



**Sigma #456**

**April 2024**



**SIGMA NEWSLETTER**

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**Cover image:** Eclipse over Dormont, PA 4/8/24. by Jesse Lutz

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**PARSEC HAS A NEW MAILING ADDRESS!**  
If you need to mail anything to Parsec, Confluence,  
Parsec Ink or WorD, the address is:  
**PO Box 79281 Pittsburgh, PA 15216**

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**The four programs under the Parsec Inc., 501(c)(3) organization are:**

- [Confluence conference](#)
- [Monthly Meetings](#)
- [Parsec Ink publishing \(Triangulation\)](#)
- [WorD - Write or Die writing and critique group](#)



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Dear Friends of Parsec,  
Welcome to the new edition of the Sigma newsletter!

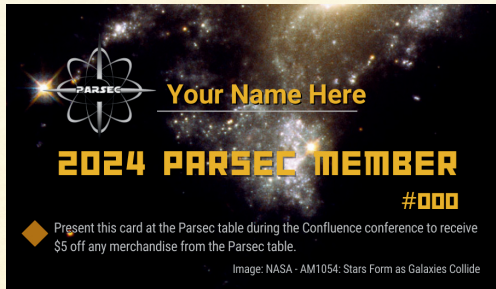
I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this new format; a lot more like the old newsletter, but online. You can also download or print the PDF.

If you have a minute, please [let me know what you think](#). Should we keep setting up the newsletter in this format or do you prefer the format more like we've used the last couple of years?

Your opinion is important. Tell me what you like and don't like

Did you know your annual membership dollars go to support all the Parsec programs? For only \$30yr/ you'll be helping keep Confluence, Triangulation and the workshops going.

You'll also receive your own nifty, digital & printable Parsec membership card. Visit [www.parsec-sff.org](http://www.parsec-sff.org) for information.



If you haven't completed the [DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY](#), please take the 2-3 minutes it will take to complete the survey and help Parsec with our grant requests.

Regards,

Karen Yun-Lutz, Board of Directors Treasurer and  
Newsletter editor

# PARSEC PROGRAMS



## Parsec Ink

### Triangulation: Hospitium

Co-Editors Greg Clumpner and Brandon Ketchum

After sorting through so many amazing submissions from all over the world, editors Brandon Ketchum and Greg Clumpner are piecing together the Table of Contents of Triangulation: Hospitium. Expect final decisions in the coming days.

**[Watch for the Triangulation fundraiser next month!](#)**

**Parsec Ink officers:** Chair: Diane Turnshek. Treasurer: John Thompson.

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## *Write or Die*

A Science Fiction & Fantasy Writing Group

The Write or Die (WorD), Pittsburgh, PA science fiction, fantasy & horror writing and critique group meets twice every month!

Time: 6:45 pm - 9 pm.

2nd Tuesday of each month on Zoom only

4th Tuesday of every month at the Mt. Lebanon Public library, with a Zoom option.

Meetings are free to attend and open to the public. Registration is required for the Zoom meetings.

For information on meeting procedures, contact info and how to register, **[Visit WorD on the web.](#)**

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## Parsec Short Story Contest:

The 2024 Parsec [Short Story Contest](#), "AI mythology" is now closed to submissions.

The winners will be announced on Friday July 26th during the Confluence opening ceremonies.

# April Parsec Monthly Meeting

**Please note the venue change!**

The Parsec Monthly Meeting will take place on Sat April 20, 2024, **ON ZOOM ONLY!**

Social starts at 12:30pm

Official meeting starting at 1:00 pm.

Our guest this month is John J. Ventre, a former multi state Director for the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), actor, and author of “They Are Us: The Time Travel False Flag.”



John Ventre was a 10-year multi-State Director for the Mutual UFO Network. It was John’s research into end time prophecy and cultures that got him interested in UFOs in 1996. He is an occasional columnist for many different UFO magazines.

[Read more on the website](#)

Register for the Zoom meeting by [visiting our website](#) or use the direct Zoom [Registration link](#)

[parsec-sff.org](http://parsec-sff.org)

**The 2024 Confluence t-shirt is available for pre-order!**



Check out Christine Hutson's amazing piece of artwork that will be used for the Confluence T-shirt, program book cover and on the name badges!

**Shirts are not guaranteed unless you pre-order.**

**Pre-Order t-shirt**

Confluence 2024 Confluence 2024 Confluence 2024 Confluence 2024 Confluence 2024

**Saturday Evening  
Featured Entertainers:  
The Confused Greenies!**



They're back in 2024 for a second performance!

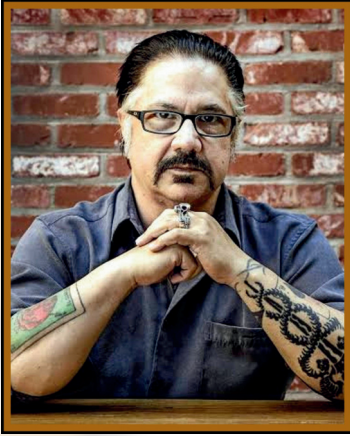
On Saturday evening the Confused Greenies will be performing their new commedia dell'arte parody, "*A Mockery of Mimicry*", their first D20 project play celebrating the 50th anniversary of Dungeons & Dragons!

Play performance will be audience interactive. Make ready your D20 rolling skills!

**See all the great everything coming to Confluence on July 26, 27 & 28. Visit the website! [confluence-sff.org](http://confluence-sff.org)**

**Confluence officers:** Chair: Kevin M. Hayes. Secretary: Karen Yun-Lutz. Treasurer: Mark Stewart.

## Guest of Honor Richard Kadrey



Richard Kadrey is the New York Times bestselling author of the Sandman Slim supernatural noir series. Sandman Slim was included in Amazon’s “100 Science Fiction & Fantasy Books to Read in a Lifetime,” and is in development as a feature film. Some of Kadrey’s other books include King Bullet, The Grand Dark, Butcher Bird, and The Dead Take the A Train.

## Featured Music Guest Bonnie Gordon



Bonnie Gordon is a voiceover actress, singer, songwriter, & entertainer (not to mention a huge nerd!) based in Los Angeles, California. As a voice actress, Bonnie is known for voicing such characters as: the Ship Computer in Star Trek: Prodigy; Rainbow Mika in Street Fighter V; Silque in Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows of Valentia & Fire Emblem Heroes and more!

Confluence 2024 Confluence 2024 Confluence 2024

### Music Concerts you don't want to miss!

If you haven't checked out [all the music concerts](#) W. Randy Hoffman has lined up for Confluence weekend, do it now!

[confluence-sff.org](http://confluence-sff.org)

# Last month at the Monthly Meeting

Last month during the Parsec Monthly Meeting we welcomed author [Richard Kadrey](#). We had the pleasure of listening to him speak about his books and help us put together some pretty amazing panel topic ideas for Confluence 2024.



Kadrey is the Confluence conference 2024 Guest of Honor! We had a nice in-person turnout, especially given that there are usually 3-5 people that show up for the in-person meetings. In addition to the people shown in the photo, there were another dozen people attending via Zoom. Scot took video of the presentation and we're just waiting on Karen to have time to do the edits and get it up on our --> [YouTube channel](#). <-- Follow us to receive updates when new videos are available!

————— • • • —————  
We still need a Monthly Meeting Secretary! We're ISO someone to attend monthly meetings (either in-person or on Zoom), take a few notes then send them to us for the newsletter. If you're interested or just available for a few months/meetings please contact us at: [newsletter@parsec-sff.org](mailto:newsletter@parsec-sff.org)

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**Monthly Meeting officers:** Co-Chairs: Scot Noel & Jane Noel  
Vice Chair: John Muth. *Secretary: Open position. Needs someone ASAP!*  
Commentator: Kevin M. Hayes



## Are Aliens Visiting Us to Watch the Eclipse?

By Scot Noel

On April 8 th , 2024, a total solar eclipse tracks along a narrow band stretching from Texas to Maine, leaving a partial eclipse in its wake that all 48 contiguous states could see.

But my question is: were aliens visiting Earth during the total eclipse of 2024?

When you were setting up your viewing spot with the perfect angle, your solar glasses at the ready, your eclipse party ready to go, did you think that you might be sharing this experience with visitors from across the galaxy?

Yes, I'm talking about aliens, sophisticated extraterrestrial tourists, and nerdy other-worldly scientists who have come all this way because Earth offers the best views in the known universe.

Let's imagine the possibilities.

To our alien visitors in the spring of '24, human civilization might seem no more elite than a shrewdness of chimpanzees appears to us, and our greatest achievements, like literature and philosophy, might not even register on their scale of interest. So, what could possibly draw them across light-years of space to our little blue planet?

A total solar eclipse, of course.

### The Cosmic Rarity of Earth's Eclipses

Earth holds a unique ticket in the cosmic lottery. Our total solar eclipses, where the moon perfectly covers the sun, leaving only the glowing corona visible, are a marvel of cosmic alignment and scale.

Our moon may be alone in the galaxy, such that from the surface of an inhabited planet, perfectly matches the size of the sun in the sky. This precision creates the total solar eclipse, complete with a view of the sun's corona and chromosphere— elements of our star which can't easily be seen under any other conditions.

But there's a catch: this alignment is a fleeting cosmic trick. The moon is inching away from us at about 3.8 centimeters per year, the same rate your fingernails grow. Fast forward 600 million years, and total solar eclipses as we know them will cease to exist.

The moon will appear too small to completely cover the sun, transforming all future eclipses into annular ones, where the sun forms a "ring of fire" around the moon.

Why does this matter, especially to our interstellar spectators? In our galactic neighborhood, where moons are either too small, like Mars's Phobos and Deimos, or non-existent, like Venus, the phenomenon we witness is not just rare; it's a once-in-a-galaxy spectacle.

For an alien civilization advanced enough to traverse the stars, such a unique event could be worth the journey, drawing them here not for our culture or technology, but for the shadow that falls upon our world for just a few precious minutes.

(Technically, anti-social aliens could achieve weak-tea versions of our eclipse by hovering at just the right spot above the clouds of Jupiter or from the frozen surface of Pluto, where the sun is only 1/39th as big as it appears to us, but where is the fun in that?)

## **How Did the Moon Form?**

Our moon's origin is a tale as old as the formation of the solar system.

*Cont on pg 10*

# ANNOUNCEMENTS



**Susan Kaye Quinn** has a collection of short solarpunk stories up for preorder: [Halfway to Better](#) releases on Earth Day, April 22nd. Each story explores a near-future where we're struggling to survive the climate crisis and build a better world. These hopeful climate-fiction stories take you from the bottom of the sea to the towers of a bot-filled city, from sparkling labs to flooded lighthouses, all imagining futures halfway to a better world.

Each week leading up to Earth Day, one short story will be set free. The collection contains all six stories plus a bonus prose-poem and accompanying sky shanty. If you enjoyed the optimistic climate solutions in Kim Stanley Robinson's Ministry for the Future or the cozy cooperative future in Becky Chambers' Monk and Robot series, you will enjoy Halfway to Better.

The spectacular print-art for the series was made by Eddie Spaghetti. [Read more about the art here](#)

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**Susan Kaye Quinn** has also launched a podcast/substack about hopeful climate fiction stories. Bright Green Futures lifts up stories about a more sustainable and just world and talks about the struggle to get there. To build better futures, we need to imagine them first. <https://www.BrightGreenFutures.wtf>

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**Donald Firesmith's** story, "The Manikin," will be published on May 15th in the Second Star to the Right, the anthology of the winners (first place, second place, third place, honorable mentions) of the 2023 Indies United Small Bites Short Story Contest. "The Manikin" won second place.

It's a story scientists have pieced together from lunar rocks, orbital mechanics, and computer simulations. The prevailing theory, known as the Giant Impact Hypothesis, suggests a scene from a science fiction blockbuster. Around 4.5 billion years ago, not long after our planet formed, Earth experienced a catastrophic collision with a Mars-sized body. A hypothetical world we've come to call Theia.

This impact launched a huge amount of material into Earth's orbit, debris that eventually coalesced under its own gravity to form the moon. It's a theory that explains many of the moon's peculiarities, such as its composition, which is remarkably similar to the Earth's mantle, its relatively small iron core, and its great size relative to Earth, about 27% as big as our own planet.

## **The Moon's Slow Goodbye**

As mesmerizing as the moon is, both in its origin and everyday presence, it's engaged in a slow departure from Earth, a fact that carries profound implications for our planet and its inhabitants. This gradual distancing is due to tidal forces, a complex gravitational dance between the Earth and the moon. Each day, the moon steals a tiny bit of Earth's rotational energy, using it to move into a slightly higher orbit, a process that causes the moon to drift away at approximately 3.8 centimeters per year.

In college physics, this idea fascinated me. The moon and Earth share no physical connection, yet because they are gravitationally bound, Newton's law of conservation of angular momentum means that as the Earth's rotation slows down, the moon must move away! While 3.8 centimeters might not seem like much, over millions of years, the consequences are significant. This slow migration affects the Earth's rotation, gradually lengthening our days, and has implications for the total solar eclipses we cherish.

In the distant future, the moon will no longer completely cover the sun, transforming our awe-inspiring eclipses into routine events that could be seen anywhere in the galaxy.

This phenomenon, known as the Moon's Slow Goodbye, serves as a reminder of the transient nature of the cosmic spectacles we witness. It emphasizes the importance of appreciating these events while they are still accessible to us. Any aliens watching us may feel the same way.

### **The Interstellar Audience:**

As another Total Eclipse arrives, imagine advanced civilizations for whom space travel is as easy as hopping on a bus, choosing Earth as their eclipse destination.

These interstellar tourists, ranging from the deeply scientific to the luxuriously rich, find our planet's solar spectacle worth the journey.

**Scientific Explorers:** Among our guests, we might find alien scientists, their interests purely academic. To them, Earth's eclipse provides a unique laboratory to study cosmic phenomena under conditions unavailable on their own worlds. Their mission, possibly directing them to observe without detection, would have them analyzing the sun's corona, the moon's composition, and even the effects of eclipses on Earth's environment and its life forms (that's you and me).

**Galactic Tourists:** Then, there is the galactic jet-set, the ones for whom this eclipse is but a line on their cosmic bucket list. These visitors might be akin to wealthy tourists, seeking out the universe's most spectacular shows. Earth's total solar eclipse, a rare event even by galactic standards, offers just the kind of exclusive experience they crave.

## Spotting an Alien Among Us:

Total solar eclipses can be crowded events. In some places along the path of totality, U.S. populations are often expected to double and triple for the event. In 2024, multiple counties in Texas issued disaster declarations for the April 8th event, because of the enormous influx of tourists expected.

Or is it that the authorities of the Lone Star State know that aliens are among us during Totality?

With such a diverse audience possibly mingling under the black sun, how can you spot the extraterrestrial attendees? Let's consider the signs...

**Unusual Attire:** Did you spot an eclipse watcher whose outfit seemed like it was researched by A.I. after hacking Google and downloading "What to Wear for Every Occasion?" Did their undergarments shimmer with an unearthly glow, or did their ears change colors with their mood? And those sunglasses that looked like they could give a 3D view of the cosmos... Definitely suspect.

**Over-prepared Viewer:** That grey-skinned kid who brought along what looked like highly advanced viewing equipment, including a self-propelled telescope in the shape of R2D2, or a backpack filled with photometers, spectrographs, polarimeters, and coronagraphs. They might just have a closer relationship with the stars than the rest of us.

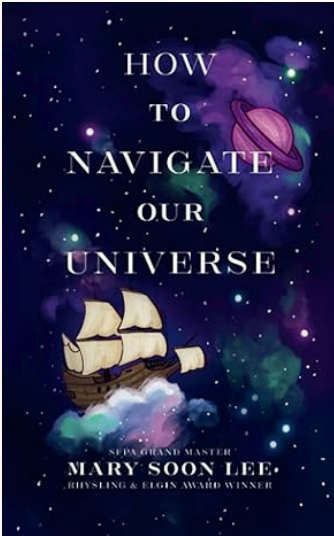
**Curious Behavior:** An alien visitor might be overly fascinated by what seems ordinary to us. If you see an oddly colored humanoid consuming mass quantities of fish sandwiches and chocolate shakes while staring unprotected at the sun, they're either an extra planetary visitor or a politician.

*Cont on pg 14*

# ANNOUNCEMENTS



[Rillan macDhai](#) will have their books and assorted oddities in the Confluence Dealer's Room for sales, signings, and general smoozing. Drop by and meet the author.



[Mary Soon Lee](#) is honored to report that her poem "Sphinx," first published in Asimov's, was nominated(\*) for the Rhysling Award.

She's also delighted to report that her poem What Xenologists Read is a finalist for the AnLab Readers' Award and that two of her poems, the aforementioned Sphinx, plus The Treachery of Images are both finalists for the Asimov's Readers' Award.

Mary's astronomy collection How to Navigate Our Universe has been reviewed by [Vivian Wagner](#) in Strange Horizons.

To keep up on all Mary Soon Lee news, subscribe to her [Newsletter](#).



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[newsletter@parsec-sff.org](mailto:newsletter@parsec-sff.org)

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**Obviously Unearthly:** Did you find yourself talking to someone who was polite, well-spoken, empathetic and respectful to others, offered you eclipse glasses when you'd forgotten your own, and quietly slipped away as the event drew to a close. Definitely not human!

## **The Specialness of Earth's Eclipses**

As the shadow of the moon sweeps across Earth, casting a temporary twilight during the day, it's not just a moment of astronomical fascination; it's a profound reminder of Earth's uniqueness in the cosmos.

Total solar eclipses, such as the one on April 8, 2024, offer us a fleeting glimpse into the balance of conditions that make our planet exceptional, not only within our solar system but potentially across the galaxy.

The fact that the moon and the sun appear almost the same size in the sky, allowing for the beauty of a total solar eclipse, is nothing short of a coincidence. This fortunate alignment is a result of the moon's orbital position around Earth, as well as the sun's own size and distance from us at the center of our system of planets. Such an exquisite balance is rare in the vastness of space, making total eclipses on Earth a marvel that could be unique in the universe.

The slow dance of celestial mechanics, which gradually changes the distances between Earth, the moon, and the sun, reminds us that these events are not eternal.

With the moon inching away from Earth each year, we are living in a golden age of total solar eclipses. Future civilizations, whether human or something succeeding our species, will not experience these



phenomena in the same way we do, adding a layer of uniqueness and appreciation to each eclipse we witness.

## **Connecting Cultures and Generations**

Eclipses have captivated humans throughout history, inspiring awe, fear, and wonder across different cultures and eras. They remind us of our shared humanity, our quest for understanding, and our place in the universe.

The anticipation and communal experience of watching an eclipse binds us together. It's a rare moment where millions turn their gaze upward, united by a common celestial spectacle.

Imagining that Earth's total solar eclipses might attract the attention of interstellar visitors underscores not just the beauty, but the rarity of these events on a cosmic scale.

It's a humbling thought, one that encourages us to appreciate these moments not just as spectators, but as part of a larger, interconnected universe that continues to inspire curiosity and awe.

### **Reference Links:**

[What is a Total Solar Eclipse](#)

[Solar Eclipses on Other Planets](#)

[How did Earth's Moon form](#)

[What can we learn from Solar Eclipses](#)

[How Solar Eclipses Affect Earth's Environment](#)

*Scot Noel has always written Science Fiction and Fantasy Fiction. Indeed, from the moment he learned to scribble in cursive, he began to split his time between playing with toys and writing tales of their plastic adventures. In time, he went on to earn a degree in English and to make his living via the keyboard.*

## Excellent Tangent Review for



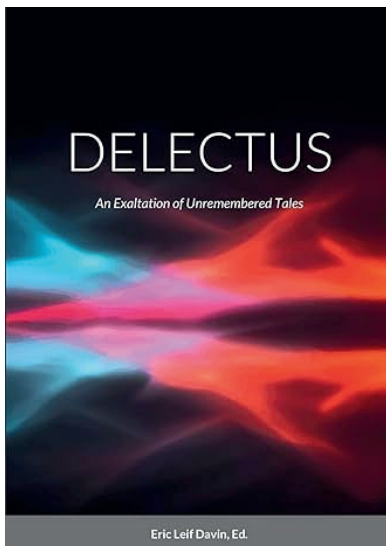
DreamForge Anvil 15, has received an excellent review on Tangent!

Thank you to Mina at Tangent for a great review of DF Anvil 15! See which ones are "simply beautiful," "startlingly good tales," "echo Carol Sagan's Contact," and more.

[Read Review Here](#)

[Read Dreamforge Issue 15 HERE](#)

## PAST AND PRESENT PARSEC MEMBERS PUBLISHED!



**DELECTUS** is an eclectic collection of delectable stories. Hence, the title, *Delectus*; a Latin word meaning simply a selection from various authors. All of these authors are writers who deserve wider notice. The stories are of no rigid genre, although most of them are fantasy or science fiction.

Featuring many past and present Parsec members! Authors include:

[William Blake Hall](#), Barton Paul Levenson, [Eric Leif Davin](#), Joe Coluccio, Larry Ivkovich and Francis G. Graham. PLUS! Two poems by award-winning poet [Mary Soon Lee](#)!

Get the book [HERE](#) for \$5

# REVIEWS

## USING MICROSOFT COPILOT

Product review by Donald Firesmith

I've recently started using Copilot, the Microsoft chatbot, to produce marketing materials for some of my books.



### **Nice features of Copilot include:**

- 1) it is powered by GPT-4, OpenAI's most advanced chatbot
- 2) It comes with the Edge browser, so you don't have to pay OpenAI to use it.
- 3) It includes three modes: Creative, Balanced, and Precise
- 4) The results are very good and only require a few tweaks to be usable.

5) It provides links to the sources for its results as footnotes so you can check on the accuracy of its answers.

6) It includes Dall-E for image generation.

### **As an author, I find the following chat prompts to be especially useful:**

1) Write a sales description of <enter the book title and author or existing book blurb>.

2) Write 10 book club discussion questions for <book title and author>.

3) What differentiates <book title and author> from other books?

Less useful prompt, but still worth trying:

4) Write 10 loglines for <book title and author>.

You can try it free for yourself here -> [Microsoft Copilot Studio](#)

*[Donald Firesmith](#) is a multi-award-winning author of science fiction, fantasy, and paranormal horror novels and short story collections*

# NEXT MONTH

## May Monthly Meeting with Scot Noel



In May, we'll discuss questions on the benefits, issues, and the future of A.I. and Large Language models, from medicine to the military, from baked in bias to accelerated research, and how everything from the computer chip industry to the power grid is already being transformed by a technology that is only getting started.

Next Monthly Meeting date: Saturday, May 18, 2023

Via ZOOM and IN PERSON at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Squirrel Hill, Meeting Room B.

Time: 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm;

Room and ZOOM both open for social chat at 12:30 pm.

[Register for Zoom](#)



Thank you to this months contributors!  
And, as always, thank you to the program officers and Board Of Directors that help keep everything Parsec running smoothly.  
Editor, Karen Yun-Lutz

**Parsec Board of Directors:** President: Kevin M. Hayes.  
Vice President: John Thompson. Treasurer/Secretary: Karen Yun-Lutz..  
At Large Members: Scot Noel, AJ Smith and Kathryn Smith  
Executive Director: Diane Turnshek  
Current BOD can be found on the [WEBSITE](#)