long list of monsters. This was meant to be the finale of the franchise, and pulled out all stops on the movie. However the boxoffice response persuaded them to make more.

Geis also mentioned the fan-fiction for these monsters, which is evidently numerous and has some very odd and twisted subsets, and answered trivia questions (what was the name of the one in which?). The movies then inspired a variety of TV series, one of which just stopped being made last year. They also inspired many more monsters, with *Godzilla* slowly but surely becoming the hero. Eras of *Godzilla* are named after Emperors: showa, heisei, shinsei. Geis traced the history of these monsters through their movies through the transforming stage, the cute monster stage, and into current monsters, where the effects are getting better and better, though many of the plots seem to be a bit weak. *Godzilla Final Wars* is supposed to be the next, coming out next year, and they plan for that to be the last one for about ten years. There have been 29 to date.

This year is the 50th anniversary, and the 90th birthday of the Japanese man who scored most of the movies. Geis is holding his own celebration at Confluence, and listed a number of the *Godzilla* (and some other monster) movies he plans to show. He will let the audience vote as to whether he shows the subtitled Japanese version or the dubbed version.

The meeting broke up into enthusiastic discussion and conversation, and officially ended about 4:30pm.

Hayes - continued from page 5

cult for Westerfield to write. The book definitely slowed down when Oxham was on stage, which is unfortunate.

At the end we are left with questions about the survival of the Empire and the direction humanity will take. Another series of books perhaps?

I can recommend the two Books of Succession, but I think the original, leaner version would have been much better.



Hayes - continued from page 7

I remember a lot of discussion about politics. I really must learn to keep my mouth shut. It's tough, sometimes, to have such conservative leanings in such a liberal group. (Just don't offer to beat me up for it, or try to convert me.)

And I remember a discussion at my end of the table about the presence of JJ at the gathering. I brought up the line in my last piece about needing to have him to match the cynicism and Timons Esaias to match the wit of the original Algonquin Round Table. I had to go into a little background and detail since JJ hadn't read my piece. Once he was clear about the references, I noted that with him at the table, we now had the cynicism, but without Timons, we still lacked the wit.

Not everyone thought that was as clever as I did.

Reviews



The Summer Country

by James A. Hetley

Ace Books trade paperback, 361 pages

ISBN 0-441-00972-7

reviewed by Chris Ferrier

Maureen Pierce lives by working as a convenience store clerk, her family thinks she's insane, and now a strange man is stalking her through the icy winter streets of her Maine hometown. The

stalker corners Maureen in an alley and is attacked in turn by Brian Albion, a modern day knight from the Summer Country.

Maureen learns she is descended from the Old Ones, the same race as Merlin and Morgan le Fay. Soon she finds herself in the Summer Country, lured there by one of its treacherous inhabitants who turns her over to another man as a slave. Since she is an untrained witch, they both overlook her powers. But untrained doesn't equal powerless. Maureen must fight sorcerers, witches, and the land itself to free herself and others.

For the Summer Country isn't a land of cute mythological creatures and wise gentle magic. The Old Ones rule. They may use modern conveniences like indoor plumbing and solar heat, but their rule is feudal and brutal. They have dungeons and they use torture. Only by facing her own troubled past and learning to use her untested powers will Maureen have a chance to escape.

The Summer Country has a well constructed plot and well-drawn believable characters. The shift from blue collar small town to the beautiful treacherous land of the Old Ones is handled successfully. Terms of endearment are overused, especially by one character who is described as irritating. Italics are also over-used.

This is a good first novel, recommended for those who like their fantasy dark and strong.

Note: Language, Sex, Violence.

Wyrmhole

by Jay Caselberg

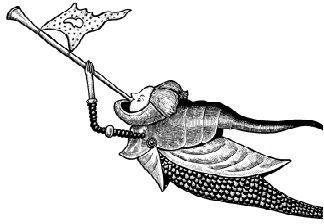
ROC Books

October 2003, paperback, 309 pages

ISBN 0-451-45949-0

reviewed by James J. Walton

Jack Stein is a Psychic Investigator. He solves mysteries by gathering "impressions" from inanimate objects and then dreaming about the owners. Jack doesn't get much respect. A loner with very few friends, Jack wanders around in a daze, possibly psychotic, definitely sleep deprived.



Announcements

- The winners of this year's PARSEC short story contest are:

1st: "Push the Big Red Button, Bill Kennedy" by C. Kevin Barrett

2nd(tie): "From the Ashes" by Margaret McGaffey Fish and "Facing Facts" by Anil Menon.

3rd: "Hard Port" by Henry Tjernlund

Next year's the theme is "High Crimes and Misdemeanors" We think this theme is broad enough to give everyone scope for new and interesting stories. The sf/f/h connection can be with the crime, the misdemeanor, or the highness of both. Please remember, though, that Confluence attracts many families, and the story will be printed in the program book. A certain restraint and subtlety is called for. Too much explicit gore will definitely count against you. All entries must be postmarked by April 15, 2005. The judges so far are Julie Czernada, Canadian author of 8 sf novels. and Fruma Klass, short story writer, editor and technical writer

- On June 5th, Michael Arnzen was honored to receive his second Bram Stoker Award from the Horror Writers Association. His free newsletter, The Goreletter won the award for "Alternative Forms." His book of twisted flash fiction, *100 Jolts*, is also now available at amazon.com. Sign up for The Goreletter or learn more about 100 Jolts at his website, gorelets.com.

- To promote its bid to hold the 65th World Science Fiction Convention in 2007 at Yokohama, Japan, the bid committee is holding a haiku contest. The contest will be administered by their North America agent, Peggy Rae Sapienza, who alone is responsible for it. Please submit entries to her at peggyraes@comcast.net, or P.O. Box 314, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701, U.S.A. They'll announce winners on Friday, September 3, 2004, at Noreascon 4, the 62nd Worldcon, Boston, Massachusetts. Peggy Rae, who chaired Bucconeer, the 56th Worldcon, will provide treasure (not necessarily of monetary value). Enter as often as you like, but Peggy Rae may decline to consider anything that reaches her after Friday, August 28th, or more than a reasonable number of haiku from anyone. She claims no knowledge of any language but English. She may appoint suitable judges, but her decisions will be final.

- One of the world's best private collection of Rare Scientific Books are currently on display in the new Posner library building which was formally opened on May 17th, 2004. On display are first editions of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton. This will be a rotating exhibit, but for the opening they have put out the best. Current exhibit continues through October. It is open to public for visits between 1 PM and 4 PM, Monday to Friday. Since no publicity has been given about this fact as yet there are hardly any visitors. See more details of collect at <http://posner.library.cmu.edu/>. Thanks to Kavan Ratnatunga for this information.

Life at the Edge - Part 2

Kevin Hayes

Okay, I will have to admit, this month's remembrance of the ongoing adventure is a little fuzzy; probably for two reasons. First, it has been a week since it happened and second, because, let's face it, I'm talking about a Beer emporium. You know what happens in a Beer emporium? People drink beer. Not all people though, I do know of at least one person among us who did not have beer. So if anyone doubts my veracity regarding anything I couch in this column, check with Heidi Pilewski. She may have a clearer memory than I. But I digress.

Yes, I had beer. In fact, I had two. While I can't speak to what anybody else enjoyed—there were just too many in attendance to keep track—I had a Beck's 2 heart—hmm, I can't recall if it's a lager or an ale. A little hoppier than I prefer (for oenophiles, read dry). And after the Beck's 2 Heart, I had my all-time fave: Harp Lager, brewed by Guinness.

Okay, enough about my beer.

There had been a Con-Com meeting after the regular PARSEC meeting and many arcane and secret things were discussed. I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you, or recruit you. Just suffice it to say that 2004 will be a great year for Confluence, mmm, and so will 2005.

Most of the Con-Com, after deciding the fates of conference attendees for the next two years adjourned in favor of the Sharp Edge for dinner. I hate to have to make a list, but we consisted of: Christina Schulman, John Schmid, the Manns—Jim and Laurie, Ann Cecil, the aforementioned Heidi P, Mary Tabasko—who hates her first name, a woman whose name I do not know, but who seemed to be friends with both John and Christina, and, of course, yours truly. Lest anyone think my beer-muddled brain is malfunctioning, let me also say we were joined by JJ Walton. He didn't go to the C-C meeting, but was already at the Edge when we arrived. I guess I can't fault his thinking—skip the insignificant trivia, like the meeting, and get to the important stuff: good food, good drink and good company.

Lively discussion ensued—I know, that sounds like puffery written by an advertiser about boring plodding subjects. Believe me, it was anything but. Conversational subjects sparked through the group, flashing here and bursting there, and since the group was so large, there could be any number of conversations sparking at any given time. Throughout all of this, I kept thinking to myself, "Self? You have to remember this; don't forget that. Wasn't that a sagacious remark? Don't forget it. Shouldn't you be writing this down? Nah, with stuff this good, you'll remember it."

I remember we had food. There were salads, pizza, a burger and a bunch of other stuff. For what I had, it was worth the wait and price, but I can't speak for everybody else.

continued on page 10



June Minutes

PARSEC Meeting – June 12, 2004

PARSEC trickled into the Carnegie Library, East Liberty Branch, starting at 12:30 pm when the President and the Commentator fast-talked the nice man into letting them set up early. They were entertained by the loud groans and odd cries emanating from the play rehearsal next door, which fortunately stopped before the main PARSEC meeting started.

This meeting saw the introduction of a new guy, Caine Gordon, who is rewriting his second (sf) novel, and the return of a previous member, Rob Willis, who hasn't been with us for a number of years. Rob distinguished himself by starting a political discussion that raged up until the meeting proper started.

Raffle was held, though attendance was down (only twelve people) due to many members being off at Raccoon Creek State Park attending the Fort Weyr Fest weekend campout. The raffle made \$17, and Shaun Lawson won and took a book (David Weber's *War of Honor*). Attendance picked up as the meeting continued (to a peak of 20).

Ann Cecil announced the winners of the PARSEC/Confluence Short Story Contest, as well as the topic for next year (see announcement elsewhere in this SIGMA). There was no Treasurer's report as the Treasurer was off playing drag-orrider in the woods.

Ann also gave a report on the 501c3 committee, which will meet Monday night at her house. They have finished the federal Articles of Incorporation and hope to finish the by-laws rewrite soon, have it reviewed by various legal volunteers, and distribute to paid members for approval before fall.

Rob Willis mentioned that he is looking for a roommate to share expenses in his new, large, multi-bedroom house in Lawrenceville. Contact him at trobtwill@hotmail.com.

Jean Martin announced that she has sold a short story to Arabella Romances.

Booth planning for the Three Rivers Arts Festival next weekend: hours are noon until 9pm or they make us go home, all three days (Friday, Saturday, Sunday).

Kevin Geiselman began his presentation on Godzilla by setting the historical background. The movie idea was developed 8 years after Hiroshima: Godzilla instantly became the personification of the atom bomb and Japan's fears.

Geis discussed the scales used: the model was 1/25th of everything except the Diet (Japanese Parliament), which was done 1/35th, so Godzilla could completely trash it. Godzilla is 50 meters tall. He then moved on to the construction details of the rubber suit, its weight and the difficulty of the actor moving with it on, let alone swimming in it.

worlds to their liking, never caring if the billions of humans live or die.

The annihilation of the human race seems certain until rumors of a long forgotten weapon surface. This weapon, Priam's Lens, is located on the Titan controlled world of Helena and a group of scientists and mercenaries decide to go in after it. No one knows if the weapon really exists or if it is operational but it is seen as mankind's last chance.

Priam's Lens is actually two stories in one, the first being that of the crew searching for the lost weapon. The second tale is that of the remnants of humanity on Helena and the lifestyle they lead as they try to stay alive and preserve as much of their society as possible. The indigenes have reverted to a near stone-age existence. Of course these two groups meet in time for the novel's climax.

Although the ending seems a bit rushed and there are a couple odd coincidences, Chalker ties up the loose ends of *Priam's Lens* nicely and gives us a decent tale of adventure. Jack Chalker delivers once again.

The Killing of Worlds: Book Two of Succession

by Scott Westerfeld

Tor Books, October 2003, hard cover, 336 pages

ISBN 0-765-30850-9

reviewed by James J. Walton

The Killing of Worlds is the continuation of Westerfeld's *The Risen Empire*. It begins a few seconds after the end of the first book and will be of interest only to people who've read the first volume. After a brief synopsis of the proceeding book *Worlds* returns us to the action.

Gallant Captain Laurent Zai and his crew take the ship Lynx into battle against the approaching Rix ship, knowing the Emperor has marked them for death.

While there is plenty of action in *The Killing of Worlds* it seems subdued in comparison to the first book. We are more concerned with the relationships between the captain and his crew and the political intrigue back on the Imperial planet.

Imperial Senator Nara Oxham, Zai's lover and protector, is engaged in his own battle with the Emperor and his supporters. Her fight to prevent the murder of billions of innocent people is tantamount to treason and threatens the stability of the Imperial government. We learn much more about her strengths as she gains support from unexpected quarters.

I have to wonder why this book was split into two. Both volumes seem padded (though not to excess) to bring them up to word count. A couple of times I wondered why a scene was necessary. Do two slimmer novels sell better than one larger book?

I was disappointed that I didn't enjoy *Worlds* quite as much as I'd anticipated. The political maneuvering, interesting and important to understanding the background and outcome of the two books, seems to have been much more diffi-

continued on page 10