



SIGMA

The Official Parsec, Inc. Newsletter



Sigma #486
October 2026

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Cover image: "On a Platter" 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 spooky season. I actually don't care much about Halloween—I don't care much for any holiday, really. Though, that's a topic for another day. But I love that the weather is now cool, cloudy and rainy, and the perfect excuse to stay inside.

This month's newsletter is a little shorter than normal, but I think it's still pretty full of good stuff. Part of that is saving the space by removing Program update pages that...don't have updates. That said, I want to point your attention, specifically to **Word's Halloween Reading Event on Tuesday, October 27!** And next month's Parsec meeting will be quite different in that, our programming will actually be held during the **Scribble House Lit Fest, on Saturday, November 21**, where we'll talk to this coming year's editors of *Triangulation*, the short story contest, and there'll be some readings by Parsec-folk.

The only other thing left to say is that the next **Board of Directors meeting will be held on Saturday, October 24, at 10am.** There's more information on the following page. But I want to note that as this year winds down, I'd love to hear from our members (most of whom you can see on the following pages) about what the board, what Parsec could be doing to better serve you and our community! This year, **we added the exclusive e-book of winners from this year's contest, solely for members.** (Much thanks for Short Story Contest Coordinator, Jamie Lackey for putting that together!) What else is there? My plan for the BOD meeting is to also propose an update to the Bylaws to institute a vote on who should be running the organization. I have thoughts on the matter, and I'd welcome all members' thoughts as well as fellow board members.

Thanks as always to this month's contributors. We have some new things lined up that I'm also excited about! But I'm always happy to include as much from you all as I can.

Until next time!

John Muth

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

PARSEC B.O.D. MEETING

The Parsec Board of Directors currently meet monthly on the fourth Saturday of the month over Zoom. Meetings are open to all current Parsec members.

Join the Zoom.

Date: Saturday, October 24, 2026

Time: 10 to 11:30 am.

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, October 17, 2026; Time: 1 to 3 pm.

(Zoom room will open at 12:45 pm.)

Location: CLP - Woods Run, Meeting Room

1201 Woods Run Ave. Pgh, PA 15212

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

Come talk with us about Spooky Season, what you're reading, watching, and anything else that crosses your mind!



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

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 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 (BOD), Susan M. Smith, Michael Alberg, 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, Rebecca Warren, Rebecca Miner, Barbara Barnett, Elektra Hammond, Doug Solter

2026 Associate Members:

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

PARSEC PROGRAMS

Parsec Short Story Contest

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

THE THEME FOR 2027 IS NON-HUMAN RESOURCES.

We're looking for stories that capture both aspects of "Non-human resources." By that we mean stories that engage with the idea of resources and/or workplaces, and that prominently feature some kind of non-human (which can be a human-derived thing like a ghost or were-creature, or humanoid/near-human aliens a la Dr Who or Star Trek, though we'll be extra excited by stories featuring characters, entities, and lifeforms that are markedly different from humans). Bonus points for cheekiness, wit, and humor--we're excited to see people have fun with this theme (or, at the least, more fun than you'd expect from a visit to HR).

For more information check out the [Short Story Contest page](#).



Scribble House exists to connect writers in Western Pennsylvania with knowledge, resources, and community. Founded by two writers and lit mag editors based in Pittsburgh, Scribble House runs the Feedback Open Mic series and annual Scribble House Lit Fest, along with other workshops and writerly meet-ups. You can see what they're up to at ScribbleHousePGH.com.

PARSEC PROGRAMS

Write or Die

A Science Fiction & Fantasy Writing Group



Word Halloween Reading Event

Tuesday, October 27, 2026

7 to 9 pm

Trace Brewing

4312 Main St. Pittsburgh, PA 15224

Join Write or Die, Pittsburgh's science fiction, fantasy & horror writing and critique group, for the annual Halloween Reading Event. Ten writers will read original short stories. Food and drinks available for purchase. Door Prizes. Emceed by Nick Chase.



**Featured Guest Reading by
Richard Kadrey**

(Sandman Slim, The Pale House Devil)

word-pgh.weebly.com



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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- Tuesday, October 13 at 7:00 pm, on Zoom only.
- Tuesday, October 27 at 7:00 pm at Trace Brewery. (No Zoom.)

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

AUTHOR SEEKING REJECTION

A QUEST, Volume 10

By Timons Esaias

The month of Germanicus (I refuse to call the ninth month of the year "Seventh Month") was a little problematical in my quest for rejections. Yes, 19 of them rolled in, and my YTD is a reasonable 248. But 25 per month is the baseline for hitting 300, so this was underperformance. It's good I was ahead of myself.

The real problem, though, is that I was out of town, mostly out of the country, for the bulk of the month, so I made no new submissions. Worse, I was too busy suffering through air travel, attending We Have Ways Fest (<https://wehavewaysfest.co.uk/>), decoding Bletchley Park, unrolling the Bayeux Tapestry, hiding in Churchill's War Cabinet Rooms semi-bunker, adoring the Charles Dickens House Museum, and hitting the Normandy Beaches to write anything.

No submissions and no writing is not the way forward. Yeah, the military stuff was research for the book, but still.

In penance, my self-challenge for this month is to put 100 things back in the mail (remember "the mail"?), – 150 if possible – to make up for this spate of world travel. Simultaneous submission is my friend, in this case, since I don't have quite that many pieces lying around doing nothing.

Wish me well in Pinterfylllep.

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.



Horrific Scribes

By Jess Simms

It feels fitting to highlight a horror magazine for October, and there's a new-ish one that's caught my eye lately: Horrific Scribes, which publishes transgressive dark fiction and poems "that challenge the ordinary." Basic deets:

- Founded in February 2025
- Online archive of horror, dark fantasy, weird, and surreal stories
- Posts 2-3 new stories per week



Work published in Horrific Scribes runs the gamut from bloodless psychological horror to straight-up splatterpunk, and each piece has an Extremity Rating and trigger warnings so you know what you're getting into. Horrific Scribes occasionally compiles work from the archive into "Exhibits," which are basically themed anthologies. The latest is Exhibit Eight: Scary, Strange, and Totally Alien, and past themes have included Folk Horror, Nasty Nature, and the Art of Decay. The archive is sorted by category, too, which is helpful for finding stuff that suits your interests. Some recent highlights:

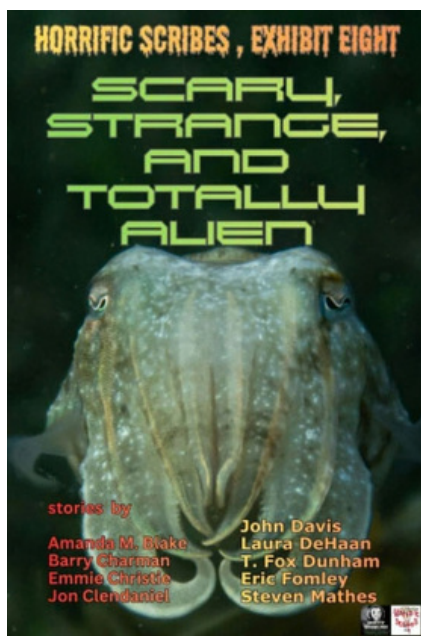
- A real-life movie monster walks into a bar in the cheeky and trope-twisting "Monster at the Black Heart"
- Since adding flash to their repertoire in August, they've published several

SPEC LIT MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT

excellent drabbles (“No Escape: Three Dark Drabbles” is my personal favorite packet)

What should submitters know about Horrific Scribes?

Horrific Scribes is always open for both short fiction and poetry. They’ll consider stories up to 5,000 words, with a sweet spot in the 2,000-3,000 word range. Pay is a flat rate of \$25 for poetry or stories over 1,000 words and \$10 for flash fiction, so hovering between token and semi-pro depending on the story’s length. The aggregated acceptance rate is 7.34%, so it’s not super competitive yet, and they do consider simultaneous submissions.



One helpful thing Horrific Scribes does for submitters: their Submission Evaluation scoresheet is available on their website. The categories in the scoresheet are Provocative, Scary, Strange, Polished, and Intangible, and there are descriptions of what each of those means and what score tends to result in acceptance on the page.

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 Marie Vibbert:

I have a new story out this week:

<https://escapepod.org/2026/10/01/escape-pod-1065-sister-cities/>

From Mary Soon Lee:

My poem "Autumn Heart Valley" was published in Star*Line #49.4, Fall 2026. This poem will likely be the second poem in the midquel to "The Sign of the Dragon" that I'm working on.

From Ken Chiacchia:

Remember me whining, at a couple of Confluences, how the **IceCube Neutrino Observatory**'s map of the Milky Way was revolutionary and hadn't gotten enough press? Well, it just won the Nobel Prize for Physics.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/.../physics/2026/press-release/>

So there.

(Here's my article about the work, from 2023: <https://www.psc.edu/icecube-observatory-creates-first.../>)

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 Jenny Thompson:

the Greater Pittsburgh Science Fiction Book Discussion Group has been meeting monthly at the Mount Lebanon library. Here's what we are reading and discussing in October and November:

October 28, 2026

Novel: "Dream Park" by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes

Short Fiction:

"Symbiont" by Robert Silverberg

"The Road Not Taken" by Harry Turtledove

November 16, 2026

Novel: "Earthman, Come Home" by James Blish

Short Fiction:

"Mother and Child" by Joan D. Vinge

"Phoenix in the Ashes" by Theodore Sturgeon

We always read one long work and two pieces of short fiction.

We meet at Mt. Lebanon Library on the 4th Wednesday of each month. (Except in November we meet a week early because of Thanksgiving).

Not All Who Wander...

By John R. Muth

t's October, which means it's time to watch horror movies... Well, as we all know, any time is a good time to watch horror movies—if you're like me. But, there's something about the month of October that just feels like, “this is our time!” (Goonies reference.) So, I've caught up with a couple of films that have certainly had their moment in the autumnal, chilly sun this year. The recently released Resident Evil, and one of the pop-hits of the summer—Backrooms.



I'm going to start with the movie I loved! Resident Evil is by the filmmaker, Zach Cregger who has been on a tear lately with his previous hits Barbarian and (the Oscar-winning!) Weapons. Based on, but not really, the popular video game franchise, this film really plays more like a prequel to anything in that series (and nothing at all connected to the previous Milla Jovovich films), so you can go in not knowing a single thing and be right in-step with the film. That said, if you're familiar with the lore and everything, there are certainly a couple of good easter eggs tossed in but certainly nothing that is required for audiences to know.

But to set the tone, the movie starts with a guy who delivers organs for surgical transplantation. As the movie opens he's dropping off his last cooler of some kid's liver, or an old lady's spleen or something. He's also rapt in a deep and critical conversation with his girlfriend on the phone. He makes the drop and then is offered another run... A run he needs to say no to for multiple reasons (you'll have to watch the film!), but as happens in these kinds of stories—he says, “I'll do it.” From there

REVIEWS

he descends into a Hell that could never be imagined. This is one of the goriest movies, especially mainstream movies, that I've seen and it really does well at folding in the idea of this being like a video game. It has a jump scare in it, that was probably one of the biggest I've ever seen where the entire theater I was in jumped. And then we all laughed. We laughed a lot, because the movie is so great at playing against the viewer at every moment. It zags when you think it'll zig. It has a character make a stupid decision in the moment, but only because they know it's a stupid decision.

I loved it. I'd recommend seeing it, or any of Cregger's previous films. He comes from a background in comedy and it shows in both the laughs his films are filled with, but also in how he's so attuned to what will affect his audiences. All of the actors here are amazing—and there's a few fun surprises in casting (nothing big or shocking, just a number of "hey that person!" moments), that just made the film absolutely.... evil fun!

Backrooms is based off internet lore. The idea, as far as I understand it, was started by a guy who posted a photo of an empty office and it has seemingly triggered a fear in people regarding the liminal and unnatural space of empty offices buildings. Maybe that existed before COVID, but I can certainly see there being a connection there to that idea of just the world being empty.

The film, it's not a spoiler to say, but I feel like it confused me initially, is set in 1990... Why? I'm not entirely sure, other than just the fact that the world was more analog at that time. It was on the cusp of the technological (Hell?) world we're in today, and it's still recognizable to most people—just without the cell phones and internet. You may have heard the filmmaker behind this movie (and a long-ish-running YouTube channel) is only twenty years-old. The movie being set in 1990, then, to him makes this historical fiction and as someone who was alive then, it clearly plays as someone guessing what the world was like then.



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I didn't overly love the movie but it had a number of elements that were affective in what the movie is trying to do, and the presentation of the backrooms is certainly disconcerting as room upon room continues, ad infinitum. It's all a sickly yellow (an effect that would make David Fincher very satisfied) and as 1990 surely was, it feels like a world without hope. I think it's definitely worth watching just for seeing this opening salvo of the next generation of filmmakers. I'm interested to see what the upcoming folks, who are not necessarily cinephiles and have never known a world where everything (or almost everything) wasn't accessible, are sure to interpret this uncanny real-world we live in interesting and still very unsettling ways.

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Published Reader Content is not denote the approval of or represent the opinions of the Sigma Editorial team, or Parsec, Inc.

Send submissions to parsecsigmanews@gmail.com

PARSEC EVENT IN NOV.

Join Parsec at the Scribble House Lit Fest!



Date: Saturday, November 21, 2026

12 to 5pm

Location: Velum Fermentation

2120 Jane Street (South Side) Pittsburgh, PA

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

(There will not be a Zoom element.)

The Scribble House Lit Fest is a place where writers and readers can meet some of the incredible publishers that call the Pittsburgh region home.

The core of the festival is the book fair, where folks can chat with the editors from local presses and journals, get books signed by local independent authors, and check out all the cool stuff both groups publish.

From 1 to 2pm, there will be a **Parsec Showcase**: Hear from the team behind the yearly Triangulation Anthology about their plans for the 23rd anthology, which will be opening for submissions in November (this year's theme: "Leviathan"). You'll also hear about Parsec's other programs, like the long-running Confluence Conference, monthly events, and Write or Die workshop group.

We hope to see you there!

Thank you to this month's contributors, who have yet to say anything about the pig monsters trying to break in through the cellar...

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