



SIGMA

The Official Parsec, Inc. Newsletter



Sigma #484
August 2026

Contents

Pg 3: Dear Friends of Parsec

Pg 4: Announcement: Parsec Seeks an Executive Director

Pg 5: Parsec Monthly Event

Pg 7: Parsec Member List

Pg 8: Parsec Programs - Confluence News

Pg 10: Parsec Programs - Parsec Ink

Pg 11: Parsec Programs - Parsec Short Story Contest

Pg 11: Parsec Programs - Write or Die!

Pg 12: Author Seeking Rejection by Timons Esaias

Pg 14: Spec Lit Magazine Highlight by Jess Simms

Pg 16: Member Announcements

Pg 20: Reviews

Back Cover: Next Month's Event

Cover image: "Dolly Electric Sheep" 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,

We did it! It was so great seeing so many people, and for many, meeting you for the first time, at Confluence. It was my first time, mostly, being behind a table at a con and I appreciate the folks who came up and spoke to me, the few who I somehow managed to buy a Parsec membership, and for the nametag ribbons being such a hit!

If you attended please consider completing the Post-Confluence Survey, and otherwise letting us know what you thought of the con. Along with that, I hope you'll join us next weekend for the Parsec Picnic at the Dormont Park large pavilion, and then next month we'll be touring and hanging around the Parsec Library. So, there's still many, and FREE, opportunities to gather and talk about all things speculative literature.

Our search for an Executive Director is still open, so please check out that posting and consider whether you want to step up to run the day-to-day operations of this nonprofit organization.

And finally, I want to thank this month's contributors. We've got some great news and updates from Parsec members, and a couple of really good reviews. If you want to submit reviews, comments, or anything else, please email parsecsigmanews@gmail.com. Even if you just have an idea of contributing something but aren't sure about it, let me know and we'll see what we can do.

That's all for now!

Until next time!

John Muth

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

Parsec, Inc. seeks an Executive Director



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.

POSITION: Parsec, Inc. is a divergent organization with many interests, a long history, and a desire to continue far into the future. For that, we are looking to fill a volunteer position of Executive Director who has the energy, the stamina, and the willpower, to maintain the organization through its many projects and programs. The organization has always been a work in progress, an experiment of the grandest order, limited only by the time, resources, and people making everything happen.

To that end, below is a list of basic duties expected of an Executive Director, but our real goal is to bring in someone with a vision and passion for what makes Parsec impactful: a celebration of creativity and our people.

HOW TO APPLY: Despite the title, this is not a regular job. Parsec, Inc. is not a regular organization. Therefore, we do not have a regular process. If you are interested in applying for the Executive Director position, please submit a proposal of what you see Parsec, Inc. needing, how you would lead the organization into the future, and a plan for sustainably continuing the programs currently active. Growing the programs and the organization so that it remains the premier organization promoting science-fiction, fantasy, and horror in literature, media, and music, in Pittsburgh and beyond.

You are welcome to submit a cover letter, resume, essay or presentation (video or slide), that communicates how you would be best to serve as Executive Director. Be creative, think outside the box, but be honest with what you believe you can achieve with Parsec.

Please send all submissions to: parsec@parsec-sff.org

Being a Parsec member is not a requirement of applying for this position. All potential candidates will be requested to meet and interview with the Parsec board of directors. If you have any questions about Parsec or the position, please contact the email address, above, and we will do our best to answer you.

Thank you!

PARSEC MONTHLY EVENT

Date: Saturday, August 15th, 2026; Time: Noon to Dusk
(There will be no Zoom.)

Dormont Park Large Pavilion
1801 Dormont Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15216
Check www.parsec-sff.org for more details.



- Bring a dish to share!
- Burgers, hot dogs, buns, ice, some beverages and other assorted picnic necessities will be provided by Parsec.
- Plenty of room for gaming, readings and more!
- The pavilion is wheelchair accessible.
- Friends of Parsec are welcome! All Parsec meetings are free to attend & open to the public.

This is a potluck event. It is suggested that everyone bring a dish to share: salad, side dish, dessert or snacks/chips & dip. You can indicate what you will be bringing on the [Parsec Picnic RSVP form](#). Also, let us know if you want to read or sing for us.

Parsec will supply charcoal, meats (burgers & hot dogs) buns, condiments, ice, some non-alcohol beverages (a mix of diet, sugared and teas). tortilla chips & salsa, candy & nuts, and paper products (plates, napkins, flatware).

Monthly Event Officer: John Muth

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 Main Members:

Judith Gallagher, Susan Urbanek Linville, Susan Kaye Quinn,
Dan Bloch, 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 (BOD), Susan
M. Smith, Michael Albergo, Paula Sandusky, Brandon Ketchum,
Kevin M. Hayes, Shane LaBarge, Kim Vilsack, Mary Beth Diehl,
Alan Irvine, Karen Yun-Lutz, Nick Chase, Kaitlin Burge, Larisa
VanWinkle (BOD), Michael Taylor, Jim Mann, John Leavitt

2026 Associate Members:

Amy Finkbeiner, Stephen V. Ramey, Elizabeth Penrose,
Jane Noel, Bernadette Harris, Deborah Steinberg,
Nancy Janda, Laurie Mann

CONFLUENCE NEWS

If you attended Confluence, we would love to hear from you. **Please complete the Post-Confluence Survey.**

**Here are
some
memories.**

Photos by
Karen Yun-Lutz



CONFLUENCE NEWS

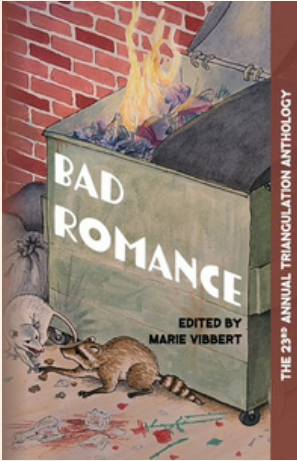


Confluence officers: Chair: Kevin M. Hayes. Treasurer: Karen Yun-Lutz.

PARSEC PROGRAMS



Parsec Ink



Thank you for making the Bad Romance launch at Confluence so special. We had a great time on our panel, during our reading from Bad Romance, and of course at the launch party itself!

The special edition paperbacks of Bad Romance have been shipped or delivered! The ebook and KDP versions of Bad Romance should be available soon.

At Confluence, next year's Co-Editors, **Shannon Cross and Fritze Roberts**, announced their theme: Leviathan: Larger than life forces and the heroes who run toward the danger. The open call for submissions is planned for November. More details to come!

If you are interested in being a part of next year's production of Triangulation: Leviathan, including becoming a first-reader, contact parsecink.editor@gmail.com.

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

2027 Short Story Contest Coordinators: Liz Abeling and Jess Simms of Scribble House

The theme for 2027 will be: Non-Human Resources.

More to come soon.

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, August 11 at 7:00 pm, on Zoom only.
- Tuesday, August 25 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, Volume 8

By Timons Esaias

August has arrived with thunder and lightning and post-Confluence collapse. Nonetheless the current YTD rejection count is 220. As I observed last month, this means I'm not only likely to meet my goal of 300 for the year, I may be approaching 400.

We'll see.

I promised to talk about spellchecking, a topic that's on my mind as I'm proofreading someone's book and also preparing to teach two courses on Preparing for Submission: "A Freelancer Prepares" for Pennwriters in November, and "How to Submit for Publication" with *Flash Fiction Magazine* in December.

Beginning writers (and virtually every poet on the planet, it seems) these days are over-reliant on their computer spellchecker, which means there are whole categories of mistake that they miss. I have developed two disciplines to reduce the number of mistakes.

First, one must check the spelling of every place name, famous person's name, and product name. You think you know how to spell them. Mostly, you are wrong. Check the spelling of your own name, including in the page headers. And the title. Can't tell you how often I've seen errors in the title, repeated on every page.

Second, do a "spellcheck with a hand list." Take a legal pad and make two columns: Names and Words. Now begin spellchecking and stop every time your spellchecker flags something. Look it up. If it's correct (this includes words you've made up) write it down on the pad before you hit Ignore All.

AUTHOR SEEKING REJECTION

What's this? Here's the name again? That's how you discover that you spelled it two different ways. Never hit Ignore All until you've vetted the spelling and written it down on the Approved List.

Timons Esaiias 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.



Haven Speculative

By Jess Simms

Hello, folks! This is a new column to help people learn about (relatively) new sci-fi, fantasy, and/or horror magazines that are worth reading (and could make a great home for writers' stories and poems). Each month I'll highlight a magazine that was founded within the last 20 years, pays its contributors, and is either currently open to submissions or will open soon.



This month's magazine is *Haven Speculative*, which describes itself as "a speculative fiction magazine featuring stories for a 21st century audience."

The basic facts:

- Founded in 2021
- Publishes short fiction and poetry, mostly sci-fi with a sprinkling of fantasy and horror
- 6 digital issues per year (can be read for free online)

Haven Speculative has four unthemed issues every year, along with two focused on climate fiction ("Wet" and "Dry"). It publishes stories and poems that are mostly set on near-future (or slant current) Earth and focus on characters more than technology or worldbuilding.

Issue Twenty-Four (July 2026) is unthemed, though intriguingly much of the work still centers on a shared idea: In six of the eight pieces, the protagonist has lost something precious. Each of them deals with it differently, so the

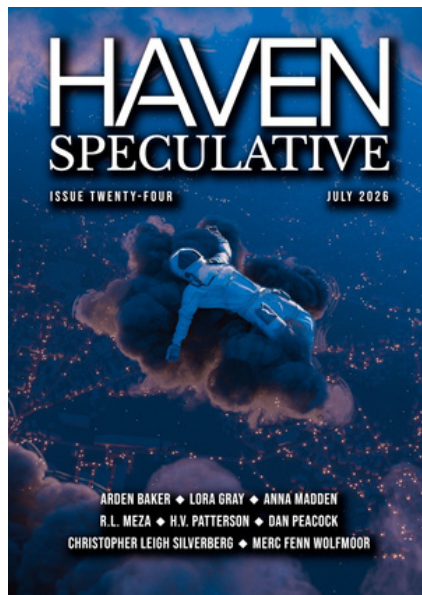
SPEC LIT MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT

issue feels cohesive without getting repetitive. Some highlights:

- "Convergence" (fiction) brings a new twist to the "trapped with the enemy" trope, told from perspective of a disabled spaceship
- "flowers, coffee, cinnamon and the long way home" (poetry) compresses the full character arc of a reluctant astronaut into 71 lines

What should submitters know about Haven Speculative?

Haven Speculative is open for submissions through the end of August. It has four set reading periods: October-November, January-February, April-May, and July-August. The first month of each reading period is reserved for underrepresented authors, with the second month open to all. The pay rate is professional (.08/word for fiction and \$20 per poem), and like most pro markets it's competitive, with an aggregated .58% acceptance rate across Duotrope, ChillSubs, and Submission Grinder.



Most of the stories published in recent issues are in the 1,000-3,500 word range, with a slight preference for 1st-person POVs over 3rd. The majority of recent poems are free verse narrative poems that use straightforward language and concrete imagery.

*Jess Simms is a freelance writer and editor, and the managing editor of After Happy Hour. They are the author of the flash fiction chapbook *Cryptid Bits* and have published stories and essays in *Mythaxis*, *Orca*, *SLAB*, *Atlas Obscura*, *Rinky Dink Press*, and elsewhere.*

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



From Brandon Ketchum:

Here is my schedule for Worldcon, or LA Con 6, in Anaheim:



Where to find Brandon Ketchum at Worldcon

Disabilities Within the Genre	Thursday, Aug 27	6:00 PM
Fantasy Found Families	Saturday, Aug 29	3:00 PM
Disability and Worldbuilding	Sunday, Aug 30	10:30 AM



From John R. Muth:

My story "Cold Brew" has been accepted into Air and Nothingness Press' follow-up anthology, from the previous book *Tea or Coffee, Stars, and Gravity*, titled *TCSG: A Second Cup*. According to Todd from AaNP: "The twist this time is all eight new stories take place in our own solar system but still feature tea or coffee, stars, and gravity as key narrative elements."

Currently it's available as an add-on for their current running [Kickstarter](#) for two other books.

I also have all the copies of my graphic novels from my *Kickstarter* and am currently awaiting my backers to complete their Pledge surveys (*Ahem!*) And then those books will be going out!

If you're interested the [Pledge Manager](#) is also open to [new orders](#)!



PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



From Greg Clumpner:

I had such an amazing time at Confluence, seeing so many old friends and making new ones. It's been two weeks, yet I'm still recovering from the weekend and the Triangulation: Bad Romance launch party. I regrettably haven't had as much new writing time as I've liked over the past couple months, but I've had several recent short story releases and a crazy acceptance tale.

First, the tale of "Offensive Alien" finding a home. The story was originally written in 2023 as a sci-fi/horror piece about communication, affectionately referred to by some in the Write OR Die critique group as my F-U story (There are a lot of F-bombs dropped). I had the story out for simultaneous submission with three different venues. While driving on a trip to Cincinnati, I'm getting gas in Columbus and see the email acceptance highlighted on my phone. YAY! I'm obviously super excited and squealing about it for the remainder of the drive. We check into our Airbnb and I hook up my laptop to the internet, ready to respond to the acceptance and send withdrawal notices to the other two venues. Uh-oh. One of the other venues also sent me an acceptance during that last 2.5 hours of the trip. It's one of the best problems to have as a writer, but I'm freaking out about it, trying to formulate the "Sorry, but it literally was accepted just hours before by another venue and I didn't have a chance to withdraw it yet" email and not sound fake or unappreciative about it. Fortunately the other publisher was super cool and understanding about it, but I still felt like an ass. Now, "Offensive Alien" is slated for publication in the October issue of BAM! Magazine, which feels like where it was always meant to be. The Editor, Jeffrey DeRego, has set up an introduction for all the contributors to get to know each other and we're starting to go through edits.

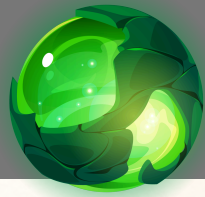
I've sold two drabbles to Manawaker Studios for their 100-Word Project; "Libra and Pisces" in May for the theme of "Scale," and "Bacon-Wrapped Dates" in June for the theme of "Date." I also have an [interview with CB Droege](#) for Meet the Manawakers, releasing August 10th.

I have a horror drabble, "[4BR, 3BA Smart Home - Live Clutter Free](#)," with Black Hare Press for their Dark Moments segment.

"[Cross Examination](#)" is a flash piece published in Issue 85, Summer 2026 of Bethlehem Writers Roundtable.

One of my very first written short stories, "Crossing," found a home in [TRUNK: stories that took the long way](#), and is now available in hardcover, paperback, and ebook through both Ingram Spark and KDP.

PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



From M. Christine Benner Dixon:

I have two book launch events to note in the newsletter—one for me and one where I'll be a panelist.

1. **ALL HER GHOSTS** book launch and author panel

August 25, 6 p.m.

Riverstone Books, Squirrel Hill

Cynthia Prith will be talking about her debut novel, *All Her Ghosts*, joined in conversation by Jess Mey and Mir Benitz. Following the discussion, there will be time for Q&A with the audience and a book signing. Also, cookies. Three local authors in one place!

"Forced to choose between an imperfect life that's wholly hers or an otherworldly responsibility older than time, the echoes of Persephone's decision will alter the fates of all souls—living and dead—forever."

Reservations: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/an-evening-with-author-cynthia-prith-for-all-her-ghosts-tickets-1989841069203?aff=website>



2. **FIRE POWER** book launch event

September 2, 6 p.m.

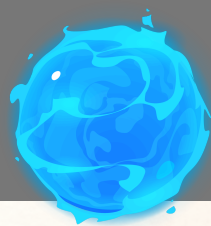
The Shelf Love Society, Lawrenceville

Join Mir Benitz (a.k.a. Parsec member Christine Benner Dixon) for the launch of her dragon racing romantasy, *Fire Power*. In conversation with Pittsburgh's sports romance darling, Lainey Davis. Stop by for a chance to drive a very small (sadly, flightless) little dragon at the event!

"Asta faces off against her ex-best friend and first love in the Grand Prix of dragon racing. Seeing Felix again comes with baggage that Asta can't afford to carry onto the track. The prize money would change her life, but winning doesn't come cheap."



PARSEC MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS



From Jess Simms:

I have a couple of announcements for the next Sigma. One on behalf of Scribble House:

Registration for the Scribble House Lit Fest is currently open! The Lit Fest will take place on Saturday, November 21st from 12-6pm at Velum Fermentation (2120 Jane Street, Pittsburgh). Tables at the Lit Fest are free for publishers and independent authors. Register by 8/31 to be in the first selection pool (any spots remaining will be available on a first-come basis until full). For more info or to register go to <https://www.scribblehousepgh.com/litfest/>

...and I also have a personal announcement/request:

I'm looking for reviewers for my debut novel, which will be coming out in November 2026 with the local micropress Last-Picked Books. The Lost Text of the Omen Bird is an epistolary sci-fi novel set on the planet Kirri, told through an ancient naturalist's log footnoted by its modern translator. If you're interested in reading and reviewing it, you can shoot me an email at jrsimms29@gmail.com and I'll send along a digital ARC!

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

Supergirl: What Good Writing Can Do

By Alan Irvine



I admit that I was not eager for the Supergirl movie to come out. The last Superman movie ended with a glimpse of Supergirl stumbling into the Fortress of Solitude still drunk from some interstellar party. Supergirl?! This was not Supergirl. What were they doing with Supergirl. Was this some director deciding to “make the character dark, just because, you know, that’s cool?” or worse yet, “let’s make the character dark to show that I’m cool”?

No.

This was someone finally taking the character and her story seriously, thinking through the implications of it, and using it as the foundation for a beautifully crafted story.

Supergirl’s story, however, starts with Superman, of course. Superman is the last son of Krypton, put in a space capsule as an infant and launched towards Earth just as Krypton exploded, destroying everyone else. The baby Kal-el landed in Kansas and was raised by the Kents. Eventually, inevitably, he discovered his origin, and the fact that he is the only Kryptonian left, something explored well in the last Superman

movie. Although Kal-el was from Krypton, Clark Kent was raised on Earth. Ma and Pa Kent are the only parents he has ever known. Earth is his home.

But when DC wanted to expand the Superman universe back in the 1960s with a female version, this story posed a problem. How to have another Super-being when all of Krypton died. In the end, they came up with a cheat, a little foot-note everyone had overlooked: when Krypton exploded, not everyone died. Scientist Zor-el (brother to Superman's father Jor-el) created a force field which protected his home of Argo City. Everyone there survived and this little pocket of Krypton lived on. For a while. But the Kryptonite formed by the explosion slowly poisoned the city. The population died. Desperate Zor-el built a space capsule and sent his daughter Kara (a pre-teen in the original stories, a teen-ager in this version) off to the safety of Earth. She arrived, by amazing coincidence right, on Superman's door-step and the long-separated cousins reunited. Problem solved. On with the fun.

But when we look closer at that origin, as some combination of producer James Gunn, Director Craig Gillespie, and writer Ana Nogueira did, there is more to it. Unlike Superman, Kara actually grew up on Krypton (or at least a piece of it). For Superman, Krypton and its fate is essentially abstract, when he mourns the loss of Krypton, he is not mourning a place he ever knew or even remembers. Clark grew up on Earth; Earth is his home. Earth is where his family and friends all are. Not so with Kara Zor-el. She grew up on Krypton, with Kryptonian family and friends, all of whom she watched die, while she alone survived. Kara's home was Krypton. Earth just happens to be where she landed. These two perspectives are nicely captured in a short exchange between Clark and Kara early in the movie. They are on a video call while Kara is on her interstellar pub-crawl, and Clark is urging her to come back to Earth, to spend more time here. "I'm just worried that you will never find your people," he says (I am paraphrasing from memory.) And she answers, "That's the thing, Clark. I don't have any people." (Millie Alcock, who plays Kara, delivers this line in a simple, straight-forward tone that instantly makes clear all the pain and loneliness lurking in the background.)

But this is not just a more thoughtful approach to Supergirl's backstory. The creators build on this, making it the foundation of the whole story. The question of whether Kara can move beyond her guilt and grief becomes the engine driving the movie.

Everything ties back into that story.

Two specific events kick off the action that will provide Kara the opportunity to grow beyond her pain and loneliness. First, she encounters Ruthye (Eve Ridley,) a younger girl on a quest for revenge. Ruthye watched the interstellar brigand Krem slaughter her family. The Brigands showed up to steal the high quality swords Ruthye's father crafted, slaughtered the family and made off with many of the weapons. Now Ruthye, armed with her father's best sword seeks revenge on Krem. While Kara understands, even sympathizes with this desire, she refuses to help Ruthye carry it out. She knows killing Krem will irrevocably tear Ruthye's soul, and she is not willing to let Ruthye harm herself for the momentary pleasure of revenge. Ruthye, however, has other ideas, decides that Kara will be her mentor and her guide to revenge. Kara's futile attempts to avoid this provide much of the movie's humor. The reason Ruthye knows that Kara will lead her to Krem is that Kara has her own reasons for pursuing the brigand leader. Krem shot Krypto, Kara's childhood pet from Argo City and hence the only link to the life she lost. Krem shot Krypto with a nasty, slow-acting poison, then steals Kara's ship (this happens on a planet with a red sun, so she has no superpowers and can't just fly after him.) Kara has three days to track down Krem and retrieve the antidote to the poison before Krypto dies. And she has to do this while keeping Ruthye from committing a murder that will forever scar her.

The fate of Earth does not depend on Kara's quest. The Galaxy/Universe is not in peril. The very existence of the entirety of the multiverse and every time-line ever conceived does not hang in the balance. The stakes in this movie are simple and small: Kara's grief, Ruthye's soul, and the life of a dog. Of course, simple does not mean not important. All of this is vitally important to Kara, and to us. These small stakes establish a story far more compelling than the latest multiverse spanning epic. The movie is a great example of what I call Stine's Law, coined by Hank Stine, the editor of *Galaxy Magazine* for just a few issues in 1979. (He may have had a different name for the concept.) In an editorial that has stuck with me ever since, Stine argued that the size of the stakes in a story (particularly speculative fiction) is in inverse proportion to the ability of the writer. Poor writers go big, because they

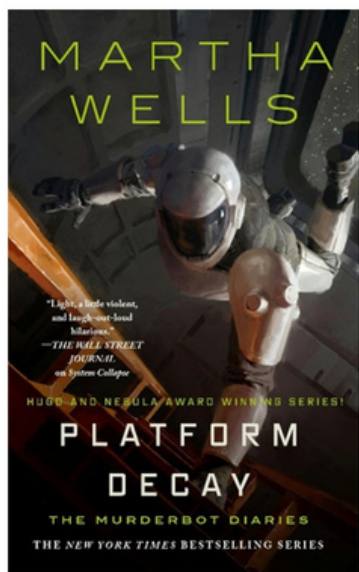
have no other way of convincing the reader to stick with the story. Good writers don't need big stakes; a good writer can make the reader care about small stakes. In this story, we care about what Kara will do with her life. And in the end, when she... but no, I won't spoil it. See it for yourself.

But saying the stakes are small, is not the same as saying the movie is small. Kara Zor-el is, after all, Supergirl, one of the two mightiest beings in the DC Universe. The movie is filled with action, including a couple of fights obviously inspired by the action of *Fury Road*. The action, however, is also designed to further the central story of Kara's journey to possible redemption. The first time Kara goes into action, she confronts a big bruiser right out of the seedier parts of *Star Wars* who has just stolen Ruthye's sword. Kara insists he return the little girl's sword, and when he refuses, Kara easily takes him out. The fight is short and the bruiser highly outclassed, despite the fact that they are on a planet with a red sun, so Kara has no super-powers, and so is more than half drunk. Right there we know that Kara is a force to be reckoned with, powers or not. (Kara's recovery of the sword is also what convinces Ruthye that Kara will be her ticket to Krem – and her unwilling mentor.) In another fight, we see Kara delight in taking out a couple dozen laser-wielding bounty hunters. She obviously enjoys the fight, while also taking care to shield Ruthye from harm. The fights are not just action for the sake of action. Like everything else in the movie, they are rooted in the character and story.

With its thoughtful approach to the character, to the effects of her origin story on her and on those around her, this is my favorite version of Supergirl yet. And it is easily the best written super-hero movie to come along in years.

Platform Decay by Martha Wells

By Larry Ivkovich



I know, I know, I recently reviewed four short stories from the Murderbot Universe but... I just finished reading the latest book in the Murderbot Diaries series and couldn't resist including a review of it in this month's Sigma. It's that good. Now I do have a couple of pseudo spoilers (not a lot given away) in this, so read at your risk.

Platform Decay is the eighth installment in the series by Martha Wells and it's, well, pulse-pounding may be a little extreme, but the story moves.

It's right up there, in my opinion, with *Network Effect* in terms of action and suspense, etc.,

great, but oddly devoid of a lot of action. Honestly, there's not much of a plot in *Platform Decay*, being, basically, one long chase scene, but it's so much fun and has a great ending (pseudo spoiler? Sorry). Oh, and many parts of it are really funny. It's a Murderbot book so what else is new, right?

The book opens with Murderbot and SecUnit Three on a rescue mission on a "gigantic planetary torus," a huge space station, orbiting a mined-out planet. Remember Three? It was first introduced in *Network Effect* but only mentioned briefly in *Systems Collapse*. Murderbot ended up giving Three the code to hack its own governor module in *Network* and Three became a part of Dr. Mensah's and ART's teams. It still struggles with its free will, which irritates the hell out of

REVIEWS

Murderbot. Of course, what *doesn't* irritate Murderbot?

Members of Dr. Mensah's family have been abducted—at least that's what everyone thinks—but there's more to it than that. Murderbot, with Three decoying the bad guys, finds the three family members are hiding out in a safehouse with an old adversary—Supervisor Leonide of the evil Barish-Estranza Corporation, the vile villains from the previous two books, where Leonide also appeared.

Leonide will help lead Mensah's family members to safety if Murderbot also rescues members of Leonide's family who are being held by Leonide's enemies. Murderbot reluctantly agrees and the chase is on!

Mensah's family members are Farai, one of Mensah's spouses, Naja (the grandmother who doesn't take any crap from Murderbot) plus Farai's and Mensah's pre-adolescent daughter Sofi. Naturally Murderbot doesn't know how to act around such a young child, who just loves Murderbot and isn't shy about showing it.

Mixed in with the action are some tense moments with Farai and Naja, who, despite being familiar with Murderbot, aren't completely comfortable in its presence. There's also a strong scene with one of Leonide's children near the end that upends what Murderbot and the others have thought of this child and their situation.

And, there's a really cool surprise on, literally, the last two pages of the book and a great ending sentence (another pseudo spoiler! But I warned you).

Read this immediately!

PARSEC EVENT IN SEPT.

Join us for a tour of the Parsec Library!



This is not a photo of the library.

Date: Saturday, September 19, 2026

1pm to 3pm

Location: 2966 Voelkel Avenue, Dormont, PA 15216

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

(There may be a Zoom element, but it probably won't be a great setup.)

Join us at the Parsec Library, where our librarian, Greg Armstrong will show us the many tomes, particularly impressive is his Terry Pratchett collection, and then we can relax and share some time together. Maybe you'll even leave with a book or two. (Some you may need to return, others you may not!)

Thank you to this month's contributors, who have yet to say anything about the vampires outside calling my name.

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, M. Christine Benner Dixon.

Executive Director: Diane Turnshek. Current BOD can be found on the [WEBSITE](http://www.parsec-sff.org)

www.parsec-sff.org | parsecsigmanews@gmail.com