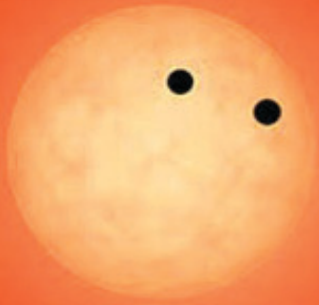


SIGMA

The Newsletter of PARSEC March 2017 Issue 372



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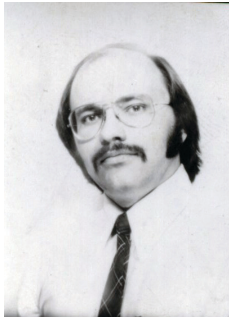
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February 2017 Meeting

Brief Bio

Eric Leif Davin

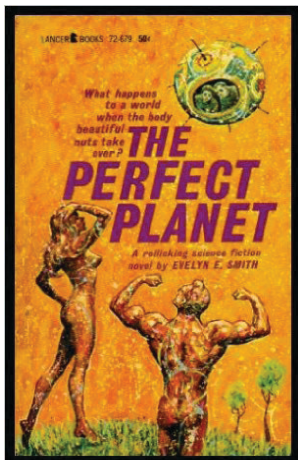


April Smith, Evelyn E. Smith, I. M. Stephens, w& G. B. Stern

April Smith, (? -?): Smith published two SF stories in the 1950s, "Settle to One" (Astounding, April, 1953) and "Birthright" (If, August, 1955). The 1953 story in Astounding was co-authored with Charles Dye, who was then married to SF author Katherine MacLean. It is possible she was therefore part of the same New York SF community as Dye and MacLean and who were then selling to Astounding editor John W. Campbell.

Evelyn E. Smith (1927-2000): A native resident of New York City, Smith wrote over 40 SF stories and appeared in almost all the SF magazines of the Fifties, primarily Galaxy. Her production of articles was even more prolific. She was also a professional compiler of crossword puzzles for publications ranging from Curtain and Drapery Magazine to The New York Times. Introducing her crossword themed story in the September, 1955 issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, editor Anthony Boucher said, "As a crossword addict myself, I am astonished to learn that these intricacies can be composed by a delightful and witty brunette in her twenties."

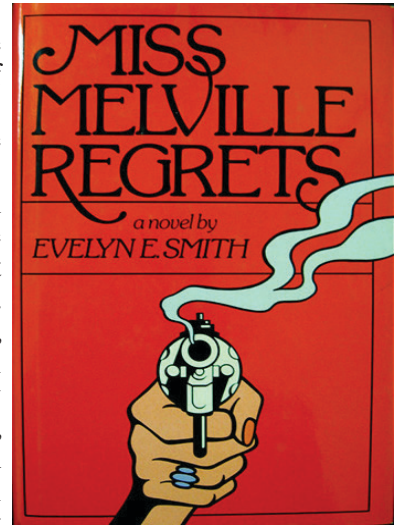
Her popular 1962 satirical novel, The Perfect Planet, concerned a planet that had originally been



established as a "fat farm" and developed that concept to an extreme after being isolated by an interstellar war. She also wrote SF and fantasy novels as "Delphine C. Lyons" (e.g., Valley of Shadows, 1968, and Unpopular Planet, 1975). As Lyons she also wrote the non-fiction 1972 book, Everyday Witchcraft. Her 1985 satirical novel, The Copy Shop, situated space

aliens in New York City -- where they were unnoticed.

Smith was also a mystery writer and created a unique character in the gently bred art teacher/painter female assassin "Miss Susan Melville." The first in the series of novels featuring this heroine, Miss Melville Regrets (1986), finds Miss Melville fallen on hard times after the genteel art school at which she taught closes. As a political protest, she decides to kill herself at a high society social event. However, she changes her mind and kills the hateful and morally corrupt guest of honor instead.



A secret group, which specializes in assassinations, which had also targeted the victim, then recruits her. In the following novels, her victims are always rich, pretentious, morally dubious individuals who "deserve to die," for one reason or another.

I. (Inga) M. (Marie) Stephens (Pratt Clark), (1906-1970): Stephens, of Norwegian heritage, was born in South Dakota. She left in her teens to study art at the Academie Colarossi in Paris and the Art Students League in New York. In 1926, at age 20 she married noted fantasy and science fiction author (as well as historian and biographer) Fletcher Pratt (1897-1956). An accomplished artist, she illustrated four of Pratt's books, including his well-known "Tales From Gavagan's Bar," co-authored with L. Sprague de Camp.

She was in great demand in New York as a freelance commercial artist specializing in fashion for magazines, newspapers, and department stores such as Bloomingdale's. She also co-authored a 1936 textbook, "Fashion Drawing."

In the early 1950s she and her husband hosted meetings at their Manhattan apartment of the Hydra Club, a group of science fiction writers that included Frederik Pohl, Lester del Rey, Judith Merril, "William Tenn" (Philip Klass), Harry Harrison, George O. Smith, Willy Ley, Martin Greenberg, Robert W. "Doc" Lowndes, and David A. Kyle.

Later they purchased a large house in Highlands, New Jersey, next door to that of science fiction writer Laurence Manning. They christened it the "Ipsy-Wipsy Institute" and continued to host gatherings of science fiction writers. Regular guests included members of the Hydra Club already mentioned as well as Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, Theodore Sturgeon, and

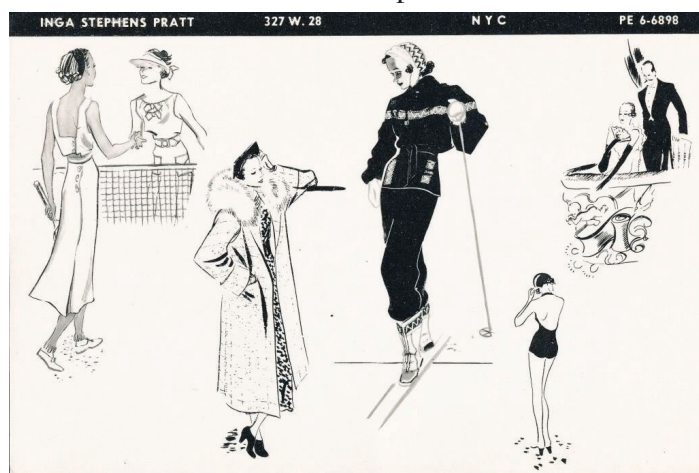
Manning. Other literary guests who attended these gatherings included John Ciardi, Basil Davenport, and Bernard DeVoto.

Fletcher Pratt frequently collaborated with



other authors and both of Stephens' early Thirties stories, both in *Amazing*, were collaborations with her husband. However, in a 1986 letter to me, legendary SF historian Sam Moskowitz, who knew the couple, commented that Pratt "was never a good story teller" and that "his wife, Inga M. Stephens, collaborated with him for years on his early science fiction." If so, none of this was credited to her. But, the two stories we have from Stephens might be two in which her contributions were so extensive that Pratt felt obligated to finally credit her.

Both Pratt and Stephens were Christian



Scientists, which may explain why Stephens was referred to as "a scientist" in the blurb for her story with Pratt, "A Voice Across the Years," *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, Winter, 1932.

After Pratt's death, she married chemist and author John Drury Clark in 1962.

G. (Gladys) B. (Bronwyn) Stern, (1890-1973): Stern was a British mainstream novelist who published over 50 books in a half century career. Born in London, she married Geoffrey Lisle Holdsworth. Her more notable

novels include *Pantomime* (1914), *The Black Seat* (1923), *Tents of Israel* (1924, published in America as *The Matriarch*, later dramatized), *Thunderstorm* (1925), *Debonair* (1928, later dramatized), *Mosaic* (1930), *Monogram* (1936), *The Woman in the Hall* (1939), *Another Part of the Forest* (1941), and *The Young Matriarch* (1942). She died in Wallingford, England.

IT'S BACK!

21st Annual PARSEC Science Fiction/ Fantasy/Horror Short Story Contest

The theme for the 2017 contest is: **A HIDDEN, UNDERLYING TRUTH.**

Contest opens January 1, 2017 and closes March 31, 2017. There is no fee to enter and all entrants will be notified of the results by June 15th.

Word count for all entries: No more than 3500 words, no minimum.

Contest judges are:

JOSHUA BELLIN – Author of the YA SF duology, *Survival Colony Nine* and *Scavenger of Souls*.

MICHELLE MARKEY-BUTLER – Author of the historical fantasy, *Homegoing*.

THOMAS SWETERLITSCH – Author of the near-future SF thriller, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*.

Information on submitting and additional details can be found on the Parsec website at:

<https://parsecink.submittable.com/submit>

February 2017 Minutes



Before everything else, I must confess that I am deeply and genuinely chagrined, flummoxed, and otherwise gobsmacked that I misidentified our new Commentator, who is Michelle Gonzalez. I can only guess that perhaps my mind momentarily drifted to the actress Michelle Rodriguez who appears in Avatar and other movies, but these two Michelles are indeed very distinctly different, so I abjectly and unreservedly apologize to Michelle Gonzalez. This, by the way, was sort of how we got started, as Joe apologized for giving a January date for that February meeting. Joe has been somewhat diverted from Sigma by all the work he's throwing into an OSHR class called Hard Boiled America. Evidently this has been a disorienting winter.

Confluence of course is on, registration \$40 till April and then \$45 thereafter. Mary Soon Lee has poems nominated for the Rhysling award, and has seen six published and ten accepted. The Nebula Awards ceremony is coming to Pittsburgh in May. Our budget is somewhere over \$2800 and Greg informs us that we have about 3500 books in our own library,

among which are "Lord Foul's Bane," "The Ship Who Sang," and "The Invisible Man" by some guy named Wells. Larry Ivkovich treated us to old issues of the Waldenbooks in-house SF magazine Xignals. Mary read poems, of particular note one of advice concerning monsters under the bed. Kevin Hayes sang "I'm a Fan." Our raffle prize was a compendium of the last three Heinlein juveniles: "Have Space Suit Will Travel," "Starship Troopers," "Podkayne of Mars." The raffle raised \$32 and the winner was recent attendee (as opposed to pure newcomer) George Obsince.

With speaker Leah Pileggi we veered from strict F&SF to talk about writing itself. A student of writing from Chatham and CMU, she found herself touring Boise, Idaho and got walked through their old state penitentiary. Noted in passing was one ten-year-old prisoner, one James Oscar Baker, who shot a man in a saloon in 1885. Pileggi became fascinated by the story behind this boy and threw herself into research, fictionalizing the boy as "Jake Evans." There were Mormons and Chinese among the inmates, and because the prison had to be self-sustaining, everyone had a job. They had musical instruments, among them a so-called Chinese banjo. The prisoners were enlisted into helping to build a new prison with walls of sandstone rather than wood, but did not feel that "into" the project, and enjoyed wasting dynamite. The boy was eventually adopted by benefactor Cyrenius Mulkey, grew up, got married, and had kids. This project took Pileggi three years and resulted in the book "Prisoner 88," which has received a lot of acclaim and is available in libraries. Autographed copies were available.

Our headcount reached 26.

Secretary Bill Hall



1960 World Con in Pittsburgh - William Penn Hotel

SF and Rock

by Larry Ivkovich



2112, the fourth album by the Canadian progressive rock band, Rush, was the group's first major commercial success. Released in 1976, 2112 is a concept album with a science fiction theme. On the original LP, the story of 2112, being 20 minutes long, is told on the first side of the album. The remaining songs are stand-alone with no connection to the album's concept. So, it's really more of a concept half-album.

In the year 2112, the galaxy has come under the rule of the Red Star of the Solar Federation. Within that cruel, far-reaching empire, the tyrannical Priests of the Temples of Syrinx control everything and everyone. When a lone citizen discovers an ancient guitar (a sin and aberration to the priests, one which they believe has a corrupting influence), and how to play it, he sets events in motion which mark the beginning of the end of the Solar Federation.

The song cycle consists of "Overture," "The Temples of Syrinx," "Discovery," "Presentation," "Oracle," "Soliloquy," "Grand Finale."

"Overture" is an instrumental containing the individual song riffs. "The Temples of Syrinx" describes the priests from their point-of-view. "Discovery" relates the finding of the guitar. "Presentation" describes the guitar being presented to the priests and their rebuking of it. "Oracle" describes a dream the citizen has where the oppressed rise up. "Soliloquy" relates the citizen dying by his own hand. "Grand Finale" ends with a revolt and planetary conflict which results in the

Red Star of the Solar Federation and the Priests of the Temples of Syrinx being overthrown.

You can listen to the 2112 song cycle by accessing the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZm1_jtY1SQ



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We appreciate your help.



Parsec Meeting Schedule Saturday, March 11, 2017

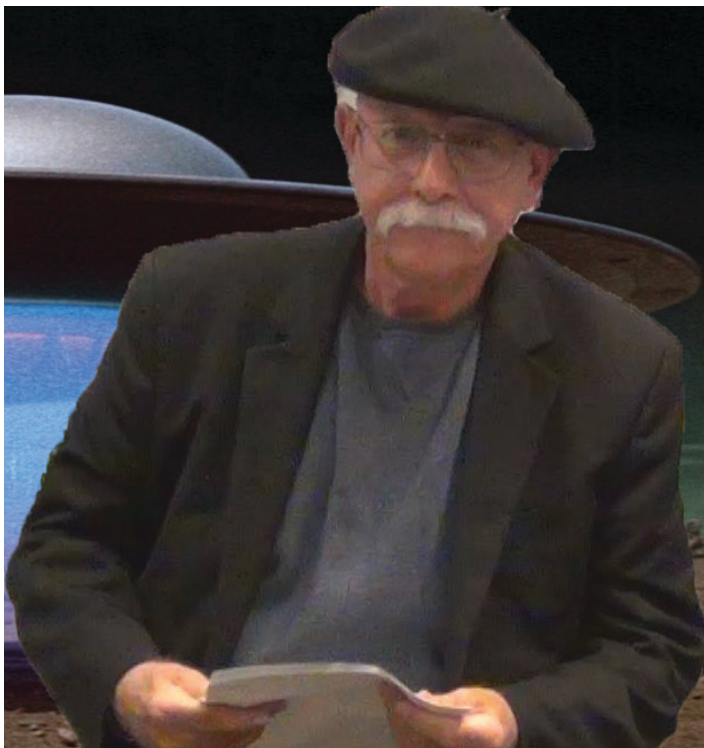
Picking Panels for Confluence

**Our yearly brain storming, mouth watering,
meeting to suggest possible topics for
Confluence Panels.**

Love the Poetry of World Extinction, or how about a discussion of the difference between the Electric Tater Masher of Tom Swift Sr and the Electronic Pickle Slicer/ Dicer of Tom Swift Jr, perhaps a colloquium on the works of Alfred, the Bester, or a manifestation of Streampunk, the all new, all the time Internet meme mime.

It is your turn, sandworm! Attendance is laudatory!

Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library
Room B - Next to the Rear Entrance
1:30 - 4:30 PM
Come in and introduce yourself
The room is open at noon.



President's Column

I walk 47 miles of barbed wire. Sometimes you just feel all Bo Diddley. I use a cobra-snake for a necktie. Usually, with me, it starts with the music. I got a brand new house on the roadside made from rattlesnake hide. Knuckles dragging, feet a Frankenstein boot stomp on the floor. I got a brand new chimney made on top made out of human skull, Feeling just a little boastful. Now come on take a walk with me and tell me, who do you love? But this time around it was just a little different.

First of all January 2017 was a month full of little promise, unsatisfactory compromise, and a deluge of disappearing reward. Enough, as I am fond of saying, to piss off a saint. It was work work work work push push push push. There were the commitments that I kept on blowing. A stack as high Clarke's Fountain of Paradise, twenty-two thousand three-hundred geostationary miles, and just as accessible in our backward time. There was the unending responsibility of grinding at the sharp teeth of business rivals. Are we certain, Mr. Alighieri, that the fourth circle of hell isn't just, not nearly as colorful as you pictured it, around the corner of some neighborhood noir dark back alley?

February wasn't all that much better. Sure the weather was swell. And in that, I swear, came a glimmer. I was feeling it, that moment when ennui squeals to flee. A gradual loosening. Me dreams was crusted with the id fulfilled architecture of Morbius, who could set that Krell instrumentality to strumming' O! Yeah. To a very high pitch. Explosive. Just like C'mell on Alpha Ralph Boulevard. Though her plight was less dire.

The Lords of Instrumentality began to reconstruct "the old culture, the old ways." Bless us O Lords for these your gifts. Take us from boredom to perilous times.

So, banked by some sun damping fog, far and away boring in from an Exospheric introversion came one small twinkle, through the Thermos, through the Mesos, through the Stratos, twisting the Bozone, into my Tropos. It wasn't the music, though there was a beating all around me. More delicious than a drumstick on the Sunday platter. It was a hearkening back. Holy day morning an array of meatball sandwiches and bottles of Vernor's Ginger Ale, couple napkins, reading the weekender Sun Tele and the Press comics strips pages. Flash and Dale were there in the pen of Alex Raymond, beautiful and burned into my memory. On the patio, my father managed never to finish the concrete surface, in a dead hot sun on a day so clear you could see to the end of time, Volume 67 #5 Astounding Science Fiction Magazine precarious on my inclined lap, finger sticking lemonade, head lulling, more time than I could ever imagine.

The thought grew until it burned a hole big enough that even I could recognize it. My life is made up of so many little pieces it would take a view from the far bubble of the cosmos to recognize it. I know so many things. From so far ago. That make so little difference. Some nights, when it is absolute cold, and I am shivering under a sky velvet and plush as an Elvis painting, I think I get it.

PARSEC
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www.parsec-sff.org

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.

Retro Artist of the Month

Virgil Warden Finlay



was born and raised in Rochester, New York.

Virgil created nineteen color covers for Farnsworth Wright, Editor of *Weird Tales Magazine* between 1935 and 1953.

Finlay served in the US Army during World War II and saw combat in the South West Pacific Theater. He made posters and illustrations for the Morale Services during his three years of military service.

After demobilization Finlay did a considerable amount of work for science fiction magazines and books. By the end of his career he had created over 2500 illustrations



Finlay was known for his bold and fantastic images of aliens, demons spaceships, fantastic landscapes, seductive women, robots. While he worked both in color and black and white, he is best known for his interior black and white illustrations.

His unique illustrating approach combined scratchboard with intricate cross hatching and a painstaking method of creating tones called stippling. This combination manner produced amazingly detailed and textured images.

"Finlay was perhaps the greatest craftsman in the history of Illustration," states the article devoted to him in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*.

Finlay died of cancer in 1971 at the age of 56.

In 1996 Finlay was awarded a Retro Hugo for the Best Artist of 1946

