

PARSEC Meeting Schedule

February 11 2006

Date: February 11th 2006 - 2 PM
Topic: Parsec Poexry: Janette Shafer leads readings of SF and other poexry by Parsec members.
Location: Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Branch

March 11 2006

Date: March 11th 2006 - 2 PM
Topic: Confluence programming. Parsec's annual workshop for determining what topics will be used for panels at Confluence.
Location: Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Branch

April 8 2006

Date: April 8th 2006 - 2 PM
Topic: Art Show and Tell. Bring your art (painting, sculpture, photography, CGI and more) to talk about creativity and techniques. There will also be a vote to determine the cover art for the Parsec 2007 calendar.
Location: Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Branch

Cover photographs of the Benefit for *William Tenn: a Writer's Life*
by Karen Yun-Lutz

Editor's note: The minutes of the January Parsec meeting will appear in the next issue.

PARSEC

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

President - Kevin Geiselman Vice President - Shaun Lawson
Treasurer - Sarah-Wade Smith Secretary - Janette Shafer
Commentator - Ann Cecil

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

Meetings - Second Saturday of every month.

Dues: \$10 Full Member, \$2 Associate Member

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



SIGMA

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Eeriecon Eight

April 21-22-23, 2006

GUESTS OF HONOR:

Harry Turtledove Tanya Huff
Esther Friesner

The hotel for EERIECON EIGHT will again be
DAYS INN AT THE FALLS
443 Main Street
Niagara Falls, NY 14301
Telephone: (716) 284-8801 FAX (905) 374-7338

Members should reserve hotel rooms at least a month before the convention.

Special guests: Anne Bishop • Marilyn Mattie Brahen • Carolyn Clink •
David Clink • Merri Lee Debany • Nancy Kress • Lynn Flewelling •
James Alan Gardner • Mark Garland • Lois H. Gresh • Derwin Mak • Will
McDermott • John-Allen Price • Darrell Schweitzer • Rob Sawyer • Josepha
Sherman • Caro Soles • Dr. David G. Stephenson • Edo van Belkom •
and others to be announced.

If you want to be on our mailing list, please let us know. For further information on room rates, telephone numbers, advance membership rates, other featured guests, or anything else about the con, please go to our website at:

<http://www.eeriecon.org>

or email us at: eeriecon@juno.com

or write to us at:

Buffalo Fantasy League

P O Box 412

Buffalo NY 14226

View From the Top

The President's Column - Kevin Geiselman

Cryptozoologists would have you believe that their search for "mystery" animals such as Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, Chupacabra and Mokele-mbembe should be treated with the same respect as the search for other animals such as the Coelacanth, the Thylacine and the Ivory Billed Woodpecker. I've read a number of articles by cryptozoologists, clouded by their belief in the creatures they are looking for, lambasting other scientists who discount their findings.



"Let's get this business about belief straight. The believers are the scientists, they're the ones who are clinging to a belief. The people who think that there are Sasquatches are the ones who are investigating - the ones who have become convinced on evidence. The scientists are the ones going on pure faith and don't actually know much about it and make darn sure they don't know anything about it."

I'd like to think that cryptozoologists hunting for Bigfoot are behaving like other scientists but, to be honest, I just don't see it. Last year, when my friend came to the PARSEC meeting and did a presentation on local Bigfoot investigations, he went on, what he described was one of the most slipshod scientific investigations he could think of. It seemed to consist of a bunch of guys running around for one night hoping to see something. The fact that they actually saw something on that one chaotic night makes me suspicious. My odds of seeing a deer in the woods on any given night aren't that good and I'm sure that whitetail are much more common in Pennsylvania woods than Sasquatch.

But the Cryptozoologists own words and portrayals of encounters mark them as being something less than scientific. I read an article about a security breach at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Little Rock.

"There's no doubt in my mind that the officer saw something, but it wasn't human," Col. Brian S. Lindamood said. "At this time I have no idea what it could be. He reported that he saw three individuals on foot inside the (secure area) and when he approached in his vehicle they ran into the woods." Lindamood said the guard was between 70 and 165 feet away at the time and the area was brightly lit."

What the article doesn't tell us is what lead the commanding officer to say that what the soldier saw "wasn't human". The rest of it seems pretty clear. Three people in the field run off when approached. The only mystery is that no footprints were found but that, in and of itself, does not mean much. Maybe the ground wasn't in a condition to leave noticeable footprints.

But the headline on the cryptomundo.com website is "Bigfoot Security Breach?"

Most of these articles have a distinct lack of skepticism. In fact, many seem to lash out at skeptics for being part of the "scientific mainstream", unwilling to accept the cryptozoologists ironclad evidence. What is most disturbing is that when someone comes forward and announces "I was involved in the Patterson film hoax", "I

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faked the Surgeon's photo of the Loch Ness Monster" or "This is how I make crop circles", these people who vehemently oppose being referred to as believers jump on these as false claims.

So it shouldn't be surprising that Cryptozoologists make noises like an oppressed sub-culture of science and try to attach themselves to successful cryptid hunts such as the Ivory Billed Woodpecker.

Of course, the guys who found that previously believed to be extinct species call themselves biologists.

Minutes of Last Con Com Meeting

Publicity:

-We still need someone to do these. Greg did some "emergency" work at the last minute (thanks!)

Program:

-The Program Meeting in earlier January was very successful.
-The "Super Science Saturday" sounds great!

Registration:

-We decided to increase the pre-reg rate to \$35/adult starting on 15 January. (Registration before that, \$30). At the door will be \$45. No change in child rates, though.

Website, publicity materials:

-We need to update our registration forms (on-line, print) with the new rates. (Website looks done as of this writing.)

Dealers:

-First round of invites have gone out. (Since then, two dealers have signed on, with memberships. Info sent separately.)
-John was also going to get me some candidates from Pennsic.

Hotel search:

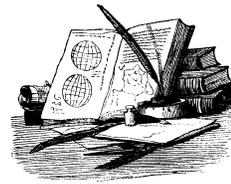
-Laurie will look (has, by this writing) at the Holiday Inn South Hills. She's posted info about the proposal since the meeting. We'll discuss at the February meeting.
-Also, the former sales manager from the Sheraton (current hotel) called to "invite" us to look at a new property. Can't hurt.

T-shirt:

-Need a design. We talked about asking someone, but I can't remember who (forgot to write it down. Sorry!)

coal miners every year, while China loses them by the thousands. Meanwhile, at the opposite end of things, outer space rather than inner space, we see X Prize winner Burt Rutan teaming up with Richard Branson and Microsoft co-zillionaire Paul Allen to bring us an age of space tourism by 2020 at \$200,000 a launch, and I can't help but wonder if, for a brief while anyway, the safety of such tourism will shame not only NASA but the airlines themselves. Space, perhaps especially post-NASA space, is looking safer all the time compared to the other things we do all the time, like going for long drives during the holidays in inclement weather. Certainly, there is still much more we need to learn about space medicine -- and even Randal McCloy may accidentally contribute to that. Yet space is an option, and not just for tourists either. The day must come when people will survey the Moon and refine its metallic wealth, and that too will involve risk -- but will it be a risk that is simply business as usual, more of the same, or a risk that can wind up unleashing a whole new age of human life? I think of Homer Hickam, who before going to NASA gazed up at the stars as the elevator sank him deep into the coal mines, and can't help but suspect that, all things being equal -- and someday they may be -- he would rather have been lunar prospecting.

There is never any getting completely out of horror's way. The question is, which risks will yield more -- or perhaps more to the point, yield better? I salute the dead of Sago and I salute Randal McCloy, who was denied his ticket to the 25th Century, but that's how it is in the real world. In reality, making it to the 25th Century is the job for all of us, not some lone hero.



Reviews

Books

Camouflage

by Joe Haldeman

reviewed by Chris Ferrier

Camouflage begins with an alien vessel plunging into the depths of the Pacific Ocean. The occupant comes out and begins to study the Earth by taking the form of different sea creatures. The changeling, as it calls itself, continues this pattern for millennia, slowly forgetting its origin. Unbeknownst to the changeling, a second alien has also been on the planet for thousands of years. This one is the chameleon and like the changeling, it is capable of changing its shape. It spends a large part of its existence in the military and always tries to stay on the winning side.

After introducing the changeling, the book then jumps ahead to the near future year of 2019 where a third story line introduces a marine biologist, Russell Sutton, who learns of the discovery of a massive shiny sphere in the ocean near Samoa. He joins a team of experts who hope to recover the sphere and study it. Both aliens are also attracted to the sphere and will do anything they consider necessary to obtain it.

The narrative moves from the changeling to the chameleon to the scientists, the shifts in time shown by different chapter headings with dates. While the scientists try to crack the sphere, the aliens converge through time and location toward the island of Samoa in 2019 where they may finally confront each other.

The changeling and the chameleon are the major characters in the book. Since their roles are smaller, the scientists are more sketchily drawn. The aliens' encounters with human beings, which are most interesting parts of the book, range from the violent to the humorous.

For example, in the year 1931, the changeling copies the body of a young man it has killed and begins to learn about human behavior. This process is much more complicated than becoming a fish, of course, and results in a stay in an insane asylum. But the changeling learns quickly. So while it outwardly mimics the actions of the humans it meets, it begins to change inwardly as well, resulting in it being able to pass for human itself.

Clear prose and quick pacing make the novel easy to read. Mr. Haldeman handles scenes of warfare so skillfully that even brief passages convey the horror of captured soldiers on Bataan in 1942. The changeling's experiences as sharks and other large sea creatures as well as its tenure as a professor of marine science include brief, and interesting, explanations of marine biology.

The book is both an adventure story and an account of the aliens' experiences on Earth. Recommended.

The Last Light of the Sun

By

Guy Gavriel Kay

review by Chris Ferrier

The Last Light of the Sun takes place in the north of Mr. Kay's fantasy world,

far from the alternate Southern Europe and Middle East of his previous books. These are harsher lands than the opulent court at Sarantium or the fountain-filled courtyards of Al-Rassan. His prose is leaner and more direct, reflecting the setting, but if the characters are more likely to wear fur than silk, they are still complex and fully developed.

A young man of the Erlings, with only a life of punishment in his future, becomes a sea raider. A farmstead in the land of the Cyngael is attacked by ruthless men, one of whom surrenders when the other men are driven off and joins the household for reasons of his own. A clever king of the Anglcyn works for a better future for his children and his subjects in a divided land. An elderly cleric hopes to bring peace between warring peoples of the Cyngael and Anglcyn while carrying memories of personal loss.

Mr. Kay takes all of these threads and weaves a complex plot. Events will bring most of the characters into contact at some point in the book. Their conflicts and how they resolve them will change their lives forever.

Mr. Kay has studied the chronicles and sagas and it shows in the depth of his characters and setting. Readers of Mr. Kay's books, if so inclined, could research history texts to determine if Roderigo Belmonte is based on the legendary Cid or if King Aeldred is based on King Alfred the Great. The world these characters live in is very close to our own. The geography is roughly that of Europe and the Middle East, but very important differences show that this is a true fantasyland. Two moons shine in the night sky, fairy-folk may still be seen, and the haunted forests are actually haunted. The differences in the physical world reflect differences in the characters from any historical originals.

Life in the northern lands is hard and uncertain, a fact emphasized by the author. During "a Wind-Age, a Wolf-Age...of sharp sword-play and shields clashing", no place is safe for long. Even empires, however rich, will fail in the end. But the characters find the courage to plan for a better futures for themselves and those around them. King Aeldred builds a fleet to guard the coast and starts an annual fair to promote trade. The priest, Ceinion, promotes peace between the Anglcyn and the Cyngael, with unexpected results. The younger characters fall in love. And even a sea-raider can change his life.

Highly recommended.

Note for the incurably curious: The quote is from "The Elder Edda".

Eagle

The Making Of An Asian-American President

by Kaiji Kawaguchi

reviewed by Sarah-Wade Smith

OK, I am not dead sure this qualifies as SF. An Alternate-History of the 2000 Presidential elections, to be sure, but is that enough to make it SF?

On the other hand, having just spent most of my Christmas "holiday" rereading the series and finding them just as enjoyable as the first time around, I have concluded that it is worthy of Parsecian attention. Therefore:

This is a translated Japanese manga and a very long one, I might add, running to five multi-hundred page volumes. You would think it would get boring by about

Mine Safety, Space Safety and the Lessons of Buck Rogers

William Blake Hall

Anytime we have a mine incident, like we did with Quecreek and now with Sago, I automatically think back to Buck Rogers. According to the newspaper cartoon strip which debuted in 1929, Buck was a World War I flying ace who somehow found himself doing a geological survey of a cave just outside Pittsburgh, when there was a fall of rock and he got trapped for five hundred years, kept alive by the strange preserving properties of a glowing radioactive gas. This, of course, was pure vehicle, the flimsiest of technical rationales for an updated Rip Van Winkle, in a time when a quickie paragraph about "astral projection" or "ancestral memory" was all that was needed to whisk the reader not only to Otherwhere but Otherwhen. What was really important was to get Buck into the Allegheny Orgzone in the 25th Century and commence adventuring.

Quecreek and Sago remind us how cruelly curt such a vehicle was. Of course, it helped that mysterious "Red Mongols" invaded America not long after Buck vanished, but you still have to wonder if anyone ever bothered to dig for Buck's body, if Buck's family (in true 1929 fashion, Buck's final gasp before his big sleep is "Mother") grieved over him, and if a memorial service noted the irony of his surviving World War I only to die in a cave. One gets the sense that 1929 was a very hardnosed time indeed, and that surely if Buck got lost nowadays we would do everything in our power to deny him his 25th Century destiny -- because, let's face it, suspended animation by radioactive gas is awfully silly. Yet even if such a gas existed, that might be to the good, it might revolutionize how we envision manned flights into deep space.

Sago in particular, even more than Quecreek, brought Buck to mind. You tell me -- is it just me, or did anyone else find themselves having the exact opposite reactions that we were "supposed" to be having? The conventional wisdom about Sago goes something like this: "There was an explosion, but there was a chance they were all alive and for that we all hoped. Then someone announced that they were in fact alive and well -- but mere hours afterwards, we were devastated to learn that twelve of the thirteen had died."

Now, let me tell you my own reactions. When I heard they were two miles underground with pretty much nothing to breathe but dangerous levels of carbon monoxide, I figured right there "They've probably had it -- there are a lot of unknowns down there, and some may even turn in our favor, but they're probably dead." I missed the cruelly cheerful announcement, though I suspect I would have found it downright loopy and not to be trusted. Finally, I was amazed to hear that Randal McCloy made it. So there you have it. The headline: Joy, Then Horror. My own take on it: Horror, Then Joy.

This may just go to show you what sort of world we live in where opposite reactions can be generated by the same data. History and common sense were against anyone surviving, yet everyone seemed to expect a literal "miracle." I personally find such loose talk of miracles nearly irreligious, as if everyone is always lusting for the big Old Testament stuff, seas parting and all that. To my eye, though, God's style, for whatever reasons best known to Him, has been supremely subtle these past several centuries, preferring miracles which are only slight variations on what is technically possible. I guess what I'm asking is: how do we manage to completely miss the astonishing story that is Randal McCloy? He paid his price, with bruises, damaged kidneys and a collapsed lung, and he had his youth on his side, and I STILL wonder how he did it -- and I even enjoy imagining that some glowing radioactive gas trickled its way to him.

Our workaday world is rife with horror. America seems to lose two or three dozen

the "bravest girl he's ever known," we take him at his word. He is serious, and while he may be many things, he is not a liar. For the new Denham, the line is simply part of the show. And while the original Denham knew that Ann would draw Kong back to the village, he would never deliberately put Ann and Jack in harm's way in the manner Jack Black's Denham does. What it really boils down to is that Armstrong's Denham was an adventurer who also shot movies, while the Black Denham is a businessman who also shoots movies. (Though Jackson himself says that his Denham is based on Orson Welles, which, based on what I've heard of Welles, also makes sense.)

The effects in Kong are great. The dinosaurs also by and large look good, though there are parts where they don't look right combined with the people. This is especially true in the stampede scene where people are dodging in and out between the sauropods legs. I just didn't buy that they were actually in the same place; they didn't interact enough. Moreover, it would have been a miracle if any of the people survived such a stampede, but of course in the movie almost all do.

In the end this is a fine film, but one that could have been even better had Jackson just trimmed a bit and not gone quite so overboard in a few places.

Sky High and Batman Begins

reviewed by Diane McCarty

The other weekend I got together with some friends and watched the DVDs of two superhero flicks: *Sky High* and *Batman Begins*. These two movies could not be any more different from each other if they tried. However, they are both, ultimately, stories about a person in search of himself.

Sky High may not be deemed "Oscar worthy", but it is good old-fashioned Saturday matinee fun. Think of this guilty pleasure as a cheese corn-curl puff. What's all the crunching about? Well, what's worse than the first day at High School? The first day at a High School where you know you won't fit in when everyone thinks you'll be a star. That is the problem our hero, Will Stronghold, has. His parents, the Commander and Jetstream, are "the two most famous superheroes in the world". So, he is sent to the High School for superheroes, the floating Sky High. Unfortunately, Will has no superpowers whatsoever. Eventually it is up to him and his fellow "Sidekicks" to save the day, and the school. Be sure to tune in to this exciting episode to see what happens next, folks.

Batman may have no superpowers, either, but he battles evil with the help of his "marvelous toys". Anyone not familiar with Bruce Wayne's dark past can watch a grim and gritty re-visioning of it in *Batman Begins*. He goes on a quest to understand crime and criminality after seeing what happens to the crook who killed his parents. Every movie needs a bad guy or two, and this one has Ra's Al Ghul and the Scarecrow for Batman to battle for control of Gotham. (It may just get an Oscar nod for FX, or some style element like set design or cinematography.) Watch this one with the lights on, and be careful of things that go "bump" in the night. Happy viewing good citizens.

half-way through, but it managed to avoid that. The series follows the imaginary 2000 presidential campaign of insurgent Democrat Senator Kenneth Yamaoka as he challenges incumbent Vice-President Albert Noah, Jr. (a very recognizable Al Gore clone) to become the first serious non-white contender for the presidency.

The story is shown from the viewpoint of Takashi Jo, an up and coming, but inexperienced Okinawan reporter. Takashi is the illegitimate son of a US marine and an Okinawan girl. He is totally baffled when, shortly after the tragic death of his mother who never spoke about his father, he is tapped over much more experienced reporters to get an exclusive on the Yamaoka campaign.

Takashi's bafflement only increases when, shortly after his arrival in the States, Kenneth Yamaoka reveals that he is Takashi's mysterious father. If this isn't complicated enough, Takashi begins to suspect that his mother's death may not have been the accident it was ruled and that Yamaoka himself might be responsible, while at the same time, he is falling deeply in love with Yamaoka's Hispanic adopted daughter, Rachel.

At first glance, Yamaoka seems like a dream candidate: grandson of an immigrant made good, Marine combat vet, Yale law school and football team, successful high-powered Manhattan attorney with a rep for working pro bono cases, second-term senator and married to the beautiful heiress of a patrician New England banking dynasty. But Takashi quickly learns that the most baffling question about Yamaoka is "Who is the real Kenneth Yamaoka?" The devoted husband of Patricia and adored father of Rachel? Or the callous slime who got Tomiko Jo pregnant and abandoned her 28 years ago and whose overwhelming shadow is drowning his son Alex?

Is he the straightforward no-bull idealist who doesn't hesitate to advocate gun control to Texas cowboys or call for making the United Nations into a true world police force from the Vietnam monument? Or is he the political dirty trickster who blackmails New York's mayor into backing off on a corrupt housing deal, leaks scandals to destroy his opponents, and cuts under the table deals to get the votes to win the nomination? Should Takashi help him or stop him?

For me, part of the attraction to his series was the outsider's view of the American political process and how it looks from Japan. It echos, like Kenneth himself, with a mix of idealism and cynicism and a frequent lyricism as when Takashi notes that the Japanese never worry about what it means to be a Japanese, but unlike the Japanese, Americans aren't Americans because they are born that way, but because they choose to be Americans. Again, when union boss Leonid Koslov talks to his blinded father who fled a repressive Poland in the 70s for an America that has totally baffled him: "Warsaw is the other way, Dad. You can't even read anymore with your blind eyes and if you did, it would just be the *Gazeta Polska*. Thirty years in this country and you never learned one word of English".

Another striking moment is the one where Kenneth asks the rival he has just defeated for the nomination to be his vice-president. "Why" the flabbergasted man asks, "me"? After listing a few reasons, Kenneth adds "and because you're white". Then goes on to explain that no matter how multi-ethnic America may be, every president but one has been a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant and you notice how the Irish Catholic ended up. How are people going to react when the jump is from an

Irish Catholic to a president with slanted eyes? Maybe he'll have more in common with Kennedy than he wants. And if that happens, he needs to be sure that the man who inherits his office also shares his dreams, that he regards power as a means to accomplish ideals rather than an end in itself. That he is someone Kenneth can trust with his dreams.

Another is where a voter considering the issue of prejudice in the campaign notices that there aren't any non-whites at his health club. Of course, the club doesn't discriminate. It just doesn't happen to have any minority members. I mean, he wouldn't have joined if it had a rep for excluding people, but then again he probably wouldn't have joined if he had showed up and seen black people hanging out there. So, what does that say about his real attitudes?

Or have I mentioned the moment when Takashi finds out that Kenneth and his Afro-American campaign manager have been secretly funding right-wing hate groups that are openly calling for Kenneth's assassination?

Yeah, not what you expected at all, is it? That's the glory of it.

There are certain topics that are very difficult to discuss in American society. Race is one of them. Oh, we all know that discrimination is bad and that people shouldn't do it. I mean, our founding fathers put in our Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. On the other hand, the man who wrote those words also owned men as slaves until his dying day. It's just considered impolite to call him a lying hypocrite for it.

And from a minority viewpoint it's really hard to discuss the racism of majority America because the majority don't want to admit that this stuff still happens or that it has anything to do with them. It's not polite to point that out.

Eagle takes you on a guided tour of many of America's contradictions and conflicts in a way few if any American graphic artist can.

There are a few false notes. For one thing, the artist frequently depicts American military personnel with goatees and in one case, a habit of going deliberately unshaved - things which are totally against military dress regs. However mostly, it is a wild ride through the far sides of the American Dream.

And if you are lucky, it might just do more for you than entertain you. It might just make you think about what this wild and wonderful country of ours is and means. And that might be the best gift of all.

Movies

King Kong

directed by Peter Jackson

reviewed by Jim Mann

After his success with *The Lord of the Rings*, Peter Jackson took on another ambitious project – a remake of the 1933 classic *King Kong*. The original *Kong* is a masterpiece in its own right. Tightly edited, with a compelling story line and, for its time, state-of-the-art effects, it remains a very watchable film. Jackson has long been fascinated with this film, and has said that he always wanted to remake it. His previous successes gave him the clout (and budget – in Jackson's hands, the new *Kong* may well be the most expensive film ever made) to take on this remake.

So, how did he do? Overall, pretty well. The film is full of marvelous

moments, the characters (including Kong himself) are compelling, and much of the action astonishing. Yet, there are times when Jackson just went too far over the top. I shudder to hear myself say this, but at times there were too many dinosaurs. In fact, there were too many of everything at some points. The original Kong fought a tyrannosaur; the new one fights three at once, in a much longer fight. The original Kong fought a pterodactyl; the new one fights a swarm of what look like giant vampire bats (why not pterodactyls?). The original Kong had a now lost sequence where a group of survivors must fight against giant spiders; in the new film, the survivors fight an over-the-top gathering of giant bugs of all sorts. And even where the original Kong grabs, then discards, one blonde in New York whom he mistakes for Ann Darrow, the new Kong must discard multiple blondes.

But don't let the above give you the wrong impression. This is still a good film (though one that could have been better if Jackson just reined himself in in a few places). It's also very much of a movie fan's film, with a number of references to the original film. Carl Denham (Jack Black) is, like in the original film, making a movie within the movie. In one scene, he actually films a scene from the original. When Kong is brought to New York and put, in chains, on stage, the act around him is a re-enactment of the native scene in the original, complete with the Max Steiner music. It's a lot of fun.

But the film's greatest achievement is the characterization of Kong. The original Kong was mostly a giant monster; we know he liked Ann, but there was no real tenderness there. The poor 1976 remake tried to humanize the ape a bit, but clumsily, and in the midst of bad dialog and effects. The new film succeeds, and in doing so succeeds in making both the character of Ann Darrow and the audience sympathize with him. Jackson takes an interesting twist to accomplish this. After Kong captures Darrow and brings her to his mountain home, he bellows at her. Her response – she's a vaudeville performer as well as an actress – is to strut and perform back at him. He's amused when she tumbles, and she begins to play on this, to gain his trust. When he takes it too far – he begins knocking her over, since he has found it funny to watch her fall down – she bellows back at him. He walks off, sulking, but the relationship has been established. He saves her, and the relationship is cemented. Because of this, we relate to Ann's fear when Kong carries her up the Empire State Building: she doesn't fear for herself. She knows that Kong is going to his death.

The film is also quite exciting in parts, though the excitement is diminished in a few places by the fact that Jackson takes it just a bit too far. Both the sauropod stampede and Kong's fights with the tyrannosaurs would have been even more exciting had they actually been shorter. (I can't believe that I just said that we'd have done better with shorter dinosaur scenes, but there it is.) But the New York scenes are riveting, as are a number of the scenes on Skull Island.

Jackson puts a bit of a different spin on his characters than the original Kong did. The difference with Ann Darrow is pretty obvious. She reacts to Kong with more than fear and does more than scream. But Carl Denham is also played differently. Both Denham's are showmen, both are trying to outrace their creditors to create a movie. But the original Denham had an underlying integrity that Jack Black's Denham does not. When Robert Armstrong's Denham in the 1933 film calls Ann