



SIGMA

The Official Parsec, Inc. Newsletter



Sigma #475
November 2025

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Cover image: "NASA Astronaut Stands on Mars" by: NASA/JPL-Caltech, 2020. Taken from the [NASA Image and Video Library](#).

Want to submit your own photo, art, 3D rendering for use on the cover of Sigma?

Submit files to parsecsigmanews@gmail.com

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

- [Confluence Conference](#)
- [Monthly Events](#)
- [Parsec Ink Publishing](#) (Triangulation)
- [Word - Write or Die Writing and Critique Group](#)

**Need to mail anything to Parsec, Confluence,
Parsec Ink or Word? The address is:
PO Box 79281
Pittsburgh, PA 15216**



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DEAR FRIENDS OF PARSEC,

I'm pretty excited for this issue. It's number 475! I tried to look up other famous issue 475s, and the main one that came up was Detective Comics 475, where the Joker tries to get the copyright for a fish that looks like him... *Seems about right.*

At any rate, there's a lot of great content here, and there's so much of it from you! I think part of what I'm excited about is the oncoming new year, where I have some (hopefully great) changes and ideas planned. For Sigma as well as... Well, we'll see. But here we have the announcement of the new Triangulation theme—and, unless I missed it (and that'd be bad!) the editor! Announcements of our members' upcoming works and events. A fun story by Barton Paul Levenson, and I have to add—though perhaps I'm biased—Scot Noel's article this month is the hopeful salve I've needed. I hope you'll check it out!

I also wanted to shout out the great time everyone (?) seemingly had at WorD's Halloween Reading Event. I thought it went pretty well, despite the endemic curse I seem to bring of microphone issues. I want to thank everyone else who came and braved the cold.

As we approach the holidays, “regular” meeting dates and times of the different Parsec programs may get moved around, so please be aware of that. (Namely, the second WorD meeting of the month is Thanksgiving week, so I'm not sure what that plan is.) And make sure to check out the last page of the newsletter for the lowdown on this year's Holiday Party! Greg Armstrong is willing to let us crash his place again. We hope to see you all there!

Oh! The last thing: I'm getting down to the last of the Sigma Reader profiles. If you like this month's, or have liked the previous couple entries, complete the [questionnaire](#). I'd love to feature MORE of you!!

That's all. For real...

Until next time!

John Muth

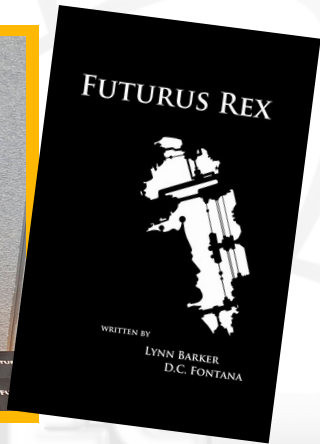
PARSEC MONTHLY EVENT

Date: Saturday, November 15.

Location: This month's event is ZOOM only.

Time: 1:00 to 3:30 pm

Parsec Events are always open to the public.



Author Lynn Barker (Twilight Zone, Deep Space Nine, Space Academy) introduces her captivating novel *Futurus Rex* and the remarkable story behind its creation. More than an Arthurian reawakening—it's a powerful collaboration with the legendary D.C. Fontana, one of Star Trek's most influential writers, and represents some of Dorothy's final published work.

Futurus Rex is available in print, Kindle, and audiobook formats, with Lynn currently working on a sequel that will explore deeper into the magical realm of the Enchantment.

Monthly Event Officers: Co-Chairs: Scot Noel & John Muth.
Positions of Vice Chair and Secretary are currently open.

PARSEC MONTHLY EVENT

Parsec Event Officer Nominations in November

During the November meeting, nominations for the Parsec Meeting Committee for 2025 will be open!

ANYONE can volunteer or make a nomination (with the individual's permission) during the November 15th, 2025 meeting. Parsec members can also send a nomination email in November to:

ParsecTalk@parsecinc.groups.io.

Deadline for nominations is November 30, 2025. Nominations will be announced and voting (if necessary) will take place during the December Holiday Party.

Nominations will open for Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary.

- **Chair responsibilities include:** planning monthly events, inviting guests to speak during monthly events, organizing and implementing the events, coordinating event space, and managing the Zoom option for monthly meetings.
- **Vice Chair responsibilities include:** Filling in for the chair should the chair not be available or able to fulfill their responsibilities, additional support for the chair when needed and providing ice during in person social functions.
- **Secretary responsibilities include:** Taking the monthly event minutes and providing those minutes in a timely manner to the newsletter editor. (There has not been a Secretary for the past two years, so we don't run the minutes for previous events currently.)

Our goal is to communicate officer nominations prior to the December Holiday party so they can be voted on. If there is no opposition to those nominated, there will be no need for voting and we can note the candidates are elected by acclamation. If there are candidates to be voted on, we will make sure to announce them in the Sigma prior to the party.

Join us at the events!

PARSEC PROGRAMS



Parsec Ink

Announcing the 2026 Triangulation anthology theme, edited by Marie Vibbert:

BAD ROMANCE

You know that friend who keeps falling for terrible people? That couple that not only fights all the time but makes each other a worse person, and they keep getting back together?

Send us them.

We want stories or poetry about trashfire, toxic relationships, with a speculative element.

We will be open for submissions from November 15, 2025 to January 31, 2026 for original short stories and poems as well as reprints.

Full submission details can be found at
<https://www.parsecink.org/submissions>.

Looking for a past edition of Triangulation?

[Dark Hearts](#) (2025)

[Hospitium](#) (2024)

[Seven-Day Weekend](#) (2023)

[Energy](#) (2022)

Or find many more of our anthologies on [Amazon](#).

Parsec Ink officers: Chair: Jessica Carver. Treasurer: Greg Clumpner.
Editor: Marie Vibbert.

PARSEC PROGRAMS

Parsec Short Story Contest

2026 Short Story Contest Coordinator: Jamie Lackey

This year's theme is Metamorphosis: Send us your stories of complete transformations, inside and out. Of inevitable moments of sudden, irrevocable change. Of destruction that leads to unexpected growth.

The contest is open to non-professional writers who have not met the eligibility requirements for SFWA Full Membership. Writers meeting the SFWA Associate level of membership are eligible to submit to the contest. Previous first-place winners and current year contest coordinators, readers and judges are ineligible to enter.

Submissions will be open from January 1-March 31st. You can find out more [on the short story contest's webpage!](#)

Write or Die

A Science Fiction & Fantasy Writing Group



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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- Tuesday, November 11, at 7:00 pm, on Zoom only.
- (Unsure on the second meeting for November.)

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

PARSEC PROGRAMS



Halloween Reading Event Recap

by John Muth

Write or Die (WorD) gathered at the Millvale Community Library for the annual Halloween Reading Event. Unfortunately, our planned emcee, Larry Ivkovich, and fellow readers Randy Brock and Steven Tubbs, couldn't attend. But Laine Wilson filled in, still maintaining the gravitas as well as the exact words Larry would have used. Our group of authors read great and chilling stories, on a great and chilly night. Features included monster CPAs, a tiny, capitalistic Pazuzu, pirates (both in word and in person), as well as a haunted board game, among others.

Our special guest was Gwendolyn Kiste, whose story was great and she brought a charm that illuminated and charmed the crowd, as the temperatures dropped. Thank you to her, to AV Tea Co., the Millvale Community Library, our readers, and audience.

We hope to see you, inside, next year!

**Confluence will be held July 24 through 26, 2026
at the Sheraton Pittsburgh Airport Hotel
1160 Thorn Run Road Extension, PA 15108**

2026 Guest of Honor ANDY DUNCAN



Andy Duncan is a professor of English at Frostburg State University in the western Maryland mountains; a fiction writer whose honors include a Nebula Award, a Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award and three World Fantasy Awards; a journalist since age 17; and a lifelong collector of Forteanana.

Visit his works on his [Linktree](#).

More info coming soon!

Visit <https://confluence-sff.org/> for more information.

Confluence officers: Chair: Kevin M. Hayes. Treasurer: Karen Yun-Lutz.

SIGN UP FOR YOUR PARSEC MEMBERSHIP!

Your membership dollars allow Parsec to continue offering the following long list of programs, all of which are open to the public:

Confluence

Parsec Monthly Events

Parsec Ink: Triangulation

Parsec Short Story Contest

Write or Die

Parsec Library

Sigma Newsletter



Become a Parsec Member today!

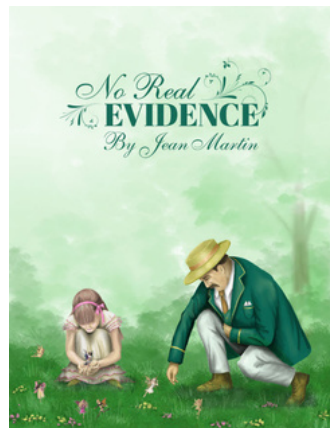
Parsec members enjoy free advertising in the Sigma Newsletter!
Membership year runs from March 1st through the end of February annually.



The Great Fairy Hoax: Did Sherlock Holmes' Creator Know He Was Being Fooled?

By Scot Noel

A few years ago, Parsec Member Jean Martin published a clever short story in DreamForge Magazine titled “No Real Evidence.” In Jean’s story, the famous creator of fictional detective Sherlock Holmes —Sir Arthur Conan Doyle— encounters two young girls who show him real fairies dancing in the moonlight. Horrified at the thought of what Victorian scientists would do to such delicate creatures (vivisection, formaldehyde, and cages come to mind), Doyle convinces the girls to destroy their genuine photographs and replace them with obvious fakes made from paper cutouts. The hoax, in Martin's telling, becomes an act of protection rather than deception. Jean’s story was clever and heartwarming. And ever since I read it, I wanted to know more. Let’s take a closer look at one of the early 20th Century's most enduring mysteries.



As We Would Say Today: WTF?

In 1920, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle championed what would become known as the Cottingley Fairies photographs. He argued that the photographs provided genuine evidence of supernatural beings, seeing them as proof that fairies existed in a world beyond human perception.

For decades afterward, the question has remained: Was the master of logic himself duped by two young girls? Or, as Martin's fiction playfully suggests, did

he know exactly what he was doing? The real answer is more complicated, and more human, than either answer, and it might have a little to say about hoaxes and misinformation in today's "influencer economy."

The Photos That Captivated a Generation

One summer day in 1917, two young cousins were playing near Cottingley Beck, a stream running through a wooded glen in Yorkshire, England. Nine-year-old Frances Griffiths and sixteen-year-old Elsie Wright returned covered in mud. As usual, they received a scolding, but this time, the girls had an excuse that would change everything.

"We only went to see the fairies," they insisted.

As it developed, this was a claim they were willing to prove. They borrowed Elsie's father's camera on their next trip to the stream. When Arthur Wright developed the plate in his darkroom, he found something extraordinary. The photograph showed Frances with four tiny, winged figures appearing to dance in the air before her, their elaborate dresses billowing, their bare feet treading air. (They look very "Roaring Twenties" to me.) A month later, the girls produced a second photograph showing Elsie with a gnome-like creature that no modern eye would entertain as real, or so I might hope.

Even in the early years of the 20th Century, Elsie's father was immediately suspicious. He knew his daughter to be artistically inclined and familiar with both photography and retouching. She was a talented sixteen-year old! He assumed she'd created clever forgeries using paper cutouts and confiscated the camera. The photographs were filed away and forgotten.

Or they would have been, if not for Elsie's mother.

How a Childhood Prank Became a Sensation

Polly Wright was a member of the Bradford Theosophical Society, a group fascinated by mysticism, spiritualism, and the esoteric. It was all the rage back

then. In 1919, she rediscovered the photographs and showed them at a society meeting. This is where the story picks up steam—not because the photos were particularly convincing, but because of how information travels through trusted networks.

The photographs passed from Polly Wright to leading Theosophist Edward Gardner, a prolific writer and lecturer. Gardner had the negatives examined by photographer and photographic expert Harold Snelling. Snelling declared the images to be genuine single-exposure photographs with no evidence of tricks. Two important points here: Snelling was himself sympathetic to spiritualist causes, and he didn't proclaim that "the fairies are real," only that the photographs were untouched.

It might have been 1920 then, but this is how misinformation spreads even today through social media echo chambers. A trusted friend shares something, which gets passed to others in the same community who all want it to be true. Each person in the chain adds their own credibility to the claim, and skepticism (the initial reaction of Arthur Wright when he developed the plates) gets mistaken for closed-mindedness.

By mid-1920, the photographs had reached the desk of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The Unlikely Mystic

To understand how the creator of Sherlock Holmes could become an enthusiastic promoter of fairy photographs, you have to know a little about Doyle's life in the years following World War I.

Arthur Conan Doyle had trained as a physician, a man of science and medicine. He'd created perhaps the most famous rational character in all of literature. Sherlock Holmes was a detective who solved crimes through careful observation, logical deduction, and an almost mechanical approach to evidence. "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth," Holmes famously declared. And it's still a good rule today!

But Doyle's own words were not as powerful as the blows his life handed him.

His son Kingsley died in 1918 from wounds and influenza contracted during World War I. His brother, his two brothers-in-law, and his two nephews also died in the war. Like millions of others in the post-war period, Doyle turned to spiritualism, a belief that one could communicate with the dead through mediums and séances. For many, these beliefs offered comfort and hope in an age of unprecedented loss.

By 1920, Doyle was already one of spiritualism's most prominent advocates. He wrote extensively about it, attended séances, and defended mediums against skeptics. When Edward Gardner sent him prints of the Cottingley photographs in June 1920, Doyle was in the middle of a lecture tour in the United States, promoting spiritualist ideas. He saw the fairy photographs as proof that the material world had cracks in it, that science hadn't explained everything, and that wonder and mystery still existed.

Today we call that reaction confirmation bias.

In correspondence with Gardner, Doyle expressed strong belief in the images, later describing one figure in his book as “undoubtedly a fairy.”

More than that, he proposed publishing them in *The Strand Magazine*, the famous periodical that had serialized his Sherlock Holmes stories decades earlier. Arthur Conan Doyle was not just a believer, he was an influencer before the word had taken on its modern sensibility.

The Campaign Begins

In December of 1920, *The Strand Magazine* published 'Fairies Photographed,' an article written by Arthur Conan Doyle himself, featuring both the images and a glowing endorsement by Doyle. His promotion of the Cottingley Fairies became a full-scale media campaign.

Magazine circulation skyrocketed. Public reaction was fiercely divided. Where some saw proof of the supernatural, others saw obvious fraud. But everyone was talking about it.

Doyle didn't stop there; he arranged—through Edward Gardner—for the girls to receive new cameras and take additional photographs.

They were happy to oblige. Then, in 1922, Doyle published an entire book on the subject: "The Coming of the Fairies." At 200 pages and self-funded to the tune of £500 (equivalent to over £36,300 today), the book included the photographs, expert analyses, and testimonials from clairvoyants who claimed to have seen similar entities.

Sales were modest but generated international attention. Newspapers around the world covered the story. Doyle gave lectures defending the photographs. When critics pointed out obvious problems: the fairies' poses looked suspiciously like illustrations from children's books, the wings appeared flat and two-dimensional, the images did not show motion blur (very common in cameras of the day) despite the dancing poses—Doyle dismissed their skepticism as prejudiced views.

Doyle had decided the photographs were genuine, and every piece of contradictory evidence became, in his mind, proof of how people were resistant to accepting uncomfortable truths. He'd consulted experts, yes, but only ones already sympathetic to his cause. He'd considered alternative explanations, but only enough to dismiss them.

I've seen this effect among my own friends and family, and I know it's true for me as well. Intelligence doesn't make you immune to believing what you want to believe—it just makes you better at rationalizing it. How about you?

The Question of Belief

In the end, did Doyle really believe in the Cottingley Fairies? I think he did.

His private letters reportedly show genuine enthusiasm, even childlike wonder, about the photographs. He wasn't trying to pull off a hoax; he was trying to share

what he saw as revolutionary evidence. In correspondence with fellow spiritualists, he described the fairies as proof that the material world was just one layer of reality, that science was too narrow in its definitions, that humanity needed to open itself to larger realities.

He continued to reference the Cottingley Fairies in lectures for years. When skeptics challenged him, he responded with hurt feelings and accusations of closed-mindedness. When he died in 1930 at age 71, he had never retracted his support for the idea or admitted any doubt about authenticity of the photographs. It is said Doyle knew Elsie was an accomplished artist. He knew the photographs showed inconsistencies. He must have noticed that the fairies looked remarkably similar to popular illustrations of the era. It's hard to believe that the creator of Sherlock Holmes was stupid or gullible, but considering the heartbreaks he endured, he just desperately wanted it all to be real.

He chose to see actual evidence as personal attacks. He chose the belonging he found in tribe of Spiritualism and, consciously or unconsciously, he chose the comfort mystical beliefs could give over skepticism.

The Truth Revealed

In the end, the girls kept the secret for more than six decades.

In 1976, Yorkshire Television tracked down the now-elderly cousins for an interview. They acknowledged that “a rational person doesn't see fairies” but stopped short of admitting fakery, maintaining ambiguity about the images. Finally, in 1983, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths admitted the truth to a magazine called *The Unexplained*. The fairies had been traced from a children's book, drawn on cardboard, cut out with scissors, and held up with hatpins.

It had been that simple all along.

Elsie's confession was matter-of-fact: they had been young girls playing a prank that spiraled wildly out of control. Frances was more complicated. She admitted to the fakery but maintained until her death that they had seen real fairies in Cottingley Beck, and that the fifth photograph had captured something genuine. (Look it up. I see genuinely increasing skill at special effects. Why didn't a

movie producer hire these girls?)

Believe it or not, and who could have seen this coming: when researchers found the original cardboard cutouts in Elsie's attic, they matched the photographs exactly! The fairies had been copied from illustrations in "Princess Mary's Gift Book," a popular children's publication. The ultimate irony? One of the stories in that very book had been written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself!

Why It Still Matters

The Cottingley Fairies might seem like a quaint historical curiosity, but the story resonates more than ever as we enter the age of perfect deepfakes, AI-generated images, and viral misinformation.

This was history's first major photographic hoax to achieve viral status. Before Photoshop, before CGI, before artificial intelligence, two young girls with scissors and cardboard fooled millions—including one of the most famous writers in the world.

They succeeded not because their forgery was so good, but because people wanted to believe. Trusted networks amplified the message. Experts confirmed what they were predisposed to find or what benefited their reputation. They succeeded because the photographs offered hope and wonder in a world scarred by war and grief.

As human beings, we are no more skeptical now than we were then. Every day, manipulated images spread across social media platforms, shared by people who trust the source, confirmed by "experts" with agendas, believed by audiences desperate for validation of their worldview.

The Cottingley Fairies teach us that the problem isn't technology—the problem is us. Our need to believe, our tendency toward confirmation bias, our trust in networks that share our assumptions. These are constants of human nature, unchanged by a century of technological progress.

A Protective Fiction

Which brings us back to Jean Martin's story in DreamForge Magazine. Her fictional twist—that Doyle knowingly created fake photographs to protect real fairies from scientific exploitation—offers something the historical record cannot: a satisfying moral resolution.

In reality, Doyle almost certainly believed in the photographs because he needed them to be true. He needed proof that the world was more than matter and mechanism, that his son Kingsley existed somewhere beyond death, that wonder and magic hadn't been completely extinguished by the modern age, by World War I and the Spanish Flu.

Once devoted to creating the pinnacle of rational detection, Doyle had turned toward faith, hope, and the desperate search for meaning in a nihilistic age. Martin's story gives us permission to see the author more generously, not as someone who knew the truth and covered it up, but as someone who understood that some truths matter more than facts. That protecting wonder, even false wonder, might sometimes be worth the cost of credibility.

What do you think?

The Cottingley Fairies were fake. But the need they fulfilled was heartbreakingly real.

Reference Links:

- [Jean Martin's "No Real Evidence"](#)
- [The Cottingley Fairies: A First Deep Fake in History?](#)
Discovery UK analysis of the hoax and its modern parallels
- [Cottingley Fairies: The Photo Hoax That Fooled Kodak and Arthur Conan Doyle](#)
PetaPixel's detailed photographic analysis
- [The Coming of the Fairies](#)
Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia
- [The Cottingley Fairies: A Study in Deception](#)
Google Arts & Culture exhibition

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.

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



From Greg Clumpner:

One of my drabbles, "[Heaven's Stray](#)" is available with 100-Foot Crow for their "Train" theme.

I have a drabble and a micro releasing with [Rat Bag Literary](#) on Wednesday, November 19th. Rat Bag Lit is a new publisher out of Pennsylvania. My drabble "Death's Cradle" is a somber piece written for their "Funerary Raccoon" prompt. My micro "Beware What Hides In the Woodpile" is more dark humor.

I also recently had my short story "Crossing" accepted to the TRUNK: Stories That Took the Long Way anthology, expected in early 2026. "Crossing" was the first story I had critiqued in the WorD group and the first I submitted to publications. It has since had over 40 rejections, despite several encouraging personal notes and suggestions attached to the "No"s. I loved working with Editor B. Morris Allen at Metaphorosis Publishing to help push my story over that last hump.

John Frochio's story "Don't Use Grandfather for Fish Bait" has just been published in anthology Strange Legacy 2025: Creature Feature, available at [Amazon](#) in Kindle and paperback formats.

Your Announcement Could Be Here!

Parsec members never pay for ad space in the monthly Sigma!

Become a Parsec member for only \$30/yr

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PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



Alan Irvine's story "Designed For Death" was published in Black Cat Weekly. The story is a murder mystery set on a space station, in which two seemingly mundane cases lead detective Desimora Jones into a web of conspiracy.

From M. Christine Benner Dixon:

Dialogue can make or break a story. When characters open their mouths and speak, they aren't just delivering exposition—they are telling us about themselves and how they see the world. And sometimes they lie. This online skill-building workshop, offered through Literary Cleveland, will delve into the pitfalls and opportunities of writing dialogue in fiction.

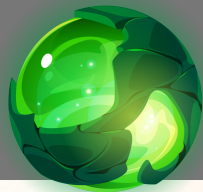
More info: <https://www.litcleveland.org/classes-workshops/say-what-dialogue-in-fiction>

From Mary Soon Lee:

Hoping those of you in the northern hemisphere are holding up well despite the shortening days. I'm glad to report that the [Reddit Readalong](#) of [The Sign of the Dragon](#) is underway. Discussion of Part 3 (has begun). :-)

I'm also happy to announce that *The Sign of the Dragon* was reviewed by Peter Heck in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, and, better yet, he highly recommended it. His [Asimov's book column](#) may be read online. N.B. The review of *The Sign of the Dragon* is currently third, but will disappear when the next issue's set of book reviews appear.

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



Mary Soon Lee (cont'd.):

I've also had a couple of new poems published. "Cyberpunk Dragon" appeared in the Cyberpunk issue of Eye to the Telescope, edited by Casey Aimer. And "Corn Snake #6" appeared in US1 Worksheets #70 (which is not online).

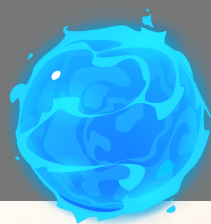
A reminder that I will be on the "Poetry, Flash, & the Power of Hybrid Storytelling" panel at Quasar on November 16th. This event is over Zoom, but you need to have paid for either Quasar or the earlier Nebula conference.

And now my favorite part: the reading update. It was an excellent reading month. I think my favorite book was Robert Jackson Bennett's "The Tainted Cup," a mystery that takes place in a strange, marvelous, perilous fantasy setting, narrated by a very likable character. There are echoes of Holmes and Watson, but this is far removed from the streets of London. I also very much enjoyed the second book in this series, "A Drop of Corruption."

There were three more books that I particularly enjoyed.... Roger Zelazny's "A Night in the Lonesome October," thirty years old but a new discovery for me. This is a Halloween-flavored Lovecraftian fantasy. After a brief introductory chapter, there are thirty-one more chapters dated October 1, October 2, ..., October 31. As recommended by Sharon Lee, each evening in October, I read the chapter for the corresponding day. The book is narrated by a dog called Snuff, who gives the book much of its charm. Though there are many horror elements, it's largely a delight.

Sarah Beth Durst's "The Spellshop" is a sweet and gentle fantasy with a strong romance component, though it is not without menace and danger and grief. (The book opens in a burning library, which is clearly A Terrible Thing.) Meanwhile L.E. Modesitt, Jr.'s "Legalist" has less magic and more

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



Mary Soon Lee (cont'd. again):

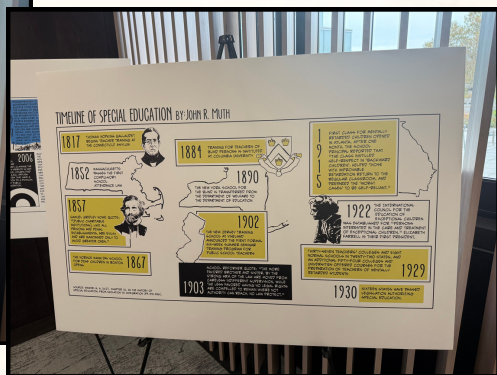
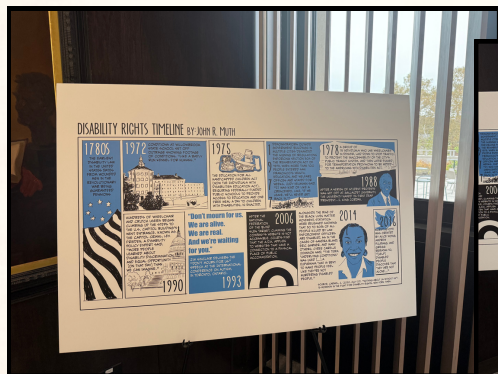
political maneuvering than most of his fantasy. I liked the main character and the emphasis on the importance of the rule of law. A note of caution: one of my family finds Modesitt's dry style tedious, but I slip into the main character's world and have a Jolly Good Time.

As ever, all my book reviews may be unearthed at [Goodreads](#).

From John R. Muth:

I've had one story accepted – though I can't currently name it or the publication. And I just received notice that a story that had been being held for consideration was finally passed on.

And not genre related, but my (day job) office recently presented two pieces of art I created, on the history of disability and special education, at an annual award ceremony. It was very kind and an honor for them to use my art.



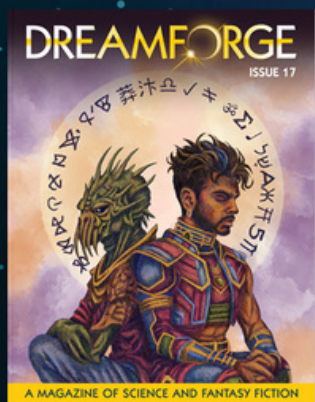
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THROUGH DEC 31

PARSEC'S SIGMA SPOTLIGHT



Jane Noel
Grapeville, PA

About Me: I went to the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and worked in computer games for about 10 years before starting a web design agency in the "early days" of the web. I'm a graphic designer (and long time fan of fantasy and science fiction) who happened to marry a writer. So we decided to create DreamForge Magazine. It's been a lot of work and a wonderful experience. We've met so many wonderful people!

What are you reading/watching now?

Sign of the Dragon (by Mary Soon Lee), All the Pieces Matter: The Inside Story of the Wire, and Parsec's Dark Hearts anthology.

How long have you been involved with anything Parsec?

Since 2018 or 2019

What's that? You want to have your profile shared in the Sigma? All you need to do is complete our Questionnaire, and you may be the next one featured!

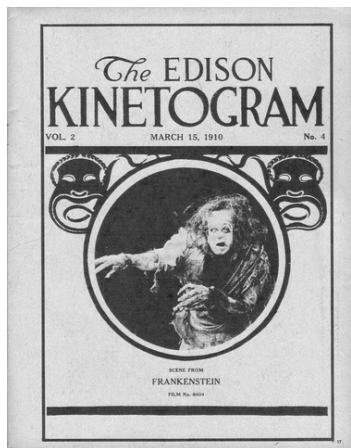
What is your favorite piece of speculative fiction? And what do you love about it?
That's really hard to pick one favorite. But I'd probably have to choose Lord of the Rings. It's the work that made me love fantasy.

It's Alive! It's Alive! And It Always Has Been.

By: John R. Muth

There's a new Frankenstein movie released on Netflix this week. It's directed by Guillermo del Toro, starring Oscar Isaac and Jacob Elordi, and suffice to say—I haven't seen it yet. It's one of those things that I was excited to watch it in the theater, but finding that it wasn't showing anywhere near me, I kind of lost interest.

Yet, despite that, as I spent one evening recently scrolling through Youtube, I came upon a video that promised: "Thomas Edison's Frankenstein - 1910." Much like the book, which I currently have sitting within arm's reach on my bookshelf near my desk, I hadn't taken in this earlier version of the story.



I watched it. It was twelve minutes long. There were a couple of scenes that flashed to red and I wondered if that was intentional or just some fault in the transfer or the film of the time, but in one particular moment it was a very affective visual. The movie was actually, also, quite affecting. The thumbnail image of "the monster" looked hokey and, well, like it was made by people who didn't know what they were doing. (Perhaps Edison could have hired little girls who photographed fairies!) And yet, the monster, if it can be called that, in the film winds up being beautiful and in the film's final moments, more haunting than I

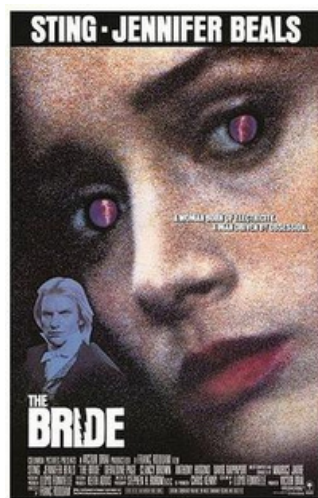
feel like any other adaptation of Shelley's work I've seen. It's one hundred and fifteen years old, but I wouldn't want to spoil it for you. Please go watch it!

But with these films, this "property," in my head, I started thinking about all the

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other versions that have been made. The ones I've seen, the ones considered “lost films,” and the ones that are surely yet to come. The idea of Frankenstein is one that's seemingly always been with humanity—the concept of creating life. Whether through arcane means like Frankenstein, the golem, or the Incredible Hulk. There's something to be said about man (and it is usually, very much men. You can bet there's been many scholarly articles applying Freudian concepts to the story!) playing god. I didn't take the time to revisit all of these recently, but I guess it's part of the season to share what are my, up until now, favorite versions of the Frankenstein story.

The Bride (1985): This Gothic romance is probably the first movie that ever broke my heart, and it's rooted in the idea of the Monster (here taking the name Victor, played brilliantly by Clancy Brown) and his good friend, Rinaldo (played by David Rappaport). The investigation into toxic masculinity and relationships that circles around the Doctor Frankenstein character, a snot-faced Sting, and the titular “Bride” played by Jennifer Beals, is also magnificent. (Even though she was thoroughly criticized, even winning a Razzie for her performance.) Again, I haven't seen this since I was a pre-teen, so who knows how well it's aged, but in my mind it's an undersung classic!



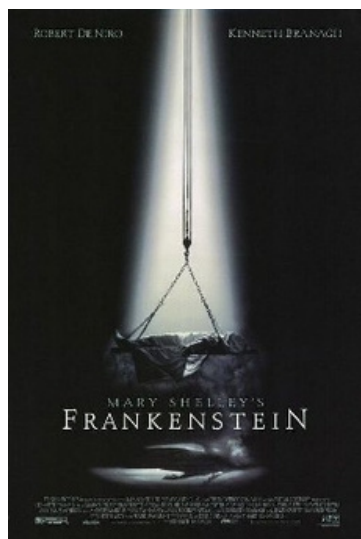
Frankenstein (1931): I'm going to list this movie just because it's the original Karloff version, but for my money Bride of Frankenstein is better. Suffice to say, even as a person who's always been more into vampires, this film is so much better than the 1930 Dracula and it along with the sequel are top-notch. In fact I'd love a supercut of the two films together, including the score (this film lacks) from the sequel, which would still keep both films under two hours. But Karloff creates one of the most iconic cinema characters, and along with him, Dwight Frye (who was also in the 1930 Dracula, as Renfield, and is



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better there) steal the show.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1994): All right, this is where I'll lose most of you but 1994 was key Kenneth Branagh time for me. And I guess the hype coming off Coppola's *Dracula* (which is the much better version of these 1990s adaptations) made this appealing. Plus, it's got Aidan Quinn as the arctic ship's captain. De Niro isn't great as the monster, here. Yet, he encompasses the fury and intellect of a being created and abandoned by his god. (I feel like he was stifled trying to act through the makeup.) But I found Branagh's *Frankenstein* captivating. It was before I'd seen any of his Shakespearean adaptations, but his madness, his obsession, his vanity, was magnificent.



Okay, this one isn't a recommendation, and it's not a movie I particularly liked. But 2015's *Frankenstein*, directed by Bernard (Candyman) Rose, features the one thing I have to give it props for... Its cinematographer is the same person who filmed my very first short film. (A creation on its own that we started and ultimately abandoned.) It also features Danny Huston as Frankenstein, Carrie-Anne Moss as his wife, but the movie feels very first-draft-like, its ambitions are too big for its seemingly small budget, and I can only promote it to support my friend.



Lastly, because I feel like I'd be hunted down with torches and pitchforks if I didn't list it: **I, Frankenstein!** *Just kidding.* Although, I've got to admit, I do vaguely recall enjoying this 2014 movie where the monster (Aaron Eckhart) fights gargoyles!

I actually mean to list Mel Brooks' 1974 **Young Frankenstein**... Say it with me, now: Franken-STEEN! Because I'd seen this long before seeing James Whale's 1931 film, I'd had no idea how much of it was directly stolen from that film. Gene Wilder Gene Wilders. Cloris

Leachman Cloris Leachmans... *What's not to like?*

I'm sure I'll get around to Del Toro's *Frankenstein*, eventually. It's the kind of story he was seemingly born to make. (Unlike his long desire to adapt Lovecraft's *At The Mountains of Madness*, which I've read versions of... And to quote Elizabeth (Madeline Kahn's character) from Brooks' film: *woof!* But even if I don't (as I still haven't seen his *Pinocchio*), I'm sure there'll be another version along soon.

And just for good measure, here's the poster for the Bernard Rose *Frankenstein* movie. I don't remember, nor do I think it makes sense, why the numbers in the title are like that.



Erwin's Cat

By: Barton Paul Levenson

"I'm coming for you, Schrödinger!" yelled the cat.

The professor backed away from the box. "You can talk?" he asked.

"Bloody right I can talk," the cat said. "And I'm gonna bleeding kill you!"

The cat was small, black, and weighed no more than five pounds. The professor outweighed it by at least twenty to one. Nonetheless, its determined walk frightened him, and he fled up the stairs. "It was just an experiment!" he cried.

"I know it was a bloody experiment! You were gonna put me in a superposition of states? Both dead and alive? How d'ye suppose that'd feel to me, yer bloody insensitive blighter? Just don't think, do yer?"

"No! That wasn't the point at all!"

Schrödinger's wife, Annemarie, and his girlfriend, Hilde, came into the room, drawn by the noise. "What is going on here?" Anny asked.

"The cat is trying to kill me!" Schrödinger said.

"The *cat*? Oh, Erwin, have you been drinking again?"

"Please, you've got to believe me!"

Meanwhile, Hilde had bent over the strange-looking box on the living room carpet. "What is this here? What were you doing with the cat in the first place?"

Schrödinger took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead, almost dislodging his circular-lens glasses. "It was an experiment in quantum mechanics. In the box I place a cat, a radioactive atom, and a detector, for a period of one hour. If the atom decays--a 50% probability--poison gas is released and the cat dies. If the atom does *not* decay, the cat lives. Those who follow the Copenhagen interpretation would say that before I open the box to observe it, the cat is neither dead nor alive, but in a superposition of both states!"

"But that's silly," Hilde said. "It can't be both."

"Of course it's silly! That was my point! It's either a live cat or a dead cat! The Copenhagen interpretation is wrong! This whole superposition business is misguided!"

"*And for that you put me in that bloody death trap?!*" the cat yelled.

"*Nein! Nein!* I did not realize you were a sentient being! I meant no harm!"

"I'll getcher for this, yer sodding great arse!" the cat said. It charged up the

stairs, with Anny and Hilde right behind it.

“Oh, please, *katze-chen*, calm your ire!” Anny said.

“Calm down, there's a good kitty,” Hilde said.

Schrödinger ran to his bedroom and tried to slam the door behind him. He was too slow to prevent the cat slipping in just before the latch clicked. There came the most terrible screeching, caterwauling, and screaming from behind the door, as Anny and Hilde listened in horror.

Finally the noise stopped. The women looked at each other. Neither one wanted to be first to try the doorknob.

They knew what had happened. At the age of 48, Professor Erwin Rudolph Josef Alexander Schrödinger--winner of the 1933 Nobel Prize in physics for his wave equation of quantum mechanics; philosopher, writer, one of the greatest physicists of the twentieth century--was dead, lying on the floor of his Oxford bedroom.

And at the same time, he wasn't.

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PARSEC EVENT IN DECEMBER

You're invited to the Parsec Holiday Party!

In December, PARSEC holds its annual Holiday party on Saturday, December 13th from 4 pm – 10pm. (There is NO ZOOM meeting in December)

All Parsec members and friends of Parsec are welcome to attend. Feel free to bring a friend. Enjoy great conversation, food, fun, frivolity and maybe even some gaming.

The Parsec Holiday Party is a potluck event. Bring a sweet or savory dish to share. Plates, napkins, cups, flatware, ice, and some beverages will be provided.

The 5500+ books of the PARSEC library will be on display at the party, so even if you are just looking for a good book to stick your nose into, this is the place to be!

No RSVP required.

Date: Saturday, December 13th, 2025

Location: 2966 Voelkel Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15216

Time: 4 to 10 pm

(There is no Zoom meeting this month.)

Please check www.parsec-sff.org for more details.



Thank you to this month's contributors! Thank you to the program officers and Board Of Directors that help keep everything Parsec running smoothly, and especially thank you to the readers who have yet to say anything about the dishes not being done.

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