

SIGMA

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CONFLUENCE

PITTSBURGH'S PREMIER SF/F/H LITERARY CONFERENCE...AND MORE -- JULY 29-31, 2016

July 29-31, 2016

Sheraton Pittsburgh Airport Hotel



Guest of Honor:
Saladin Ahmed



Featured Filk Guests:
Jeff & Maya Bohnhoff



Special author: Klingon guest
Lawrence M. Schoen



Special Music Guest:
Steve Goodie

President's Column



The right honorable Professor Samuel R. Hodgkins, Chair of Meta-ontological Studies, Cornwall University, Author of *The Many Myth-Takes of History, A Revelatory Tale of the Archetypical Mandala*, sat on an uncomfortable folding chair on the stage of the auditorium of Wolford Hall. His talk was well attended. There were more than twenty people in the sea of red plush sheets. At least half were giggling at the rear of the hall passing around a joint rolled with dirty brown papers. Professor Hodgkins was encouraged by the whispers of “O! Wow!” that issued with some regularity. Tonight was the introduction of his stunning new thesis.

Dean Forsythe began to wrap up the endless announcements that accompanied every Rafaela and Rafael Contorini Monthly Memorial Lecture. Hodgkins was selected this evening, thirtieth month into the series, not so much for the prestige, but because the Joint Psycho-Philosophy Department was scraping the absolute bottom of the barrel. Last month, they presented a cartoon retrospective featuring a pirated 8mm version of “Steamboat Willy” with a two-hour exposition afterward by the entire staff of Carl’s Fun-Attic, the local comic book emporium.

Forsythe abruptly ended his encomium to the professor. Hodgkins unfolded like a tall joint-spindled insect, knocked over the chair, and moved toward the podium with his hands up in the air, staying the audience, who were either politely clapping or swooning and chanting.

“Good evening.” he said, “it is my great pleasure to be here this evening. I have reached a new plateau in my research considering the use of one overarching myth of all humankind, a Grand Unified Myth if you will.”

From the back of the room, someone shouted, “A GUM?”

“Well, my young friend, it is what I have come to call it. I was following a line of bread crumbs from...”

“Chewing bread crumbs in your GUM can be downright irritating, Doc.”

Hodgkins continued undaunted “...the Argent expedition, which was charged with studying the rivers of Deutschland as they relate to the Psycho-Philosophy of our beginning times. Argent himself mentions that somewhere around Berzekheim Om Rhine, Wotan, the potent Teutonic Godhead, was blinded in one eye in a ferocious tussle with a wombat. It was after his disability that he made his descent into the Underworld, to save the love of his life, Lotte, the Lenya.

“I guess that took him quite a Weil, Doc.”

“Humh, quite so, my young Niebelung. We must now switch our focus to the Valley of the Kings, Egypt, where quite another mystical Godhead makes his appearance under the auspices of a Rosetta translation. Many an evening I sat puzzling over the peculiar encoding of the ancient Egyptian mummery. Finally, the lids of my eyes heavy, I had a dream about a squash and the London Underground. Enlightenment followed in a flash. I realized that Osiris, a god made whole by his wife Isis, except for his penis, also lost an eye to a bird. Horus, to be sure, but an avian creature, nonetheless.”

“You sure Isis didn’t just loose his RX for Viagra when she was out shopping, Doc?”

“Certainly, my young Imhotep, I gave the notion of impotence a glance. One must at my age, you know. I set the idea aside as quickly as I considered it. I discovered that Osiris himself, made a trip to the Underworld to free his mate, Isis, from the clutches of the Unwashed People of Wombat. This was astounding to news to me. This parallel development of two Gods separated by a geography of two thousand miles, disconnected by a sea, on two different continents. It was the proof of my GUM thesis.

“Well, just what the hell are you saying, Doc?”

“Why, that Wotan is a Rhine Osiris, of course.”



From the Editors



Mea Culpa!

Mea Maxima Culpa!

If this edition comes to your home late, it is entirely my fault. Honest, I thought I had another week. To string together this June edition of Sigma.

You will see that Larry has done a yeoman's job of filling this issue. (Thanks to Eric Davin and Bill Hall, as well) To paraphrase Harry Truman, what the hell is a yeoman anyway? Which reminds me. Where are the thousands of words of articles from Parsec Members and Friends about the impact of SF on life? An exposition of the deeper meaning of popular culture on the American psyche? The threat of social extinction through dystopian notions? Your latest encounter at the local cinema? A wax-coated cardboard cylinder from 1897 about the Mars landing you discovered in the attic? A polaroid of a UFO taken over Swissvale on a dark Middle Atlantic evening? A sketch of Pickman's Models? So we can fill these pages with gobs of gracious goodness. C'mon, I know you want to expose yourself.

Now, the following is in every way a warning. If you don't give a hand, (lend a voice?), there's a metaphor aborning somewhere; then you will unleash the full logorrheic cascade of Larry and me on the pages of Sigma. Don't think for a moment that we can't do it. Especially Larry. Did you ever hear him talk?

And me? I've patterned my writing life on Leo Gorcey as Terence Aloysius "Slip" Mahoney in the Bowery Boys. You can expectorate something monumuddle from me.

Write to us. We are lonely.

Sigma@parsec-sff.org

or

Submit (how lovely is that?) a story or sketch or photo or audio file at <http://parsec-sff.org/contact-us/submissions/>

How did it get to be June? Why just this weekend it was May. Sometime before that April.

- Joe Coluccio

PARSEC Smile at Amazon

Parsec, a non-profit organization is a member of the Amazon Smile Program.

When you shop at smile.amazon.com, Amazon donates to your favorite charitable organization.

Go to smile.amazon.com from a web browser. Then select a charitable organization (PARSEC Location: Pittsburgh, PA | Year Founded: 2007) to receive donations.

In the future go to the smile.amazon.com page when you shop and Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to Parsec.

We appreciate your help.

May 2016 Minutes



Unpleasant but well worth catching – once. That was the impression I got of a Western horror movie called *Bone Tomahawk* starring Kurt Russell which got discussed before the meeting. President Joe wore his *Weird Tales* tie, and Larry Ivkovich noted that the tie was specifically Margaret Brundage artwork. (We've been writing and talking about her lately.)

We were pleased to have two newcomers, John, and Khalil. In June, we should have Timons Esaias talking about Percival Lowell and the mysterious canals of Mars. (We are forewarned of possible sarcasm.) Larry says he's read the "unexpurgated" "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and it is available for anyone to look at. Greg Armstrong cited books in the Parsec library: Saladin Ahmed's "Throne of the Crescent Moon" (Ahmed is our Confluence GOH), Benford and Niven's "Bowl of Heaven" (think "Dyson hemisphere," so designed as to redirect stellar energy), the Harry Dresden adventure "Wizard For Hire," Gail Carriger's steampunk tale "Etiquette and Espionage" – and, oh yeah, something called "Dracula" by some guy named Stoker. Local YA author Joshua David Bellin promises us an "eco-fiction" called "Scavenger of Souls," due out in August. Mike Watt has a "V-Wars" book out. (V is for both vampires and virus, I'm guessing.)

Joe is heading to Pulpfest in Columbus for the 90th anniversary of *Amazing Stories*. Jeff Mierzejewski let us know we can still get online to contribute Confluence panel topics. Our picnic is in Dormont again, on August 27. Neither Eric Leif Davin nor Mary Soon Lee was on hand to read to us this time. Kira won the raffle prize, "Immodest Proposals," the first of three volumes of the complete works of our own William Tenn (Phil Klass). But must Kira now somehow win the other two volumes, I wonder?

Our presentation was an extension of a prior one about science fiction and Westerns. Our speaker once more was Bill Watt, this time focusing on how science fiction writers often contributed to Western fiction. (Seems only fair, since for a struggling and/or committed writer any market was fair game. Somewhere along the way Barton Paul Levenson left us a notice that his Western-style SF story "Side Trip" is featured in *Science Fiction Trails* #2 2007.) First, thought, dressed with the badges of both sheriff and Starfleet, Bill reasserted his fondness for TV's "Firefly" and "The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr." He noted that there is an anthology called "Sturgeon's West" recording Westerns written by Theodore Sturgeon, and went on to insist a second time that we check out a character named Bluefeather Fellini created by one Max Evans. He went on to note three Westerns written by Will Jenkins (better known as Murray Leinster) and Clifford Simak. The best works may be those of Richard Matheson, some of which can be found in the source "The Twilight and Other Zones." Sort of in the Matheson vein, he speculated on another talk about the overlap of Westerns and eerie tales. Sounds all right by me.

He wrapped up with a poem about a man's quest to buy a bra, which got enthusiastic applause from ex-President Jean Martin.

Our headcount was 25.

Secretary Bill Hall

Risingshadows

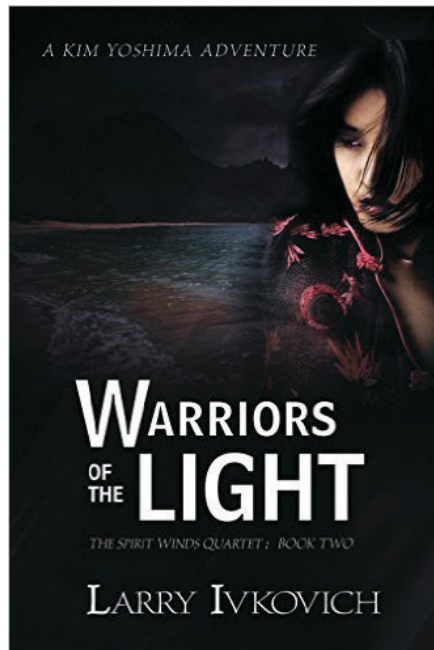
A recent discovery of mine has been the website *Risingshadow*, which describes itself as a genre database.

It's quite a nice-looking site and is filled with a lot of very well organized information primarily on SF and Fantasy. Lots of reviews and articles, an online library, and a forum. They've also got a Goodreads-type format on part of the site where you can build a bookshelf of personal favorites and chat with other fans.

They recently posted a tribute to David Hartwell and also reviewed my new novel, *Warriors of the Light*.

<http://www.risingshadow.net/>

- Larry Ivkovich



Directions to Confluence

By bus from downtown Pittsburgh:

Take the 28X Airport Flyer to the airport, then use the complimentary hotel airport shuttle. Consult the Port Authority Transit page for more information on the [28X Airport Flyer](http://www.portauthority.org/paac/SchedulesMaps/AirportService.aspx) (<http://www.portauthority.org/paac/SchedulesMaps/AirportService.aspx>). Hotel shuttle schedule can be found here: [Parking and Transportation](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/area/transportation.html?propertyID=3725) (<http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/area/transportation.html?propertyID=3725>).

Driving directions:

Due to the possibility of construction and traffic, it would be best to consult [511PA](http://www.511pa.com) (<http://www.511pa.com>) right before you leave. To see the Pittsburgh area, in the "ZOOM TO" box on the top left, choose "Southwestern Region (Pittsburgh)".

GoogleMaps usually does a good job of getting you there in the Pittsburgh area.

The hotel offers customized driving directions here: [Driving Directions](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/area/directions.html?propertyID=3725) (<http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/area/directions.html?propertyID=3725>).

Hints for a more pleasant drive:

If you are arriving Friday evening, Pittsburgh rush hour is usually 4 – 7 pm. Try to avoid areas close to downtown Pittsburgh during those times. The sections of I-376 and I-279 within the downtown area are particularly congested. If you click on Pittsburgh on GoogleMaps, it will zoom in and show the outline of Pittsburgh city limits. Any major road within that area is going to be backed up during rush hour.

Either plan your arrival to hit downtown Pittsburgh before 4pm or stop and have something to eat and finish the drive around 7pm.

Parking

Parking is free if you are staying at the hotel, or attending Confluence. They have a \$5 a day fee for people who leave their car at the hotel and leave for longer than a day.

X-Files Lite - The Copycats Are Out There

Special Unit 2 and *The Chronicle*:

Two of the unsuccessful television shows
inspired by and following in the wake of
The X-Files.

by Larry Ivkovich

With the success of both public and cable television shows like *Fringe*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *Supernatural*, *Grimm*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Warehouse 13*, *Lost*, *True Blood*, and other programs of the Sci-Fi/Fantasy/Horror ilk, one would think the preternatural and all things bizarre were an easy sell to the TV viewing public anywhere at any time.

But not always. For a while during the late nineties and early 2000's, despite a concerted effort by television networks to duplicate the success of the phenomenally popular series, *The X-Files*, several TV shows surfaced and floundered quickly. All possessed similar setups and storylines involving strange beasts and unexplained phenomenon, yet none survived very long.

One such program, lasting only 19 episodes was *SPECIAL UNIT 2*, airing from 2001 to 2002. An American show filmed in Vancouver, this show followed the exploits of two detectives, Nick O'Malley and Kate Benson, in a special Chicago police unit that investigated appearances of fantastical beings called "Links" (as in Missing Links).

Some Links were straight out of mythology like SU2's own Carl, a bad-tempered gnome who served as a sort of bridge between the human world and that of the Links. Other times, these creatures could be the result of human folly like the creature that self-evolved from waste fat thrown out by liposuction clinics. Not only did he look like the Michelin Man but could stretch his body like Mr. Fantastic or Plastic Man. I'm not making this up.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Unit_2

THE CHRONICLE, a series that also aired for one season in 2001 through 2002 on the then-named Sci-Fi Channel, related the adventures of a group of reporters and photographers at a tabloid newspaper. The hook being that tabloid staples such as cryptids, aliens, time-travel, alternate dimensions, etc. we all ogle in the supermarket checkout line and then deny doing it, are, in fact, real.

This revelation comes as a great surprise to Tucker, a serious journalist who can't find a job. In desperation, he takes a position at *The Chronicle*, joining forces with shutterbug, Wes and reporter, Grace (who claims to have been abducted several times by extraterrestrials).

A recurring character was Sal, the Pig-Boy, who resided in the basement of the building in a combination living quarters/laboratory and often assisted in solving the oddball cases. Hmmm, did the writers of "Seinfeld" contribute to this storyline?

Two of the more-recognizable stars of the show were John Polito (*Homicide: Life on the Street*, *Miami Vice*, and a zillion other TV and movie roles), and Rena Sofer (*CSI*, *Heroes*, *NCIS*, *Coupling*).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chronicle_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chronicle_(TV_series))

Both *The Chronicle* and *Special Unit 2* are available on DVD and/or NetFlix and are worth checking out just to see how far an idea or theme can be pushed, for good or bad. But most importantly, despite the derivative warts, they're fun to watch.



Special Unit 2 Cast



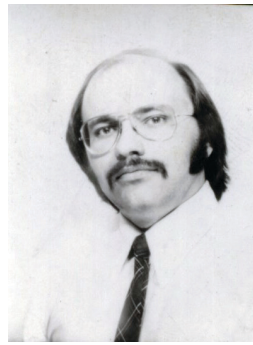
Chronicle Cast

Parsec Library

The Parsec Library has been open for business since 2011. With over 3200 science fiction, fantasy and horror books, it is one of the largest private collections of genre fiction in Pittsburgh.

It is currently located Greg Armstrong's house in Dormont, just minutes from a trolley stop and West Liberty Avenue.

To check out a book, make an appointment to visit or contact Greg Armstrong for delivery. He works at the Robotics Institute, so delivery to CMU students, faculty or staff is easy. Call 412-344-0456 or write to him at roboman@cmu.edu.



Brief Bio Eric Leif Davin L. Major Reynolds

"L. Major Reynolds" (Louise Leipiar) (?-?): She was a long-time active member of the famous Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS). She published a dozen science fiction stories between 1950-1955. She also published mysteries, e.g., "Second Chance," in Malcolm's Magazine (January, 1954), reprinted in the single-issue 1960 British magazine, A Book of Weird Tales. Editor Donald A. Wollheim lavishly praised her second published story, "The River," when he ran it in Avon Fantasy Reader No. 16 in 1951. He said the "unknown author" had not submitted it to him, but to "another Avon publication." Even so, it "piqued our imagination" when he saw it in the slush pile, as "this is no pulp story, and fits no magazine's formula." So, he snatched the "unknown author's" manuscript for his own publication.

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.

The Desperate And The Dead by Eric Leif Davin



The Pirates of Penzance it's not. Which is a very good thing.

A mixture of horror, the supernatural, bloody pirate violence, zombies, and populated with real persons and places, *The Desperate and the Dead* is both a novel for those interested in un-whitewashed pirates and history and a rollicking good read for all.

Longtime Parsec member Eric Leif Davin's entertaining mashup is filled with larger-than-life (and death) characters, voodoo, historical people and places, and enough pirate lore to satisfy even the most discriminating reader. Gritty, violent, and, at times, not for the faint-of-heart, *The Desperate and the Dead* provides real thrills and chills and a few surprises along the way. It is a page-turner.

The "Desperate" of the title are the human characters, coexisting in a world where real zombies, those of the "Dead," exist. Refreshingly, these zombies are not the more contemporary ones of the virus kind, though their bites do turn their victims into

the undead. They are people risen from their graves by voodoo.

In the novel's setting, the world has acclimated to zombies living among them. The Dead serve the living, working as servants, cooks, field hands, and ships' crews, completely obeisant to their living masters (Again refreshingly, a couple of zombie characters turn out to be more than just a mindless automatons, one of which, in fact, becomes very heroic, in a scene which is nicely done).

But the famous pirate Blackbeard, has other ideas. Power-mad and psychopathically evil, he's gathered a zombie army/navy and made a deal with the forces of darkness to release Hell's demons from the "Deadpit" into the world through human sacrifice. And not just any human sacrifice, but that of young female virgins. Blackbeard wants the world destroyed so he can rule over what's left.

It's up to the "good" pirates Bartholomew Roberts (as in "The Dread" from *The Princess Bride* fame), Ann Bonny, Black Caesar, Calico Jack, and prostitute-turned-nun Sister Sierra to fight against the insane pirate captain.

But it comes down to the young girl, Catalina, Sister Sierra's daughter who is marked for the requisite sacrifice, to stop Blackbeard's mad plan. Raised in a brothel and witnessing firsthand the demons' violent emergence from the Deadpit, Cat escapes from the unearthly attack with a pirate crew. It's a decision which forever changes her life and those around her.

Well-described action, great dialogue, and settings run throughout the novel. And if you ever think of pirates in a kind of romantic, glorified fashion, read this book. You'll never think that way again. Which is a very good thing.

Highly recommended.

- Larry Ivkovich



Parsec Meeting Schedule

Next Meeting - June 11, 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.

Timons Esaias
What Happened to the Canals on Mars???



In 1906, Percival Lowell published *Mars and Its Canals*, which laid out the scientific proof that Mars not only sustained life, but was under the control of an advanced civilization. The proof was in their globe-encircling canal system; a canal system that NASA has failed to account for. Timons Esaias will discuss the scientific failures that this case reveals, along with offering a number of theories as to what happened to those canals. There may be some sarcasm.

Fantastic Artist of the Month

Vincent Di Fate



Vincent Di Fate, born in Yonkers, New York, is this month's Fantastic Artist, who, not coincidentally, is one of my favorites. Like many of his contemporaries, he initially worked for the pulps, creating his first cover illustration for the November, 1969 issue of *Analog*. He's a master of different styles and genres.

He's won numerous awards, including the Hugo for Best Professional Artist in 1979 (being nominated a total of 10 times), the Chesley Award, the Frank R. Paul Award for Outstanding Achievement in Science Fiction Illustration, the Lensman Award, and the Edward E Smith Memorial Award for Imaginative Fiction.

He was inducted into the [Science Fiction Hall of Fame](#) on June 25, 2011.



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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.