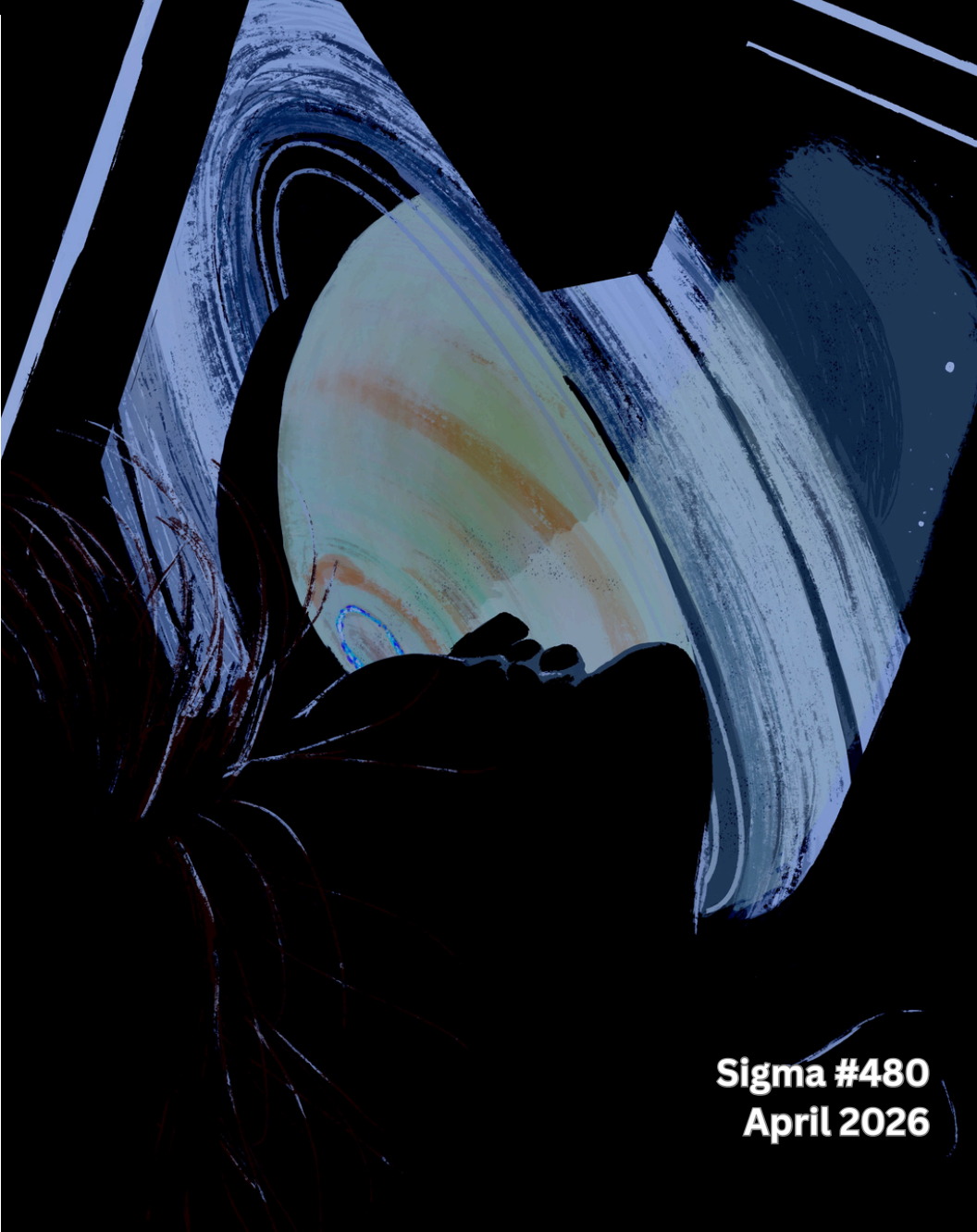


SIGMA

The Official Parsec, Inc. Newsletter



Sigma #480
April 2026

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Back Cover: Next Month's Event

Cover image: "After Artemis II" 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**



Parsec Inc., is an equal opportunity, nonprofit organization and does not discriminate based upon age, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, gender expression, national origin, disability, race, size, religion, sexual orientation, military status, socioeconomic background, or any other status prohibited by applicable law.



DEAR FRIENDS OF PARSEC,

Grr! This is two months in a row of Sigma going out a little late. But, I think we've wound up with a pretty good issue. You know the thing that'd make it even better though?

Contributions from you!

If you haven't already, please make sure to renew, or purchase a membership for the first time (or in a long time). The reason(s) to do so are small, but mighty. I went into the whys last month, and they're listed on the following pages.

If you've been following the news, and who doesn't love doing that nowadays, you may have heard of the Artemis II mission. This month's cover is an homage to the amazing, and amazingly awe-inspiring, photos the crew took. Speaking of the cover, if you hadn't noticed I've been drawing new covers for each month, since December. I do them in Procreate on my iPad, which has this cool tool where it retains a timelapse of the creation of the art. I'm going to be putting all of them (past and future) on my [YouTube page](#) if you'd care to see how they're created.

Other than that, I hope you'll join us next Saturday, at the Hazelwood library, where I'll be speaking to the Air and Nothingness Press founder, Todd Sanders. Or at the WorD meeting this Tuesday, or any of the other upcoming fun things to do.

Until next time!

John Muth

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

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!**



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**

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



RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP OR BUY ONE FOR THE FIRST TIME!

With your membership you get a digital membership card with your name and status for the year. Each member can also choose to have your name on the Parsec website, and here in the Sigma Newsletter. Join today and get your name listed along with these folks:

Lifetime Members:

Barb Carlson, Greg Armstrong, Mary Soon Lee, Timons
Esaias, William Blake Hall

Founders Fund Members:

Sarah Wade Smith, Joan Fisher

2026-27 Main Members:

Judith Gallagher, Susan Urbanek Linville, Susan Kaye
Quinn, Dan Błoch, Jenny Thompson, Barton Levenson,
Larry Ivkovich, James Hardin, John Muth (BOD), Darcy
Conaty, Scot Noel, Kathryn Smith (BOD), Jamie Lackey
(BOD), Alan Bailey (BOD), Jennifer Theoret, Jess Simms,
John Frochio, Greg Clumpner, Amanda Pica, Christine
Benner Dixon

2026-27 Associate Members:

Amy Finkbeiner, Stephen V. Ramey, Elizabeth Penrose, Jane
Noel, Bernadette Harris

PARSEC MONTHLY EVENT

Date: Saturday, April 18th, 2026; Time: 1 to 2:30 pm
(Zoom opens at 12:45 and ends at 3:00 pm.)

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - Hazelwood,
Meeting Room and on Zoom.

CLP is not the host or organizer of this event. CLP does not support, sponsor, or represent this group or event.

Check www.parsec-sff.org for more details.



Todd Sanders lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he works as a graphic designer, poet and translator.

In 1997 he formed the Air and Nothingness Press to facilitate the publishing of his translations of French Surrealist poet Robert Desnos. To date he has published five books of translations by Desnos - The Circle and The Star (2000), The Secret Book For Youki (2001), Calixto (2004), Mythmaking (2006), and Voyage to Burgundy (2008). He also has five collections of his own poetry published - Underland (1997), Lack River(1998), Species of Night (2010), Qila-Kolis (2019) and Ild-Irys (2025).

Todd has also found time to be a successful board game designer. His game, Pulp Detective, was a Kickstarter success with his publisher AV Studio Games, and is printed in five languages. It has had 3 successful expansions and was followed up by Pulp Invasion, and Pulp Romance. He has other games published with LudiCreations and Button Shy Games.

The Air and Nothingness Press is currently celebrating its 29 year and publishes multi-genre short story collections and F/SF anthologies.

Monthly Event Officer: John Muth



Mark Your Calendars!
In May, PARSEC holds its

ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY

Date: Saturday, May 2.

**Location: 2966 Voelkel Avenue,
Dormont, PA 15216**

Time: 4 to 10 pm

The last two Parsec Holiday Parties have been snowed out.

To keep this from being a trend, **Greg Armstrong** is going to have another Parsec Holiday Party, only the holiday will be **Star Wars Day**. It is pot luck, so bring and enjoy good food, better conversation, and the best books available!

(May the Fourth [be with You] is a Monday, and no one wants to party on a Monday.)

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.

Writing Exercises **M. Christine Benner Dixon and Schereéya**



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).

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.

Writing Workshops with Marie Vibbert

Signup is required. Visit the [WRITING WORKSHOPS](#) page for more info.

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



2026 Featured Artist Patricia McCracken

Patricia McCracken is an accomplished Fantasy artist working in watercolor and acrylics. Her style is clearly influenced by the Japanese wood block prints from the Edo period called, Ukiyo-e, which translates to “pictures of the floating world.” Keeping her paintings light and delicate, but with the bold colors and patterns typical of the latter end of that period. “Ever since I can remember, art has always been a part of my life. I guess I was just born into it.” She pursued love of art through two degrees. Receiving her BFA at the

University at Buffalo and a MA at Syracuse University. In 2002 began exhibiting in art shows all across the country and has won a number of awards for her Japanese style work. Patricia continues to show at convention art shows and lives in New York City with her family.

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

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

PARSEC PROGRAMS



Parsec Ink

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

BAD ROMANCE

Editor Marie Vibbert has finalized the stories and poems, and the manuscript is coming together beautifully. We can't wait to share the full Table of Contents when we launch the Kickstarter. There are some names and pieces you're going to love.

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 closed on 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, March 24 at 7:00 pm in the Mt. Lebanon Library, Room A with a Zoom Option available.
- Tuesday, April 14 at 7:00 pm, on Zoom only.

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

AUTHOR SEEKING REJECTION

A QUEST, Volume 4

By Timons Esaias

In my search for 300 rejections in 2026, March began with 149 pieces in submission, rose to 165 in submission, then a flood of rejections dropped it as low as 133. I then diligently submitted until I finished the month with 152 pieces in submission.

I was at 97 rejections at that point, but as of this writing I've jumped to 109 YTD, which is well ahead of schedule.

I should talk about that last increase, because it involves a marketer's ongoing worry: how patient are you supposed to be with markets that never respond? My rule has always been to be Very Patient, because editors are overwhelmed with submissions, and often they hang on to a manuscript they like, hoping to find a good spot for it later. Right now, I have two stories at major markets that have been long, long after the usual response time. Am I going to nudge them, bother them, ask them what's happening? No, I am not. In each case I'll be waiting another two months before they hear a peep out of me.

One of the reasons I don't like to nudge editors is because they often just auto-reject the piece in reply. I just had that happen. A story had been in submission for nearly a year, with a magazine that tends to go yes or no in six weeks. I finally asked if it was still under consideration, and WITHIN MINUTES they told me that yes, it was, but no, we've decided not to take it.

Nonetheless, I did purge my list of a few markets who had exceeded the 300-day line, and counted them as "presumed rejected." Their loss.

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




From **M. Christine Benner-Dixon:**

On April 26, Lara Messersmith-Glavin, Portland-based author of the award-winning essay collection *Spirit Things*, is coming to Bottom Feeder Books as part of her book launch tour for *Ruiner*, a political fantasy where storytelling is combat magic and ordinary people must fight against exploitation and environmental destruction. *Ruiner* is the first book in the Teller Series from AK Press. Messersmith-Glavin will be joined by Cindy Crabb and M. C. Benner Dixon for reading and conversation.

WHAT: *Ruiner* book launch event

WHEN: April 26, 4 p.m.

WHERE: Bottom Feeder Books, 415 Gettysburg St., Pittsburgh, PA



**SUNDAY
APRIL
26TH
4-6 PM**

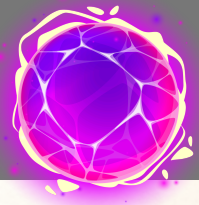
**BOTTOM
FEEDER
BOOKS
415
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ST.**

**BOOK RELEASE
AND READING**

RUINER
BY
**LARA
MESSERSMITH-GLAVIN**

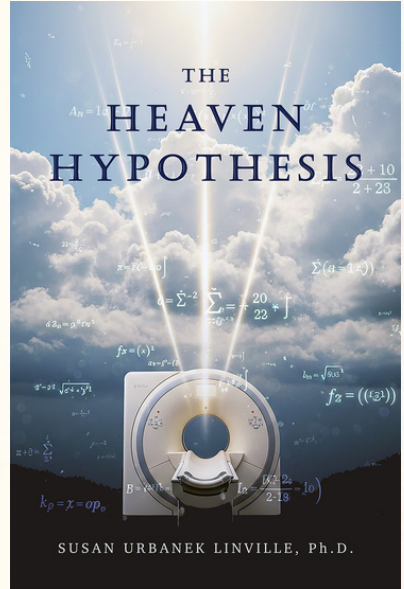
JOINED BY
**CINDY CRABB
AND
M.C. BENNER DIXON**

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



Sue Linville just published a new non-fiction book that may be of interest to PARSEC members: [The Heaven Hypothesis](#)

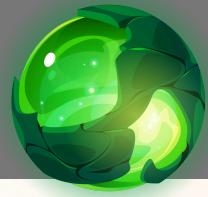
Fifty thousand years after Neanderthals buried their family members in caves, Predynastic Egypt began to develop. Early burials were in simple, shallow pits with a few burial goods. By 3500 BCE, mummification began, and complex rituals were performed to help the deceased enter the afterlife. And the rest, as they say, is history. Or is it? After centuries of time, various religions have come and gone, we have travelled to the Moon and back, but we still have no scientific proof that heaven exists.



Most books approach the topic of life after death in narrow ways. The Heaven Hypothesis is different in that it encompasses every aspect of the topic, covering science, prehistory, history, philosophy, religion, brain science, and recent experimentation. It is a compendium, an “everything you wanted to know but were afraid to ask” type of book. It examines our beliefs in the afterlife. When did the belief in heaven begin? Is it a place or a state of consciousness? Are near-death experiences just hallucinations of a dying brain or real experience? The author believes we are on the verge of being able to answer those questions.

Available on Amazon. Reviews welcome.

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



From **Diane Turnshek**:

I'm moderating an author panel at the [Pgh Book Fest](#) on Saturday, May 30th that Parsec members may be interested in attending. Pricing, times and the names of panel members will be announced shortly.

Parsec member **Jen Theoret** won 3rd prize in Globe Soup's February Micro Competition with her entry, "The Christmas Gift." There were over 350 entries in this international competition.

She also successfully completed the Odyssey Online course, "All the World's a Page."

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

The Tainted Cup - Book 1 of Shadow of the Leviathan

By: Larry Ivkovich



The Tainted Cup, a novel by Robert Jackson Bennett, is a fantasy/mystery with elements of Kaiju and horror sprinkled throughout. It won the World Fantasy and Hugo Awards for Best Novel of 2025. It's a hoot.

Particularly well-written and imaginative, it takes place in a secondary world right out of what used to be called "New Weird" fiction like China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* among many other authors. It's full of strange augmented humans (via botanical modifications that imbue those who receive them with extraordinary powers like intelligence, eidetic memory, strength, longevity, and on and on and are created and administered by a group called the

Apothetikals). There are giant sea monsters called leviathans (and sometimes titans) which are kept each rainy season from going ashore and causing death and destruction by sea walls and explosive weapons called "bombards." Buildings are made from certain plants called "fernpaper" and other vegetation is used for different purposes like giant mushrooms which serve as air conditioners and purifiers. It's wild.

The book is also a takeoff on Sherlock Holmes/Doctor Watson and Nero Wolfe/Archie Goodwin. The novel's two protagonists are the Holmes/Wolfe character Immunis Anagosa Dolabra, called Ana, a brilliant genius who is the Iudex

REVIEWS

Investigator of Daretana Canton and, as you might suspect, has many eccentricities and a harsh, combative personality. Signum Dinios Kol, called Din, is the assistant to the investigator and voices the novel in the first person. Din is really the main character, and serves as the Watson/Goodwin stand-in. Din does most of the investigative legwork. He's an Apothetikal augmented human called a Sublime, whose power is an "engraver" which gives him a photographic, eidetic, and highly superior autobiographical memory all rolled into one. He "engraves" scenes, people, and dialogue in his mind and reveals all he's learned to Ana who processes the clues while blindfolded (I told you she was eccentric) and can read any text with her fingertips.

Ana and Din are called upon to investigate a series of horrible, grisly murders of members of the Engineering faction (who maintain the sea walls). All the victims have had trees violently sprout from within their bodies and completely destroy them as the trees grow very large and very, very fast.

This is a really "hard to put down" book. The characters are great and the worldbuilding is extensive and crazy but it all works. The storyline is suspenseful, exciting, mysterious, and very humorous in the parts which feature a very sarcastic and foul-mouthed Ana.

And it turns out Din has secrets he doesn't want the highly intuitive Ana to find out about.

Completely deserving of its awards and highly recommended. A sequel called *A Drop of Corruption* came out this year and I plan to read that asap!

We will publish the art, writing, or reviews and commentary of the Sigma Newsletter readership. Parsec membership is not required. All content must be original to you. We retain the right to refuse anything deemed inappropriate by the Sigma Editorial team.

Reader Content may not be self-promotional in nature, other than providing a link so we can credit you. Please view the [Sigma Advertising](#) page for details on non-member ads and announcements.

Publishing Reader Content is not an approval from the Sigma Editorial team of any art or opinions stated in submitted work.

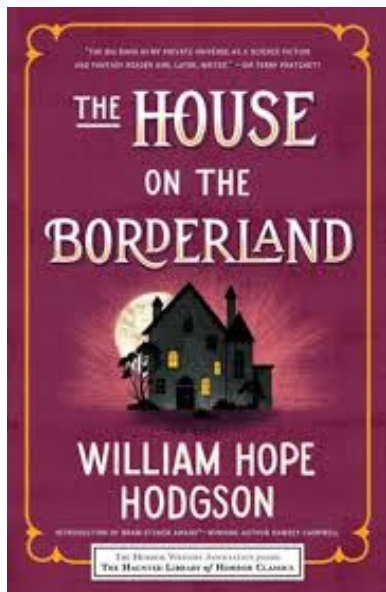
Send submissions to parsecsigmanews@gmail.com

Catching Up On Classics

By: John R. Muth

I've always enjoyed discovering the connections from work of art to work of art. Whether it's material that has inspired others either in the form of adaptations, homages, or... complete ripoffs. Maybe it's just a part of how my mind works where I like making connections. (I do not, though, overly-love the New York Times game, "Connections." In that case, I'm much more of a "Spelling Bee" guy.) I certainly have my own sources, my personal canon as it were; touchstones a lot of my creative endeavors refer to, but it's also fun to find those things that I may not have quite understood how influential it's been—maybe because it's not normally my genre, or it's that there's just too much stuff and I'll never get through it all.

At any rate, over the last few months I've managed to read three novels that I think have found their way into many a zeitgeist, inspired many things that have come later, and in many ways are such rich texts that there's probably still more to be mined from them!



The House on the Borderlands is one of those books, especially if you're into weird fiction, cosmic horror, or "trippy nonsense" that has been deeply explored, but not quite exactly copied. In a way it cast a spell on me, much like it does its unnamed narrator, and I felt whisked away on the strange, convoluted adventure, only to come back and find that I... didn't really remember much about it.

Even in revisiting the book in writing this up, I find everything within the story to be captivating. I recall the writing being good, and filled with confused urgency—something I feel Lovecraft was also able to expertly convey. Similarly to that specific author within this genre,

REVIEWS

there's definitely some undertones of racism, orientalism, and just that ever-creeping feeling that I shouldn't like the narrator—let alone congratulate the author—too much. Rooted in the narrator supposedly being “mad,” and the glee in which he took on defending his castle from “pig creatures,” I fully expected there to be some kind of reveal on what, or who, they might have actually been. A reveal that he'd been gunning down neighbors and innocent passers-by. Or through description, reveal his bigotry by wrapping them in ethnic stereotypes. But, we're left with the mystery, and that probably helps make the weirdness of it stand out even more. The fact that it's a story within a story, and the characters in the bookended sections don't really involve themselves, leaves it as a mere curiosity. Almost as if they forgot it as soon as they'd read it too.

I Am Legend on the other hand is a book that I went in feeling like I knew what it was going to be. Multiple movie adaptations, so many stories naming it as inspiration. And yet, I found myself completely surprised on what this densely angry story still had to share with me. Having now read the book, I'm quite shocked that none of the adaptations have quite done justice to what the story of the book is. I'd say, it'd mostly still work, as is, today.

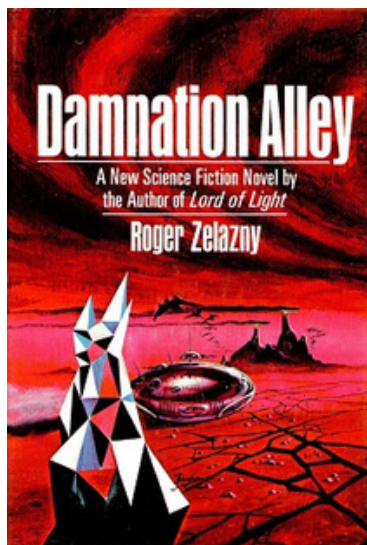
Both of these books have “the dog dies” moments (spoilers, I guess!) but the one here, was so affecting I did feel like I'd been staked through the heart. The anticipation once the young woman shows up becomes very tense, and—despite the era—handles the danger, the yearning and whatever, fairly well. (Not to give it too much credit, but it's not bad for the 1950s.) Her reveal, not as a vampire (also kind of a spoiler), but in her connection to Robert Neville hit me almost as hard as the dog's death.

I think the ending got a little muddled for me. I don't know that I quite followed what was going on with the different kinds of vampires/people, but the finale



REVIEWS

builds up perfectly to that classic final line...*JYKYK*. This was probably my favorite of the three books. Even though it was also, probably the most “familiar” in its place in the literary canon.



Damnation Alley itself probably owes a debt to *I Am Legend*, in going even further in the unlikeable main character. But “Hell” Tanner would eat Robert Neville for breakfast and not even think about it.

An imprisoned Hell’s Angel, SS knife and nihilistic mean streak, along with many other elements of the story, haven’t aged well for today’s audiences. But the story moves. It’s intriguing in its world-building, and I couldn’t wind up doing anything but cheer for Hell to get to the end of this trip. A steady diet of anti-hero, heroic villains who ultimately sacrifice themselves for the greater good that they know they’ll never

be, and never wanted to be a part of, just speaks to me having been raised on characters like Snake Plissken, Wolverine, and pretty much any character Timothy Olyphant has played. I have not seen the movie adapted from this novel, specifically, but I’d be interested to see how well it adapts.

In the end, these books left me with a clearer vision of things I have seen, read, or probably even worked into my own art, unknowingly. None of them were up-and-away homeruns in my read through, but I appreciate their existence for what has come after. For the power they do still possess, to inspire and allow the space for next generations.

Of them all, though, I do feel like I’d most like to see a legit, true adaptation of *I Am Legend* as a film. I kind of keep imagining Thomas Jane from the end of *The Mist*, as the jumping off point for how dark the story could be... Not that most are asking for that, I guess.

PARSEC EVENT IN MAY

Let's be fans!



Apparently there was a time when the Parsec meetings didn't always include invited speakers, special guests, or presentations. That was before my time, but let's try bringing that back. Sometimes we can forget that it's the love of science-fiction, fantasy, and horror, that got us all interested in things like Parsec, Sigma, and Confluence.

For me, please join us at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - East Liberty, to talk about our favorite genre works, both of all time and recently discovered works. Books, movies, TV, comics/graphic novels, animation, or actual-science related items.

Hope to see you there. Bring a friend!

Date: Saturday, May 16th, 2026; Time: 1 to 2:30 pm

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

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - East Liberty,

Meeting Room 3A and on Zoom.

CLP is not the host or organizer of this event. CLP does not support, sponsor, or represent this group or event.

Check www.parsec-sff.org for more details.

Thank you to this month's contributors, who have yet to say anything about the robot destroying all of civilization..

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. Executive Director: Diane Turnshek

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

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