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## New Earth Theater film lassos fury of storms

Friday, December 22, 2000

By Adrian McCoy, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Many people wonder what a storm chaser sees, but would be inclined to run the other way if they actually saw a tornado or hurricane. They can get a pretty vivid feel for the sights and sounds of nature's most extreme forces in "Force Five," a new presentation opening tomorrow in the Carnegie Museum of Natural History's Earth Theater.

"Force Five" is the latest production to open in the year-old Earth Theater. It replaces "The Millennium Show," the premiere production, which explored the origins of the solar system and the earth. Another production about geography is geared to school groups and also is screened on weekends at the museum.

"Force Five" was made in collaboration with the Houston Museum of Natural Science and will open there in May.

It teaches basic lessons about extreme weather and natural phenomena, which are driven home with eye-catching visuals and crisp digital sound.

In addition to showing how hurricanes and tornadoes form, and seeing the destruction they cause, the viewer is also pulled into the storm with compelling animation and video images. The dramatic visuals include funnel clouds and aerial shots of a hurricane eye, and amazing sequences of flying into the storm.

Segments show the devastating force five hurricane that hit Galveston, Texas, in 1900, and the Oklahoma City tornado of 1999. Another shows the eruption of Mount St. Helens.

But all these earthly disturbances are ultimately dwarfed by the final sequence, which illustrates and explains solar flares, and their effect on our planet.

The animations are spectacular, but also strive for scientific accuracy. When they were completed, they were put on a Web site, where a group of scientists looked at them and offered feedback.

The dramatic 3-D sequences were done by Sybil Media in Houston. The soundtrack and video portions were produced here.

The technology behind this production is as interesting as the subject matter.

The theater's 70-foot-wide screen arcs around the audience, so that the images fill the viewer's field of vision. The SkyVision system projects half a billion pixels per second, via five light projectors, making the resolution superior to HDTV. The sound system has been upgraded, and new software added to create more visual effects.

"Force Five" will be converted to a format that can be shown in a domed planetarium theater, by adding imagery to fill the top of the screen.

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### 'FORCE FIVE'

**WHEN:** The film opens tomorrow and will be shown daily.


**WHERE:** Carnegie Museum of Natural History's Earth Theater.

**TICKETS:** \$2 person, plus regular museum admission.  
412-622-3131

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There are only a handful of venues around the country equipped to show productions like this, and the library of works to show is just beginning to form. So the potential for subject matter is wide open, says Kerry Handron, Earth Theater director and "Force Five" creator.

These exhibits are relatively inexpensive to produce, compared to film, because of the all-digital technology used to create them: "Force Five" cost under \$100,000, and that includes the added costs for the planetarium version: The Earth Theater version alone would have cost about \$50,000. That makes them "the wave of the future" for museum and science theater presentations, Handron says.

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