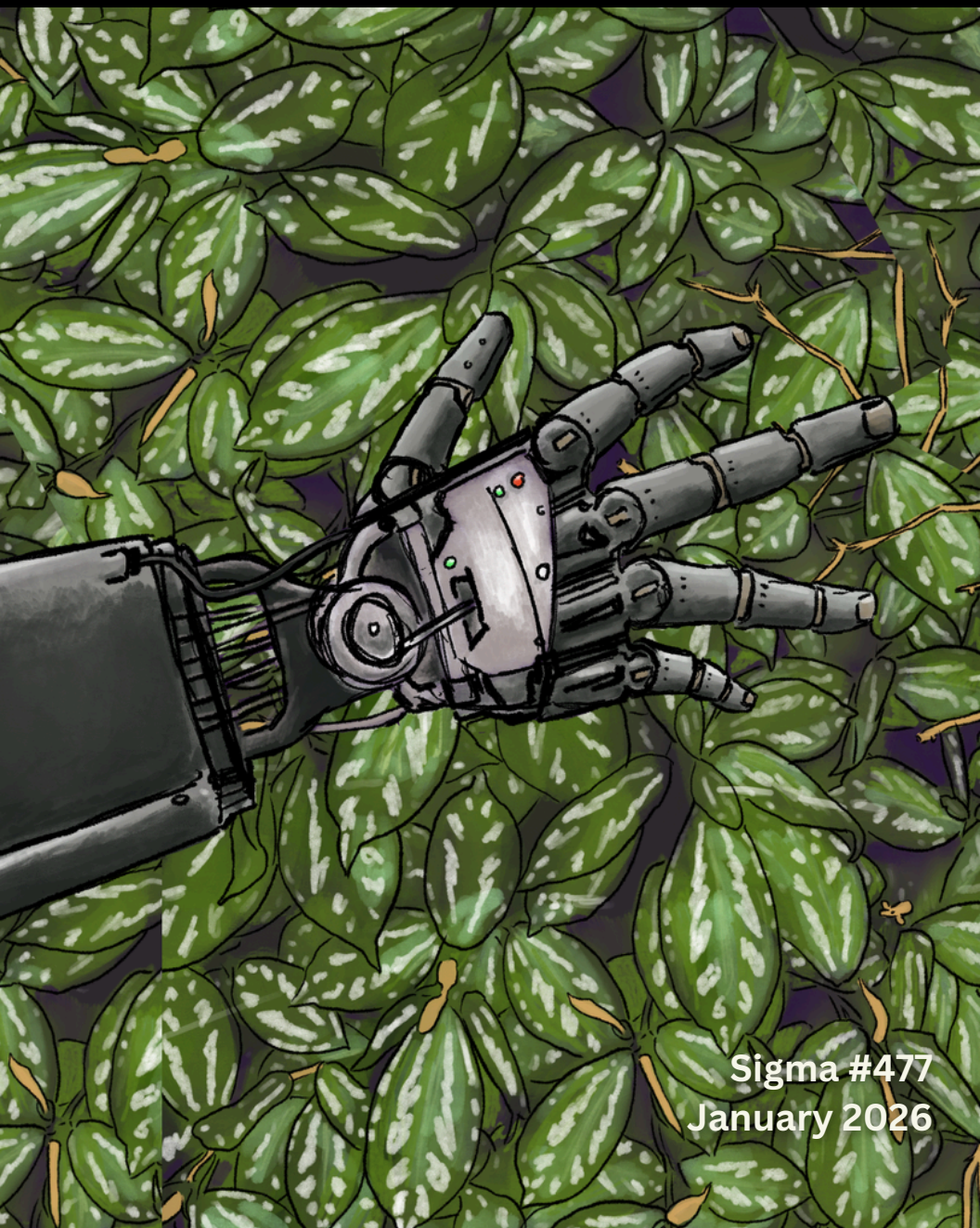




SIGMA

The Official Parsec, Inc. Newsletter



Sigma #477
January 2026

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Cover image: "Touch Grass" by: John R. Muth, 2026.

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,

Welcome to 2026. It's a whirlwind of weather here in Pittsburgh. Snow, wind, warmth (or relative warmth), rain, sun, and clouds. More snow. Seems about right.

I want to start the year with acknowledging the changes within the organization that is Parsec, Inc., the 501(c)(3) nonprofit that oversees the monthly events, Confluence, Parsec Ink - Triangulation, Sigma, and other programs. The following page outlines the general change in the board of directors, with other "staffing" announcements coming soon. But, as I am on the board, I want to thank all the volunteers (and we're all volunteers) for their diligent work in trying to keep Parsec running. I look forward to continuing to work together.

With that said, we are a community, so I want to speak to all of you reading this – at last count there were 976 subscribers to this newsletter. There are over 600 members on our Facebook group page, and there are those folks who maybe aren't actual followers, or members, who know about Parsec in some way either through the annual Triangulation anthology, or through the Confluence conference, or possibly even just from the mention that you have made to someone. But, in the spirit of... the things happening in the world, I want to note that together we are mighty! Sure, in this case we're talking about sharing science-fiction, fantasy, and horror, but survival takes action. Engagement.

I am excited to say I have conspired, colluded, bribed, or simply asked, people to participate in the Sigma Newsletter for the year. I'm excited for what they share with us in the coming months. Maybe it will inspire you to also participate. I know it can be hard to find the time, but look at it as taking a moment for yourself. "Sparking joy" as the popular phrase went a few years ago. (Does anyone say that anymore?) Honestly, there are weekends when I sit down to do the Sigma and am not looking forward to it. But then I see people's wonderful

(cont'd.)



contributions – the columns, the member announcements, the events each program is involved in, and the reviews/opinion/stories that people send in – and I push forward to write that review of movies or books (and this intro). I truly enjoy the appreciation I get from so many of you.

The world is a slog. It's tiring, and I'm tired *so much*, but coming to this community: WorD meetings, the monthly events, Confluence, and this newsletter; being around and meeting so many of you, brightens my day/week/month.

Happy 2026, I'm glad you're here.

OH! Before I forget, **memberships expire at the end of February.**

Remember to renew your (or buy a new) membership! Help us keep going. Other than that, I hope you all enjoy this issue. I think it's pretty great.

Until next time!

John Muth

Sigma Editor, Monthly event officer,
and President of the Board of
Directors for Parsec, Inc.

PARSEC, INC.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

At the December 2025 Board of Directors meeting for Parsec, Inc. the board elected a new executive committee. Four board members also left the board due to their terms ending.

**John Muth - President
Kathryn Smith - Vice President
Larisa VanWinkle - Treasurer
Laine Wilson - Secretary**

The current at large members of the Parsec, Inc. Board of Directors are: Alan Bailey and Jamie Lackey.

The new board wishes to thank the previous board members for their time and dedication to Parsec and we hope to continue the organization's mission:

To promote awareness of the richness of speculative fiction as literature, art and music; further general education in the sciences and arts, support contributions—both scientific and artistic—to society and to espouse the enjoyment of speculative fiction as literature, art and music with others.

We also hope to lead with the involvement of you, Parsec's members, subscribers, and attendees to our various programs that are always open to the public.



PARSEC MONTHLY EVENT

Date: Saturday, January 17.

This will be a Zoom meeting.

Event 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. (ZOOM opens at 12:45 pm)

To Register visit <https://bit.ly/PARSECmonthly>.

****PLEASE NOTE THE NEW ZOOM LINK!
THE OLD LINK WILL NO LONGER WORK!****

Open to the Public.



Our Program: Parsec Ink's Annual Triangulation Anthology's theme for 2026 is BAD ROMANCE. This year we are joined by the editor Marie Vibbert, and her team, to discuss the idea behind the call, what it's like managing an anthology, and answer your questions from experienced editors who are writers themselves.

Find out more information and submit your story on the [Parsec Ink website](https://bit.ly/PARSECmonthly).

Bring a friend!

Monthly Event Officer: John Muth

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP OR BUY ONE FOR THE FIRST TIME!

**The Parsec Membership year runs annually
from March 1st through the end of February.**

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 Writing & Critique Group

Parsec Library

Sigma Newsletter

Become a Parsec Member today!

Parsec members in 2026 will receive a free ebook of this year's
**Parsec Short Story Contest winners, and enjoy free advertising
in the Sigma Newsletter!**



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

Writing Workshops with Marie Vibbert

Workshop Registration:

- Signup is required. Visit the [WRITING WORKSHOPS](#) page for more info.
- A [Confluence membership](#) is required to attend and register for the workshops. There is no additional cost for the workshops.
- Both workshops are limited to 14 participants! One workshop per person, please!
- Workshops are 2.5 to 3 hours in length.
- Workshops will be held in the Board Room this year!



Hugo and Nebula nominated author Marie Vibbert's short fiction has appeared over 100 times in top magazines like *Nature*, *Analog*, and *Clarkesworld*, and been translated into Czech, Chinese and Vietnamese. Her debut novel, *Galactic Hellcats*, was long listed by the British Science Fiction Award and her work has been called "everything science fiction should be" by the Oxford Culture Review. She also writes poetry, comics, and computer games. By day she is a computer programmer in Cleveland, Ohio

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

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



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 Fortean.

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

2026 Musical Guest **QUICK SAVE**

[Quick Save](#) is a six-piece videogame music (VGM) from Baltimore, MD (three in the rhythm section, three in the horn section).

Formed during COVID, the band has been playing the convention scene for five years. They've performed at MAGFest, BitGen Gamer Fest, Setsucon, and the VGM Con Digital Stage, just to name a few.

In their sets (which feature humorous visuals, screaming solos, and more musical memes than you can shake a stick at), they broadly explore VGM using the jazz/fusion spectrum. They pull selections from a variety of games — everything from classic 8 bit favorites to current Steam chart-toppers.



PARSEC PROGRAMS



Parsec Ink

The 2026 Triangulation anthology is edited by Marie Vibbert.

The theme for this year 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 through 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, January 13 at 7:00 pm, on Zoom only.
- Tuesday, January 27 at 7:00 pm in the Mt. Lebanon Library, Room A with a Zoom Option available.

For information on meeting procedures, contact info and how to register, **Visit WorD on the web.**

A Quest

By Timons Esaias

Our Esteemed and Glorious Editor, John Muth, had me subpoenaed to a coffee shop in Squirrel Hill, because writers are still allowed in such places. He charged me, using credible threats, with the duty of writing a column each month of 2026. The subject of that column is to be my annual quest for rejections.

Specifically, rejections of my writerly submissions, including poems, flash fictions, essays, articles, bills of attainder, regular short stories and chapbooks. I have an annual goal.

"Why," I hear you asking, "would somebody have a goal for rejections? Isn't that unduly negative? Doesn't it smack of self-loathing and mental decay???"

Well, possibly, but there is a reason. Here's a brutal truth: Writing tends not to sell and appear in print if it isn't in submission in the first place.

There are few major awards for unpublished work, and the royalties are practically non-existent. Clearly this is a horrible system, but it's what we writers are faced with.

So, as I say, to get over the resistance to submission, I've made a game of rejection. I have an annual goal, and the goal for 2026 is the same as my goal for the last couple of years: 300. I was a bad person in 2024, and failed to reach the goal. I was more respectable in 2025, and surpassed the goal with 301. And as of



the submission of this column, I'm at zero for 2026. Goose egg. Which means I'm already behind.

The plan is that I'll keep you up to date with my progress during the year, while discussing the virtues of Brute Force Marketing, and persistence in general. May your goals in 2026 all be achieved.

Timons Esaias is a sporadically award-winning satirist, fictionator and poet. His works have appeared in 22 languages, on at least one planet.

He also teaches workshops.

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



Here is the news for myself, **Brandon Ketchum**:

I will be reading a ghost story at Winter Ghost Stories with Girl After Dark at the Poetry Lounge in Millvale on January 18 starting at 7pm.

As of this morning, my story "[The Chains That Bind](#)," as well as my intro to the story, is available on Season 2 Episode 1 of the Myth and Fiction Podcast by Flame Tree Press.

From Marie Vibbert:

My next book, *Multitude*, is open for pre-orders from Apex Books. Paperback pre-orders will receive a cephalopod keychain!

[Direct order link](#).

[More information on the book](#).

Your Announcement Could Be Here!

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

[Become a Parsec member for only \\$30/yr](#)

Email: parsecsigmanews@gmail.com

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



From Judith Gallagher:

The 36th annual Ligonier Valley Writers' Student Poetry Contest, open to all students in grades 4-12 throughout southwestern Pennsylvania (including homeschoolers), has a deadline of March 11. All topics, including SFF ones, are welcome. Cash prizes in 30 categories, no entry fee, and an awards ceremony at Barnes & Noble and a printed booklet of all the winning poems. Entry form and contest rules will be posted at www.LVWonline.org by January 21.

From James Hardin:

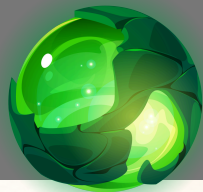
My story "Speaking Bear Leader's Quest" will appear in the Amazing Stories Best of 2025 collection. I don't know when the collection will be published.

From John R. Muth:

My short story, "Leave the Gun, Grab the Cannoli" was published at [Carnage House](#) in December.

I discovered that a short story that had been accepted in 2024, for a charity anthology, went on sale in December as well. My story is called "The Wishing Crypt" in [The Butterfly Effect: And Anthology of Broken Wings](#).

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



Mary Soon Lee:

I've started writing a group of new poems set in the middle of The Sign of the Dragon, a midquel if you will. For those wondering, these extra poems – so far – have no major drama: no demons, no battles, no deaths greater than the demise of fish. Nor do I think they would suit a reader new to Xau and his world. But hopefully returning readers might enjoy them. N.B. This is likely to be a shorter project, perhaps 40 or 50 pages.

Two more items on the topic of The Sign of the Dragon. Firstly, the Reddit Readalong of The Sign of the Dragon wrapped up on 12/23/2025. Secondly, Topher's Library, on YouTube, discussed The Sign of the Dragon in a list of Criminally Underrated Fantasy Books (at 20 minutes 45 seconds into the video).

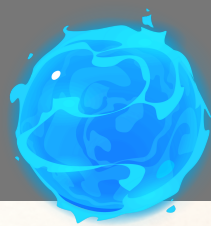
I've had four new poems published, none of them online, though "Feline Domestication" should appear online at some point....

- "Eating with the Dead #2" in Asimov's Science Fiction, September/October 2025
- "Feline Domestication" in Plott Hound, Issue 3, Fall 2025
- "Enough" in yawp, Fall 2025
- "Chilean Sea Bass" in Constellations, Volume 15: Invisibility, Fall 2025

On the reading front, I hugely enjoyed re-reading Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses (neither SF nor fantasy) and also greatly enjoyed a re-read of Scout's Progress, by Sharon Lee + Steve Miller, part of my ongoing re-read of all their wonderful Liaden Universe books. If anyone is looking for space opera with highly likable characters accompanied by found-family elements and some romance threads, I strongly recommend this series.

Of the books I read for the first time, I had the most fun with Death By

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



Mary Soon Lee (cont'd.):

Silver, by Melissa Scott + Amy Griswold, a fantasy murder mystery with a gay romance component, set in a version of Victorian London where magic is an established practice. There's an autumnal feel to it, the characters a little downtrodden and short of funds, but cheered up by each other's company. Plus I finally made it to the end of Dante's *Inferno*, slowed down by my questionable decision to read the Italian alongside the English. Suffice it to say that my Italian is NOT at reading-Dante-level, so it was quite a challenge.

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

Anthropic Class Action Lawsuit: Filing Claims

By: Susan Kaye Quinn

If you've been following the Anthropic Class Action lawsuit, you know that there's an official Works Database you can search to see if your works are eligible for filing a claim and that the deadline to file claims is March 30th, 2026.

Many (many!) authors who had works pirated in the LibGen database (Atlantic has a searchable database that covers pirated works up to 2025) unhappily discovered their works were not in the official Works Database. There are several possible reasons for this (as covered on the settlement website), the most common of which is that the works weren't copyright registered, something that many publishers neglected to do and many authors (reasonably) did not think necessary to protect their rights.

But what if your titles met the requirements and still weren't in the Works Database?

I suspected this was true for me, and once I (finally) sat down to go through all my works, here were the stats:

- 91 titles pirated in LibGen
- 73 registered works
- 51 met all the criteria/timing for registration
- ONLY 40 are in the Works database

I appealed to the class action lawyers to include the other 11 (some novels, some shorts) in the Works Database. These works meet all the criteria, as far as I can tell. There are three possible reasons they've been excluded (beyond

simple error):

1. The works weren't in the database Anthropic downloaded (despite being in the Atlantic database and being published at the same time as similar works that were in the Works Database).
2. The works were corrupted.
3. The works were arbitrarily excluded for being short stories. I say "arbitrarily" because I have several short stories that were included in the Works Database.

The lawyers said "we cannot determine the exact reason why individual books were not included in this settlement." Which is absurd given they were the ones who created the Works Database and they have a massive amount of funding to hire people to respond to complaints. Disappointing, if not enraging, but so many authors have been excluded from this settlement for all kinds of reasons, none of them resembling fair compensation or justice.

As I've said repeatedly, we writers have two unique hammers to use, Luddite-fashion, to smash the blight that is AI:

1. use stories to change the narrative about AI's "inevitability" and to portray a world where technology is used to benefit humanity not subjugate it, only making the rich more powerful,
and
2. use copyright law to enact a cost for the industrial theft of creative labor.

In speaking with my lawyer about updating my will & Trust (which covers my publishing business), he said he fully expects litigation against AI corporations to go on for years, if not decades. In that light, I highly encourage you (when feasible) to both register copyright for your works and make sure you have a way to clearly convey copyrights for your IP to your heirs.

And please keep writing! The more AI slop degrades the world, the more authentic human creation will stand out for the brilliant thing it actually is.

PARSEC'S SIGMA SPOTLIGHT

We've run out of submissions. If you want to have your profile shared in the Sigma? All you need to do is complete our [Questionnaire](#), and you may be next.

But if you prefer just emailing stuff, feel free to answer the questions below to parsecsigmanews@gmail.com, and include a photo of yourself, if you like.

Name?

Where are you from/living currently?

Tell us about yourself.

How long have you been involved with anything Parsec?

What are you reading/watching now?

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

Youthful Revisit

By: John R. Muth

Over the holiday/New Year break, my partner and I tend to do the conventional thing of rewatching one of the epic movie franchises that has become tradition for so many families in this new millennium. But this year, we wanted something new... Part of it was that we couldn't decide on whether it should be Lord of the Rings or Pirates of the Caribbean. Do we include the Hobbit movies? Do we include the last couple Pirates films that just felt like cash grabs? Harry Potter? Star Wars? Bleh...

Then we were struck with an idea. What if we revisited a number of movies at least one of us saw as a child and evaluate whether the films hold up or not. Many of you are probably already cringing at the idea. The films hardly ever can stand up to the feeling of nostalgia that we carry with us. But did it hold true this time? Let's see.



The Last Unicorn (1982)

I had never seen this, but my partner noted how she'd cried like a baby watching this as a child. She recently read the book (maybe for the first time...? I have also not read the book) and seemed to think the Peter S. Beagle classic didn't hold up to what she remembered, so how would the film fare?

It's...pretty bad. Some may wish to write off that this animated film was made in 1982, and by Rankin-Bass Productions (yeah, that Rankin-Bass), but another film I'll talk about in a moment also came out that same year. And the differences

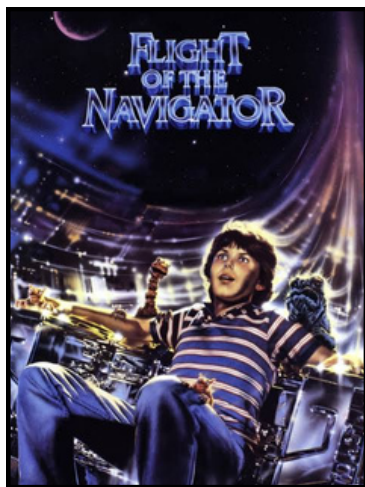
REVIEWS

are night and day. Part of the difference may be that the movie was actually animated in Japan, with the quality of Japanese animation of that period — think *Speed Racer*, *Voltron*, etc. — namely, cheaply and with a lot of limited frames of animation, terrible character and voice acting (and design, if I’m being honest), and finally there’s the soundtrack. “Songs performed by America.”

The film features the voices of Jeff Bridges and Alan Arkin, in all the splendor — and pretty much the same affections — you would expect from “The Dude” and “Yossarian.” Christopher Lee also voices a character in the film, and he seems to be aware of the high art truly being made. And don’t even get my started on Robert Klein’s “The Butterfly.” You might notice a lack in actually covering the plot, and that would be because... it was utter nonsense and nothing made sense.

The Flight of the Navigator (1986)

This one was a perennial favorite when I was a kid. I remember a summer program that my brother and I would attend that gave out free lunches and show movies. They always showed *The Flight of the Navigator*. I was so afraid of how bad this was going to be, but I was delightfully surprised. The main thing the movie really has going for it is that... it’s essentially plotless. It’s got a little bit of contrived storytelling, but then it’s basically just a kid goofing around with a robot that winds up talking like Pee-Wee Herman (Paul Reubens).



And that was the thing, it pushes hard on the emotional conceit of the kid needing to get back home (cue the *E.T.* joke, which is also made in the movie), the great performance by Joey Cramer. The visual effects, an early version of the same CGI that would eventually take over Hollywood, and the set design of the interior of the space ship. (I realized while watching that there was ever a little touch of this ship in the design I used for my graphic novel, *Theoxenia*.)

I will say that the Paul Reubens schtick gets a little old — though it definitely would’ve been peak timing for it in 1986 — and is actually even called out in the

REVIEWS

movie. (The kid was from another time. He wouldn't understand!)

The Secret of NIMH (1982)

Okay, this is another animated movie, from 1982, made by Don Bluth. His name ought to be familiar to you if you paid any attention to rodent-based animation in the 80s and 90s that wasn't made by Disney. I loved this movie as a kid. It may actually be one of the, not only inspirations for my interest in storytelling and art, but in being earnest in trying to help people and being a complete goofball.

This film probably holds up the best, and after our watching it, we agreed that it might even be better seeing it as adults. I'll admit that I don't recall ever really understanding what "NIMH" was, but in watching it now — it's literally given away in the opening moments of the movie by the farmer's wife. But it's the heart, the love, and the utter unwillingness to quit by Mrs. Brisby (Mrs. Jonathan Brisby, like she doesn't have a first name!) that drew me in as a kid, and made me cry as an adult.

I remember always being fond of Dom DeLuise's plucky crow, "Jeremy," in the movie, but he did come off a little more annoying than I remembered. But, I like that that also gets called out in the film. The animation here is SO ***** beautiful. I love that the animals are just ever this much anthropomorphic, but still scurry around like animals. I love how dark the film gets, not just with the duplicitous factions of the rats, but in the terror of the climactic "moving" scene.

The movie was a gem — literally, a magical gem — and I'm so glad we revisited it. Both of the movies I'd seen before really tickled that inner-child that, in today's climate, seems to be more and more set to the side. I might have to read the books about NIMH, and maybe I'll check out the book of The Last Unicorn before it surely gets a modern remake.



PARSEC EVENT IN FEBRUARY

Break out the Lutes, ready thine Poetry!

Our guest poets will be Luiza Flynn-Goodlett. Other guests TBA.
We hope you'll join us.



Luiza Flynn-Goodlett (she/her) is the author of *Mud in Our Mouths* (Northwestern University Press, 2025) and *Look Alive* (Cowles Poetry Book Prize, Southeast Missouri State University Press, 2021), along with numerous chapbooks, most recently *Lossland* (forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press). Her poetry can be found in *Poetry Northwest*, *Third Coast*, *The Common*, and elsewhere. She serves as a poetry editor for the Whiting Award-winning LGBTQIA2S+ literary journal and press *Foglifter*.

Date: Saturday, February 21st, 2026; Time: 1 to 3:00 pm
(Zoom opens at 12:45 and ends at 3:30 pm.)

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 time I flipped a switch and ended the universe.

Editor, John Muth

Parsec Board of Directors: President: John Muth.
Vice President: Kathryn Smith. Treasurer: Larisa VanWinkle. Secretary: Laine Wilson.
At Large Members: Alan Bailey, Jamie Lackey. Board Consultant: Kevin M. Hayes.
Executive Director: Diane Turnshek
Current BOD can be found on the [WEBSITE](http://www.parsec-sff.org)

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