

PARSEC Meeting Schedule

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)

February 2006

Date: February 11th 2006 - 2 PM
Topic: To be announced.
Location: Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Branch (children's
reading area)

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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View From the Top

The President's Column - Kevin Geiselman

The ruling in the case of the Parents vs. the Dover, PA School Board over the inclusion of an Intelligent Design statement in science class has been handed down with a strong victory for science and truth.

"In making this determination, we have addressed the seminal question of whether ID is science. We have concluded that it is not, and moreover

that ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents."

"The breathtaking inanity of the Board's decision is evident when considered against the factual backdrop which has now been fully revealed through this trial."

I particularly love the use of "breathtaking inanity".

His 139 page ruling made it abundantly clear that their arguments simply don't hold water. The ID proponents brought in their big guns, their top scientist supporters, and the only way that they could support their assertions was to resort to a redefinition of science broad enough to include the supernatural.

"It is ironic that several of these individuals, who so staunchly and proudly touted their religious convictions in public, would time and again lie to cover their tracks and disguise the real purpose behind the ID Policy."

It is, of course, too soon to claim real victory. Half of the people in this country still disbelieve evolution in favor of a literal reading of the story of Genesis and those who would propagate the lie that is Intelligent Design as science will not go away any time soon. At least we now have a sound legal precedence more recent than the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial on which to base our defense of truth and religious freedom.

Geis

Announcements

- January will bring the publication of Eric Leif Davin's new book, *Partners in Wonder: Women and the Birth of Science Fiction, 1926-1965*. He hopes to have a book signing at the Squirrel Hill Barnes and Noble in February or March. It can already be pre-ordered online from Amazon.com. Eric will be at the January Parsec meeting to answer questions about it. And to see what David Brody has to say about George Melies!

2005 Holiday party

Ann Cecil

PARSEC's annual December meeting was held on the 10th at Ann and Greg's house, as a day-long Christmas party. The festivities started at 2pm and ended officially at 2 am. All those still present were forthwith drafted into a cleanup squad, and cheerfully helped restore the premises to good order.

Much food was consumed, as usual, with a slightly stronger emphasis this year on healthy or 'real' food, and less on very fattening (though there was some excellent fudge, and Mark Stewart's multi-layer chocolate cake disappeared as rapidly as always). Pastas and chilis were popular, as was Fruma's serendipity soup and Ann's beef barbeque.

The usual cast – with some missing faces (Wendy Kosak couldn't make it this year) and some new faces (most notably Sasha's fiancé, Jonathan) – made the scene at some point. People we don't get to see other times: Caren Bachmann, David Brody's charming Liz, Pervase and Aleta Akhtar, and Christina Schulman were there, as well as those who do turn out for meetings (too many to mention). Lara Van Winkle, Nancy Janda and Amy Finkbeiner came later in the evening, and caused a splash, since they were 'dressed to kill.' And of course Phil Klass (aka William Tenn) dominated the living room scene, while Fruma snuck upstairs to join the gamers.

Interesting conversations were held, books were returned (now I have two copies of *Guards, Guards!*), and a good time was had by all.

October 2005 ConCom Meeting notes:

- JJ -- No sightings of Bigfoot [ale] in this area.
- Karen and Laurie are researching area hotels for hosting the con in 2007.
- There will be a program meeting January 7th at 2 pm (tentative). (Meeting since rescheduled for noon).
- Send suggestions for authors to invite and program items to a suggestion box-mail. (suggestions@spellcaster.org)
- Bonnie F. is backing up Kira on the program book and also doing the flyers.
- Joan and Heidi to send reminders to artists a few months prior to con.
- Mary sending reminders to dealer's and new invtes to artisans from Pennsic.
- Science Programming ideas: Alan Schultz from Robotics at CMU.
- Possibly invite Kavan Ratantunga (sp?) and Diane T to talk about Gravity Lensing
- Greg: developing a con-suite recipe book to pass on to next consuite head.. Note: Owl pellets will not be in this book
- Mike Farb submitted some financial info for 501c3 Parsec filing.
- PR discussion: Flyer, Book Marks, Trade Ads, Local Advertising needs to be done 3 months ahead (April).
- Perhaps invite Jim Morrow to talk about his book at March or April Parsec meeting.
- Greg will be attending different Cons within driving distance and wants to advertise Confluence by having room parties. He will need people to help him.
- Next Concom Meeting January 11th at 7:30 pm.
- Programming meeting January 7th at 12:00 pm.

Call For Artists

TimeSpan LAB's is now accepting artwork for the 2007 PARSEC Calendar. The deadline for submissions is April 1st 2006--No fooling! Contributors must be Parsec members. Information about the benefits of PARSEC membership can be found at <http://parsec-sff.org/benefits.html>. Artists will be paid \$10 per artwork image published in the calendar, and also receive a free copy of the finished calendar worth \$15. It's a great publishing and portfolio-building opportunity!

This year we have decided to try a few new things: Due to popular demand the calendar will be semi-themed and will coordinate with the PARSEC Short Story Contest "Instruments of Madness." What does semi-themed mean? It means abiding by the theme is *not* required, so if you do not have themed work, submit your work anyway and it will still be considered for publication.

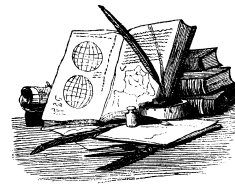
We will also be holding a contest at the April 8th PARSEC meeting to see which piece of artwork will grace the cover of the 2007 calendar. So get those submissions in before the deadline!

For more information and submission guidelines, please go to the PARSEC Calendar page at:

<http://parsec-sff.org/calendar.html#Call-for-Artists>

doing and not simply following behind someone else that had no patience for a beginner. We played for over 12 hours and I could have kept going. I have played the game, both with my friend and alone in single player mode, for well over 100 hours in a month.

My interest in game playing is already waning, but a new interest is to look into means of making and programming my own games. It wasn't until I knew the terminology to use in an online search ("game engine") that I found a plethora of game making links. These game engines run a wide range of full point-and-click game making systems (often costing hundreds or thousands of dollars) to bare-bones software engine cores that have to have a game programmed on top of them. In between are several inexpensive systems that have an "engine" with a simplified scripting language. This is what I am dabbling with now. So then the question becomes, what kind of game to make? A space flight simulator, first creature shooter, or maybe an SF/F/H convention simulation?



Reviews

Books

THUD

by Terry Pratchett

reviewed by Ann Cecil)

THUD is a new Discworld novel, in the continuing sub-series known variously as the Vimes books (after the predominant character) or a *Guards* book (since the books in this sub-series mostly feature adventures of the Night Watch). I've also heard them referred to as books set in Ankh-Morpork, or books with Carrot in them. But I think of them as Vimes' books, since an interesting thing is happening in them. Others of Pratchett's many Discworld books (33 or 34 at last count) continue to be hilarious, belly-laugh provoking exercises in parody plots and satiric snipes at various sacred cows of our current civilization.

Vimes books are turning into something slightly different: Vimes is becoming a real person, with a great deal of dimension, and is dragging the other caricatures into full characterization with him. Vimes tangles with serious themes, issues of morality, of life and death and the choices we make in facing both.

THUD is a book that brought out an occasional chuckle, but no belly-laughs. It is longer than many of the other Discworld books, meatier, and a great deal more thought-provoking. Sam Vimes is doing a balancing act now: he is still commanding the Watch, but he is also a responsible husband and father. His city is in danger of being torn apart by an age old racial feud (dwarves versus trolls), but his focus is kept narrowly on his duty. He is a splendid example of a man coping with an impossible job, who works through it, task by task, to accomplish a major feat.

The action starts when, pretty much simultaneously, a key dwarf player is murdered and Vimes is forced to take on a vampire as a recruit for the Watch. While Sally is clearly meant as the comic relief for the book, even she began to develop a personality in the course of the tangled investigation. The dwarves claim a troll must have done the murder; there is evidence that a troll was present at the crime scene; and then Sam Vimes discovers, with the aid of both trolls and dwarves (particularly Carrot, the Human-dwarf) that the case includes four more dwarf murders.

Vimes means to find the truth, no matter what the cost, and his lady supports him, both morally and with her amazing connections. The finale takes Vimes and company out of Ankh-morpork and into a cavernous region called Koom Valley. The concluding scenes are in eerie and memorable underground areas, vividly described.

A good deal has been made of the children's book that Sam reads to his son in this book. There is even a picture book version for sale (Greg bought it). Depending on how tightly Pratchett has caught you up in his world, you may find the interaction between father and son a bit silly, mildly cute, or moderately inspiring. Personally, I can't wait to see the first version of the game (*THUD*) described in the book to hit the stores. But then, I am a confirmed Vimes fan.

Highly recommended reading.

Nine Hundred Grandmothers

by R.A. Lafferty

Most science fiction writers – like most other writers – have been influenced by and in turn (if they are good writers) have influenced others, both inside the field and

outside of the field. You can see, for example, the influence of Campbell's golden age writers – Heinlein, Sturgeon, van Vogt, et. al. – in many places. But in all of this, I can point to two writers who stand outside, who aren't like anyone before them, and whom nobody has really tried to write like since: Cordwainer Smith and R.A. Lafferty. And of the two, Lafferty is the more sui generis. In Smith's case, you can see how Chinese story telling techniques influenced him; and you can see occasional stories influenced by him (such as Silverberg's great short work, "Nightwings"). But I can't think of anyone who even tries to write in a style similar to Lafferty's.

It's hard to pin down a description of his style. In some ways, it seems dreamlike and a bit out of control, but look closely, and you'll see that Lafferty has tight control over what he is doing. The stories can be surreal, though again that's often not quite right; in many cases, they are a few steps beyond that. Lafferty's work can't be nailed down to any genre or technique. And there are phrases that stay with you, either for their strangeness, their humor, or (usually) both:

"Hi, Robert," Homer said, "what's new today?"

"Nothing, Papa. Nothing ever happens here. Oh, yeah, there's a monster in the house. He looks kind of like you. He's killing Mama and eating her up." This is from "The Hole in the Corner".

Lafferty's approach to the universe was somewhat skewed and very much his own. He looked at things in a new, fresh way, and caused his readers to do the same (and often walk away scratching their heads). And this isn't only true of his fiction. (If you can find it, read his *The Fall of Rome* which is a history (though history very much in Lafferty's voice and style.) But perhaps the best way to both be fully immersed in Lafferty and to get a view of all that he can do is to pick up a collection of his short stories. *Nine Hundred Grandmothers*, his first collection, was originally released as an Ace Science Fiction Special in 1970. It remains a major and highly entertaining work of SF today.

The collection features 21 stories, on various subjects, in various modes – all unmistakably Lafferty, some more or less surreal, absurd, or strange than others (though all certainly strange to some extent). All are enjoyable, and several are major works. There are too many stories for me to mention all of them, but I'll at least point out several of my favorites.

"Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne" is one of several stories that involve Epikt the Ktistec machine (though I defy anyone to try to fit those stories into any kind of consistent arc, since that was not something that concerned Lafferty). The group of scientists who work with Epikt have decided to change the past, such that Charlemagne will form a close friendship with Islam and science and literature will flower centuries earlier than it did. Meanwhile, the scientists, who know what the world around them is like, will watch for the changes. They don't see any changes, feel frustrated, and try again. But each time, even though they can't see it, the universe changes. It's both an amusing and insightful look into the historical process and into alternate history.

"Slow Tuesday Night" involves a future world where everyone lives at a breakneck pace. Fortunes are made and lost many times within a few hours. People meet, get married, and are divorced within the hour. Lafferty eases us into it, but once there he sweeps us along at breakneck pace. It's all unrealistic, of course, but it's such a fun ride while you're on it.

"The Six Fingers of Time" is a more serious story than many. A man wakes up with time moving much faster for him. Those around him seem to almost be standing

Confusions of a Video Game Newbie

by Henry Tjernlund

Okay, I hate the word "newbie," and it doesn't completely apply, but it makes for a more interesting title. I am also not completely new to gaming in general. Back in high school (mid 1970's), my one brother and I researched some games. These were board strategy and role playing games (RPGs). They usually came in a box and involved a board that you unfolded with a hexagonal grid, cardboard items that you needed to punch out from a card, dice, and a somewhat thick book of rules and tables. Unfortunately, that was about when my brother left for college. When he was done, then I left for college. So we never got around to playing the several games that we got. Some of them may even still be in mint condition, wherever in storage they are.

College was boring, game wise. I did almost no socializing. Study, study, and more study. Actually, that is not completely true. In the U. of P. (Pitt) computer labs there were a couple computer games available on the school mainframe. One was StrTrk (*Star Trek*) that when playing, you had to print out a new text grid every few moves to see what was going on. A terrible waste of paper on the printing terminals. Plus, there was *Zork*, one of the first computer RPGs. That one was all text too as each room, or area, was described to you and you had a limited choice of commands to type in to take any action. One term I got slightly obsessed with *Zork* and was making maps and saving print-outs of room descriptions. My grades dropped noticeably and I forced myself away from the games. I managed to avoid them through the rest of college.

Afterwards, although still working there (1980's), a friend tried to get me involved in her D&D gaming group. It was a less than fun experience. One should not game with others who are not your direct friends or at least tolerant of beginners. My underpowered character was sidetracked on his own little adventure while the main group continued on for the vast majority of the game playing. Oh well. I spent some time perusing some of the game books they had. They were filled with tables and charts on hit points, damage points, and other character and monster statistics. I commented out loud that this would be the perfect thing to program into a computer. "You could NEVER do this on a computer," someone scoffed at me. "It's too complicated to program and wouldn't be any fun anyway." I made the mistake of assuming that they were right. Oh, I have played the occasional arcade game, and tried my hand, usually unsuccessfully, at some console games when invited to join in. Usually people did not take the time to show me what to do and charged ahead in the game with me trying to figure out how to just keep up.

Then only a couple months ago, while visiting a good friend, they put an RPG game called *Baldur's Gate* in their console game system. They actually explained to me what to do, what the things on the display meant, and started out letting me take the lead with them being a backup character to mine. It was fantastic fun! Yes it was a challenge to make it through even the first level and my character died several times. But, for a change I felt in control of what I was

books. All in all, it was a very impressive flick.

Speaking of the Harry Potter books, (not to drop any spoilers) but did any of you want to blow fits over the ending of *The Half-Blood Prince* as much as I did? It was much more the kind of thing that should happen in the last book, or maybe the first book. All I have to say is that ol' J. K. R. had better come up with something PRETTY good for book number seven. And, she had better do it quick. She doesn't have too long before they have to start filming it.

Since the WB Bunny was doing so well with Harry, the WD Mouse had to have a go at YA fantasy literature movies. Disney chose C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, another seven book series. However, this is not the first time *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* has been put on film. Several decades ago an animated version did more justice to the story than the Tolkien toons did to theirs. (But then that's a rather easy goal.) Not too many years ago a small-screen, live-action BBC version came out. The BBC followed up by doing two more of the Narnia books. These are now on DVD.

Disney has spared no expense on special effects for its fantastic new version. No giant furry talking potatoes playing the parts of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver for them. They decided to play it very close to the book. This was a good idea considering the changes I heard they wanted to make. Things like setting it in modern day California, and "Why have Aslan die after all?" Someone must have reminded them of who their fan base was. "You know those people who just love to organize boycotts and protests when things don't suit their morals? Well, don't tick them off." So once again, four English children find the door into Narnia in an old wardrobe. There they help Aslan the Lion fight the White Witch; who makes it always winter, but never Christmas.

There were basically two main places the movie differed from the book. In the opening scene they show an air raid on London during the Battle of Britain, something only mentioned in passing on the page. This was a good choice for the film in this Historical Knowledge poor era. The other place is when the Pevensie children -- Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy -- cross the frozen river. They make it a much more harrowing escape than in the book. They also add a neat little scene where Edmund meets Mr. Tumnus in the White Witch's dungeon.

My one quibble with this fine film is the look for the White Witch. I have always thought of her as looking like Anderson's Snow Queen. In the book she has black hair. But, in the movie the actress giving her chilly portrayal of the Witch is blond. You possibly could try to say they even things up by making Edmund -- a blond in the book -- black-haired in the movie. The same thing happens in *The Goblet of Fire* where Crouch Jr.'s hair is shown as far too dark to be called "sandy".

I'm sure Disney will film the rest of the *Chronicles of Narnia* before long. Especially since *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* opened as number one at the box office, while *Goblet of Fire* dropped to third. Can Fox be far behind with *The Wizard of Oz*? L. Frank Baum wrote fourteen Oz books you know. They had best get cracking before Dakota Fanning gets too old to play Dorothy. You see, at sixteen Judy Garland was far too old to play an eight year old girl. She did have the chops for the movie, though. It would have been far poorer starring Shirley Temple. But then again, Ambassador Black could be a great Auntie Em.

still, and he's able to finish days worth of work before the others arrive. He learns to control it, and, after tiring of practical jokes (the story does indeed have some humor), he begins to use his abilities to learn. But there is a real force of evil in the world, one that tries to recruit him, which is what really gives the story its more serious focus.

Two stories involve the Camerai, a planet full of people where laws can be made by any subgroup, the world president is chosen by lot, and no formal organizations exist. The reactions of human researchers on the planet are both amusing and interesting reflections on our own way of looking at the world.

Many of the stories feature strange inventions, often made out of the strangest (or silliest) thing and able to do bizarre things. In "Seven Day Terror" a young boy builds a "disappearer" out of a beer can and two pieces of red cardboard. In "Hog-Belly Honey," a man builds a machine capable of causing things that are not needed to disappear (and does things like make a man's beard vanish). Epikt the Ktistec machine is back in "Through Other Eyes" where a machine allows a scientist to view the world through other people's perspective, finding out just how different those perspectives are. (How many of us, as kids, wondered if when we looked at something and saw that it was red, if we indeed perceived this "red" the same as someone else looking at the same object. Or did they see what we'd call "blue" but use the name "red" since that's what they'd been taught to be the name. Lafferty starts there, but goes much farther.)

I could go on. As I look down the titles in the table of contents and come across story names, I find things I could say about each. In many cases, I could get very enthusiastic ("that was the great one where ... !"). But I won't. Instead, I'll just recommend that you go out, if you haven't discovered him already, and discover the joys and wonders of R.A.

Movies

Is Prince Caspian Ready for His Closeup

by William Blake Hall

I lost my keys the evening I saw *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, which struck me as an appropriate metaphor for how people can lose their bearings going to this movie. Designations like "left" and "right" feel too monolithic to me; suffice it to say that I've heard from "en-theizers," those eager to add the movie to some very particular dogmatic arsenal, and "de-theizers," those who seem tolerant yet get extremely nervous at any whiff of religiosity. Being left-of-center, I'm willing to hear out the de-theizers and, yes indeed, *Lion* is in fact brought to us by rightist billionaire Philip Anschutz (no relation that I know of to film pioneer Ottomar Anschutz) and, yes indeed, a plan is afoot to show this film in churches, a plan eerily similar to that of the distinctly rightist *Left Behind* movies.

Luckily, once you actually see *Lion*, none of this matters. Anschutz and company have gotten behind it, but they haven't been pigs about it; the story retains its own escapist charm, and a diverse general audience is free to enjoy. To anyone who would try to use this as some tool of indoctrination, all I can say is, Lotsa luck with that. There is indeed a moral cosmology behind all this, but it reminded me more of the tales of the Brothers Grimm than of any theology.

As with Peter Jackson's Tolkien trilogy, you can tell when you are in the presence of people who love the original material. I have some nits, like always being distracted by the ears of Mr. Tumnus (James McAvoy), or the centaurs tending to always stand in profile, looking a little like basketball players modeling pantomime horse costumes, but these are easily forgiven. Once Lucy makes her way through the snow to the lamppost,

you're set, it all works. The four kids are well cast, the always reliable Jim Broadbent makes a good Professor Kirk, and Tilda Swinton, an actress long relegated to the obscurely bizarre in movies ranging from *Orlando* to *Constantine*, triumphs here as the evil White Witch Jadis. (In fact, about the worst joke you could make about this movie is some mild suggestion of drug hallucination. The E! channel's clip show *The Soup* proclaims "This winter -- I want to know what they're smoking!" and suggests that the wardrobe may be where the kids hide the bong.)

In fact, to my mind the challenge here is not one of doctrine but of culture. The movie is very much of its place and time, wisely beginning with a reference to World War II raging in the background, so the adventure becomes a kind of metaphor for a child's subconscious wrangling with war, wishing to be safe and yet wishing to help and be brave. *Lion* makes for an excellent one-shot effort, but can it really lead us on to Prince Caspian and other characters of C. S. Lewis, as seems to be the master plan, or will kids think "Thank you, but deciding to become warriors at a tender age and becoming kings and queens has been quite enough"? On this score, the one thing in favor of such a series is that parents can not only feel safe but enjoy it themselves. Time and again I heard waves of chuckles at this movie's gentle humor, and it will be interesting to see if young and old come back for seconds. (I'm still in Christmas feast mode).

What I find striking about Lewis is that he chose to incorporate both mythology and outer space into his personal universe, rather than dismissing or belittling them. If his work gains a new foothold, it could be a very great benefit indeed. We shall see. As for the real world, I don't know how Grimm-like the universe actually is. All that I do know is that after the movie, a fellow tenant lent me his cell phone to call the landlord to let me back in -- a tenant named Leon.

Farewell Terra Ingognita

by William Blake Hall

Having produced a radio version of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Orson Welles tried to make a movie of it -- and I can't help but wonder if Peter Jackson had this in mind when he made this new *King Kong*. After all, Jack Black does have the dark intense countenance of a young Welles, though unfortunately not the low voice, and the Conrad novel does keep getting invoked in a subplot as Skull Island looms larger. The very name Skull Island is more suggestive of monsters of the id than monsters of the Jurassic epoch, but here that symbolism is actually explored rather than simply exploited, as it was in 1933. The Carl Denham of Robert Armstrong was tough and ruthless yet somehow admirable in an peppy can-do way, but here the Carl Denham of Jack Black is offered as a study in terrible and well nigh psychotic hubris. So what is Skull Island, if not simply the granddaddy of a Michael Crichton franchise? I would say that Skull Island is a stand-in for mystery, the very concept of mystery, and how we try to wrangle with mystery and pollute it with our glaring scrutiny at our own peril. As time moves on -- indeed, with practically each new Robert J. Sawyer novel -- it seems a waning argument, but it does tug at the heartstrings, and that's what's important here.

Black's Denham here is an open outlaw, dodging everyone to get the hell out to "the one blank spot left on the map" so as to superimpose a necessary obligatory love interest upon his next great safari film, and while there can never be any dethroning of the 1933 original, this upping of the stakes is just one of a series of distinct improvements that Jackson brings to this version. The acting is better -- none of that awkward stilted "Say, Ann ... I think I love you ... !" -- and has better characterizations. The story

hangs together with much better internal logic, and, of course, the special effects are triumphant in their own right. Whereas in 1933 this was a rousing lark, here we are on a true rollercoaster, relentlessly inundated with one gruesomely fascinating horror right after another. It does go on a bit, and I found myself think "Okay, okay, I get the idea -- it's really dangerous to be in the middle of a dinosaur stampede!", but it's still worth checking out.

Perhaps most surprising of all is that Kong is genuinely interesting here. Where before we simply humored the behavior of a stop-action animation gorilla with a cute crush on Fay Wray, we now see, without ever losing any sense of him as a beast and even a bully, that Kong feels torn. He is truly king of the ever-dangerous hell that is his island, yet he looks at an impressionist sunrise and longs for peace and beauty. Here we see that Ann Darrow (Naomi Watts) is a kind of blonde incarnation of that sunrise, Kong's own personal sun goddess, at which point you have to take a new look at the Kong-Ann relationship and say "Well, no wonder."

Of course, once taken from Skull Island, Kong is exploited rather than respected, and he goes on a rampage not because of mere flashbulbs but because they've tried to palm off a fake Ann on him. Before you know it, Manhattan is celebrating Please Wear a Brunette Wig Night as Kong (literally) picks up and scrutinizes blonde after blonde hunting for Naomi Watts, in what I suppose could be called The Original Watts Riot. Jack Driscoll (Adrien Brody), here a writer rather than a sailor, gamely drives and dodges, not so much to "save" Ann as to help her back to human love. And, yes, Denham again says "It wasn't the airplanes." Ehh, but 72 years later and I still have to disagree -- it really was the airplanes, Carl. But at least this time, the fuss was about something. Skull Island presumably endures, but without its king, and the last blank spot on the map is now blander than it ever was before.

Lucky Number Sevens: Harry and Louie

by Diane McCarty

This December two excellent movies, based on two different well-loved seven book series, grace the theaters. They are *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, and *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* -- first of the Narnia Chronicles. It looks as though one will follow where the other led. Be sure to catch them both.

In the fourth Harry Potter movie, Harry has more things on his plate than will fit on a buffet. Not only is he having agonizing dreams about Lord Voldemort; but his best friends forever -- Ron and Hermione -- are mad at each other, and at him. Plus he is the extra -- and underage -- contestant in the dangerous Tri-wizard Tournament. All this and he still has to find a date to take to the Yule Ball. Due to the large size of the book not all of Harry's problems made it to the screen. Harry's yearly exit from the Dursley house, Hermione's quest to free the house elves, and Rita Skeeter's comeuppance were dropped entirely.

However, *The Goblet of Fire* does better in transferring its book's story to the screen than *The Prisoner of Azkaban* did. Two short scenes of explanation -- adding at most five minutes to Azkaban -- would have made all the difference in that movie. Then you would not have missed what was left out, or been confused at events. The *Goblet of Fire*, on the other hand, does not miss what was left out. Although, keeping the monsters in the Third Task Maze, rather than making the maze itself the only monster, would have been better. Computer animation nowadays is good enough to handle it. The dragon and the lake creatures in Tasks One and Two were great. Maybe the special edition DVD's will have extra scenes to cover the dropped portions of the