

## PARSEC Meeting Schedule

### December 2005

Date: December 10th 2005 - 2 PM until Ann & Greg want to go to sleep  
Topic: Holiday party  
Location: Ann Cecil's house in Dormont (Directions below.)

### January 2006

Date: January 14th 2006 - 2 PM  
Topic: George Melies: The First Science Fiction Filmmaker and the Inventor of Special Effects presented by David Brody  
Location: Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Branch (children's reading area)

#### Directions to Holiday Party

Ann's house is 2966 Voelkel Ave, in Dormont in the South Hills. Voelkel is a one-way block between Hillsdale and Potomac Aves, which makes it slightly more difficult to get to than you'd guess from a map.

From the trolley: Catch the 42S. Get off at Kelton, walk north (towards Pgh. on the sidewalk), cross Hillsdale and tracks, half a block west to Voelkel, and enter first house (not apartment bldg) on left side of ave.).

From East & North: Cross Mon on Liberty Bridge, go up West Liberty Ave. to Hillsdale, make right at light, drive down 4 blocks (across T tracks) turn right and find place to park. First house on left (not apartment bldg).

From South & West: Come north on Rte. 19 through Mt. Lebanon until road changes name to West Liberty: turn left onto Hillsdale at light and follow directions above.

For mavericks who come via parkways and get off on Greentree or Banksville: The blue belt signs point you to the climb up Potomac Ave, and then you have to cross the tracks, make a right on Belrose, right on Hillsdale, back over tracks, and right onto Voelkel, park etc. as above.

### 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 Associate Member

Sigma is edited by David Brody  
Send article submissions to: [sigma@spellcaster.org](mailto:sigma@spellcaster.org)



# SIGMA

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## View From the Top

The President's Column - Kevin Geiselman

### On Censorship

– Geis

## Top Reasons for Going to Parsec Holiday Party?

Compiled by Greg Armstrong

- 15: Seeing the Confluence *Dune* parody video in its nearly final form.
- 14: Perusing Ann's book collection for the 57th time and seeing who brings back the books they borrowed at last year's party.
- 13: Seeing if there are any additional SF-themed decorations up this year.
- 12: Meeting new members, like Sasha's new fiance.
- 11: Seeing which out-of-town friends show up.
- 10: The Pittsburgh Songwriter's Circle anthology will be released the night before, so Randy will have it there.
- 9: Car-pooling with other attendees keeps the party feeling strong that much longer. Or the challenge of finding parking in the same time-zone.
- 8: Memories of Cap'n John's Romulan Ale.
- 7: Watching political arguments in the kitchen and placing bets on when the knives are drawn.
- 6: See and talk to some really interesting Parsec members who only show up for the Christmas Party.
- 5: Vote and get early Parsec officer election results.
- 4: Delectable edibles found nowhere else.
- 3: Play Apples to Apples and other games.
- 2: String-of-pun conversations.
- 1: William Tenn holds court there.

## An Urban Legend

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Judi Galardi

### Hammer Toe Surgery

Hammer toe surgery is status quo for most people, but for one young woman it became her nightmare.

Having had surgery, the lass couldn't wait until the pin came out. Although she fretted about it, her day of reckoning arrived.

She went into her surgeon's office – a man of good repute, by most accounts.

She laid back; he began to remove the pin from her toe. The pin was stuck. "No problem," he thought. He gave it a twist. It was still stuck.

The patient yelped in pain. "It'll be okay," he said, trying to console her. He yanked again.

She screamed this time, a blood curdling scream.

Although a good doctor, he panicked. He gave the pin another twist and yank. Then to his horror, he pulled the pin straight out – with the toe still attached!

Somehow the pin had become something of a corkscrew...

Blood spurted all over the office; the patient writhed in pain and horror.

The patient had a heart attack on the spot and couldn't be revived. The surgeon disappeared and was rumored to have gone to work for a shoe manufacturer as a consultant on those high-heeled, pointed shoes.

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Larry Ivkovich recently sold his short story, "Gateway to Avalon," to the e-zine Kenoma. Also, his story, "Navilla's Wraith," was accepted for the anthology, *Twisted Cat Tales*, to be published in February of 2006 by Coscom Entertainment, a Canadian publisher.

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and food, for a small fee at the Arts Festival building downtown.

Janette Shafer volunteered to organize a meeting on SF/F/H poetry for next year. Heidi Pilewski is organizing a possible field trip meeting to the NASA Research Center near Cleveland.

Diane McCarty suggested doing local field trips. Geis stated that she was free to organize them, but it wouldn't be a meeting substitute, as various people do those frequently.

The meeting dissolved back into a book swap and conversations. There was a play group meeting scheduled afterwards, so the group that meandered over to the Sharp Edge numbered only six.

Minutes reported by Ann Cecil, as Joan had to work at her new job (Blockbuster Video -- if you need to rent a movie, we now know where to

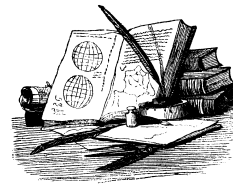
## Reviews

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### Movies

#### Zathura

reviewed by William Blake Hall



*Zathura* was the movie I had to see. How badly did I have to see it? About as badly as I would have wanted the alleged board game it's based on had it come out thirty or forty years ago. Yeah-yeah-yeah, you'll hear "Oh, it's just Jumanji in space," but don't believe it. Yes, there's a game that becomes too real, with an ex-player imprisoned therein, but I found this a lot more involving than elephants stampeding through Keene, New Hampshire. Weirdly enough, it reminded me more of *Galaxy Quest*. I took a 10-year-old girl to see it, and though I doubt that she got as much out of it as I did -- after all, at age 10, one's development of a sense of nostalgia is very limited -- she enjoyed the acting, especially in the mountains-out-of-molehills style of sibling bickering. Though I like him best as the host of the cable show *Dinner for Five*, Jon Favreau is also a veteran comic actor who showcases his comic instincts well as director of this movie. I did worry, though, that the girl was underwhelmed by the Zorgons -- dear Gawd, if you're going to make a silly-yet-scary comedy adventure based on old-fashioned space opera, you really do need to get your Zorgons just right for the demanding audiences of today's youth.

Two brothers who don't get along are left at home, with an older sister who is a disquieting mix of attractive appearance and repellent attitude, and they find and play an old board game. The look of the game is just right, very Rocky Jones, and it pops out some great cards warning of, for example, the gravity field of Tsouris-3 (an interesting Yiddish in-joke, that). Perhaps the best card is simply "Reprogram." The house gets fantastically ripped out into outer space, circling some Saturn-like world, and the brothers' only way back to Earth is to play out the game as a reluctant team. Along the way we traverse not only space but time as well. I tried placating the puzzled little girl I was with by saying "Movies about time warps usually don't hold up very well if you think about them too much." There are about three semi-naughty words, and an accusation of causing a divorce cranks up the angstrometer a little too high, but the adventure works. The girl found it interesting. Me, I had fun.

#### Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

reviewed by William Blake Hall

Thank God for the British. There are things that I usually do not trust us Yanks to get right, save for the occasional rare miracles like Robert

Altman's *Gosford Park*. Take death. Orthodox conformity to the Simpson-Bruckheimer formula decrees that Anthony Edwards must die early enough for Tom Cruise to agonize over him before soaring to a heroic finale. We've gotten used to death as metaphor for Hero's Inner Doubts, let alone death as License for Vengeance. Not so in *Goblet of Fire*, when the death is frankly disorienting and awkward, set as it is near the very end, but appropriately so, conveying a serious loss weighing over the sequel.

My only problem is this: all right, the stakes have been raised -- but over what, exactly? Without a clear mission, villains age into dreary showcases of lousy attitude and little more. I can guess that Voldemort -- who I have come to think of as the Big V -- wants power, but how and to what end? Is he, for example, a magical equivalent of the mutant Magneto? It says something that the Big V now carries more evil punch than the Original Big V -- that is, Darth Vader -- but whereas Vader wanted a galaxy, I look at Voldemort and see someone whose internal issues might be resolved by a simple Beverly Hills nose job.

Thankfully, there is much more to *Goblet* than just this Big V business. The movie before this, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is probably my favorite thus far, but curiously enough I found this one refreshingly relaxing, without all the prodding snap, crackle and pop of the director of the *Azkaban*. Sure, there's a Quidditch World Cup, but it's more of a setting than an event and gets "crashed" by oddly unevocative fellows suggesting photographs of Ku Klux Klansmen. Sure, Harry has to go through three grand tasks, but after outwitting the dragon in the first one they prove to be more creepy than terrifying. In general there's a more assured sense of how to stage a mystery this time around. I do worry, though, that the tasks really do not lend themselves to a crowd of spectators; about all an audience can really think "Sure hope no one drowned" or "Sure hope they're okay in that big maze out there."

One personal nit is that Hogwarts socializing doesn't seem any more enlightened than the socializing of my Muggle youth, it's all pretty much the same petty sexual politicking as ever, and that seems a shame. True, the Yule Ball is more sumptuous than the average prom, and there is a tickle of curiosity over whether brainy Hermione feels drawn to a brawny opposite, but the whole business pretty much dragged for me.

I have to confess I've not read any of the books. No sooner did I see this than I went to work, and a friend of a co-worker informed me that this movie really only covers one thin sliver of all the plot in the book. Now that's a wonderful position for an author to be in -- anyone complains about the movie, and she can say "It wasn't for lack of material to work with." In any event, I'm here for the ride, and I do hope the Big V gets his comeup-

## November Minutes

Ann Cecil

PARSEC gathered for the monthly meeting at the Squirrel Hill branch of the Carnegie Free Library of Pittsburgh on November 12, 2005. The featured item this month was the annual book sale/swap (some members bring books to sell, and some bring them and frantically beg others to take them away so there will be more space on their bookshelves).

The new meeting room, which now has all the amenities, is a little smaller than our old space. Members crowded books on tables and some piled their offerings on chairs or even the floor. The turnout was somewhat larger than usual, making the room seem very crowded. Four first-timers turned up: Louis Chandler, who "just wanted to talk to someone about sf/f books," Steve Latuplippe, who is an author, David Peters, who is a new member of the WorD writing group, and Emily Held, who rooms with Erika Satifka.

To start off the business portion of the meeting, Diane Turnshek talked about the mundane work of organizing the SFWA publishers meeting in NYC. She also brought a large pile of SFWA Bulletins, which she encouraged those interested in writing to take. Diane announced that she is doing a talk at the Greensburg branch of Pitt on SF writing.

For Alpha, Diane announced that the last of the four guests has been set: Theodora Goss has been added to Wen Spencer, Tamora Pierce, and Timothy Zahn.

Kevin Geiselman (aka Geis) opened the floor for nominations for next year's officers. Janette Shafer had already been nominated as Secretary; Sarah Wade Smith agreed to become Treasurer; Ann Cecil indicated she'd like to continue as Commentator; David Brody was nominated for Vice President, as was Shaun Lawson, and Geis agreed to be President for one more year.

Barton Levenson gave a brief summary of his current publications and Janette Shafer announced that the Writer's Post Journal is running her interviews, garnered from various authors at Confluence.

Chris Ferrier won the raffle (again!) but, following PARSEC tradition, turned over her ticket to David Peters, who couldn't decide what to take and passed it on to Emily Held, who took a book (the Silverberg SF writing 101).

Greg Armstrong gave the Treasurer's report, which was negative for the month, since we had expenses but no income.

David Brody announced that he is doing a video on the Life of William Tenn. He plans to have an 'occasion' in January with a reading, a playlet,

Continued on next page

# Notes From the Maintenance Department

The Editor's Column - David Brody

I recently joined an organization called The Interfaith Alliance. In part because their mailing came with a letter from Walter Cronkite (and I will do just about anything that national treasure and icon of my youth tells me to do), but also because of the 5%. 5% you ask? That's the portion of the marketing budget for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Disney is spending on advertising the film to church groups, mostly groups with an avowedly fundamentalist agenda. That's a relatively small amount of money, but still in the millions of dollars.

Now, please understand that I consider myself a religious person. The details of my beliefs are unimportant, but my conviction that the supernatural is real and that divine forces are at the heart of the universe is unshakeable. However to cast the writings of C. S. Lewis in terms of the one dimensional, inflexible stick figures of today's Christian fundamentalists, is an insult to a complicated man of profound genius.

Lewis's faith was the result of decades of thought and contemplation. His own Christian beliefs went through numerous transformations. He believed in Christ, but as depicted in *The Last Battle*, the final Narnian book he believed that people of all faiths could find a place in heaven. Lewis himself was a smoker, drinker and lived with a woman, unwed, for many years.

Hardly a example of the version of a Christian lifestyle that many of those who will be using *The Chronicles of Narnia* to sell their beliefs would wish for. After all, if the people of Dover, PA don't pass muster, I can't imagine that Lewis, a man who liked a party as much as many modern college students, would have found his way into Pat Robertson's or Jerry Falwell's version of heaven. Yet the right, knowing that children respond so well to his rich fantasy imagery, will be using the books to sell their spare, inhuman version of religion.

They will of course suggest that Narnia is an allegory. A world of talking animals couldn't actually exist. Humans were made in God's image and only they have a place in his kingdom. Actually Lewis made it clear that his stories were not allegories. He intended them as speculations on the form Christ might take in a world of talking animals. They are meant to be taken literally. There is no hidden message. Aslan is simply the redeemer of his universe. Call him Christ, call him Krishna, call him Mohammed. It's the story that counts.

Finally to quote Cronkite (once considered the most trusted man in America): "Using religion as a tool to push their personal political beliefs...not only insults people of faith and good will, it also diminishes the positive, healing role religion can and should play in public life."

And using C. S. Lewis to push the same agenda and shoehorn it into the minds of our youth, diminishes the legacy of this great Christian fantasist and philosopher.

pance fairly soon -- though I admit, if it all does come down to a nose job after all, I'll be disappointed.

## Mirrormask

reviewed by William Blake Hall

Those who saw the dearly departed Jim Henson's *Dark Crystal* may recall that the seemingly incompatible Mystics and Skeksies got magically fused back together into their original greater selves. All these years later Henson's company now has Neil Gaiman to draw upon for ideas, but the theme of inner duality is back more intensely than ever, this time in the form of a passionate and willful girl on the brink of adolescence. As her mother suddenly takes ill, the girl, one Helena Campbell (Stephanie Leonidas), wants to take back the last thing she said. The old excuse "I wasn't quite myself at the time" is taken seriously here, for Helena is constantly drawing her own imaginary world — an intriguing choice of pastime for a girl whose parents run a circus, but there you have it. As Helena dreams, she wanders through a world based roughly on her drawings. (Note to self: take a second look at Paperhouse sometime.)

Helena has to make her way back out, not only to apologize to her hospitalized mother, but to replace her dark impulsive impostor in the real world, who seems bent on fitfully destroying all her drawings and thereby denying her access back. At this point the movie reminds me a little of a certain MTV video from the Eighties, the one for the song "Stay On Me" by the band aha, in which a girl's crumpled-up drawing of the pretty-boy lead singer must fight his way out of his Flatland to meet her in 3-D.

What the movie loses in easy "accessibility" (and why isn't it being screened more widely?), it makes up for in internal integrity. The unnamed realm is no cozy Oz, too sharp and faintly metallic to really pass for a dreamscape. I also wondered why the story did not claim that in addition to drawings Helena made collages, because some of the imagery makes far more sense in that form. However, it occurred to me that maybe we're seeing new ideas in their raw state, before they've even had a chance to settle into a standard dream. The place looks slightly muted and fluctuating, causing one to wonder "What's the light source for this world, anyway?"

The whole "faces vs. masks" business never really compelled me, but I enjoyed classical jokes at the expense of so-called Sphinxes which are pretty much winged talking cats with a vicious side. All in all, the look and feel of this is probably well-suited to Helena's edgy personality.

As with other movies (which I plan to discuss directly), I found this a bit confounding at first, but as it all worked its way out it became more satisfying. I wouldn't go calling it *The Next Oz* or any such thing, but it's both commendable and recommendable.

**Support Your Babes in Black:  
The Matrix, Underworld, Aeon Flux**

reviewed by William Blake Hall

Note: This is mainly just a review of *Aeon Flux*, but I couldn't resist tying it back in with *The Matrix*, and a preview for *Underworld: Evolution*. End of note.

To date, literary honor has been heaped highest on two novels which stand as polar opposites in the same genre, that of dystopian fiction. I refer to *Brave New World* and *1984*, and to this day I think it's fair to say that BNW is the harder sell. This makes *Aeon Flux* another movie, somewhat like *MirrorMask* (above) or the original *Underworld*, which gets on my nerves early on but then becomes more gratifying as it develops. Sure, it's all very sleek and slick and hip, but I'm an old-fashioned type who likes to be clear about who is fighting who for what, and I was rather maddened for a while before I really started liking the film.

Fact is, *Aeon Flux* is not only well-conceived by comic book artist Peter Chung, but well-played. The cast includes Sophie Okonedo, Paul Rusesabagina's wife from *Hotel Rwanda*, as Aeon's partner Sithandra, Jonny Lee Miller (who to my mind will always be The First Mr. Jolie) as dynastic scion Orrin Goodchild, and Pete Postlethwaite in a crucial small role. The one off-note was Frances McDormand; she herself was fine, but I kept wondering "Why is Marge Gunderson from *Fargo* this redhaired apparation, and why, to what end, and who is she anyway?" The world as we know it is destroyed by a virus in 2011, and in 2415 the city of Bregna is all that's left of humanity. This begs some questions I find amusing, like "In 2415, why must security systems be so labor-intensive?" or "In 2415, why must transparent materials always be easily shattered glass?" But I digress; truth is, the ideas in this film raised my hopes for eventually lensing something like Heinlein's *Friday*.

Aeon is assigned to assassinate scientist/savior/founder Trevor Goodchild (Martin Csokas) -- but can't do it. Luckily, this does not reflect poorly on her, because she is very much your post-Xena can-do fighter. This is a story of reality breaking through illusion, of nature breaking through artificiality, of sex (in the most clinical biological sense) competing with cloning, and whereas this sort of thing has been done badly in, say, *Zardoz*, it has also been presaged, with varying success, in *THX 1138*, *Logan's Run*, *The Truman Show*, to some extent *Pleasantville*, of course *The Matrix*, and even the instantaneous terraforming climax of *Total Recall*. *Aeon Flux* easily outshines a slapped-together cash-in like *The Island* by actually caring what it's about.

My only real worry about a story like this is where it reminds me of a crucial scene from *The Matrix*. Neo is essentially dead, and Trinity (Carrie-

Ann Moss) must talk to him, kiss him, and then command him to get back up in order to revive him. It makes for good myth and even nice romance but ever more fantastical science fantasy. Here, I'm willing to accept Aeon's trinity-like moves as the real deal rather than VR, but the plot seems to rely heavily upon something resembling the Jungian idea of racial memory. While I do not doubt that we have only begun to appreciate the power of genes, I think I have to attribute a great bulk of the whole human heart/mind/soul plexus to so-called "memes" as well, data not so easily accounted for by as old a symbol as blood or as handy a catchword as DNA. Racism may be dying, but it's time to confront the racialism of our biological and spiritual beliefs as well.

Watching this, it occurred to me that this could help make up an enjoyable "Babes in Black" triple feature with *Underworld* and *The Matrix*. Certainly, the Babe in Black is neither that original or that pure a concept: one could trace it back to the catsuits of Diana Rigg as Emma Peel, and watch it make its way to a small French curiosity like *Irma Vep*. It gets cartoonized by Elvira and *Barb Wire*, and parodied outright by Kevin Smith in *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*. It's also easy to get wrong, as in the variations on *Catwoman*, of which Michelle Pfeiffer's is probably the best to date. Halle Berry dared to replace the universal symbology of the black leather with her own "black" skin, and paid for that. (However, Woman of Color as Woman in Black is not at all precluded, as proven by Gina Torres as Anna Espinosa in the earliest episodes of *Alias*, or even Rosario Dawson as Gail in *Sin City*.)

However, when it's right, when the maiden and the mission become one, nothing quite compares. In a slight reworking, one can easily imagine Trinity herself as being the One, and Kate Beckinsale as Selena is more rewarding to tag along with than Van Helsing. False cosmic paradigm got you down? Tired of werewolves and vampires always fighting for power? Other contenders don't really match up. So forget the British tuxedoed womanizer with the kooky gadgets, or Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith in sunglasses and funereal suits, or even Lara Croft, that souped-up X-chromosome Indiana Jones clone who can go anywhere and thereby never really has anywhere to go. I say, support your Babes in Black. Once you go black, you never go back.