



SIGMA

The Official Parsec, Inc. Newsletter

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Cover image: "Changeover" by: John R. Muth, 2025.

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,

Well, 2025 is over... Almost, but we'll round up like we're a store giving change. (RIP penny.) Let's keep it short and sweet. Bittersweet, even.

This month we have Scot Noel's final column as the Parsec Events chairperson. It's a harrowing, and wildly optimistic dive into his current health situation. (C/W: It does go into some delicate things regarding eyes—if that's a problem for you.) But, having worked with Scot over the past two-ish years, **I want to say thank you, Scot** for all you've done in leading the monthly events, contributing these monthly articles, and just being a general rock to rely on in my experiences here at Parsec.

Finally, I hope you all have a wonderful holiday season. **Join us on Saturday, December 13, for the annual Parsec Holiday Party!** In January, we'll be back with some new features (if all goes to plan), me taking over for the monthly events as well as this newsletter (Yikes!), and who knows what else.

I hope to have you be part of that conversation! Please send in member announcements, reviews, stories, or other content to parsecsigmanews@gmail.com. Let me know how you're liking the newsletter or pieces therein (I got a very nice note from someone commending Scot on his "Fairies" column.)

Until next year!

John Muth

PARSEC MONTHLY EVENT

In December, PARSEC holds its

ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY

All Parsec members and friends of Parsec are welcome to attend. Bring a sweet or savory dish to share.

The 5500+ books of the PARSEC library will be on display.

No RSVP required.

Date: Saturday, December 13.

Location: 2966 Voelkel Avenue, Dormont, PA 15216

(Look for the 10 foot tall dragon out front.)

Time: 4 to 10 pm

Parsec Events are always open to the public.

There will be no Zoom option this month.

Monthly Event Officers: Co-Chairs: Scot Noel & John Muth.

Positions of Vice Chair and Secretary are currently open.



PARSEC PROGRAMS



Parsec Ink

The 2026 Triangulation anthology edited by Marie Vibbert. The theme is:

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 are 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, December 9, at 7:00 pm, on Zoom only.
- There will be no second meeting in December.

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

**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.



Fighting Blindness from AMD, a Personal Story

By Scot Noel

This will be my last article for Sigma, at least for the foreseeable future. And while my headline sounds dramatic, I'm not exactly going blind any time soon. What I have is Age related Macular Degeneration, a progressive loss of central vision which I've had for a while and has recently been getting worse. (Writing is more tiring to do these days, and since I have a lot of writing to do; I need to re-prioritize. So, while I've enjoyed the privilege of contributing to Sigma, it's time to give others the same wonderful opportunity.)

But what this article is really about is a look at the future of vision care, happening now.

I recently found myself talking via ZOOM with a team of sixteen people at OKKO Health, all focused on the same thing— my eyes. It wasn't a medical appointment. It was a conversation about how their app, still in development, is helping me monitor the progression of my macular degeneration.

It struck me then: if I'd been born at almost any other time in history, I might be blind by now.

Instead, I'm living in an age when vision loss doesn't have to be a one-way road. It's a challenge met with apps, advanced drugs, imaging technology, and even retinal implants. I'm not just getting treatment; I'm standing at the edge of science fiction turning real.

How It All Started

My eyesight didn't begin to slip because of macular degeneration. It started with cataracts.

A decade ago in my 50s, I began to notice everything becoming doubled and blurry. Cataracts are one of the oldest and most common causes of vision loss worldwide. For most of human history, there wasn't much to be done. But I was lucky enough to live in the 21st century with decent insurance.

In 2013, I had cataract surgery with lens implants in both eyes. Suddenly the world came into clearer focus, at least for medium and long distances. I still needed reading glasses for close work, but I could function, drive, and work normally again. It was like being handed back my vision.

But even then, something else was quietly waiting in the wings.

More Than Cataracts – Macular Degeneration

During routine exams, my optometrist noticed **drusen** at the back of my eyes. These are little yellowish deposits beneath the retina. Drusen are often the first sign of **age-related macular degeneration (AMD)**, a condition that slowly eats away at central vision.

AMD comes in two main forms: dry and wet. The dry kind is more common and slower to progress. My brother had it too. He was older than me and flying planes into his seventies. I took that as a good sign. Maybe any vision degradation for me was a long way off.

To monitor things at home, I used an Amsler grid. This is basically a piece of graph paper with a dot in the center. You hold it up, focus on the dot, and see if the lines look straight or warped. If they start to twist or bow, it can be an early warning that the disease is advancing.

For years, my grid stayed reassuringly straight.

When Things Started to Change

Then came 2025. I started noticing distortions when I looked at the grid. Lines wavered and tilted, especially in my **left eye**.

While I didn't know it at the time, that was the beginning of the transition from

dry AMD to wet AMD. Wet is a more aggressive stage caused by abnormal blood vessels growing under the retina. These vessels can leak or bleed, leading to rapid vision loss if not caught early.

My optometrist sent me to eyecare specialists. At first, they suspected something called a **macular pucker**, but soon enough the swelling and bleeding pointed to wet AMD. But even from the first visit, they introduced me to the **OKKO app**, a new eye monitoring software that can work from a smartphone or tablet.

The Power of an App

OKKO is simple to use. You play what’s essentially a short game on your phone or tablet: tapping distorted circles, finding the “off” dot in a ring pattern. Behind the scenes, the app tracks subtle changes in your visual field, often before you consciously notice them. This makes it a great early warning system to catch advancing deterioration.

I started using the app a few times a week. Not religiously at first. More like, “Well, the doctor wants me to do this.”

Then one day, it flagged a **significant change** in my left eye. I saw it too. The distortion had become so uncomfortable I bought an eye patch to cover that eye so I could read. My right eye was still fine, but the left was... disconcerting.

When I went in to see the doctor, they didn’t want to “schedule something for later.” They said, “We’re doing your first injection now.” Injection??

The Shot in the Eye

Yeah, I’ll admit it: that freaked me out. The words “needle in your eye” do not bring up warm, fuzzy feelings. I like a good long runway to worry about things, and this was right now.

But it wasn't as bad as I feared. You don't actually see the needle. There's a numbing injection, and then the medication goes in. Honestly, it hurt less than a dental Novocain shot. Your eye feels scratchy afterward and is so watery it's largely out of commission for the day, but that's about it.

The drug I received is **Eylea HD**, one of the newest anti-VEGF (vascular endothelial growth factor) medications. It's only been available for a couple of years, and the results have been impressive. The injections stop the abnormal blood vessels from leaking, and in many cases—including mine—they actually improve vision. Scans show the geography of my retina is returning to normal.

I noticed that improvement surprisingly fast. It's not perfect, and probably never will be, but better is a word I didn't expect to use after "wet AMD."

The initial treatment involves three monthly "loading" shots. After that, I'll likely go on a two- or three-month maintenance schedule.

A Front Row Seat to Innovation

Here's the thing: I didn't just benefit from the app and the drug; I became part of the feedback loop.

For one thing, the OKKO team noticed that my results didn't look like the "typical" user's. They were curious why. It turns out my **background in game design** (they think people with gaming experience react differently) and my particular distortion pattern were revealing areas where their algorithm wasn't tracking closely enough.

The lead scientist invited me to talk to their team. Not just a developer or two, but a full meeting with sixteen people—coders, UX designers, project managers, even legal. We discussed how people actually use their phones during testing, how the interface works for real users, and how to make detection even more precise.

It was wild to realize that my condition was **helping shape a tool** that will help thousands of others down the line.

And it has turned into more than that one meeting. The Product Manager at OKKO wants to meet with e monthly to review my progress and hear about my use of the OKKO app and we'll discuss ways to improve it for everyone.

Living in the Right Century

I think about what would have happened to me a century ago, a decade ago, a few years ago. With cataracts and macular degeneration, I might have lost my central vision completely by now. Reading. Writing. Editing stories for DreamForge. All of that might have been impossible or much more difficult.

Instead, I'm using advanced drugs to stabilize and even improve my sight. I'm tracking my vision daily on my phone. I can get treated **immediately** when something changes.

And the story doesn't end there.

The Next Frontier: Seeing Again

Today, I'm lucky enough to be living at the front edge of AMD treatment. But there are researchers pushing things even further.

One of the most exciting developments is the **PRIMA subretinal implant**, which uses a tiny photovoltaic chip placed beneath the retina. Patients wear glasses that capture video and beam it to the chip, which then stimulates the retina directly. In a recent global study, about **80% of participants with advanced AMD regained meaningful central vision**.

Other advances are coming fast—AI-driven vision monitoring, at-home retinal imaging, gene therapy, and regenerative medicine. We may be moving toward a time when blindness from macular degeneration isn't just delayed but substantially reversed.

Gratitude and Hope

I know I'm privileged. I live in a developed country with access to good insurance and good doctors. Not everyone does, and that's something we need to fix.

But I'm also deeply aware of how extraordinary this moment in history is. I have a progressive eye disease—and I can still read, write, and live my life. I can even play a small part in helping shape the future of treatment.

It's easy to get lost in daily news cycles that make the world seem like it's always teetering on the brink. But stories like this remind me (and I hope they remind you too) that we're also living in an **age of astonishing progress**.

Once, macular degeneration was a slow march toward blindness. Now, it's something we can fight, and sometimes, even push back.

As always, the human adventure is just beginning.

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.

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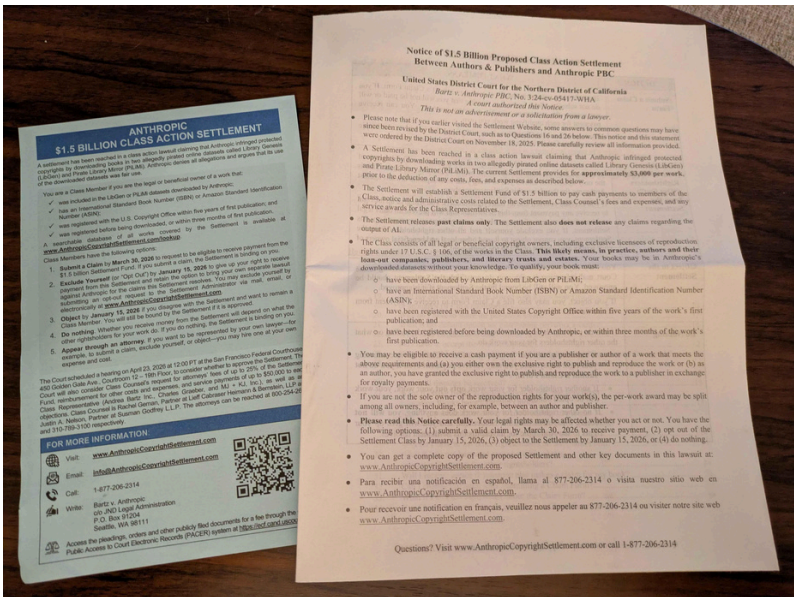
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THROUGH DEC 31

QUICK UPDATE ON ANTHROPIC CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT

By: Susan Kaye Quinn

As of Dec 1st, the court/lawyers sent out a mailing to all the authors/publishers they have on record as potentially being members of the Class. You should have gotten something like this in the mail:



If not, I recommend contacting the lawyers and having them send you the info:
<https://www.anthropiccopyrightsettlement.com>

The deadline to file claims is March 30th, 2026.

I'm still meticulously going through my body of work and making sure I find each one that qualifies for a claim. I'll report back on any tips/tricks in that regard in January!

Keep writing, my friends! Art is Resistance and the world needs human art like never before.

PARSEC'S SIGMA SPOTLIGHT



Mary Soon Lee

A galaxy far far away (London)

How long have you been involved with anything Parsec?

About 32 years.

What are you reading/watching now?

"A Hymn to Dionysus" by Natasha Pulley, and, very very very slowly, Dante's "Inferno" in a bilingual edition, and this year's Elgin-nominated poetry chapbooks.

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 next!

About Me: Mary Soon Lee was born and raised in London, but has lived in Pittsburgh for thirty years. She is a Grand Master of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Poetry Association, and winner of the AnLab Readers' Award, Dwarf Stars Award, Elgin Award, Rhysling Award, and Utopia Award. An illustrated edition of her epic fantasy "The Sign of the Dragon" was published in January 2025. She hides behind a cryptically named website (marysoonlee.com) and BlueSky account (@marysoonlee.bsky.social).

What is your favorite piece of speculative fiction? And what do you love about it?

"The Lord of the Rings" - this is my stock answer but others are possible, such as "The Dispossessed." I love Tolkien's worldbuilding, the story, the epic nature, the characters, and how the book has been part of me since childhood.

PARSEC EVENT IN JANUARY

Parsec Ink Panel

Join us in January, when the minds behind this year's (and many previous years') annual Triangulation Anthology will speak about the theme for 2026, **"Bad Romance!"**



Get insights from Hugo- and Nebula nominated author and this year's editor, Marie Vibbert, learn what it takes to make an annual anthology from other members of the team, and prepare your stories about "trashfire, toxic relationships, with a speculative element."

Submissions are open until January 31, 2026. [Submit now](#) or after the meeting!

Date: Saturday, January 17th, 2025

Time: 1 to 2:30 pm

(Zoom opens at 12:45 and ends at 3:00 pm.)

Location: This event will be held on Zoom only.

Register for the Zoom link.

****Please note this is a new link for 2026! You will have to reregister to join the meeting.**

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 elf on the shelf.

Editor, John Muth

Parsec Board of Directors: President: Kevin M. Hayes.

Vice President: John Thompson. Treasurer/Secretary: Karen Yun-Lutz.

At Large Members: Alan Bailey, Jamie Lackey, John Muth, Scot Noel, and Kathryn Smith

Executive Director: Diane Turnshek

Current BOD can be found on the [WEBSITE](#)

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