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Cover image: Hubble Sees a Horsehead of a Different Color, NASA/ESA/STScI

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

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 May edition of the Sigma newsletter!

I guess I’m the new face around here. So, I’ll introduce myself. My name is John Muth. I’m a writer/designer/filmmaker/comic book artist. I have been attending Parsec and WorD meetings for about a year and a half, and attended Confluence for the first time in 2022. Other than that, I’m just another guy with a beard who’s happy to help and look forward to putting the newsletter together for the foreseeable future!

We have gotten your feedback, and it seems like this new format is a keeper. If you have any more feedback, please let us know what you think. Your opinion is important. Tell us what you like and don’t like.

Did you know your annual membership dollars go to support all the Parsec programs? For only $30/year 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 for information.

If you haven't completed the DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY, please take 2-3 minutes to help Parsec with our grant requests.

I feel like I need a catchy sign-off… Until next time!

John Muth - Parsec Meeting Vice Chair and Newsletter editor
Parsec Ink
Co-Editors Greg Clumpner and Brandon Ketchum

Infuriate the gods with a poorly timed joke. Interrupt a demon’s day off by summoning them for a spot of tea. Bring your bot-friend home to meet your embarrassing parents.

These are three of the amazing 24 poems and stories within the pages of Triangulation: Hospitium, an anthology of F/SF/H centered around guest rights and host obligations, featuring authors from every corner of the globe.

Join us for our launch party at Confluence on July 27th!

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

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.

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 in Ballroom A.
**Date:** Saturday, May 18th  
**Location:** On ZOOM and in-person at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - Squirrel Hill, Meeting Room B 
The room and ZOOM open for chatting at 12:30 pm  
**Official meeting starting at 1:00 pm**

### An Interactive Discussion on A.I. and Large Language Models

A.I. and especially Large Language Models have broken into the public consciousness over the last couple of years. Some absolutely hate them as apocalyptic, while others tout them as the greatest thing since the harnessing of fire. Saying that the truth is somewhere in between, while likely true, can obscure the level at which LLMs are indeed highly disruptive, world-wide technological shift.

This meeting is designed not as a presentation, but a series of interactive questions where attendees are encouraged to express their own experience, hopes, fears, and feelings about A.I. Let’s engage with humility, courtesy, curiosity, and most importantly a willingness to hear one another’s points of view.

Register for the ZOOM meeting by [visiting our website](http://parsec-sff.org) or use the direct Zoom [Registration link](http://parsec-sff.org)
The cutoff for pre-ordering Confluence t-shirts is June 15th!

T-shirts are pre-order only! See the artwork and color on the website: 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.

Only 11 people have ordered shirts. If you’re not sure if you’ve ordered your shirt, you can contact Karen at: treasurer@confluence-sff.org

See all the great everything coming to Confluence on July 26, 27 & 28. Visit the website! 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!

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
Last month during the Parsec Monthly Meeting we welcomed 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.”

We thank John for his time, but due to our current lack of a secretary, we do not have any notes to share. If you are interested in the position, please contact newsletter@parsec-sff.org

The role of Secretary attends the monthly meetings (either in person or on ZOOM), takes notes, and sends them to use in the newsletter. Please let us know if you’re available for a few months/meetings.

Thank you!

If you missed the March Parsec meeting with guest speaker, Richard Kadrey, you can now watch it on our YouTube channel!

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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
Curious Technologies
We’ve Left Behind

By Scot Noel

Technology doesn’t always progress in a straight line. The use of some tools is forgotten over time; the formulas for others lost and never recreated. Time and circumstance hold few things dear.

Human history is littered with innovative marvels that once shaped the world in ways large and small. From the mystifying to the military, these inventions reflect the breadth of human ingenuity. Yet, for various reasons, they have faded from our collective memory. Let’s take a look at six such curious technologies, delving into their uses, the periods they hail from, and the reasons they’ve been left behind.

Gallo-Roman Dodecahedron

**Time Period:** 1st to 4th century CE

**Actual Use:** Unknown, theories include religious artifacts, candle holders, or even devices for determining optimal sowing dates for winter grain.

With over 100 found, Gallo-Roman dodecahedrons are small, hollow objects made of bronze or stone, featuring a geometric design of twelve flat pentagonal faces, each with a circular hole of varying diameter. Despite numerous theories, their true purpose remains a subject of debate.

Because they are reputed to show little wear and have been found among coin hoards, I’m a fan of the theory that they were a device for detecting counterfeit money.

They faded from history because their use was not documented, leaving their purpose to be lost over time.
Greek Fire

**Time Period:** 7th century CE onwards  
**Actual Use:** Incendiary weapon used in naval warfare.

Greek Fire was a weapon of war that played a critical role in the military success of the Byzantine Empire, especially during sea battles.

The first recorded use of Greek Fire was during the Arab siege of Constantinople in 678 CE, where it played a crucial role in breaking the siege and driving the invaders away.

Its composition was a closely guarded state secret. No enemy could replicate it. The original formula for Greek Fire was lost during the decline of the Byzantine Empire, though there have been many attempts, it has never been reproduced.

The Semaphore Telegraph

**Time Period:** Late 18th century to the mid-19th century  
**Actual Use:** The Semaphore Telegraph was a form of visual communication for transmitting messages over long distances. Much faster than horse and rider, it consisted of a network of towers equipped with movable arms.

The towers, each within 20 miles of the next, featured a device with two adjustable wooden arms and a crossbar. Operators monitored neighboring towers using telescopes. Using the arms and crossbars, they could create 196 unique symbols which were then relayed tower to tower, ensuring message transmission across distance.

Believe it or not, the word “telegraph” was coined to describe this network, not the later electrical one.

Of course, the system was eventually superseded by the electric telegraph, which could transmit messages faster and under any weather condition, rendering the semaphore network obsolete.

Remnants of this 19th century technology can still be found around Europe.
**Gyro Monorail**

**Time Period:** Early 20th century, 1907-1910.

**Actual Use:** A rail technology using gyroscopic forces to balance a train on a single rail.

Why run a train on two rails when a single rail will do? The Gyro Monorail was an innovative approach to transportation. It featured vehicles stabilized by gyroscopes, which promised smoother rides and less infrastructure compared to traditional trains. Despite its fascinating premise, it failed to gain widespread adoption due to high costs, technical challenges, and the dominance of conventional rail.

During testing, passengers were driven around a circular track. Winston Churchill was one, and he showed considerable support for the Gyro Monorail.

**Pykrete**

**Time Period:** World War II

**Actual Use:** A composite material made of approximately 14% sawdust or wood pulp and 86% ice, pykrete was proposed as a construction material for massive, unsinkable aircraft carriers.

Pykrete is possibly my favorite forgotten technology. It was developed during World War II as part of Project Habakkuk. This icy material was intended to create ship-like, floating airstrips in the Atlantic. Despite its remarkable durability and slower melting rate compared to plain ice, the project was abandoned due to the high costs and logistical challenges, as well as advances in aeronautics that made such ‘ice carriers’ unnecessary.

The prototype ice-ship, abandoned in Patricia Lake, Alberta Canada, did not melt until at least the end of the next summer, while some say it took at least 3 years.
Echo Satellite Balloons

Time Period: 1960-1964

Actual Use: The first passive communications satellite experiment, consisting of large metallic balloons that reflected radio signals.

This is the curious tech of which I have a real-life memory. Around the time I was 3 or 4, my parents took me outside, pointed at the sky and said “there it is, the echo satellite! Can you see it?” They were very excited, and I didn’t want to disappoint them, so I agreed. I couldn’t see a thing.

The Echo Satellite Balloons were essentially giant, reflective spheres launched into space to act as passive reflectors for transcontinental and intercontinental telephone, radio, and television signals. Get that? You bounced the signals off of these giant balloons!

While successful in proving concepts behind satellite communications, they were quickly surpassed by active satellites, which could amplify and redirect signals rather than merely reflect them.

Time is a Powerful Thing

Humans have been using plastic for over 100 years, but what if a century or two from now no one even remembers how to make it? Will television and movies be able to withstand the augmented reality entertainment of the years ahead? What if mobile phones become curiosities after less than a century of common use? After all, those Gallo-Roman dodecahedrons were widely known for over 300 years, and we haven’t got a clue.

Reference Links:
Gallo-Roman Dodecahedron
Greek Fire
The Semaphore Telegraph
Gyro Monorail
Pykrete
Echo Satellites

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.
Larry Ivkovich says:
I've got a novella being released by IFWG Publishing, titled "Hope's Song," a science fiction/steampunk and (maybe) something in the alternate history genre all mashed up.

I also got a short story accepted into the anthology "Stories in the Key of Tull," which is stories inspired by the music of Jethro Tull. No release date yet.

Brandon Ketchum says:
1. I am co-editing the Triangulation: Hospitium anthology, which will have a crowdfunding project coming soon to fund the anthology.
2. I have received an acceptance from a major pro short story market. Details to follow when I am allowed to make an announcement!
3. I will be appearing on programming at Confluence in July.

Your announcement could be here!
Parsec members never pay for ad space in the monthly Sigma!
Send announcements, updates, news, articles and reviews to: newsletter@parsec-sff.org

Become a Parsec member for only $30/yr
From Mary Soon Lee:

I am honored and delighted to report that How to Navigate Our Universe has been nominated for the 2024 Elgin Award :-) :-) If you're curious about how I ended up writing a book of astronomy poetry, that’s one of the questions Jeff Georgeson asked me in his interview at Penumbric. I was also honored to participate in the launch party reading for The Heartbeat of the Universe, an anthology of poems from Analog and Asimov's. It was a lovely Zoom gathering with friends old and new, and I very much enjoyed hearing the other poets read their work.

Closing out the writing news, my poem "On Dragon Food" is in the new dragon-themed issue of Eye to the Telescope, and I also have two poems in the new issue, #47.2, of Star*Line.

On the reading front, I finished up my short-fiction Nebula reading in time to vote. In addition to the novellas I mentioned last month, I particularly enjoyed R.S.A. Garcia's short story "Tantie Merle and the Farmhand 4200." For a far longer read, one that took me nearly five months (!), I reached the end of Don Quixote (Cervantes, 1615), a hefty classic that surprised me by its abundant humor and likable characters. I liked Quixote and I loved Sancho Panza. Of the newer novels that I read in the past month, easily my favorite is Teckla, book three in Steven Brust's excellent Vlad Taltos series. I'm letting myself re-read the series at the rate of one book a month, and it was hard not to proceed straight to book four. As ever, my book reviews may be unearthed at Goodreads.

Lastly, our family hugely enjoyed the solar eclipse! This month’s photo was taken by my son, William Lee-Moore. I'm also appending an eclipse poem.
How to Collect Eclipses

— first published in "How to Navigate Our Universe"
By: Mary Soon Lee

Select as your first quarry
a commonplace partial lunar.

Measure the Moon’s motion,
the seasons of syzygy.

Pick the hunting ground.
Stay as still as you can.

Even these lesser lunars
will seek cover in clouds.

Once the prey is sighted,
let the camera capture it.

There. Savor your triumph,
that spreadeagled image.

Progress from partial lunars
through full blood moons.

Catalogue each new specimen,
itemizing time and type.

Stalk the solitary solars,
the elusive selenelions.

Beware blindness, obsession,
the occult call of shadows.

Earth cannot calm such fervor,
cannot quench fevered fixation.

You will yearn for other skies,
the far transits of Jupiter.
Susan Kaye Quinn says: My story is going to be in a climate exhibit! My short story Slimy Things Did Crawl will be at a climate fiction exhibit in NYC, which runs from May - Nov, but the launch is May 18th.

THE CLIMATE IMAGINARIUM: A new consortium of climate organizations with a center for the arts on Governors Island in New York City. The Imaginarium serves as a community center for climate and culture, with galleries and spaces for exhibitions, performances, film screenings, and events that respond to the climate crisis with visions for hope and justice. The center includes an exhibit on hopeful climate fiction, and Slimy will be one of the stories they'll have up on the wall (with my cover artist Eddie's fabulous art!) and a QR code so people can download the story right there and read it!

WHERE: Governor’s Island, NYC
WHEN: Open Hours of 11a — 5p on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays throughout the 2024 season (Launch party May 18th!)
If you're planning a visit to NYC this summer, check it out!
If you can’t make it to NYC, you can download Slimy Things Did Crawl for FREE.
You’re invited to In Your Write Mind, the annual writers’ conference that is sponsored and run by the Seton Hill University Writing Popular Fiction MFA Alumni.

Registration this year is only $60 for the entire conference!

Register here!
... or register at InYourWriteMind.net
Cutoff for registration is June 17, 2024.
Registration includes a FREE TABLE at our book signing on Sat, June 29th. (See below*)

**What:** This is an annual, alumni-run writers workshop. It features writing-related classes, a book signing, and other special events. It’s a great way to network with other writers.

**When:** June 27-30, 2024.

**Where:** On the beautiful campus of Seton Hill University (1 Seton Hill Drive, Greensburg, PA 15601) We are not offering a virtual option this year.

**Who:** The workshop is open to the public.

**Why:** It’s a great opportunity to meet and network with other writers, gain writing inspiration and publishing knowledge, get your writing mojo back, and have fun!
We have received reviews, poems, photos, and of course announcements. But this newsletter is by and for you! Share your work. Send us a poem or a short story you don’t mind having its publication being in the newsletter. (We also welcome short items that are already published!)

Send any submissions to newsletter@parsec-sff.org

Please send me things so I don’t need to embarrass myself like this in the future. (Descriptions of below, clockwise from top right: Me, in June 2023 in Death Valley. My fingernail is pointing at the sign that is at sea-level; a strange frog-alien drawn on a whiteboard in the conference room at work; a digital drawing I did of Ashoka.)
John Muth - As I was putting the finishing touches on this issue, I was looking for some content to help fill out the pages. That’s when I saw two people had died who had profound impacts on my love of cinema. One is Susan Backlinie (1946-2024) and the other is Roger Corman (1926-2024). Many of you may be very familiar with Corman, as the father of cheap b-movies, but my fascination with him came in seeing him in Silence of the Lambs and finding out how he was actually a key component in the development for some of Hollywood’s biggest/greatest directors. (James Cameron, Francis Ford Coppola, Ron Howard, and Jonathan Demme, among so many more.)

Backlinie, I have to say, I would not recognize by name, or even by face necessarily. Unless the face I was shown was of a young woman in the water off the beach being killed by an unseen great white. Yes, she was the first victim we see in Steven Spielberg’s 1975 film, JAWS. Very sad news indeed.

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!
May Monthly Meeting with Scot Noel

In June our guest will be Elizabeth Eve King is an award-winning painter, performer, writer, and naturalist. Ray Bradbury called Elizabeth’s stories, “marvelously inventive, wildly funny, and deeply thought-provoking.”

Elizabeth will talk with us about her new novel “Gods and Monsters,” as well as her other adventures!

Next Monthly Meeting date: Saturday, June 15, 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 month’s contributors! Thank you, especially to Karen Yun-Lutz for her help in getting me all set-up. And, as always, thank you to the program officers and Board Of Directors that help keep everything Parsec running smoothly.
Editor, John Muth

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
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