

SIGMA

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PARSEC MEETING MARCH 12, 2016



President's Capsule



As I sit here writing at this peculiar moment, my mind is worse than blank. It is downright resistant to creating anything at all. I feel a need to work my way into about five-hundred words that will have some

meaning to those of you reading and to me. The subject should be in some vague manner about science fiction or fantasy or horror. I understand there is a reasonable expectation of an association with Parsec. I have grown tired of my meandering stories of the past and have no feeling, whatsoever, about the future. I am trapped in the impermanent now. Each tick, if there is, in fact, a tick outside the mechanical clock on the facing wall, brings me no new information, no longing for adventure, intellectual or physical. This may be that state described as existential angst. Or maybe I just need something to drink.

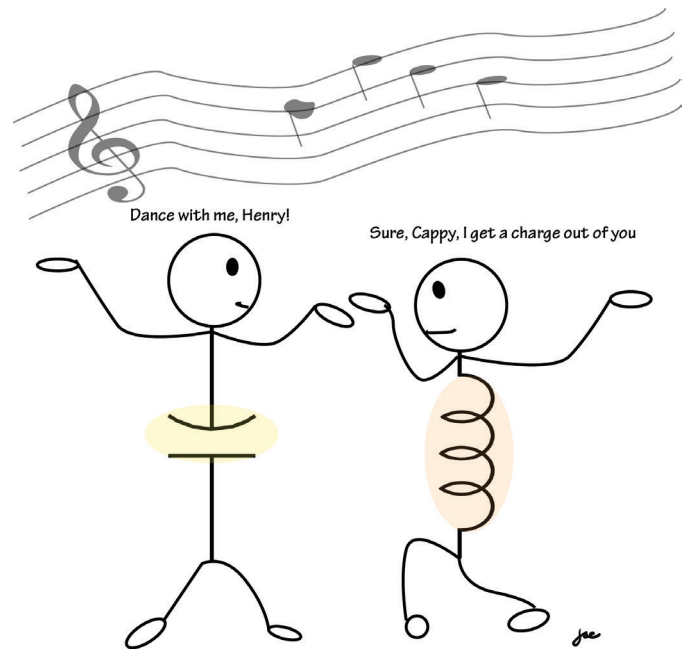
It occurs to me, being a part of this eternal now, I should think about time. Past is memory; future is conjecture based on memory and a mix of imagination, "now" is fleeting as a sweet taste, or a mellifluous melody, or the sharp prick of a pin. Something that cannot be held. Not possible to understand. We're all on the same boat. Slugging our way in an apparent timeline together. The evening news would have us believe upcoming events are dangerous, and the preceding occurrences were catastrophes. We schedule meetings at work, our proposed vacation, the start and end dates for projects. They pass us like signposts on the highway. We set aside a time to do our real work or be with our family and manage to fritter it away clicking on articles or staring at bad doses of reality on pervasive media. Each night we sleep, which seems either a waste of our precious living time or a chance to restore our vitality.

We are all stories. We are all a part of each other's stories. There is the something; I have been struggling to write. We come together at Parsec meetings once a month. In the past few months, a feeling of camaraderie and family has been growing. I wonder where those of you who don't attend spend your time. I can tell you that we miss you at the meetings. Would like to see you and hear

what you have to say. Who you are and what you do IS important to us. Mr. Rogers used to buoy me up each day by telling me I was special just the way I am. Nothing truer was ever said of all of us. Come on. Join our story.

Joe Coluccio

Read my blog each Sunday at <http://parsec-sff.org/blog/category/presidents-blog/>



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From the Editors

Honest!

We are looking for submissions from Parsec members and others to fill the pages of Sigma. Aren't you sick, possibly tired, and filled with an overwhelming sense of ennui when you read the same pap I write each edition? Okay, you can't really muzzle me, but you can provide a counterpoint to my rambling. You are science fiction fandom. You love SF novels and films and TV. Your knowledge is as good as many an eminent scholar. We'd love to hear it. Sigma is not a faded hectographed sheet (ain't technology a wonder?) of cranky ideas. Unless, of course, you have a crank of a virtual duplicator you want to put forth in the world.

How about a book review of some artifact or work we have no idea exists. A movie that shot in 1955 with an eight-millimeter camera and a can of Cheez Wizz? The latest odd TV debacle on cable channel eleventy-nine? An art show you were involved in? Your great grand uncle sold batteries for Hugo Gernsback? The spooky action of a quantum entangled quark in Tau Ceti? A trip to the center of the hollow Earth from the massive dark sinkhole in Spitsbergen? Your prediction of the World Series winner this year, and my fervent hope that you are from the future?

We don't pay much, in fact, we don't pay at all. Don't let that stop you. We're in this for the glory, not the gain. We'd love to put your creative work in print. Please submit to sigma@parsec-sff.org

Joe

DAVID G. HARTWELL, 1941 - 2016



David G. Hartwell, well-known and influential writer, editor, publisher, and regular Confluence attendee, passed away

last month at the age of 74. He died from head injuries sustained in a fall.

Hartwell was nominated for the Hugo Award a staggering 41 times, 19 in the category of Best Professional Editor and Best Editor Long Form. He won that category in 2006, 2008, and 2009, and won 22 times as editor/publisher of The New York Review of Science Fiction. He worked at Tor Books for over thirty years as a Senior Editor.

I only spoke with David a handful of times at Confluence over the years. He seemed like a truly nice person who really cared about SF and its fans. I was privileged to serve on a panel with him at last year's con about H.P. Lovecraft. And, dare I say it? His fashion sense was great!

David Hartwell's obituary can be read in this month's Locus Online - <http://www.locusmag.com/News/2016/01/david-g-hartwell-1941-2016/-g-hartwell-1941-2016/>

Larry

March 2016 Minutes



March 2016 Minutes Secretary Bill Hall

Larry Ivkovich announced that he is “chairman of the party suite” – I guess that’s what we now call the con suite – and he hopes to have a book launch and some Fort Weyr people there. Diane Turnshek reminded us of an event that evening featuring ten authors plus the artwork of our own Bill Keith, and reported positively on the Alpha scholarships. Barb Carlson gave us a status report on how hackers from France, Turkey, and elsewhere tried to take over our site.

Eric spoke up again with what he promised would be a brief announcement. He noted that he and Barton, as two-time winners, effectively got banned from ye olde Parsec short story contest, then noted the mileage his winning stories got elsewhere. He discovered his “Avenging Angel” (the sort of plot James West and Artemus Gordon always fought against) in an anthology he hadn’t heard of, made an inquiry, and got fresh royalties from Baen. He passed around his Baen contract. (His Social Security number was on it – anyone want that?) This gave him occasion to mention that the anthology made him a lone draft resistor amidst rather gung-ho ex-soldiers, and this led to the peculiar story of how the bureaucracies of both the Army and the Marines more or less “fought over” Eric only to have him resist – not dodge, not duck, not escape, not defer from, but resist and seek to destroy – their draft. He then followed this up with three very short stories, including Lord Dunsany’s 1910 prose poem “Charon” (worth a look).

By this point Eric’s “brief” contribution had gone on for forty minutes (and without any bios of women authors that I can recall), so Joe got the meeting moving again with the words “As I started to say back in the Pleistocene ...”

Mary Soon Lee read us two poems from her book “Crowned.”

We took the meeting’s lack of official topic as a chance to get started generating panel ideas for Confluence. Jeff Mierzejewski noted that one can go to parsec-sff.org/zambia and then enter the ID “brainstorm” and the password He Who Wrote the Foundation Trilogy to continue to look over and generate suggestions. (Another avenue is conprogram@parsec-sff.org.) These will probably reappear elsewhere in these pages, but for my part I took down:

1. Fun With Autocorrect.
2. History of the Search for Exoplanets.
3. Arabian fantasy (in honor of our GOH).
4. Claymore vs. Scimitar vs. Katana.
5. Djinn vs. Dragons. vs. Demons.
6. Near-term technology, e.g. electronic costuming.
7. Fans of F&SF recommending non-F&SF books. (Eric took this opportunity to note George R.R. Martin’s “The Armageddon Rag,” evidently a Sixties mystery with fantasy elements.)
8. Genre magazines (such as Omni): their future online? (This is partly in memory of editor and friend to Confluence David Hartwell.)
9. One-Hit Wonders (though bidding went to two or three hits).
10. The Fun of Bad SF.
11. Worldbuilding in Anime; The Cosmic Era.
12. Invented Language: Good, Bad, etc.
13. Space Propulsion (With Math).
14. Endings in Heroic Fantasy, e.g. Beowulf.
15. Woman Warrior: Arwen to Katniss.
16. Historical Fiction: Getting the Context Right.
17. Will SF Fandom Persist in an SF World? (But doesn’t it already?)
18. Reality TV and SF.
19. Gravitational Waves.
20. Six Degrees of Terminator (works leading up to it).
21. Planetary Heating and Cooling (Barton Paul Levenson as speaker).
22. Future Homes, Sustainable or Virtual.
23. How Perfect Can Your Hero/Heroine Be?
24. Young Adult: SF vs. Fantasy vs. Horror vs. ???

Greg updated us on our library, Nils picking up a Retief book by Keith Laumer while Jeff got a Wen Spencer book. There was also an “Escape From Earth” anthology, and Greg said that Poul Anderson’s “Brain Wave” is a great book (which it is). Our meeting’s head count was 25.

Review of the SYFY Channel's "The Expanse"

Larry Ivkovich

SyFy Channel's new series, *The Expanse*, recently completed its 10 episode first season. I got hooked after the first one. Once upon a time, SyFy (nee SciFi) was known for its cheesy, low-budget movies (though some, like *Sharknado*, were extremely popular) and reruns of old TV shows. We won't get into the pro wrestling thing, although it can be said that's pretty unreal as well.

In the last few years, however, SyFy has brought out some very well-done and engaging scripted series such as *Alphas*, *Defiance*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Helix*. Whether this is a result of a new programming staff or more studio money, it's resulted in some entertaining and thoughtful shows.

The Expanse is easily one of the channel's best efforts. Part space opera, part mystery, part political/social commentary, part conspiracy theory, the show is based on a series of novels by James S.A. Corey (the pseudonym for writers Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck who also work on the show). The first novel in the series, *Leviathan Wakes*, was nominated for both a Hugo Award and Locus Award in 2012 for Best Novel.

In the far future, the moon (Luna) and Mars have been colonized, getting most of their resources from the asteroid belt. The "Belters" are mainly downtrodden workers who never see the benefits of their labor, which go to the rich living on Mars. Since Mars has become a powerful, independent military power at odds with Earth and Luna, resentment, protests, and violence grows.

The story begins with the mysterious disappearance of a freighter ship, the *Scopuli*. Police detective Joe Miller, living and working on Ceres, is assigned to find one of the ship's crewmen, a runaway Earther, Julie Rao, by her rich Luna parents. During his investigation, he uncovers a plot involving a dangerous and unknown substance known as the Protomolecule. In the meantime, war between Earth and Mars looms.

The first season has three story arcs involving Miller, United Nations under-secretary Chrisjen Avasarala, and Executive Officer of the ice trawler *Canterbury*, Jim Holden, and his crew. The separate stories slowly converge to link up in the climactic season finale.

Familiar actors including Thomas Jane (*The Punisher*, *The Mist*), [Shohreh Aghdashloo](#) (24, *House of Sand and Fog*), Kevin Hanchard (*Orphan Black*), and Chad Coleman (*The Wire*, *The Walking Dead*) populate the series. Each episode (at least on On-Demand) has a five-minute epilogue where the writers, directors,

producers, and actors talk about the production, etc. One of the reasons the effects look so very, very realistic is the green-screen is about the size of a warehouse room and completely surrounds the actors.

So far, no extraterrestrials have made an appearance in this very complex and interesting series, but you never know.

Highly recommended. Search it out on Netflix or On-Demand.



Corrections to the February and March Sigma

SF and Rock an Roll - February 2016

Thanks to Lynn Hawker for pointing out in my SF and Rock and Roll article about the Irish rock album, *The Tain*, that the Morrigan is not really "The Queen of Demons," as stated. She was a goddess of fate, war, and death, and not so much a villain as a bad omen. Although the queen of demons description was taken from the Tain LP's liner notes, it doesn't appear in any other references as such.

Larry

March 2016 Minutes

The March Minutes inadvertently referred to new Parsec member, Katie Rask, as "and a woman naked Katie formerly from Tennessee and new to Pittsburgh," which should have read "a woman named Katie..." Katie, please accept our apologies and a pledge to proofread with greater diligence in the future.

Assemble Gallery - March 12, 2016

Penn Avenue
Parsec Author Signing Event

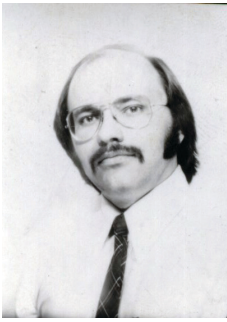
Bill Hall

Immediately after the March 2016 meeting, several of us gathered at an Indian restaurant in Garfield, then proceeded to Garfield's Assemble Gallery where astronomy-inspired art was on display. I was struck by the many paintings by our Bill Keith, one showing colliding galaxies. Ten authors appeared, among them Mary, Larry, Barton, Christine Meierz, and Joshua David Bellin, all selling their books. (Thomas Sweterlitsch also showed up.) I bought *Triangulation: Steel Cities* and Barton had four sales.



Thanks and kudos to **Diane Turnshek** (not pictured here) for organizing a month filled with activities celebrating astronomy at the Assemble Learning Center at 5125 Penn Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15224

What is more, my weekend book-buying continued on Sunday afternoon when I stopped by Timons Esaias's place, where he was selling and signing his poetry collection "Why Elephants No Longer Communicate in Greek." (The cover art by one Ethan Hahn, drawn in a way that makes me think of the best New Yorker cartoons, is alone worth getting the book.) As I arrived there, a sign explained that small children would not make acceptable payments in lieu of cash. His autograph warned me that "since you critiqued some of these, it's your really your fault, the whole collection." Good to know. I did recognize "Deadline," which succeeds in winning our sympathy for an editor, no mean feat. Reading around in it, I think the word "skaldic" popped up twice, and why shouldn't it? I also suspect that he shares my fondness for Sela Ward. I did not find one of my favorite Tim poems, one in which he says his universe is superior to mine in terms of entropy and lighting, but perhaps that is for another book and another review.



Brief Bios

**Brief Bios: Kaye Raymond
& Margaretta W. Rea**

Eric Leif Davin

Kaye Raymond (?-?):

According to Everett Bleiler, Raymond was living in Chicago in the 1930s at the time her stories appeared in *Astounding* and *Wonder Stories*. He was not impressed with “Into the Infinitesimal,” which appeared in *Wonder Stories*, June, 1934. He termed it, “Badly written, with a romance on a shopgirl level.”

Margaretta W. Rea (?-?): Everett Bleiler searched the Social Security Death Index and discovered a Margaretta Rea (1916-1986) living in New Jersey and a Margaretta Rea (1876-1967) living in Pennsylvania, both of whom fit the age range for this author. Otherwise, nothing is known of her. Bleiler thought her “Delilah,” *Amazing Stories*, January, 1933, a story about somnambulism, was a bit risqué. “Hardly suitable for a s-f magazine,” he said, “even if it had been better written.”

Eric Leif Davin's Parsec Short Story Award-winning story, “Twilight on Olympus,” will appear in “The Year's Best Military and Adventure Science Fiction,” forthcoming in 2016 from Baen Books. He is also the author of “The Desperate and the Dead,” from Damnation Books, available on Amazon and at Barnes & Noble.



Diane Turnshek being lit with angel wings at the Assemble Learning Center on Light Painting Night.
Light Painting by Dean Mougianis



More Light Painting

Parsec Meeting Schedule



Next Meeting

April 9, 2016

Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library

Room B - Next to the Rear Entrance

1:30 - 4:30 PM

A Discussion of SF and Confluence

The room open at noon,
if you would like to visit early and socialize.

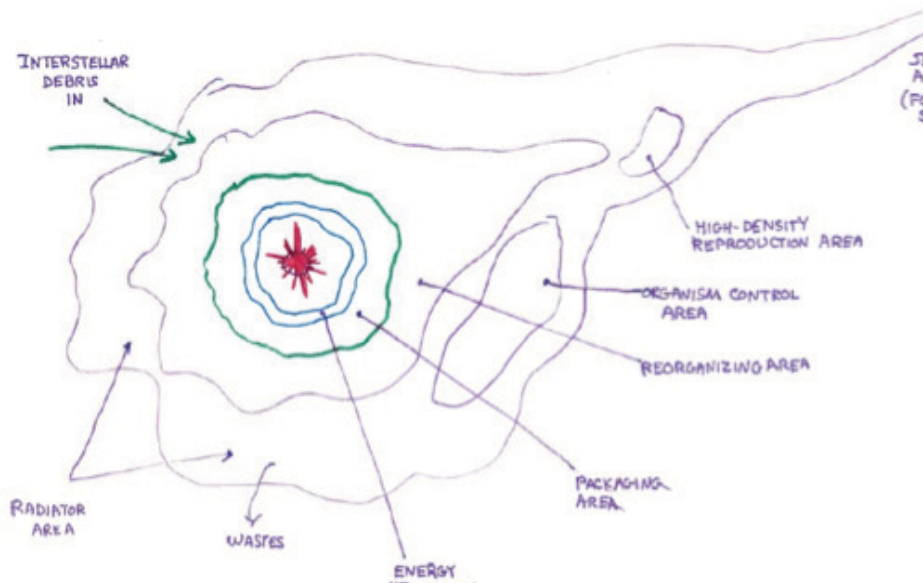
Hypothetical Circumstellar Space Metaorganizms

Francis Graham
Kent State University

Is it possible to have, floating in space, some sort of gigantic metaorganism?

Indeed! The presence of megaton amounts of amino acids floating in gaseous nebulae would open the possibility of a few enormous, 10^{12} meter-sized space organisms, living in the vacuum-like environment, enclosed in a protective exoskeleton, engaging in an interaction with a complex ecology in the nebula involving hydrogen gas and various organic substances.

Such a gigantic organism could develop intelligent characteristics yet to smaller, more spritely organisms, such



as ourselves, it might not be immediately distinguishable from a purely physical system due to the long times for chemical exchanges (order of $\sim 10^3$ years). Many years of study might be required to confirm it is indeed “alive”.

Chemical exchange in this organism would occur by ion current exchanges between its various parts. For energy, the metaorganism might surround the parent Sun.

Such a metaorganism might be the cause of the odd photometric behavior of Tabby's Star, which has been suspected by some astronomers of harboring a Dyson Sphere.

The star is called Tabby's Star, after Tabitha Boyajian, an early lead author, and also bears the designation KIC 8462852. It is visible in the refractor here as a very faint 11.7 magnitude dot—about the same apparent brightness as Saturn's major moons. It is located between the star omicron-1 Cygni and the nebula NGC 6866 in Cygnus, at astronomical coordinates Right Ascension 20h 6 m 15.457 s, Declination 44° 27' 24.61". It is 1,480 light years away.

The star has an aperiodic obscuration much greater than a planet, with a 15% dip on March 5, 2011, and a 22% dip in light February 28, 2013. This rules out a Jupiter-sized planet or brown dwarf. It also rules out a larger companion or a mass of interstellar dust, the latter because there is essentially too little long-wave infrared or radio, either artificial or thermal. It is as if whatever is partly surrounding this star is taking its energy and converting it at high efficiency with very little waste heat. It is hard to imagine a natural system that would do this.

No wonder it is called also the WTF star, semi-officially for “Where's the Flux?”

But it is nothing more stranger than a Dyson Sphere, built by tool-using tiny socially organized organisms, to have a single gigantic mega-organism spanning millions of kilometers. This must be added to the list of possibilities.

Sensitivity Training: Zootopia, Inside Out

Bill Hall

Minority rights? Racial profiling? Violence-inducing drugs? Do we really need to grapple with these issues, and within a kids' movie?

Yes. Yes, we do, and that movie is *Zootopia*.

1991 saw an interesting renaissance of the so-called kids' movie with *Beauty and the Beast*, but Disney seemed to lose that spark rather quickly. After the can't-fail Robin Williams vehicle that was *Aladdin*, they took a stab at resonant depth with *The Lion King*. (*King* still gets on my nerves, but I am evidently in a tiny minority.) *Pocahontas* strove to squeeze as much comic relief out of Meeko and Flit as possible, while *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was just ... weird. *Mulan* was good, but by then Pixar's star was ascending and no one really cared anymore.

Evidently it's still hard to care. I enjoyed *John Carter* and *Tomorrowland*, both of which are official flops. Now, however, that Disney has dared to tread upon Pixar's territory (that is to say, mastery of CGI), something remarkable has happened (at least for the moment). They have at last managed that trickiest balance of all, between substance and satisfaction. *Inside Out* had fun with the idea of different personalities running one person – the Nineties TV show “Herman's Head” leaps to mind – but along with that fun came startling poignancy. This year, *Zootopia* manages a seemingly effortless blend of the personal and the political.

In a world (oh, Don LaFontaine, how you haunt me still) of humanoid clothes-wearing animals but no actual humans, a civilization called Zootopia has arisen where predator and prey can live together in peace – eh, but there can still be some rough edges. Judy Hopps is a zesty young bunny fairly bubbling over with can-do optimism. She aspires to

be a police officer, in spite of that having traditionally gone to bigger, more macho species. I appreciated how Judy was able to pass her training through indirect action, such as whipping herself around a boxing ring and knocking out a rhino with his own fist. She soon collides with Nick Wilde, a scam artist fox, and it falls to this unlikely team (shades of *48 HRS* – in fact, they are originally given only 48 hours) to figure out what has transformed a meek gentle otter into a ferocious beast.

I find the sheer cleverness of *Zootopia* quite awe-inspiring. (In fact, I like to think the whole plot got started when someone said “Bellwether would make a great name for a character – what's the most we can get out of that?”) Where *Inside Out* tried to bridge a generation gap, *Zootopia* makes the case for bridging a whole other sensitive gap. Yet each movie sensibly keeps in mind the importance of comedy. With *Inside Out*, I can imagine the pitch “Lewis Black is Anger” and someone replying “Yes, we know that already, but what does he do?” In *Zootopia*, not only is the Department of Motor Vehicles staffed entirely by sloths, but we actually get to see a joke's punchline dawning upon a sloth's brain, the sleepy eyes lighting up, the grin spreading ever wider. I must confess to my own slowness in owning up to the importance of these movies. Some “kids'” movies, you get dragged to. Others, you should just go to. So go.

Fantastic Artist of the Month

Leo and Diane Dillon



Unlike the mainly realistic cover and interior art of most genre books today, the illustrations of the late Leo Dillon and his wife, Diane Dillon, were often more stylized and abstract. During their more-than-fifty year career together, they created images that evoked more than just a picture of what happened inside the book but a whole range of otherworldly emotions and ideas. For both children and adults.

They met as students at the Parsons School of Design in New York, graduated in 1956, and were married in 1957.

Some of their more famous works are the covers of an edition of the *Wrinkle in Time* series by Madeline L'Engle, and the paperback editions of some of Harlan Ellison's works. They won the Caldecott Medal in both 1976 and 1977, the first time the prestigious award for American picture book illustration was won consecutively by any artist.

Leo Dillon died in 2012 but recent information on Diane alone was impossible to find. Here's hoping she's still creating beautiful and unique art. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_and_Diane_Dillon



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Dues: Full Membership \$15

Associate Membership \$3 (with full member in the same household)

PARSEC is Pittsburgh's premiere organization of science fiction, fantasy and horror. We sponsor an annual conference, workshops for young writers, lectures, and other events that promote a love of the written word and a passion for speculative fiction. Our members include writers, teachers and fans. PARSEC is a 501c3 non-profit corporation.