

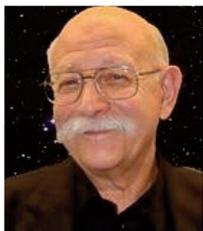


# Sigma

The Newsletter of PARSEC - [www.parsec-sff.org](http://www.parsec-sff.org)

April, 2015 - No. 349

## President's Capsule



by Joe Coluccio

It seems that spring has sprung.  
Turns my head metaphorically  
and practically to re-creation.

I'm not sure what clod put the be-  
ginning of the year at frigid and fal-  
low January, but it would have been  
better done in April. Oh, if I'm ever  
emperor...

So, what of SF in this "new" beginning?

It is harder than ever to bring to light new SF works  
and new talent, what with everyone publishing every-  
thing everywhere. I read all the mags both pro and not  
and am amazed at the sheer vision exhibited on the  
digital and print pages. So many great voices, so  
many grand images. So little time. How do we shift  
through it all? Who is at hand to curate it all for us?

I think one of the points of focus of the Parsec  
monthly meeting is to bring information about what  
is happening in SF from the members who attend to  
the members who attend. If you don't show up, you  
are missing something priceless.

Although I have objected to the name, many still  
call this meeting function of Parsec, the Club. But  
Parsec is a club of enthusiasts who come together  
monthly to meet and talk about the subject we all love  
and adore. SF.

Begs the question. If you're a member, why aren't  
you showing up?

Each month I put a sign up on the door of the meet-  
ing room of the Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie  
Library that states, "This meeting is free to the public,  
c'mon in we'd love to meet you." Same goes for  
members.

I've been President of Parsec for a year and three  
months. I hope the meetings have become more at-  
tractive, but at times I have added too many things to  
the schedule and have not left enough time for folks  
to talk together.

Parsec has the meeting room from 12 Noon to 5

PM. I arrive at about 12:30PM and will in the future  
be there by Noon. The hour or so before the meeting  
begins is a great time when people trickle in and talk  
spontaneously about what movies they have seen,  
what books they are reading, what conventions and  
shows they will attend. It is a wonderful time. I urge  
you to become part.

I have seen some email from people who are Par-  
sec members living out of city and state who have re-  
quested audio or video of the meetings. There are  
some problems with the idea. I will be glad to ask any  
of the guest speakers and others if they are willing to  
be recorded. BUT. Video and/or audio takes equip-  
ment. I don't perceive that as a real problem. I have  
enough audio equipment and can scrape together  
video equipment that will suffice. BUT. It takes more  
than one person to pull off an audio or video presen-  
tation of a meeting. Or someone who can fragment,  
duplicate and multitask.

We talk on and off about gathering people to vol-  
unteer help with the workload of all the branches of  
Parsec. Let me take this opportunity to ask on my  
own behalf. Anyone out there interested in taking part  
in recording the Parsec meetings?

Email me, call me, put a note to [president@parsec-sff.org](mailto:president@parsec-sff.org)  
on the web page. While you are there, look  
around the web page. There are plenty of places  
where we could use the help.

**PARSEC is Pittsburgh's premiere organi-  
zation of science fiction, fantasy and hor-  
ror. 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 spec-  
ulative fiction. Our members include  
writers, teachers and fans. PARSEC is a  
501c3 non-profit corporation.**

# Monthly Meeting Minutes

by William Blake Hall, Secretary

March 14, 2015

As my mind feels unusually preoccupied this month, I hope I can be forgiven for forgetting a lot of incidental details and just trying to report basics. We began with readings, first from some of Mary Soon Lee's forthcoming novel-length fantasy poem, and then Eric Davin read us the poem "Demon Lover" by Dorothy Quick. Who, you may ask, is Dorothy Quick? Evidently back in the days before Gernsback, when "spec fic" was championed by the magazine *Weird Tales*, that journal's most prolific poet was Dorothy Quick. Her name is not remembered much now, but Eric gave us a taste of her evocative work. Eric also reminded us that his story "Twilight on Olympus" is now up at *Galaxy's Edge*, and Christie Meierz also reminded us that her book "The Fall" is out. Our ex-Treasurer Sarah-Wade Smith can use help working on a DVD based on the RPG *Traveler* and getting it out by year's end. Greg Armstrong's Parsec library is up to 3180 books and this time around, in honor of the recent passing of author Terry Pratchett, he pushed Pratchett titles such as *The Vermillion Trilogy*, *Strata*, *The Color of Magic*, and *Mort*.

Word is that SFWA is starting to look at and accept small-press and self-published work. Diane Turnshek alerted us to a Young Adult fiction writing event at CMU featuring Joshua Bellin at 5 PM Sunday, April 12. She also called for reviews of local authors. The raffle raised \$45 and newcomer (or course) Caitlin got a Lovecraft anthology, *Great Tales of Horror*.

Our speaker was Joshua Raulerson, Ph.D., who is evidently also a radio personality. He spoke to us about his thesis on the whole Ray Kurzweil singularity concept. While in the past such talks have tended to get a bit overthick with "academese," actually seeming to corrupt comprehensible English and bog down ease of communication, Raulerson kept his talk accessible and used it as a kind of license for far-ranging observation. I felt gratified that he was not on some "Everything will soon be perfect once we surrender our humanity" mission.

Our own Kevin Hayes helpfully brought up the original physics definition of "singularity" and its re-

lation to "event horizon," a point at which the math becomes infinite. Though Kurzweil gets credit, Raulerson argued that the concept goes back to earlier work by Vernor Vinge. He also recommended such writers as Rudy Rucker, Charles Stross, and Cory Doctorow. The singularity has been called "the Rapture for nerds" and does indeed have its utopianism, in the form of "transhumanism" or "posthumanism."

This subject is good for exploiting such topics as nanotechnology and its possible impact (the recent Johnny Depp movie *Transcendence* springs to my mind), as well as "uploading of the self" (begging what constitutes the real "you") and economic issues in a world beyond scarcity. Once we are freed from a finite life span and the old scramble for material wealth, what new problems arise? Damon Knight was noted for his speculating on how such an economy might come about through techno-magical replicator machines, while Greg Bear has relied more on a "gray goo" nanotech. Raulerson also introduced us to the term "extropy," a kind of willful reversal of entropy, which reminded me of everything from Asimov's "Last Question" to the work of Ilya Prigogine. By the way, Raulerson's dissertation is online. He can PDF his book for an interested party.

And that could have been more or less it – except that Meeting Part 2 kicked in, with Kevin Hayes and Jeff Mierzejewski calling upon us to generate panel topics for this year's Confluence (for which we have some 45 individuals listed on the program). Topics that got kicked around included: Antarctica being anything like Mars, evolution and viruses, biology and astronautics, historical swordfighting techniques, Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, Theodore Sturgeon, Manly Wade Wellman, memorials for Pratchett and Nimoy, a Juanita Coulson filk round table, "Sects in Zero G" (SF and religion), the impact of 3D printing, choosing a best of the year in SF film, Immortality and the Law of Unintended Consequences (Wen Spencer was considered for that), What is Self-Awareness Good For, Is Space Going to Be White, SF comic books, The Marketing of Fear, a panel on the past ten years in SF (possibly involving David Hartwell) and – drum roll, Anton – Gateway Drugs for Young Readers. The con, it would seem, is on.

# Slime Gods, Crackers, Mutants and Robots

Henry Kuttner, Part One  
by Joe Coluccio

In many science fiction reference works Henry Kuttner is labeled as C.L. Moore's husband. A refreshing view. The works of women in early science fiction seldom take the lead and are masked by the wild whiff of puerile testosterone that seems to define the burgeoning field.

In the late 1930's Henry Kuttner, in New York, wrote an enthusiastic fan letter to a Mr. C.L. Moore, who lived in Indianapolis. A reply came from Miss Catherine Moore. They corresponded. Met a year or two later in Los Angeles. Married on June 7, 1940.

Both emerged as the most collaborative writers in SF. From the introduction to Henry Kuttner's novel

*Fury*, C.L. Moore writes, "We collaborated on almost everything we wrote, but in varying degrees. It worked like this. After we'd established through long discussion the basic ideas, the background and the characters,



whichever of us felt like it sat down and started. When that one ran down, the other, being fresh to the story, could usually see what ought to come next, and took over. The action developed as we went along. We kept changing off like this until we finished. A story goes very fast that way."

The works produced in that way are legendary as well as seamless and covered by seventeen noms de plumes.

But I'd like to weigh-in on the pre-Moore Kuttner.

Ray Bradbury points out in the introduction to "The Best of Henry Kuttner" that Kuttner remains forgotten and relatively unknown because, "Kuttner, then, was no moral revolutionary or political reformer. He was an entertaining writer. His stories are seeded with ideas and moralities, yes, but these do not cry out, shout, shriek, or necessarily ask for change. This is the way we are, Kuttner says, what do you think of

us?"

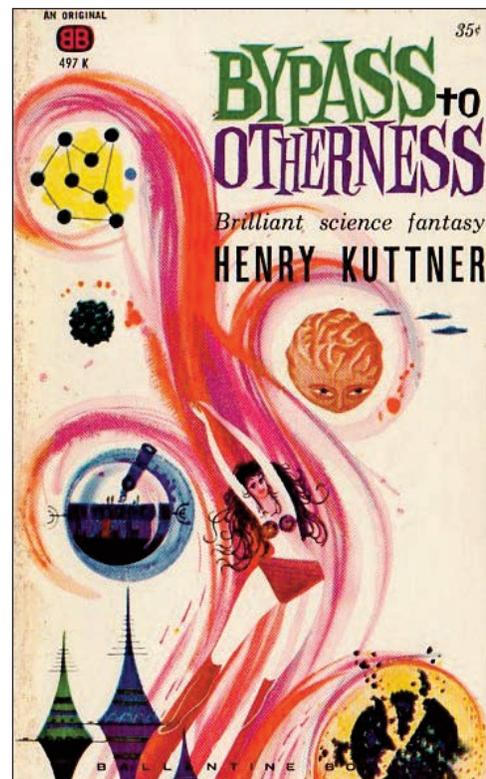
That statement resonates in what I like to consider my writing. I don't have any sense of how "entertaining" what I write is, but I do desire to seed my words with ideas and moralities. What you make of them is up to you, not me.

So, early Kuttner, the Kuttner who was mentor to a young Ray Bradbury and as a result, the rest of SF.

I refer you to three wonderful anthologies. "Terror in the House The Early Kuttner Volume One - Haffner Press 2010", where you will find much of Kuttner's work in the pulps -Weird Tales, Thrilling Mystery and Spicy Mystery. He emulated HP Lovecraft, Robert E Howard, and Clark Ashton Smith. I know Lovecraft has been raked over the deserved coals for his racist and anti-Semite attitude in the past couple years. Still, Kuttner's Tales of Chtulhu are as gooey and disgusting as his Howard influenced stories are exciting and his Smith-like stories are poetic.

"Thunder in the Void - Haffner Press 2012" reflects Kuttner's Space Opera at it's most vivid, and "Girl's for the Slime God, -Obscura Press 1997" puts those tales of brass bras, BEMs, and fainting women in naked perspective.

Read and let Henry Kuttner speak to you. This is all glorious stuff, as long as you can put away your delicate sensibilities, engage your sense of wonder and humor. Enjoy.



## Given That Premise

by Bill Hall

Laugh, go ahead, laugh at the tag line “The greatest modern horror movie to come from Detroit.” (Bet you thought that would be a remake of *Christine*.) But if you actually watch *It Follows*, written and directed by one David Robert Mitchell, you won’t feel like laughing.

For me it does feel a bit sketchy around the edges. No one ever stops to think “What about that weirdly mutilated girl they found by the lake?” And can’t the police notice that the kids in the house directly across the street from another bizarre killing are acting really freaky? And while I love how evocative it is, what’s the full story behind that house whose interior is a tribute to the final scene in Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation*? And, yes, I vaguely get that these are college-age kids somehow fending for themselves – but still, where do all the adults always vanish to? And that’s before we even touch upon the supernatural particulars of the threat. I caught the line “It can appear as someone you love” and I thought “Huh! Sort of like the Indian myth of the Rakshasa.” Yet that never comes up, as if it was an early idea that got discarded in the final draft.

And yet it works, complete with a built-in warning about promiscuous sex but without any David Cronenberg grotesquerie. A girl named Jay (Maika Monroe, a bit of an Emma Stone understudy) has sex with a guy who seems cool enough but at one time acted quite freaked about being followed. He knocks her out, then later explains to her that something’s been after him which only he can see coming, and he’s convinced that one answer is to have sex with someone and then have that person likewise pass the “curse” along by sex with yet another partner, so forth and so on. Yes, it does sound a bit like *The Ring*, although with no video technology rendered instantly obsolete to worry about.

*Follows* reminded me a little of *The Hidden* in its ability to get maximal firepower from almost no special effects, although there were inexplicable phenomena staying true to a legacy sustained by the Paranormal movies and going back to *Poltergeist* and *The Exorcist*. A stranger staring hard while walking straight up to you is rattling. Also rattling is total or even partial nudity. Something is very off, very wrong – and you want to get away from it. Again, I

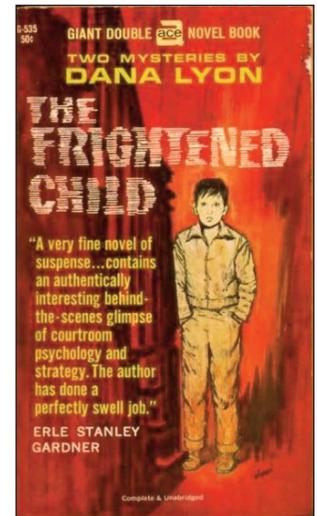
## Brief Bios

Kathleen Ludwick & Dana Lyon  
by Eric Leif Davin



**Kathleen Ludwick, (1892-1970?):** A resident of Oakland, California, Ludwick contributed to several pulp magazines in various genres, notably *Western Story*. She may have later moved to New York and died in Maryland.

**(Mabel) Dana Lyon (1897-1982):** Primarily a mystery novelist, her novels included *Retaliation* (1934), *It's My Own Funeral* (1944), *The Tentacles* (1950), and *The Trusting Victim* (1964). Her 1948 novel, *The Frightened Child*, was turned into the 1951 movie, *The House on Telegraph Hill*, directed by Robert Wise and starring Richard Baseheart.



had to wonder at particulars. If it’s steady but still slow, might not a simple plane trip settle this, leaving it to stomp around thousands of miles away? And are blind victims safe, or simply screwed? I also suspect that many horror fans would have loved to see this intensified by good gore effects. Personally, I’m fine with it as is, especially as a bit of a break from zombies. Yes, the evil dead are stalking us – but without visible bodies.

And, much like *The Evil Dead* it’s fun to pick apart. Out in the lobby I heard the theater owner say that the only part that didn’t hold up for him was Jay being able to sleep on the hood of her car – and he is one veteran movie watcher. If only because of that, I say that *Follows* leads.

# The Science in Science Fiction

## Beings of Pure Energy

by Francis Graham  
Kent State University

A theme in science fiction is that there can be beings of pure energy. Can such beings exist?

In science fiction, both in print and on the big and little screen, Energy Beings are all over the place. To some extent, this is because Energy Beings only require a couple of 300 watt colored lights and a fog machine, cheaper than a rubber mask! There are confusions between energy beings and invisible beings. Invisible beings are able to bend light around themselves, or, alternatively, match the index of refraction of air or water as they are immersed. The “Id” in *Forbidden Planet* was perhaps an invisible being. Energy beings must also be distinguished from astral beings, or beings of pure thought, who also appear in science-fiction. If such astral beings exist, they may be a sub-category of energy beings.

### Energy Beings in Science-Fiction

There are beings in science fiction with godlike powers, such as the Taelons or Q in *Star Trek*. Q is not clear whether he always inhabits a physical body, or prefers to, but could be considered some sort of energy being, although he inhabits an unknown and un-



knowable place called the Q-Continuum. The Vorlons of *Babylon 5* are energy beings; energy beings are also seen as able to communicate telepathically in science-fiction as well (as they have no real vocal apparatus). In science fiction, energy beings usually pop up when the writer wants a being that is

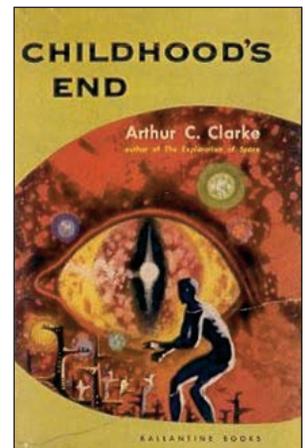
mentally far beyond human capacity. Often the energy being then creates a contradiction in the story by behaving in a human manner; we see this with Q. The argument is also made that such a being, in taking human form, inevitably acquires human attributes, a sort of Entychiaism.

In comics, Marvel introduced beings called the Etherials, which were either pure energy beings or astral beings. Zzzax was also one. Indeed, Marvel’s Living Laser being was the most convincing being of pure energy. In *Stargate SG-1* we find the “Ascended People”, who are also either energy beings or astral beings. The Embers of Muuat were certainly energy beings as well.

Mellvar’s species is a unique race of cloud-shaped energy beings from a planet called Omega 3 that have an electro-quantum structure which a human crew in a story, “Planet Express”, thought could be overloaded, but instead makes them grow.

*Titan AE* has pure energy beings called the Drej. In the original *Outer Limits* episode, “The Galaxy Being” we find an alien of pure energy who can transmit itself at the speed of light, and in “The Sixth Finger” Gwillam is proposing to evolve into such a being but his girlfriend Kathy thwarts it.

Arthur C. Clarke’s “Overmind” being in his 1955 novel *Childhood’s End* is an energy being.



The Organons in classic *Star Trek* appear to be so also.

The continued use of energy beings in science fiction shows that science fiction writers today are building on the popularity of religious themes, and indeed, energy beings are substitutes in many cases for religious figures such as sky gods. Unlike the 1930’s-1960’s, science fiction writers today are not rigidly committed to a physical materialist philosophy underlying their writing. Ultimately, this makes me a bit sad; however, this essay tries to pick up the pieces and examine if real physical energy beings could exist.

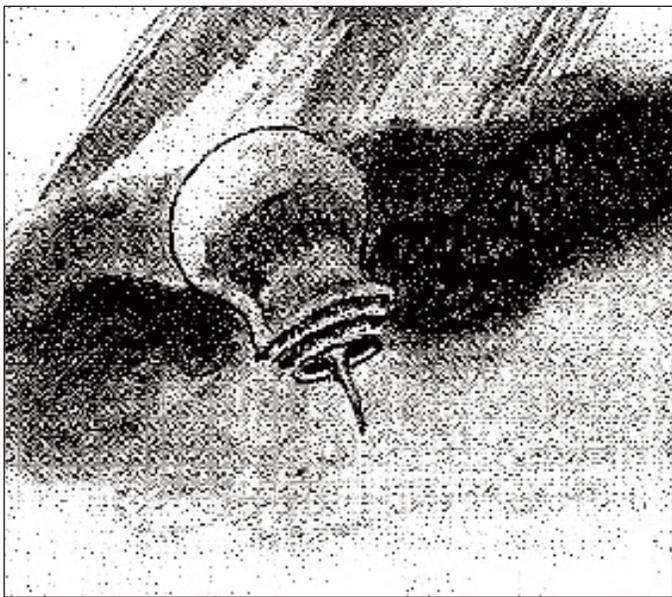
### Physics of Energy Beings

To be a being of any sort, we require the components to be extremely organized on a microscopic

level. For example, electronic beings are possible using microchip level or nano-electronic level organization, and these beings are primarily solid. They have not yet been built, but conceptually can be.

We are beings of mostly liquid; but the liquid is organized biochemically on a nano scale in structures called cells. The boundaries of cells are barely structural. As such beings, we have to assist us skeletons of mineral matter internally, or exoskeletons of calcium carbonate or sugar-like compounds.

One can see that indeed there could be gaseous beings as well, in which gases are microscopically organized to a high degree in nanostructures. In fact, such beings, decidedly balloon-like, were hypothesized to exist in the atmosphere of Jupiter by Carl Sagan and E.E. Salpeter. While it turned out they are



not floating about in Jupiter, it is easily possible that they exist in many of the billions of other gas giant planets in the Universe, or the scores orbiting the bright stars that we can see with our eyes at night.

From this, one can imagine beings with small structural components which are liquid-solid and contain pure energy. Because the energy systems are located inside microscopic structures, such beings could be called hybrid energy beings. But we need not just suppose such beings exist. Such beings actually exist on Earth, and possibly Mars as well. They are newly discovered electric bacteria, *Geobacter* and *Shewanella*. These streptobacillus bacteria act like wires and attaches themselves to a source of electricity—a natural battery on manganese rock, for example. The electricity goes through their microscopic bodies and keeps them alive. Food as we know it is unnecessary

to them.

Such bacteria on our planet ( and possibly, it is said, Mars, because of the presence of rock varnish on Mars, now known to be caused by bacteria ) are limited to colonial unicellular forms. But it is not much of a stretch to imagine an intelligent being operating on such a principle. This organism would need sources of electricity, it would need to keep plugged in somewhere. Or perhaps it would evolve solar cells.

But a hybrid organism, which uses a cellular structure to channel pure electrical energy, is not yet a being of totally pure energy. But we can use the idea of a hybrid organism to see how a pure energy being may be constructed. Suppose, between two ferromagnetic rocks, made of iron, cobalt, nickel, or rare earth ores, a microscopic highly organized magnetic field pattern of different intensities and orientations exists on domain units, and is time-varying in a complex way due to outside environmental effects. Pure energy between such zones, especially electrical energy, would have a complexity of function that would mimic living things. So, although the reasoning is convoluted, I would venture, yes, beings of pure energy could exist, sense their environment, and even think. Since the first organisms on Earth are believed to have begun on clays (described by Cairns-Smith) and were extremely simple in their reproducing ability, such pure energy beings could evolve between ferromagnetic rocks with microscopic time-varying domains, and be like a mollusk shell for the maintenance of the organism and evolve with it. The complexity, which mimics life, would be in the fields itself. The supporting rocks eventually would be controlled by the organism.

A Possible Energy Being between two ferromagnetic time-varying rocks with complex domain signatures. The planet would have no atmosphere to be the optimum environment.

Such beings would communicate with electric and magnetic fields, possibly pulsed in a binary form. It would alter the nanomagnetic domains on the two host rocks, as a substitute for memory, or persist as a standing wave of a certain frequency between the rocks. Sustenance for such beings would be new electric fields created by an influx of electrons from ionization by ultraviolet light. Of necessity, a being of this kind of physical organization would be extremely bizarre in its behavior. It would be as weird as early

clay-like organisms, breaching the boundary between living and non-living. We may not even be willing to classify such energy beings as “alive”, but instead, classify them as a nano-organized phenomenon. That would be a matter of semantics indeed.

There are now known to be tens of billions of planets in our galaxy, and trillions of galaxies. So it is almost certain that such beings of pure energy exist somewhere, and right now, are wondering if beings with liquids located in microscopic lipid shells can exist somewhere.

I acknowledge fruitful discussions with science fiction critic William B. Hall and writer Barton Levenson.

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# Monthly Meetings

April

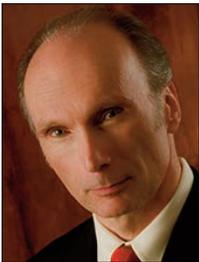
Featured Speaker for April 11, 2015 – Time: 1:30 PM  
at the Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library:

## Lawrence C. Connolly

Dreams, Memory, and Time Travel

A discussion of the manner in which dreams, memories and time travel are presented in a no-tech way in my writing and how that presentation speaks to something central to the human condition . . . and the nature of story.

Lawrence C. Connolly's books include the novels *Veins* (2008) and *Vipers* (2010), which together form the first two books of the Veins Cycle. *Vortex*, the third book in the series, was released in November 2014. His collections, which include *Visions* (2009), *This Way to Egress* (2010), and *Voices* (2011), collect his stories from *Amazing Stories*, *Cemetery Dance*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Twilight Zone*, and *Year's Best Horror*. *Voices* was nominated for the Bram Stoker Award, Superior Achievement in a Fiction Collection. He serves twice a year as one of the residency writers at Seton Hill University's graduate program in writing popular fiction and is a full-time member of the English faculty at Sewickley Academy.



May

Featured Speaker for May 9, 2015 – Time 1:30 pm at  
the Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library:

## Thomas Sweterlitsch

The Avant-Garde and Science-Fiction

A discussion on the aesthetics and influence of the “historical avant-garde” on science-fiction writing, and conversely, science-fiction's influence on the avant-garde.

Thomas Sweterlitsch is the author of “Tomorrow and Tomorrow” and the forthcoming novel “Libra.” He lives in Pittsburgh.

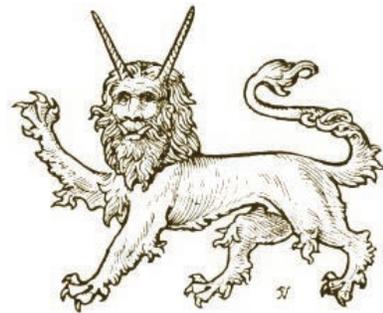


(Note: This program or event is neither sponsored or endorsed by Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.)

# Parsec News & Announcements

**The Alpha Workshop Scholarship Drive is going on now.**

<http://alpha.spellcaster.org/donate/>  
Matching funds are available (to \$900). The scholarship drive is run by alumni of the workshop. All money collected goes directly to students in need. People can donate all year. Tax-deductible. For \$10, people who donate get a 2015 Alphanthology, written and illustrated by Alpha students. Help us reach our goal. Thank-you.



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