

## PARSEC Meeting Schedule

### June 2005

Date: June 11th 2005 - 2 PM  
Topic: (Tentative)  
Dr. Gerald Myers of LBF Books on The Perils,  
Policies and Pleasures of Running a Small Press.  
Location: Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library

### July 2005

Date: July 9th 2005 - 2 PM  
Topic: Science Fiction and Fantasy on Radio: 1955 to the  
Present by David Brody  
Location: Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library

### August 2005

Date: August 20th 2005 - 2 PM  
Topic: Picnic  
Location: Indiana Grove, South Park

The Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library is at the corner of Forbes & Murray in Squirrel Hill.

### PARSEC

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

President - Kevin Geiselman                      Vice President - Sarah Wade-Smith  
Treasurer - Greg Armstrong                      Secretary - Joan Fisher  
Commentator - Ann Cecil

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

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](mailto:sigma@spellcaster.org)



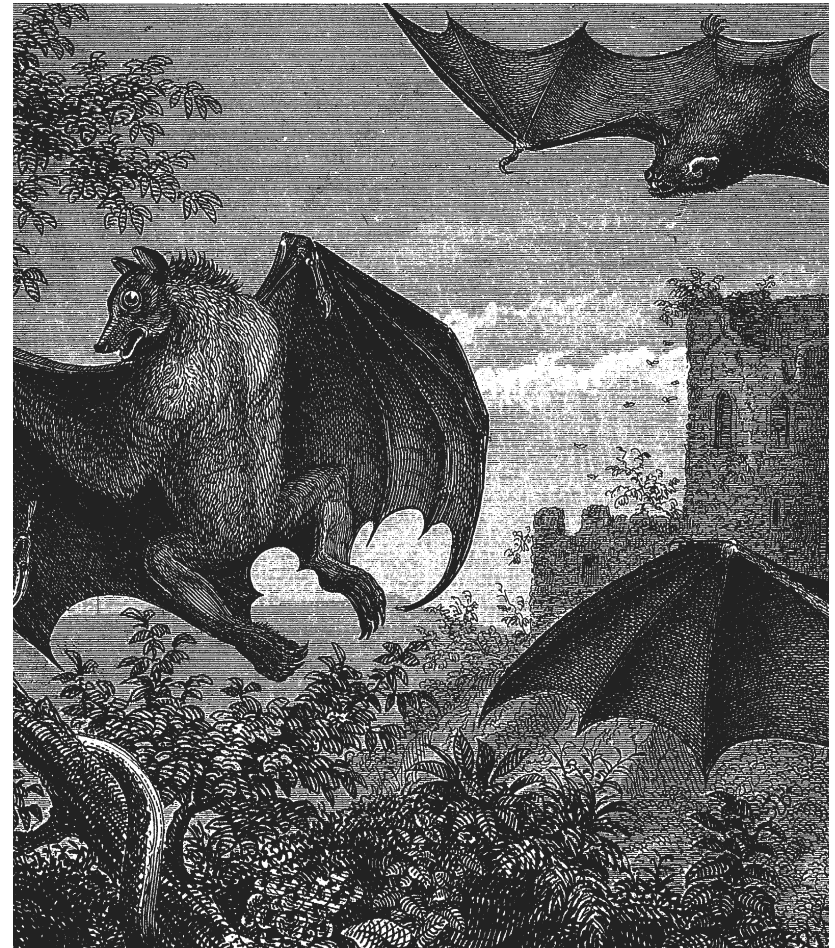
# SIGMA

The Newsletter of PARSEC • June 2005 • Issue 231

## Hall on Sith

## Urick Gets Cross

## Parsec Talks Books





# View From the Top

## The President's Column - Kevin Geiselman

Aaaaaaaiiiiiigggghhhhhh!

For those of you who haven't already noticed, the parsec-sff.org domain is down. You'll be pleased to know that I have things duplicated at parsec-sff.net

The story begins a year ago.

You may remember my previous rant about being blackmailed by our web host MongoHosting for possession of the Parsec domain. I thought this had been

resolved back in March when I paid their blood money and they added my name as owner of the domain.

They lied. As May came around and the domain was due to expire, I discovered that even though the domain had me as the owner, there was something called a TransferGuard on the account. This guard is in place to prevent anyone but the owner from transferring ownership of the domain. Since I was the owner, I thought it would be easy to do that. I was wrong. The registrar, BulkRegister would not allow the transfer to be made without MongoHosting releasing the lock. MongoHosting was not responding to my dozens of e-mails. The phone numbers and addresses for MongoHosting had either been disconnected or were outright fabrications.

Finally, I got online with a tech at Bilk, err, BulkRegister and would not go away until I got action. I used words like extortion, blackmail, thievery and fraud. It took an hour and a half but finally they removed the lock. I immediately faxed the transfer forms to my registrar Network Solutions and am waiting for that to be completed.

Hopefully, in a week or so we will have true possession of the parsec-sff.org domain. I will get a new web host and the website will be back up in all it's former, ahem, glory. I know of people who are in the process of preparing legal action against MongoHosting. They will certainly be receiving a copy of all my correspondence with both MongoHosting and BulkRegister.

It's a sad, sad thing. Even though I quickly put up the website under the .net domain, most of the search engines and links out there are pointing to the missing .org location. And this is the critical time for Confluence, when people are starting to firm up their plans, make reservations and send in their pre-reg. To have the website down could be very painful.

On the plus side, flyers went out earlier than before and our current pre-reg is ahead of last year's at this time. If all those out there who have links to the parsec website change the code to parsec-sff.net, people will still be able to surf to our content.

I want to apologize to everyone. When I first signed Parsec up with

continued on page 8

Orson Scott Card, *Songmaster*  
 Greg Bear  
*Eon*  
*The Infinity Concerto & The Serpent Mage*  
 Frederick Pohl, *The Space Merchants*  
 Larry Niven, *Neutron Star*  
 Manley Wade Welman, anything

A.E. van Vogt, *The Weapon Shops of Isher*  
 Alfred Bester, *The Stars My Destination*  
 Fred Hoyle, *October the First Is Too Late*  
 Piers Anthony  
*Kirlian Quest*  
*Incarnations of Immortality, especially On a Pale Horse*

Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End*  
 David Brin, *Uplift* series (including the last three books)  
 Vernor Vinge, *A Fire Upon the Deep*  
 Anne McCaffry, anything

Frank Herbert, *Whipping Star & The Dosadi Experiment*

Walter M. Miller, *A Canticle For Leibowitz*  
 Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*  
 Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Clifford Simak, *Time Is the Simplest Thing*  
 Tim Powers, *Dinner at Deviant's Palace*  
 Bradley Denton, *Buddy Holly Is Alive and Well on Ganymede*  
 William Sleator, *Interstellar Pig*

Samuel R. Delany, *Dhalgren*

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Robert A. Heinlein, *Glory Road*  
 E.E. "Doc" Smith, *Spacehounds of the IPC*  
 Isaac Asimov, *The Foundation Trilogy*  
 Alfred Bester, *The Stars My Destination*  
 Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan*

David Brin, *Startide Rising & The Uplift War*  
 Edgar Rice Burroughs, *A Princess of Mars*  
 Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*  
 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*  
 H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*

Daniel Pinkwater, Alan Mendelsohn, *The Boy from Mars*  
 Diana Wynne Jones, *The Homeward Bounders*  
 William Sleator, *The House of Stairs*

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*  
 Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Earthsea Trilogy*  
 Peter S. Beagle, *The Last Unicorn*  
 James Schmitz, *The Demon Breed*  
 Jack McDevitt, *The Engines of God*

Richard Adams, *Watership Down*  
 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*  
 Garth Nix, *Sabriel*  
 Meredith Ann Pierce, the *Firebringer* series  
 Alanna Morland, *Leopard Lord*  
 Clare Bell, *The Jaguar Princess*  
 Madeline Howard, *The Hidden Stars*  
 Fiona McIntosh, *Myrren's Gift*

Clive Barker, *Abarat*  
 Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*  
 Neil Gaiman, *Sandman* (comic)

Dan Simmons, *Hyperion*

Terry Brooks, *The Sword of Shanarra*  
 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*  
 Gordon R. Dickson, *Three to Dorsai (Dorsail, Necromancer, The Tactics of Mistake)*

Joe Haldeman, *The Forever War*

Meg Rosoff, *How I Live Now*

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*  
 Poul Anderson, *Ensign Flandry*

## May Minutes



Joan Fisher

May 14, 2005. The meeting started at 2pm with Kevin doing the announcements.

In the absence of Greg, Ann gave the Treasurer's report.

It was announced that the picnic will be on the 20th of August at South Park.

Confluence - The room block is still open, so call and get your room for the con.

Artwork is still needed for the calendar. Also needed, Science Fiction dates for the calendar.

Heather Houlahan was the winner of the raffle and she selected the VHS *Killer Clowns from Outer Space*.

Sigma needs articles. (Ed. note: As usual.)

The voting for next year's Short Story Contest theme went as follows:

15 votes - Instruments of madness

15 votes - Purge

3 votes - Careful what you wish for

3 votes - Bad news, we won the war

3 votes - And your mother too

2 votes - Bluebird of happiness

Winner to be announced.

Dan Bloch began the discussion of everyone's favorite book:

What makes a story a favorite? For some it is the sense of wonder that the story gives you. For other it is the struggle of the protagonist.

Everyone got up and spoke a little bit about their choice and the reason it was their favorite. The list that Dan compiled is as follows:

C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*

Anne McCaffry, the *Pern* books

("Every other book is stunning, and every other one sucks.")

Andre Norton

*The Stars are Ours*

*Galactic Derelict* and sequels

Piers Anthony

*Kirlian Quest* books

*A Spell for Chameleon*

Robert A. Heinlein

*Stranger in a Strange Land*

*Citizen of the Galaxy*

*Starship Troopers*

*The Door into Summer*

*Farnham's Freehold*

E.E. "Doc" Smith, the *Lensman* books

Daniel Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*

Frank Herbert, *Dune*

Olaf Stapledon, *Last and First Men*

Robert A. Heinlein, *The Door into Summer*

Frank Herbert, *Dune*

## Reviews

### Movies

The Long Way Home,

Star Wars:

Revenge of the Sith

reviewed by William Blake Hall

At last I understand the attraction of the dark side of the Force—quite simply, it's easier. Luke needed Obi-Wan's guidance From Beyond, then had to train with Yoda, but now we meet

Chancellor (as in Reichskanzler?) Palpatine, who has somehow managed to secretly become a Sith Lord in his spare time, and all Anakin has to do is keep acting sulky-skulky and walk around with a hood over his yellowing eyes and voila! he's Lord Vader.

*Revenge of the Sith* is an episode of fast and drastic developments, but it's worth it to see it all dovetail rather neatly with the original movie. There are some misfortunes. Mace Windu (Samuel L. Jackson) proves himself to be a true hero of the Galaxy, only to get whacked (no big surprise there). Ordinarily the presence of Natalie Portman helps make these things bearable, but it's embarrassing to see her pouring her heart out while Lucas reduces her to a passive, tragic figure. I also have to echo one of the *New Yorker's* complaints -- all this starship technology, and no one can give this woman an ultrasound? Eh, but maybe that's what you get for falling for Hayden Christensen.

Luckily, there's some real fun this time. We glimpse a planet of the Wookiees. A giant coughing droid named General Grievous makes a cool villain. R2-D2 is quite a fighter while never missing a comic note. I especially liked the inside joke of Ewan McGregor, playing a kind of golden-haired cross between Jesus of Nazareth and Errol of Flynn, persisting in his Alec Guinness imitation. Now I understand how deeply tragic Obi-Wan's death really was in the original.

*Revenge* is also tantalizing in its throwaway insights. We learn that the Jedi are oriented outwards, to be selfless, thinking of others, while the Sith cultivate selfishness. The most intriguing line of all: "Only a Sith deals in absolutes."

The franchise's collective wisdom may be dying just as it's finally getting somewhere, but the whole concept of Jedi knighthood does seem to have reached wit's end here. James Bond Syndrome abounds: a group of droid soldiers wastes time asking "Drop your weapons" before the lightsabers come blazing out, and Obi-Wan is surrounded only to get spared by the classic villainous request for one-on-one combat. Worse, we see the Jedi get nearly exterminated by quick simple ambushes. So, while I like a scene where Obi-Wan fires a gun, then tosses it aside muttering "So uncivilized!", I have to confess that the whole conceit of Lone Human With Lightsaber Beats All fell apart right before my eyes, with none of the sort of carefully built backstory that Frank Herbert brought to his

Dune cosmos.

Still, all told this is a good end and the closest thing to the original trilogy that I have seen. The series has stuck around only a little too long -- rather like the *Star Trek* franchise empire, with *Enterprise* now wrapping up. *Star Wars* gone, *Star Trek* gone -- what will be the Next Great Thing? My fingers are crossed.

### The Jacket

reviewed by Matt Urick

It's never a good sign when the movie title has little reference to the movie itself. It refers to the restraining jacket that Jack Starks wears when... But I'm getting ahead of myself and as you'll see that's Jack's gig--not mine.

Even though the following seems to give away a lot of the plot, it is all shown in the trailer and the first 15 minutes of the movie. Jack Starks (Adrien Brody) is a soldier in the Gulf War. After a nighttime battle Jack stops to reassure a scared Kuwaiti child. Anyone in the audience can see that the kid is nervous about firing the gun he has hidden, but Jack can't so he is shot in the head.

After recovering from the near-fatal wound, Jack is now hiking on a Vermont road in the winter. He comes across a stranded truck that is the sole transportation of an 8-year old girl and her hungover mother. Jack soothes the little girl and fixes the truck. The little girl asks Jack for his dogtags and he give them to her.

Later, Jack accepts a ride from a young man driving an old car and playing loud music. This turns out to be a bad decision when a policeman pulls the car over and the young man shoots and kills him. In the exchange of fire a wild shot happens to hit Jack (I think in the head again). The young man drives off to leave Jack to get the blame. He does and is assigned to a hospital for the criminally insane.

Too bad the rest of the movie wasn't as good as the setup. After all, you have a very good cast of actors, Brody, Kris Kristofferson as the doctor caring for Jack, Jennifer Jason Leigh as another doctor at the facility who cares about Jack, and Keira Knightley as the 2007 version of the little girl (more on that soon). Use them.

But that is too much to ask for this movie. Kristofferson's doctor has one note, burnt out beyond caring. Because of this, his preferred method of treating his patients is to restrain them with a straitjacket (hence the title), pump them full of drugs, and leave them isolated in a morgue drawer for a few hours in an attempt to break down their false perceptions of reality. This method of treatment was outlawed long ago before it was discovered that it could send some patients into the future.

I take that back. They never found out because the patients never tell anybody they've been in the future. After all, that would be crazy. So it makes sense that Jack tells no one that he met the little girl he helped in the future now as a 22 year-old working in a diner. He knows it's her because she has the dogtags he gave her. It's a little freaky to her at first that the homeless stranger she took

### Across

1. Ziti or penne
6. Sin against the virtue humility
11. Floor covering
14. Cold sound
15. Old Roger Elwood book line
16. Is plural
17. Jose Philip Farmer story
19. Put on
20. Long snakelike fishes
21. Home of the Tokogawa Shoguns
22. "I love" in Pisa
23. L. Sprague de Camp story
29. Taxi follower
32. Spanish cheer
33. Be careful if it's short
34. Peninsula between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf
36. What the Mohs Scale measures
40. Nothing special
41. Spring mon.
42. Asimov, Clarke, and Heinlein, e.g.
43. Pioneer Parachute Company tradename since 1963
46. Spontaneous dialogue
48. Tear one's garments
49. A summer cooler
50. Ctry. in some Turtledove novels
51. Lester del Rey story
56. That girl
57. Odor
58. Omen
62. Roth has a famous one
63. Theme of 17-, 23-, 51-Across, and of this puzzle
67. 1, 2, 3, e. g. - abr.
68. See 54 - Down
69. Make rise and swell
70. 22.5 degrees from East
71. Source of much Norse mythology
72. A logical arrangement

### Down

1. A meat paste
2. Yearn
3. He made "Sylvia's Mother" and "A Boy Named Sue" famous

4. Skoal, e. g.
5. Part of many e-mail addresses
6. EndDust competitor
7. First manufactured fiber originally called "artificial silk"
8. Belief
9. Federal Agency that took its present form in 1973
10. Sea eagle
11. "\_\_\_\_\_, I'm Adam"
12. Odor
13. Partner of mortise
18. Futurama pilot
24. \_\_\_ polloi
25. Some way away
26. Capek play
27. Makes a hippy trippy
28. Streisand title role, 1993
29. Bivouac
30. Sphere
31. Roseanne before Arnold
35. Distinguishing feature of Lincoln
36. 2003 Robot Hall of Fame inductee, for short
37. He won the first Hugo for short story
38. Bros and sisses
39. Cub slugger
41. Skirt of mid-calf length
44. Not quite an ocean
45. At least one
46. More than like
47. Room of refuge
49. "My \_\_\_\_\_" - Run DMC rap
51. Yours long ago
52. Long-necked wader
53. Wipe away
54. With 68 - Across, a California race track
55. Banana oil, e. g.
59. "\_\_\_\_\_ a wonderful time"
60. Something done at the office
61. Giant, e. g.
63. Scottish denial
64. A linesman
65. It was Live in the 90's
66. It means density to a physicist

# Crossword Puzzle

by Matt Urick

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13	
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51	52	53						54				55			
56								57				58	59	60	61
62					63	64	65					66			
67					68							69			
70					71							72			

Answers on Page 11

Geis - continued from page 2

MongoHosting, it was run by a friend of a friend. I could not have known that it would be sold to a troop of bastards. When I worked out the arrangement for ownership of the domain in March, I made the mistake of believing that getting the agreement in writing and having my name listed as owner would actually make me owner. I was deceived, manipulated and ultimately left to rot on the roadside.

home on Christmas Eve reveals himself to be the helpful stranger of 14 years ago who hasn't aged a year. She thought he died on New Year's Day 14 years ago, but his sincerity wins her over.

Now knowing he has a week left to live, Jack is in a race to travel into the future and find out enough about what will happen to him to set things right for him and the girl he helped once already. Maybe, just maybe with the aid of that kind doctor (Leigh) he just might do it.

Usually a reviewer cannot discuss the flaws of plots of movies like this one without ruining it for any poor soul who would want to watch it. One could watch this movie on some rainy afternoon and get a guilty pleasure from it and I wouldn't want to spoil that possibility. Fortunately (or maybe unfortunately) the main flaw in this plot is so basic it can be described generically without any hesitation.

You see, Jack will help some people. So it is only naturally when he meets these people in the future they would be so grateful as to answer his questions quickly and fully. Only they don't! Otherwise there would be no conflict.

A similar matter is the manner of Jack's death. It is shrouded in mystery in the future. Could it be a massive cover up of brutal patient abuse that goes to the core of the entire criminal hospital? When it happens right at the end of the movie, it is something that could have been stopped easily with one sentence from the future. A tragedy that should be avoided - it kind of sums up this movie.

## Books

### Old Man's War

by John Scalzi

reviewed by Ann Cecil

What if, when you were 75, getting creaky and feeling your body deteriorate while your brain was still lively and aware, you had a chance to trade in the old one and get a brand-new, slightly improved model (body)? What would you give for the chance to live a second lifetime, still retaining all the wisdom you've so painfully gathered? Would the prospect of having to serve in combat for a period (between 2 and 10 years) deter you? Would you even question the ethics of the combat? How much would you question?

John Scalzi's first novel is a exploration of precisely this situation. He describes a future where Earth is a backwater, struggling to recover from ecological exploitation. Those who went into space have somehow become independent, incorporated as the Colonial Defense Forces (CDF). They offer the citizens of Earth chances to become colonists, or to become re-embodied warriors, depending on the country of origin.

The USA is still a prosperous, industrialized nation; our citizens are offered the re-embodied warrior option. Widower John Perry, on his 75th birthday, signs up, and the book is about his adventures after that choice. John is very much a Heinlein-style hero, in the laid back tradition; he keeps his head when others

about him are blowing it. He uses a lot of common sense and applies all that accumulated wisdom to stay alive.

Of course he gets rewarded, and with only a slight stretching of luck and coincidence, actually winds up seeing his most treasured dream starting to come true. To get there, he has to last through some horrific encounters; however, in Heinlein style, the gore is kept to a minimum level and the emphasis is on the weird aliens being fought and the wild action being survived.

Those questions raised above also come up, but are treated pretty much in a cursory fashion. This is an action-packed entertainment, not an in-depth study of aging. The author credits Heinlein for much of his inspiration and as his writing role model. The book is enjoyable and succeeds in 'staying with you,' perhaps more so because it leaves unanswered questions echoing in the back of your mind. Recommended.

**The Crystal City**  
by Orson Scott Card  
and  
**Callahan's Con**  
by Spider Robinson  
reviewed by Matt Urick

Here are two different approaches to keeping the latest release in a popular long ongoing series relevant.

The first three books in the Alvin Maker series by Orson Scott Card were heralded as something new in the landscape of American fantasy. Each was a tale of an alternate American history where some people had "knacks" that were akin to psychic powers and each was nominated for the Hugo for the best novel of its respected year. Orson Scott Card then went on in other directions to the disappointment of the fans of this series, promising he would return eventually.

When the next book appeared, it was with much less hoopla. This trend seems to have continued. I knew the latest, *The Crystal City*, had been released in hardback in 2003 and was waiting for the paperback edition. I figured when it finally came out the local Barnes & Noble would display it in a way that would attract attention to potential buyers. Time passed and when it finally sunk in that I would have to look more actively for it, it had already been out for four months.

True, some of the anticipation has died as the later books pale in comparison to the original three. But that would have been true of almost any effort and the later books still brought much enjoyment to the fans of this series.

One of the strong points of *The Crystal City* is that it once again moves the series toward the goal that was laid out in the early novels. Finally, Alvin figures out a way to attempt to create the crystal city he seems destined to build and finally makes a start of it by the end of the book. He and his wife Peggy have been trying so hard to avert a civil war between the American nations that the reader wonders if he'll ever actually get around to it.

Still this book, as the other later ones, lacks the suspense instilled in the first ones. In those, Alvin was such a threat to the evil Unmaker that it was always creating sinister undercurrents of intrigue that could culminate in a deadly menace at any moment. Now the most troubling thing to Calvin is his relationship with Peggy who lets her fears for his future keep her distant. Although by the end there may be a break through, and now the series can really move toward its needed conclusion.

But how does an open-ended series keep its momentum? Although Spider Robinson is telling the story in the same old way, *Callahan's Con* is not the same old Callahan story. Instead of straight sf, this time Spider is trying to fuse sf with South Florida gangster fiction.

While the addition of the unfamiliar (at least to me) does bring in a fresh sea breeze to the material, there is still too much stale familiarity to it. There is some of the usual word play thanks to the verbal impediments of two new regulars who seem created for just this reason. There is also another funny song parody. In the past these things made the books seem like wonderful parties that Spider snuck you into and then put his arm around your shoulder and shared secrets of good living and other things. Now it seems just to be de rigueur.

There is also too much that is familiar about the plot. The "con" refers not to an sf convention but to a confidence game the old gang has to pull off to discourage a persistent hoodlum from plying his protection racket in the bar before he finds out about the special abilities of the patron. This is new, but the methods used in sorting all this out have been demonstrated amply in the earlier novels. One also well knows that somehow something will go awfully wrong and only a giant mind meld will once again save all.

### **Last Call for Calendar Art**

This is the final call for any artist interested in submitting images for the PARSEC Calendar Project. We still have room for more images and as a result we have extended the deadline until June 15th. This will be the last extension, so get those images in ASAP!

If you have concerns about your images, or if you do not have access to a scanner or computer, please feel free to bring your work to the next PARSEC meeting. One of the core group will most likely be in attendance and we will make time to discuss those concerns with you.

Guidelines for submissions can be found on the PARSEC Calendar Project page at: <http://parsec-sff.net/calendar.html> Or, if you have trouble accessing the page at that URL, try starting at the PARSEC home page: <http://parsec-sff.net/> and click on the "Calendar Project" link.