PHILCON 2020
A Virtual Philcon

Special Features:
• Non-Fiction
• Fiction
• Art Gallery

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PHILCON® 2020
The Program Book
November 20-22, 2020
Virtual Convention

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Editing & Design: Terry Sisk Graybill
Proof-Reading, Research, Advice & Support: Joann Lawler & Todd Dashoff

Updates & Additions
This program book contains the latest information at press time. Every convention is a work in progress until it is over, so please look for updates in the online Program Guide (www.philcon.org)

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Belemnite jewelry
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- Bob Walters 24, 92
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- Discon III 17
- Locus Magazine 26
- Farpoint Convention 2021 30
- Balticon 55 35
- Shore Leave 42 39
- Tor 40
- Westercon 74 (2022) 72
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- Chicon 8 120
Philcon 2021
November 19-21, 2021
The Crowne Plaza Hotel, Cherry Hill, NJ

Max Gladstone
Principal Speaker

Romas Kukalis
Artist Guest of Honor

• Free parking & public transit access
• Panels, art show, masquerade, concerts, gaming, anime, writers’ workshop, meet the pros, filking, vendors and more!

Note:
We are planning an in-person convention but watch our website for the most current information.

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www.philcon.org
www.Facebook.com/Philcon.PSFS
Welcome to Philcon 2020! The Philadelphia Science Fiction Society is proud to present its first virtual convention in the 84 years since the first intercity fan gathering decided to call themselves a convention. We are happy to have had the virtual choice this year, given all of the restrictions on large gatherings. Next year, we hope to see you all back in Cherry Hill in November to meet Principal Speaker Max Gladstone, Guest Artist Romas Kukalis, and the rest of our program participants!

If this is your first Philcon, we hope you love it! If this is your first virtual con, take a look at the article below on how to enjoy one. If you’re a veteran, you’ll find much of the usual structure in Zoom and Discord. The KonOpas program organization is easy to negotiate.

As usual, our program covers science fiction, fantasy and horror in as many aspects as we can fit in: literature, media, anime/animation and games. Unfortunately, we couldn’t handle a Masquerade this year. If you’re a costumer, enjoy the discussions, and come next year to compete!

Our programming staff, led by Lynat, has come up with a great list of topics, and our tech team, led by Syd Weinstein, has experience from virtual cons around the world. The gamers are like, “Online? What’s new about that?” Especial thanks to Syd’s far-flung team, some of whom have never come to a Philcon but are willing to keep our events running smoothly.

Marc Grossman and friends have arranged a fantastic filk program which will be on practically every hour. There are individual concerts or “open filk”, where anyone can take a turn. Audiences are important, too! Be sure to hang around for the songwriting contest performances and judging on Sunday afternoon.

The Art Show and Dealers Room can be found on Discord. Each artist and vendor has a “channel” on the Philcon server. They will make their own arrangements for display and payment, which may be a link to their own webpage or posts in the channel. Be sure to visit and see what they have to offer!

We decided not to require membership fees this year, but there are still expenses to be covered, so we would appreciate it if you’d make a donation to Philcon and the Society through GoFundMe Charity at https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/virtual-philcon-2020 or through the link at Philcon.org.

Have a fantastic weekend with us, and come back next year!

Joann Lawler

Joann Lawler, Chair, Philcon 2020

The Letters of Samuel Longman and Clark Ashton Smith

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Jaxon Van Hollander
From the PSFS President

We are the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society (PSFS) and we are honored to have you as a guest for our annual science fiction and fantasy convention.

Sometimes, inauspicious beginnings create movements. Those movements create traditions. Those traditions become our legacy. But enough about the American Revolution, I am here to talk about PSFS.

Yes, I know, the word society sounds so uppity. We are not. Remember also, the word society is also a synonym for community. Indeed, we are a community of fans united for a common interest. Nothing uppity about that.

PSFS was revolutionary for its time – a group of like-minded friends, getting together to talk about their favorite authors, magazines, editors, and stories. They even published a newsletter. These were the pre-internet days when radio was king and science fiction and fantasy were featured inside pulp magazines.

But even as times change, some things remain the same. Science fiction is a literature of change, forward-looking, futuristic. And here we are today, fans still being fans, still meeting, still talking about our favorite authors and novels, still filking, debating and geeking out. We do this because we are passionate, because we care, because we believe in our mission statement of celebrating science fiction and fantasy in literature, visual media, and pop culture.

Hence, despite the pandemic and social unrest paralyzing the nation, we endure. We still exist. We remain active (although safely, from a distance). This year alone we celebrated one big milestone: our 40th Annual Hugo Panel. Forty years of our strongly opinionated members evaluating and judging their favorites (and downvoting their not-so-favorites) for the Hugo Awards.

Furthermore, we hosted some incredible, terrific best-selling authors and editors, like Dina Leacock, Madeline Miller, Tobias Buckell, Gail Z. Martin, and Jonathan Maberry. Similarly, our book discussion club has read and discussed beloved books from beloved authors such as Samuel Delany (Babel-17), Matt Ruff (Lovecraft Country), Theodora Goss (The Curious Case of the Alchemist’s Daughter), and Lord Dunsany, to name a few.

Never underestimate the commitment and the resilience of the Philadelphia area fandom. The virus may slow us down, but it won’t stop us.

Hence, our first virtual Philcon – safe, convenient, cost-saving... From the comfort of your home, streamed to a device near you, and yet, with the same quality.

Our virtual Philcon’s programming will rock. You can trust us. We’ve only been doing this for the last eighty-four years.

If you like our virtual con, you should check us out in person after the pandemic ends and we can resume physical meetings. You will enjoy our programming since it is designed for fans as discerning as you.

Finally, on behalf of PSFS, I want to once again welcome you to Philcon 2020. Enjoy the con and tell your friends. Fandom is best when is shared with those closest to us. Thus, let’s grok each other.

Héctor R. Cruz
President, Philadelphia Science Fiction Society

PS: For more information please check our website at www.PSFS.org or email me at president@psfs.org

Mermaid Sketch
© 2020 Art copyright Jennifer Wilson
How to Get the Most from a Virtual Philcon

The Newbie’s Guide to Virtual Philcon

by Joann Lawler

If you haven’t attended a virtual convention earlier this year, we’d like to provide a short tutorial. We are using three applications for Philcon: KonOpas, Zoom and Discord.

KonOpas is an open source, web-based application that helps virtual conventions organize programming and events. Our tech team used it to build the main program guide. It works on web browsers for computers, tablets and phones. If you don’t look at the URL, you shouldn’t notice KonOpas as anything other than web pages.

Zoom is a video conference app that can be used for meetings and webinars.

Discord is a chat room organizer with “channels” that may be text or voice. You must register with Discord and create an account.

Zoom and Discord work best if you download and install their apps, but you can use them both through the browser if you don’t like the idea.

The Philcon Home Page

Philcon’s programs - panels, speakers, readings, filk, concerts, etc. - will run in Zoom. Panels are generally webinars (attendees can ask questions and chat but cannot speak). Other program items may be webinars or meetings (attendees can speak if the moderator allows). Once the item has finished its allotted time, the follow-up discussion will move over to Discord. The Con Suite is also in Zoom, and can be reached from the Program webpage.

At www.philcon.org, you can enter the convention by pressing the “View the On-Line Program Guide” button. A donation would be appreciated, too.
The Program Page

This page lists all of the main-track program items, including panels, readings, and filk. You reach the Con-Suite from this page, too.

The Info section includes some instructions under Quick Reference

See where it says “Discord Server: The discord server opens 11/19/2020”? There will be a link there that will get you into Discord.

Zoom webinars and some Discord channels will be designated with room names. Panels and more will be named Plaza 1 through Plaza 5, and there will be rooms designated for readings. Each of the Zoom rooms has a corresponding Discord channel with the same name, for after-program discussion. Discord also includes the exhibits. The schedule will show you which item is in which Zoom room and at what time. Spend some time looking over the schedule. You can pick out items right now that you’d like to attend by clicking the box next to the item. That allows you to look above to “My Program.” If you click My Program, just the items you typed show up in a shorter list. That doesn’t get you into the rooms, however. It just gives you the items you’re interested in.
If you click an item in the program guide, more detail about the item appears right now. Click on the title to see the description.

To actually attend a panel or whatever, you'll need to click the registration link. A little closer to the con (like the day before) the schedule will go live with links. The new part that will go up just before the con will be a link that will take you to registering for that event. The schedule is up but changes are still being made.

The People section contains capsule bios for the program participants. You can also reach this page by clicking on a panelist’s name in the program description.
Once you pick some items, My Con will have your personal Philcon plan:

**Discord**

Remember that “Discord Server” line in the Info section? A link to register with our Discord Server will appear there just before the con starts. You must create a Discord account (login and password) if you don't already have one. Download their app or access through the browser.

Discord includes our Art Show, Dealers Room and fan tables. After a panel, when you want to ask who the author was of that book they were discussing and you didn’t get the spelling, stop in the Discord channel reserved for the “room” where the panel was held. It will also have a help desk thread.

If you’ve been to prior cons that have used Discord or have joined other servers, their icons may appear in the left-hand bar. Look for Philcon’s rocket ship icon if you wind up in one of them. Here, it’s just below the Discord icon.

You must read and agree to the Code of Conduct under # welcome-to-philcon before you can see anything else.
The second bar from the left is the menu of places you can go. You can add ribbons to your “badge” and find help under # new-user-help or (further down the menu) in the HELP DESK group.
I’ve closed all of the groups (by clicking on the arrow) so you can see the organization. Click on the title to open it up again and see the selection of channels.

When there’s a speaker instead of an octothorpe (#), the channel is audio rather than text chat. All of these are locked right now but they’ll be open when the con starts.

The right-hand column shows people who are logged in. If you want to contact someone, click on their icon and a pop-up will let you send a message.

The wide, middle column will contain posts if you selected a chat channel. You can type in the box at the bottom, adding emojis or uploading pics. Discuss program items that have closed, upload cat pictures, negotiate with dealers, etc.

Remember the Quick Reference in the Info section of the program page. If you have trouble, try our Help Desk. We hope you enjoy Philcon this year and will return many times in the future!
About the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society

PSFS Activities

General (regular) in-person meetings of PSFS are open to the public and are held either at The Rotunda or at the Parish Hall of St. Mary's Church, both on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. Most months feature a guest speaker – author, artist, editor, publisher, scientist or related expert. For 40 years, a panel of readers has annually reviewed all Hugo-nominated fiction prior to the voting deadline.

The social gathering begins at 7:30 p.m., the business meeting at 8:00, and the program at 9:00.

During the closures necessitated by the COVID pandemic, PSFS has held informal gatherings via Zoom, usually with a speaker or a panel.

General Meetings

Dec 2019 ..... Audrey Schulman, author, A Theory of Bastards, winner of the 2019 Phillip K. Dick Award
Jan 2020........ Annual Meeting, Elections, no program
Feb............... Dina Leacock, author, Just a Drop in the Cup

Changeover to informal meetings (virtual)

May ............ Social
June .............. Madeline Miller, author, Song of Achilles & Circe
July .............. Annual Hugo Review Panel
Sept............. Gail Z. Martin, author, Sellsword's Oath
(Assassins of Landria)
Oct............... Jonathan Maberry, author, Lost Roads & Ink
Nov............... Philcon 2020

PSFS Book Discussion Group

by James Harper

The best book discussions are rarely unanimous. If everyone agrees that a book is terrible, there is only so much fun in shredding it to pieces, and a book everyone likes is a sign the discussion will end early that day. But when the group is divided is where the fun lies. One of the best PSFS book discussions I’ve ever attended was when we tackled ‘Foucault’s Pendulum’ by Umberto Eco; half the group thought it was brilliant through and through, and the other half felt that any novel whose premise started on page three hundred needed to be marked accordingly.

These are the great advantages of the book discussion: most attendees have read the entire book and we usually do not agree. There is nothing like growing your critical reading and analysis skills than attending a book discussion month after month, justifying your feelings for the book while understanding opposing opinions. Some of the most useful book discussions I’ve attended are for books I didn’t enjoy reading, because over the course of the 90-120 minutes I will get a thorough grounding in the book’s virtues, even if I did not experience them myself.

It also helps that the books being discussed have a fair range in publication dates. Roughly one-third of the books we discuss were written in the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, another third in the mid to late twentieth century, and the rest in the twenty-first century. This helps keep the format lively, especially as many attendees have large book collections and long memories. Recent books are compared to similar treatments of the subject matter, and classics are studied in the literary landscape where they first appeared. And always we consider whether the books, young or old, are still entertaining today.

And discussions can be fascinating when they align with an attendee’s expertise. The first discussion I ever attended was ‘Consider Phlebas’ by Iain M. Banks, after which I came away with a modest grounding in both the history of space opera and the milieu of British science fiction up to that point. Andy Weir’s ‘The Martian’ and
PSFS Activities - continued -

H.G. Wells' “The First Men in the Moon” take on new meaning when a literal rocket scientist is on hand to critique their accuracy.

Not that expertise is required for this group. After all, it's valuable to hear someone's attitudes in coming to a book cold. Last year I had prepared for a discussion on Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’ by delving into the Greek myths that Circe and her family appeared in, from her sister's marriage to Minos to Odysseus’ last days in the now-lost Telegony. I was mesmerized at how well Miller had stitched together all these disparate appearances into a cohesive whole, and I thought the book's target audience would be people similarly versed in the legends.

So it was fascinating to hold the discussion with people who had only a general schooldays recollection of the Greek myths, but who enjoyed the book on its storytelling merits just as much as I had. That book is still the highest-rated of any in the discussion group’s thirty-odd year history.

So come join us! We normally meet at people’s houses but for the immediate future we are appearing on Zoom. You will receive an invite if you are subscribed to psfs-talk or our mailing list.

Books Discussed Since Last Philcon

Dec 2019 – Exhalation and Other Stories by Ted Chiang (Rocket Rating 3.8 out of 4)
Jan 2020 – Spinning Silver by Naomi Novik (RR 3.4)
Feb 2020 – The City and the Stars by Arthur C. Clarke (RR 3.2)
Mar 2020 – Judenstaadt by Simone Zelitch (cancelled)
Aug 2020 – In the Land of Time and Other Stories by Lord Dunsany (RR 2.8)
Sep 2020 – Babel-17 by Samuel R. Delaney (RR 2.5)
Oct 2020 – Lovecraft Country by Matt Ruff (RR 2.6)

Books Scheduled for Discussion

Nov 2020 – The Strange Case of the Alchemist’s Daughter by Theodora Goss
Dec 2020 – The Neverending Story by Michael Ende
Jan 2021 – Gods of Jade and Shadow by Silvia Moreno-Garcia

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The Philip K. Dick Award

This Award is presented annually with the support of the Philip K. Dick Trust. The Philip K. Dick Award recognizes distinguished science fiction published in paperback original form in the United States. The award is sponsored by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society and the Philip K. Dick Trust, and the ceremony by the NorthWest Science Fiction Society.

The 2020 winner was Sooner or Later Everything Falls into the Sea, by Sarah Pinsker, published by Small Beer Press. A special citation was awarded to The Little Animals, by Sarah Tolmie, published by Aqueduct Press.

The other finalists were The Outside, by Ada Hoffmann (Angry Robot); Velocity Weapon, by Megan E. O’Keefe (Orbit); All Worlds Are Real: Short Fictions, by Susan Palwick (Fairwood Press); and The Rosewater Redemption, by Tade Thompson (Orbit).

The judges were F. Brett Cox, Brendan DuBois, Cynthia Felice, Tim Pratt and Jessica Reisman.

Recent Winners

2019 Award: Theory of Bastards, by Audrey Schulman (Europa Editions)
2019 Special Citation: 84K, by Claire North (Orbit)
2018 Award: Bannerless, by Carrie Vaughn (Mariner/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
2018 Special Citation: After the Flare, by Deji Bryce Olukotun (The Unnamed Press)
2017 Special Citation: Unpronounceable, by Susan diRende (Aqueduct Press)
2016 Award: Apex, by Ramez Naam (Angry Robot Books)
2016 Special Citation: Archangel, by Margaretrie Reed (Arche Press)
2015 Award: The Book of the Unnamed Midwife, by Meg Elison (Sybaritic Press)
2015 Special Citation: Elsium, by Jennifer Marie Brissett (Aqueduct Press)
2014 Award: Countdown City, by Ben H. Winters (Quirk Books)
2014 Special Citation: Self-Reference Engine by Toh EnJoe, trans. Terry Gallagher (Haikasoru)

For more details, please see: www.PhilipKDickAward.org

PSFS Young Writers’ Contest

PSFS conducts an annual short story contest, open to students and child members of the convention, in public and private schools, grades 5-8 (middle school division) and 9-12 (high school division). Entrants submit a science fiction or fantasy story of up to 1,000 words. For more information, see https://philcon.org/programming/young-writers-contest (Contest cancelled in 2020 due to COVID pandemic.)
**Philcon 2020 Committee & Staff**

### PSFS Officers & Board
- **President:** Hector Cruz
- **Vice President:** Gary Feldbaum
- **Secretary:** Todd Dashoff
- **Treasurer:** Joni Brill Dashoff

### Philcon 2020 Committee & Staff
- **Chair:** Joann Lawler
- **Vice Chair:** Gary Feldbaum

### Administration & Operations
- **Head:** Todd Dashoff
- **Operations Staff:** Hector Cruz, Gary Feldbaum, Stephanie Lucas

### Technology Services
- **Director:** Syd Weinstein
- **TD Discord:** Kristin Seibert
- **Staff /Moderators:** Jenine Abarbanel, Mowgli Assor, Jeff Beeler, Alan Bond, Rodger Burns, Brendon Chetwynd, Hector Cruz, Catelynn Cunningham, Gay Ellen Dennett, Eric Fleischer, Carolyn Frank, Eric Gasiort, Terry Sisk Graybill, Mar Hammitt-McDonald, Brian Harkless, Michael Houghton, Saul Jaffe, Lynn Cohen Koehler, Rick Kovalcik, Paul Kraus, Robert Luoma, Dennis McCunney, Caroline Meeks, Terry Neil, Hannah Nelson, Peter Olszowka, Kathi Overton, Nicky Pentilla, Jeff Poretzky, Michael Rafferty

### Programming Division
- **Deputy Head:** Lynati
- **Webmaster:** Kristyn Souder
- **Registration Module:** Tim Souder
- **Database Admin:** Tim Souder
- **Webpage Assistant:** Gary Feldbaum
- **System Admin:** Syd Weinstein
- **Zambia, KonOpas Development:** Syd Weinstein

### Anime
- **Co-Heads:** Tim & Kristyn Souder
- **Staff/Discord:** Brian Murdzak, Jackie D’Amato, Kris Twesme

### Costuming & Cosplay
- **Head:** Abigail Welsher

### Fandom
- **Co-Heads:** Anastasia Klimchynskaya, Lynati

### Filk & Music
- **Head:** Marc Grossman
- **Staff:** Peggi Warner-LaLonde, Sally Headford, Blind Lemming Chiffon, Gary Ehrlich, Douglass Davidson, Jane Garton

### Gaming
- **Co-Heads:** Ginny & John Swann, Tal Alalilma, Mark Singer, Stephanie Swann, Bobby Edoo

### Literature
- **Co-Heads:** Darrell Schweitzer, Lee Weinstein

### Writers’ Workshop
- **Critiquers:** Ken Altabef, Ty Drago, Oz Drummond, Gregory Frost, Dina Leacock, Darrell Schweitzer

### Science & Technology
- **Head:** Jazz Hiestand

### Exhibits
- **Art Show Director:** Joann lawler
- **Asst.**: Saul Jaffe

### Dealers
- **Pre-Con:** Todd Dashoff
- **At Con:** Sally Kobee

### Marketing & Communications
- **Publications Program Book Director:** Terry Sisk Graybill
- **Staff:** Todd Dashoff, John Graybill, Joann Lawler

### Marketing
- **Director:** Gary Feldbaum
- **Flyers:** Terry Sisk Graybill, Syd Weinstein
- **Social Media:** Suzanne “Zan” Rosin, Kristyn Souder, Joann Lawler
Ready Reserve

Through the vicissitudes of 2020, the following committee and staff members, many of whom had already done a good bit of work, were suddenly left with no function. We salute them nonetheless, as they would have stood up and worked at an in-person Philcon.

Administration & Operations

Hotel Liaison          Dennis McCunney
Logistics (Truck)      Bill Krimmel
Signage Head           Dee Kenealy
Signage Staff          Ed Bishop
Registration
Head                  Suzanne “Zan” Rosin
Staff                  Mimi McGinnis
                     Brian Sarcinelli
                     Sarah Yaworsky
Pre-Con                Todd Dashoff
Badge Design           Syd Weinstein

Technology Services

Audio Designer         Paul Kraus
Staff                  Fred Bauer
                     Janice Bauer
                     Tom Dings
                     “Hobbit”
                     Joseph Weinstein

Program Operations

Head                  Naomi Paskin-Parsons
Operations Staff      Hugh Casey
                     Stephanie Lucas
                     Jeff Warner
Green Room            Rosemarie Freeman
                     Jerry Crosson
                     Evan Phillips

Programming Division

Art
Head                  Nathan E. Lilly

Comics & Graphic Novels
Head                  F. Michael Yates

Costuming & Cosplay
Head                  Lynati

Filk & Music
Assistant             Roberta Rogow

Exhibits

Art Show
Assistants           Andrea Sanchez
                     Sharon Mannell
Staff                 Ira Donevitz
                     Wendy Hapek
                     Jenny Krause
Print Show Director   Rachelle Lerner
Art Show Sales       Saul Jaffe
(De)Constr. Co-Hd     Bob Hranek
                     Bill Krimmel
Trainee               Anthony D’Amato
(De)Constr. Crew      Mike Fisher
                     Noah Lewis
                     Mimi McGinnis
                     Jim Reichert
                     Tommy Reichert
                     Gerard St. George
                     Erwin Strauss
                     Jim Tigar

Dealers
At Con                Sally Kobee

Masquerade
Director              Abigail Welsher
Assistant Director    Alexander Welsher
Emcee                 Keith DeCandido
Green Room            Byron Connell
                     Tina Connell
Judges                Heidi Hooper
                     Sheena Redmond
                     Sara Weinstein
Workmanship Judge     Wrenn Simms
Judges Clerk          Kati Steiner
Photographer          Ken Warren

Volunteers
Head                  Max Liebersohn

Fixed Functions

Food Services
Con Suite              Head Gene Olmsted
                     Staff Aurora Lawson
                     Marvin Lawson
                     Sara Paul
                     Bob Schwier
                     Michele Weinstein
                     Winona Whyte-Schwier

Staff Den             Kathleen Morrison
                     Larry Kramer
                     Linda Kramer

Marketing & Communications

Publications
Bookmarks/Postcards   Terry Sisk Graybill
Publicity Distrib. Assts. Don Field
                     Hank Smith
Mailing               Todd Dashoff
Pocket Program        Sue Ellen Colter
The Philcon Rocket    Lew Wolkoff
Ad Sales              Todd Dashoff
                     Lew Wolkoff
Philcon has been held annually since 1936 (aside from an interruption for WWII) and, as such, is America’s oldest science fiction convention, and arguably the world’s. (Note: asterisk indicates guest unable to attend, & square brackets their substitutes.)

Dates & Guests

Nov. 8–10, 2019 (83)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Tim Pratt
Artist GoH .................................................. Stephanie Pui-Mun Law
Special Guest .................................................... Heather Shaw
Musical Guest ................................................... This Way to the Egress

Nov. 16–18, 2018 (82)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Stephen Brust
Artist GoH ..................................................... Gary Lippincott
Special Guest ................................................... Marshal Ryan Maresca

Nov. 10–12, 2017 (81)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Seanan McGuire
Artist GoH ..................................................... Don Maitz
Special Guest, Author/Illustrator ....................... Janny Wurts
Special Musical Guest … Bed & Breakfast (Bill & Brenda Sutton)

Nov. 18–20, 2016 (80)
Principal Speaker ............................................. C.J. Cherryh
Artist GoH ..................................................... Dave Seeley
Special Guest ................................................... L.E. Modesitt, Jr.

Nov. 20–22, 2015 (79)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Wen Spencer
Artist GoH ..................................................... Richard Hescox
Special Musical Guest ........................................ Murder Ballads

Nov. 21–23, 2014 (78)
Principal Speakers ........................................ Sharon Lee & Steve Miller
Artist GoH ..................................................... Bob Eggleton
Special Guest ................................................... Kyle Cassidy

Nov. 8–10, 2013 (77)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Allen Steele
Artist GoH ..................................................... Charles Vess
Fan GoH ......................................................... Robert Madle
Musical GoH .......................... The Heather Dale Band with SJ Tucker

Nov. 9–11, 2012 (76)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Catherynne Valente
Artist GoH ..................................................... Phil Foglio
Fan GoH ......................................................... David Kyle

Nov. 18–20, 2011 (75)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Cory Doctorow
Artist GoH ..................................................... Boris Vallejo* & Julie Bell
Special Musical Guest ........................................ SJ Tucker

Nov. 19–21, 2010 (74)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Peter S. Beagle
Artist GoH ..................................................... Mitchell Bentley
Fan GoH ......................................................... Jeff Mach

Nov. 20–22, 2009 (73)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Catherine Asaro
Artist GoH ..................................................... Frank Wu
Special Guests .............................................. L.A. Banks & Cory Doctorow

Nov. 21–23, 2008 (72)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Tim Powers
Artist GoH ..................................................... John Picacio
Special Guests .............................................. Scott Christian Sava (webcomics)
................................................... The Chromatics (music)

Nov. 16–18, 2007 (71)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Eric Flint
Artist GoH ..................................................... Karl Kofoed
Special Guests .............................................. Andrew Trembley (costume) & Voltaire (music)

Nov. 17–19, 2006 (70)
Principal Speaker ............................................. Charles Stross
Artist GoH ..................................................... Sue Dawe
Special Guest ................................................... Tom Smith (music)

Worldcons

The 65th year of Philcon was coextensive with the 59th World Science Fiction Convention

Sept. 5–7, 1953 (Worldcon: 11th Worldcon)
Guest ............................................................... Willy Ley

Aug. 30–Sept. 1, 1947 (Worldcon: Philcon 1)
Guest ............................................................... John W. Campbell, Jr.

Venues

2020 ................................................... Virtual
2008–2019 .............................................. Crowne Plaza, Cherry Hill, NJ
2006–2007 ............................................. Sheraton Philadelphia City Center
2001–2005 ........................................... Marriott Center City, Philadelphia
1990–2000 ........................................... Adams Mark Hotel, Philadelphia
1953 ........................................................ Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, Philadelphia
1947 .............................................. Penn-Sheraton Hotel, Philadelphia

Chairs

Tim Binder ................................................... 2000
Hugh Casey ................................................... 2003
Hector R. Cruz .............................................. 2019
Gary Feldbaum ........................................... 2011–14
Tony Finan ................................................... 1997–99, 2005–06
Oz Fontecchio .................................................. 1990–91, ’93, ’96
Mike Hammond .......................................... 2017
Joann Lawler ............................................. 2020, 1983–84
Jeff Linder ................................................... 2002
Stephanie Lucas ............................................. 2015
Anne Norton .................................................. 1992
Rock Robertson ............................................. 2009
Mark Trebing .................................................. 2008
Milton Rothman .......................................... 1947, 1953
DisCon III
The 79th Worldcon

John Harris
Artist Guest of Honor

Malka Older
Special Guest

Sheree Renée Thomas
Special Guest

Nancy Kress
Author Guest of Honor

Toni Weisskopf
Editor Guest of Honor

Ben Yalow
Fan Guest of Honor

Hugo Awards Ceremony Hosts
Sheree Renée Thomas and Malka Older

Wednesday, 25 August – Sunday, 29 August 2021
Washington Marriott Wardman Park and Omni Shoreham Hotels

Membership rates will increase on 1 January 2021

Visit our website to learn about Capitalize! The DisCon III Fan Fund to financially support fans, staff, and program participants from marginalized communities

DisCon3.org
info@discon3.org

Worldcon2021

DisCon III Souvenirs
offworlddesigns.com/discon
We are sad to report the loss to fandom of New York fan Ariel Makepeace Julienne Winterbreuke – also known as I Abra Cinii, Ariel Cinii and simply Abby. Abby, 66, died of an apparent heart attack in her “Upstate Manhattan” apartment early in March of this year. “One of the earliest and most outstanding trans people in Fandom, Abby, through her singing, writing, and drawing, was phenomenally creative and inventive,” said Mark Blackman posting the news of her passing on File 770 in March 2020. “She was an apahack in both incarnations of APA-NYU. As a filker and performer she was known for ‘Imported Sly,’ ‘Unknown is Unending,’ and the New York-centric ‘The Alternate Side’ and ‘Swing Low, Sweet Double-A.’”

A fellow filker and friend, Roberta Rogow, who recalls Abby at a young age hanging out at Star Trek conventions with her daughters, reminisces: “I enjoyed her songs, even if I didn’t always get her references to obscure (to me!) Anime and Commix. Her style of dress was idiosyncratic, leaning to drapery, scarves, and head-wraps. She played the mandolin, using a chopstick.” And Roberta remembers Abby’s habit of never quite ending a song: “there was always one more chorus, an extra musical coda… Abby was part of my Fannish life for so long.”

Marc Grossman, also a friend and our Philcon Filk and Music Head, remembers her as an amazing fan and artist. “Abby supported NY-regional filk including Philcon and was a fixture in the Philcon filk room. Her songs will remain treasured from the least of her works up to her Pegasus- Nominated song ‘Droozlin’ ‘Through the Cosmos’ (http://www.ovff.org/pegasus/songs/droozlin-through-the-cosmos.html). As a writer she not only wrote fiction books (as Ariel Cinii) including the Touching Lands’ Dance trilogy (The Family Forge, The Organized Seer and The Telepaths’ Song), but also designed the languages and in-depth histories of the cultures within.” Marc particularly emphasized that Abby was loved not only for her creative talents but also her sharing and helpful nature, making “All of Us” better by her inclusion and periodic leadership. “In addition to fandom, Abby was involved and engaged in Social Justice and her loss to heart disease will be deeply felt as we keep her memory and songs alive.”

Deb Wunder, long-term friend agrees: “Abby played in so many places in fandom and in the world it is almost certain that her story will go on long after those of us who actually knew her are gone.”
Hugh used to tell people that science fiction saved his life. His mother introduced him to his first fandom by allowing her small son to stay up with her to watch Star Trek when it originally aired. She also made sure that he watched the Apollo 11 moon landing live. She wasn't able to guide him into adulthood, since she died when he was eleven. Hugh's father was himself seriously ill by then, and died three days before Hugh's sixteenth birthday. Hugh and his three younger brothers were left in the care of their father's sister, who had left the convent to help raise them. The former nun was not prepared for the challenges of raising four teenage boys, and Hugh as the eldest clashed with her frequently. She didn't like his long hair, his strange taste in music and books and television, or his interest in the female form.

Hugh found hope when he was eighteen. He read in the newspaper that Isaac Asimov, Great Author (TM) would be appearing at some event called Philcon. He told his aunt that he was going to the library, and went to go meet his hero. The actual encounter is a story best told in person, but suffice it to say that Asimov took half an hour away from more sophisticated sycophants and gave his undivided attention to the gawky young man. Hugh learned that there were more people like him to...
find, adults who shared the same interests and would care about what he had to say about them.

It took more than a decade to find Philcon again, but when he did, he got involved. Hugh served as chair and vice-chair of Philcon, and as president and vice-president of PSFS. He sat on panels. He found other conventions. Eventually he settled into the role he was best known for, working on and eventually heading the Program Division of Philcon. Hugh’s gifts for making friends quickly and putting people at ease made him a natural for navigating the inevitable conflicts of schedules and personalities.

I like to say that it was Hugh’s beautiful eyes and self-deprecating humor on a Philcon flirting panel that caught my attention. It’s not the whole story. At that point, I was really looking for someone to help me make friends and get involved with the con without starting from rock bottom. I did develop an intense and unhealthy crush on him, which had to be squashed. Fortunately, we were able to start over. After Hugh lost his job in 2010, he started a photography business, setting up a backdrop and taking portrait photographs at conventions and events. I watched him work for an hour or so one evening, and then stepped in and started helping. I handled the paperwork, managed the line, and located props. That left Hugh free to give his full attention to the current subject, chatting and posing and bringing out their best self. Once I learned the most efficient way to set up and take down the equipment a few events later, he rarely ran the booth without me again. He then brought me into Philcon Programming where we continued our smooth working partnership. Our personal relationship developed later.

Hugh was diagnosed with colon cancer in April 2015, the same year that I was Chair of Philcon. I wanted to step down to devote my full attention to caring for him, but he didn’t want that. Philcon was too important to him, and he believed that I would be able to do both. It was not easy. His fourth hospital stay of the year was in the week leading up to the convention, right through the Saturday of the con. I was already at the hotel for setup on Thursday night when I heard the rumors that I wasn’t going to be at the con either. By then, he’d already been diagnosed and treated for the new problems. I didn’t miss a moment. Hugh’s cousin picked him up when the hospital released him and brought him right over so he could be where he wanted both of us to be the whole time.

Hugh made it through five years of chronic illness and pain with humor and the support of friends, many from fandom. We joked our way through chemo appoint-
ments and emergency room visits and visiting nurses. Friends drove him to appointments so I could work, they gave us advice, they sent gifts, and most importantly they sent love and prayers. Our world grew smaller, because even when his health would have let us travel, our finances did not. In 2018 and 2019, Philcon was the only time we were able to see many of our friends.

On January 2, 2020, Hugh suffered a massive stroke caused by a staph infection in his heart. At first, any recovery seemed unlikely. By March, he had woken up and recovered much of his personality and cognitive ability, but still had difficulty forming and accessing short-term memory. The paralysis of his left side was near total, and the rehab staff told me that he would need full-time care for the rest of his life. Then the pandemic lockdown hit.

Insurance sent him from the rehab to a skilled nursing facility, where he showed signs of losing ground almost immediately. He had a brain bleed late on April 20, and on April 21 he died.

Hugh wanted to live forever. Failing that, he wanted to be remembered. He never could decide how. He joked that at his wake, he wanted animatronics so he would sit up and start telling stories to freak out the mourners. I vetoed this repeatedly, but I haven’t yet decided about the life-size cardboard figure to take to conventions. Laughter was Hugh’s defense against chronic depression, against pain and fear. “The world needs more happy,” he said, and he tried to give happiness to others even when he couldn’t reach it himself.
Philcon Code of Conduct

To help ensure an enjoyable experience for yourself and your fellow members of Philcon, please review and comply with the rules described here. We reserve the right to take any appropriate action, up to and including revoking the membership, without refund, or suspending the participation in Philcon, of anyone who refuses or fails to comply with any Philcon policy or the law.

General Rules, Code of Conduct, and Appropriate Behavior

If you have any problems, report them in the HELP DESK channel #help-requests. If you want to report it privately, see the pinned message in that channel with the name of the “head moderator on call” and private message them. If you do not have a Discord account, you may email your issue to conops@philcon.org.

First, and most importantly, you must comply with all applicable laws and regulations and the policies of Philcon.

Disruptive behavior is grounds for ejection from Philcon or such other response as Philcon deems appropriate.

Be respectful towards others at all times. This includes the membership, participants, volunteers, staff and committee of Philcon and everyone else you may encounter.

If someone does not want to engage in a personal conversation with you, do not try to start or continue such a conversation. If someone does not want to pursue a personal relationship with you, do not try to start or continue such a relationship. Such behavior may be considered harassment, and will be considered inappropriate and dealt with as such. Be polite and ask permission before moving forward with a relationship. Stop if someone says no.

Philcon is a venue dedicated to the expression and free exchange of ideas for the purposes of critical examination, discussion, and consideration. The personal views of Philcon’s individual staff, program participants, or

Violations of Rules

Philcon reserves the right to take any action in response to misconduct, disruption of the conference or violations of the Philcon Rules, or violations of law that Philcon deems appropriate under the facts and circumstances.

This includes, but is not limited to, talking with the parties involved, attempting to mediate a solution, issuing verbal warnings, suspending participation, revoking memberships and directing a person to leave the conference. Philcon will not require anyone making a complaint to mediate.

Any person may be expelled, or other action may be taken, for reasons which include the following:

• Violations of ANY of the Philcon Rules, including the Code of Conduct.
• Disruptive behavior in the Conference Areas.
• Violation of any law.

Reporting Misconduct

If you feel that someone is engaging in misconduct or a violation of these rules, we suggest the following:

• If you feel comfortable doing so, point out the inappropriate behavior to the person(s) involved. Often this will resolve the problem immediately.
• If you do not feel comfortable talking to the person(s) or if talking to them does not resolve the problem, please report the situation immediately in the HELP DESK channel #help-requests. If you want to report it privately, see the pinned message in that channel with the name of the “head moderator on call” and private message them. Please try to provide the Discord screen name and Discord ID, if known to you, of the person(s) involved. If you do not have a Discord account, please email about your issue to conops@philcon.org.

We need to know about any incident as soon as possible during Philcon in order to take appropriate action. Philcon will not require anyone making a complaint to mediate. Any complaint of misconduct will be promptly investigated.
members are not necessarily those of the Philcon conference committee, and our dedication to the free expression of those ideas should not be considered endorsement. Please be accepting of the fact that other people are also free to disagree with you.

All Philcon spaces, except for those labeled 18+, are for all ages. Please keep all content age appropriate.

No interference with the personnel of Philcon will be tolerated.

Recording of any portion of Philcon is prohibited, without the written permission of Philcon.

**Administration**

**Con Suite**

Philcon will have a Con Suite area in Zoom, which is intended to create a friendly, social atmosphere. Please stop by to relax and enjoy yourself.

**Program Ops/Green Room**

Where program participants check in before their panels and ask for program-related help. This year, it will be located in a channel in Discord. Get your schedule from [https://www.konopas.philcon.org/#part](https://www.konopas.philcon.org/#part)

**Operations**

Regular members should only need us if something goes wrong, or to report misconduct or violations of Philcon’s policies (see “Reporting Misconduct”).

**Definitions**

“We” means the Philcon Conference Committee (“the Committee”), staff, and volunteers of Philcon and the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society.

“You” refers to any person present at, participating in or who is a member of the Philcon conference.

The “conference area” includes all of Philcon’s virtual sites including the Philcon web site (*.philcon.org) and associated web pages, the Philcon Discord server, and Zoom webinars and meetings.

“Guardian” means “parent or legal guardian.”

“Minor” means a person less than 18 years of age.

“Student” means any person enrolled as a student in a formal educational institution who possesses an active school-issued ID.

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Enjoy the entire convention. Program topics change year to year, so see what’s new this year. (Read the the online Program Guide for the details.)

Be sure to see the Art Show in Discord. Do stop by the Fan Tables and explore the treasures available in the Dealers Room, also on Discord. Take a break and meet new friends and relax in the Con Suite or check out the gaming events in the Program Guide. Have fun!

Programming Tracks

Anime & Animation
Discussing SF/F in animated form.

Art
Demos.

Costuming & Cosplay
Sorry, not this year. Please come back next year.

Fandom
Tales of fan activities past and topics of current community interest

Filk & Music
The folk music of SF fandom; concerts, sing-alongs for newcomers, and late-night performances of the standards. The Philcon Song Writing Contest will run throughout the weekend. Filk Head Marc Grossman will announce this year’s theme on Friday. Contestants must then write an original song on this theme (to their own or other music), submit their lyrics in advance and then perform (or have someone perform) their song during the 4:00 p.m. Sunday performance. Three judges will determine and announce the winner during that hour.

Gaming
Panels on the design and business of games.

Literary
Philcon’s main focus: The content, creation and business of all formats of written works of SF, fantasy and horror.

Media
Discuss comics, TV, film, web and other performance formats.

Science & Technology
Current developments and retrospective looks at these fields.

Writing Functions

Writing Workshop
Previously submitted stories are critiqued by professionals. This annual event is open to any member of the convention. For details about submitting for next year’s workshop, check www.philcon.org.

Exhibits

Art Show
Buy, sell, exhibit. There are three areas to see art: this book’s Art Gallery, the virtual art show (Program Guide’s Info section contains a link), or the Discord Art Show with channels for each participating artist. Artists may appear in one or more of these areas.

Other Fixed Functions

Con Suite
Socializing with other fans and pros. Access through Program Guide.

Dealers Room
The unusual, the hard-to-locate, and the wonderful. Each dealer has a channel in Discord.

Fan Tables
Chat with representatives of fan groups and other SF/F conventions, each in a channel in Discord.

Online Games
Check the online Program Guide under Program, click “Area…” at the top, and select Gaming.
Artists, Dealers & Fan Tables

As with everything else, this year's Art Show and Dealers Room will be virtual. Some past Guest Artists are returning, in combination with many of our regulars.

The Art Show and Dealers Room will be found in Discord. Each artist or dealer has a room (or channel) that pretty much looks like a chat thread. They may pin messages. It's up to the individual exhibitor how they arrange things. Philcon will not be acting as a payment agent for art this year.

• They may pin a message that includes a link to their own webpage, where they exhibit items for sale and indicate payment methods.
• They may post pictures of their artwork or merchandise, using the chat function to answer questions or arrange sales. This may involve making a payment through Paypal or equivalent, or mailing a check (what are those?)
• Some artists may not choose to have a Discord channel, but have contact information listed on the webpage https://www.konopas.philcon.org/ArtShow.html
• Some artists may choose to participate in the Art Gallery and more in this souvenir program book.

Fan tables will also have Discord channels. Visit with representatives of upcoming conventions, and get information to plan your future virtual (and, someday that can’t be too soon, live!) convention season.

Artists

Alan F. Beck
Sarah Clemens
Charlene Taylor D’Alessio
Sara Felix
Terry Sisk Graybill
Hats and Spats
Lisa Hertel
Richard Hescox
Heidi Hooper
Tess Kissinger
Janet Kofoed
Karl Kofoed
Don Maitz
Rebecca Marcus
Anne E.G. Nydam
Darrell Schweitzer
Luke Stelmaszek
Michael Swanwick
Matt Szychowski
Jim Tigar
Jason Van Hollander
Bob Walters
Diane Weinstein
Fran Wilde
Lee Weinstein
Janny Wurts

Dealers

Fantastic Books (Ian Randal Strock) (Small press, new & used SF/F books)
Larry Smith Bookseller (Sally Kobee) (SF/mystery/art books)
Michele Staffen (Author)
Vincent Rospond (Small press, new books)
Wendelyn Gray (New books)
Winged Hussar Publishing (Vincent Rospond) (New books)
Zombies Need Brains, LLC (Joshua Palmatier) (Small press, new books)
First Fandom Experience (Daniel Ritter)
Anastasia Klimchyskaya (Jewelry)
Mandah (Artist)
Shahuskies Illustration (Matt Szychowski) (Art prints & stickers)

Fan Tables

Arisia
Boskone
Capclave
Chicon 8
Discon III
Glasgow 2024
NorWesCon
Seattle 2025
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SENSE OF MISSION

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HORROR, & YA NEWS, REVIEWS, & COMMENTARY
LOCUSMAG.COM/SUBSCRIBE
Profiles are current at presstime. For up-to-date profiles, please visit www.philcon.org. For program participants’ appearance times and locations, please consult the online Program Guide.

**Danielle Ackley-McPhail**  
Award-winning author, editor, and publisher Danielle Ackley-McPhail has worked both sides of the publishing industry for longer than she cares to admit. Her published works include six novels, including the recently re-released *Baba Ali and the Clockwork Djinn*, co-written with Day Al-Mohamed. She is also the author of six solo collections, the newest being *Eternal Wanderings, the non-fiction writers’ guide*, *The Literary Handymen: Build-A-Book Workshop*, and *The Ginger KICK! Cookbook*. She is the senior editor of numerous anthologies, including the recently released *Footprints in the Stars*.

**Lisa Adler-Golden**  
Lisa Adler-Golden (she/her) has been the Programming Head of Balticon since 2018 and is the Program Division Head of DisCon III, the 79th Worldcon.

**Star Anise**  
**Catherine Asaro**  
Catherine Asaro has authored about thirty books, including science fiction, thrillers, and fantasy. Her novel *The Quantum Rose* and novella “The Spacetime Pool” both won the Nebula Award. She is a multiple Hugo nominee and a multiple winner of the AnLab from Analog magazine. Her most recent books are *The Vanished Seas* and *Lightning Strike Book II*, both of which came out in July 2020.

Catherine has a doctorate in chemical physics from Harvard and a BS in chemistry from UCLA. Her paper “Complex Speeds and Special Relativity” (*The American Journal of Physics*, April 1996) forms the basis for some of the science in her fiction. She directed the Chesapeake Math Contest for many years. Her students distinguished themselves in many national programs, including the USA Mathematical Olympiad, the USA Physics Olympiad, and the Harvard-MIT Math Contest.

Catherine has appeared as a speaker at many institutions and as a Guest of Honor at cons across the US and abroad. She served two terms as president for SFWA and is a member of SIGMA, a think tank that advises the government as to future trends affecting national security. She also appears as a vocalist at clubs and conventions. Her most recent single, the Celtic-themed song “Ancient Ages” (written by Arlan Andrews) placed on the Blast-FM top 100 in 2020.

Catherine can be reached at www.catherinesarso.net, and she has a Patreon page at www.patreon.com/CatherineAsaro.

**John Ashmead**  
John Ashmead has a BA in physics from Harvard, summa cum laude, and a masters in physics from Princeton. For several years he was an assistant editor for *Asimov’s SF Magazine*.

He is a frequent speaker at Philcon, Balticon, Capclave (& WorldCon & NASA) on Time Travel, Invisibility, Star Gates, Parallel Universes, and related topics. Recently he co-edited (with Darrell Schweitzer) *Tales from the Miskatonic University Library: What Evils Lurk in the Dark Reaches of the Dewey Decimal System?*

He is also finishing up a Ph.D. dissertation in physics, *Time Dispersion in Quantum Mechanics*. This was published as part of the International Association for Relativistic Dynamics 2018 Conference Proceedings (https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1742-6596/1239/1/012015).

His own web site is www.timeandquantummechanics.com. His lifetime goal is to build a really practical time machine.

**Eric Avedissian**  
Eric Avedissian is an author, award-winning journalist, and member of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA). His debut novella *Gargoyles & Absinthe* was published by Aurelia Leo in February 2020. Other published works include short stories in two literary magazines and two anthologies, and the science fiction/pulp role-playing game Ravaged Earth.

He lives in New Jersey where his hobbies include reading, hiking the pinelands, and battling writer’s block.

**Barbara A. Barnett**  
Barbara A. Barnett is a Philadelphia-area writer, musician, and all-around geek. Her short fiction has appeared in publications such as *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet*, *Fantasy Magazine*, *Cast of Wonders*, *Intergalactic Medicine Show*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and *Flash Fiction Online*. Outside of writing, she has spent most of her career working for performing arts organizations, most recently as an orchestra librarian for the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. She is a graduate of the Odyssey Writing Workshop and currently serves as managing editor of the workshop’s blog, as well as Resident Supervisor for The Never-Ending Odyssey (TNEO), a workshop exclusively for Odyssey graduates.

**James Beall**  
Jim Beall (BS-Math, MBA, PE) has been a nuclear engineer for over 40 years, a war gamer for over 50, and an avid reader of science fiction for even longer. His experience in nuclear engineering and power systems began as a naval officer, shortly after surviving one of Admiral Rickover’s infamous interviews, aboard USS Long Beach (CGN-9). Assignments at the USNRC include reactor inspector, inspection team leader, safety analyst, and reactor policy assistant to three different Presidential-appointed different USNRC Commissioners while earning the agency’s Meritorious and Distinguished Service awards.

He is coauthor of the *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* (JBIS) paper, “Ecological Engineering Considerations for ISU’s Worldship Project.” Baen Books (baen.com) has published eight of his non-fiction articles.

**Ed Bishop**  
Ed Bishop is President and Owner of Cohesive Systems Incorporated, a consulting firm based in New Jersey providing innovative systems and software engineering solutions for Fortune 100 and Inc 100 companies in a wide range of industries. He also participates in post-graduate research in experimental high-energy physics, data science, quantum information science and artificial intelligence. He is a member in good standing of the American Physical Society, the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers and the Association for Computing Machinery. He has also written or edited over 2,000 reviews of film, television and streaming media for the website hometheaterinfo.com.

**Roxanne Bland**  
Award-winning author Roxanne Bland was born in the shadows of the rubber factory smoke-stacks in Akron, OH but grew up in Washington, DC. As a child, she spent an inordinate amount of time prowling the museums of the Smithsonian Institution and reading whatever books she could get her hands on, including the dictionary. A self-described “fugitive from reality,” she has always colored outside the lines and in her early years of writing, saw no reason why a story couldn’t be written combining the genres she loved and did so despite being told it wasn’t possible. Today, she writes stories that are mashups of paranormal urban fantasy, romance, and science fiction, as well as other speculative fiction genres.

**Ben Brubaker**  
Ben is a co-founder of Million Year Picnic, a Philadelphia-based book club dedicated to exploring the social and philosophical implications of ‘soft science fiction’. Born in New York and based in Philadelphia, he can often be found wearing a mask while making art, playing music, designing posters, or participating in social justice initiatives and mutual aid.

**Stephanie Burke**  
Stephanie Burke, known to friends and readers as Flash, has a warped sense of humor and she isn’t afraid to let it show. From pregnant men to six-foot cockroaches, she’s covered the weird, the unusual, and the just plain strange. Stephanie is the co-founder of the charity organization Write 4 Hope where she is hoping to help make a difference, not just talk about it...though talking...
is what she does best. Visit her website at www.theflashcat.net and be sure to join Flash's Flame Keeper loop at Yahoo Groups -- http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FlameKeeper/join, or her facebook at http://www.facebook.com/TheFlashCat

**Philcon**

**Abby Cohen**

I am a lifelong fantasy and sci fi fan who has been coming to Philcon on and off since my dad first brought me to a con in the early 80s, as well as a tabletop gamer for over forty years. Professionally, I work with software teams and recently completed a fifteen-year career in the military reserves which included two Iraq deployments. My major interests in scifi lie in the military and an inveterate aerospace junkie (who'll – someday – complete his Private Pilot license). He's particularly obsessed with digital technologies & multi-level (fractal) clinical interventions.

Abby uses her background in history and politics to translate their thoughts & feelings into "Mundane-es" with their therapist). His Dissertation (Nursed Systems: Evolving Models of Embodied Psychotherapy) deals with Chaos/Complexity/ Dynamic Systems theory (to which he was first exposed in Crichton's Jurassic Park, a metathory of psychological functioning & multi-level (fractal) clinical interventions.

Some of her work appears here as well, both in the current issue of the magazine as well as some of the previous issues. To steal a line from Anne McCaffrey, Abby is four foot eight inches tall, with long hair and glasses. The rest is subject to change without notice.

**LJ Cohen**

LJ Cohen is a novelist, poet, fiber artist, potter, and relentless optimist. After almost twenty-five years as a physical therapist, LJ now uses her anatomical knowledge and clinical skills to injure characters in her science fiction and fantasy novels. Her most recent book, *A Star in the Void* (book 5 of the SF/Space Opera series Halcyone Space) represents her eighth novel and was published summer of 2018. *Derelict*, the 1st book in the series, was named a Library Journal self-e select title and book of the year in 2014. LJ is active in SFWA (Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America) and Broad Universe and splits her time between the Boston area and a farm in Central Massachusetts.
in anthologies and publications including *Children of a Different Sky, Where We May Wag, Dim Shores Vol. 2* (forthcoming) and *Horror for the Throne* (forthcoming). She is the co-editor of *Across the Universe: Tales of Alternative Beatles*, and co-wrote *The Law & Order: SVU Unofficial Companion*. Her articles appear regularly in *Variety*, the *Los Angeles Times*, Today.com and *Emmy Magazine*. Her work -- from the glam to the gory -- can be found at RandeeDawn.com

**Ef Deal**

Ef Deal lives in South Jersey with her husband and three chows for Captain Spaulding. Her short work has been published in *The Fourteen Bureau, Eternity Online, Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine*, and *The Silver Blade*.

**Keith R.A. Decandido**

Keith R.A. DeCandido has been writing fiction for 25 years now, including more than 50 novels, and a ton of short fiction and comics, both in licensed universes from Alien to Zorro and in his own worlds in the fictional cities of Cliff’s End and Super City and the somewhat real locales of New York and Key West. He also writes about pop culture for Tor.com. Learn more online at DeCandido.net.

**Anthony Dobranski**

Anthony Dobranski is a writer and game designer from Washington DC. His first novel is *The Demon in Business Class*, a cross-genre modern fantasy. He designed, Kickstarted, and published Business Class Tarot, a modern business-themed Tarot deck inspired by his novel. He is finishing *The White Lake*, an Earth-based far future science-fiction novel. He studied English literature at Yale, and made his first career at AOL opening offices in Europe and Asia-Pacific. He loves to ski.

**Barna William Donovan**


**Chris Doyle**

Anesthesiologist and critical care specialist Dr. Christine A. Doyle is a lifelong computer geek and science fiction fan. Her IT experiences have ranged from computer lab TA in college to hospital system physician champion for an EHR rollout. She is a past chair of the American Society of Anesthesiologist’s IT committee, and is now the Immediate Past President of the California Society of Anesthesiologists.

She has been costuming since grammar school, ranging from RenFaire to Klingon and everything in between. She started volunteering at her local convention in 2000 and has helped to produce regional events and Worldcons. Her roles have predominantly been in the Program Division, including internal video teams (live broadcast and taped productions), podcasting, program development, and speaker development. She was the Program Division Director for Westcon66 (2013) and Worldcon76 in San Jose (2018).

She has also participated in Masquerades as a contestant, the Emcee’s assistant/promoter, Judge’s clerk, video crew, and Judge. She was the Co-Director of the Masquerade for Worldcon75 in Helsinki, and is the Co-Chair of Costume-Con 39, which will be held in San Jose in 2021.

**Tom Doyle**

Tom Doyle’s latest novel, *Border Croser*, tells the far-future adventures of Eris, a psychologically extreme secret agent whose shifting loyalties cause chaos wherever she goes in the galaxy. Tom is also the author of the contemporary fantasy *American Craft* trilogy from Tor Books (*American Craftmen, The Left-Hand Way, and War and Craft*). In this series, magician-soldiers fight their way through the legacies of Poe and Hawthorne as they attempt to destroy an undying evil--and not kill each other first. Tom has survived Harvard, Stanford, and cancer, and he writes in a spooky turret in Washington, DC. He is an award-winning writer of short science fiction and fantasy, and you can find the text and audio of many of his stories on his website: www.tomdoyleauthor.com

Other links:
Facebook: www.facebook.com/tom.doyle
Twitter: @tmdoyle2

**Ty Drago**

Ty Drago is the author of eight (soon to be nine) published novels. These include *Ty, The Undertakers*, and the upcoming *Dragons* from eSpec Books. Ty is also the founder, publisher, and managing editor of Allegra (www.allegoryezine.com), which has been publishing quality science fiction, fantasy, and horror from new and established authors worldwide since 1998. He lives right here in Cherry Hill with his wife Helene and a dog and a cat. He and Helene founded Legacy Podcasts (www.twworldfolksiscoingstuff.com) in 2018. Their shows include “Legacy: The Novel Writing Experience” and “Legacy: The Immigrant Experience in America.” Their new show, an author’s reading of Torq, was recently debuted wherever podcasts are available.

**Oz Drummond**

Oz Drummond writes science fiction and fantasy. Oz has appeared in *Analog* and in a Russian magazine. Oz is currently working on a dark fantasy novel. Oz organized and ran a number of writing workshops at conventions, including several Worldcons, Oz is also the Comptroller for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, Inc.

**Gary Ehrlich**

Gary Ehrlich stalks the hallways of Northeast conventions and assorted filk conventions. In mundania he is a mild-mannered structural engineer for a major trade association, representing them on material design standards committees and at building code hearings. At cons he can be found on a stage or in the filk room, offering songs of space flight, lunar colonies and hyperspace hotels. Gary is a three-time chair of Conterpoint, the DC area’s incarnation of NEFilk, the Floating Northeast Filk Con, has filled other roles for Conterpoint and for 1997’s Second Concerto, and is currently Balticon’s Director of Filk and Other Musical Mayhem. In April 2012 Gary was inducted into the Filk Hall of Fame for his contributions to the filk community.

Gary appears on five collections of convention recordings: “How Many of them Can We Make Die?” (Conterpoint ’96), “The Filk Was Great...” (Conterpoint ’00), and “Millennium Pandemonium, Volume 1” (MilPhil ’91) by Kludge Audio, and USB Productions’ “Triskaidekafilika” (Filk-KONtario 13) and “Filk Heroes” (Filk-KONtario 14).

**Aaron J Feldman**

Aaron Feldman is an engineer and fan from New Jersey. As seekingferret, he writes fanfic and makes fanvids.

**Carl Fink**

Taking Heinlein’s comment about specialization to heart, Carl has worked on a loading dock, managed a store, been a schoolteacher, worked as a business trainer, managed corporate Information Technology, been a writer, and worked in many jobs at many conventions. As a member of the modern skeptic’s movement, he loves to challenge pseudoscience and superstition. Ask him about filters, or utilities, or Army software. He lives and works on Long Island, NY.

**Kelli Fitzpatrick**

Kelli Fitzpatrick is a science fiction and fantasy author, English educator, and community activist based in Michigan. Her Star Trek story “The Sunwalkers” won the Strange New Worlds 2016 contest, and her writing has been published by Simon and Schuster, StarTrek.com, Women at Warp, Sequart, ATB Publishing, Flash Fiction Online, and others. She currently writes for the Star Trek Adventures role-playing game from Modiphius. She is a strong advocate of the arts, public education, and gender rights and representation. Kelli can be found at KelliFitzpatrick.com and @KelliFitzWrites

**Katrina S. Forest**

Katrina S. Forest is a Clarion West alumna and a member of SFWA. She runs the recently
re-launched Urban Fantasy Magazine and released her first middle grade book, My Best Friend Runs Venus, this June. You can learn more about her work at KatrinaSForest.com.

Colette Fozard

Gregory Frost

Gregory Frost’s most recent novel-length work is the Shadowbridge duology from Del Rey. It was an ALA Best Fantasy Novel pick. His latest short fiction appears in the September/October Aiminovi Magazine and in issue #364 of the revamped Weird Tales.

His collaborative novelette with Michael Swanwick, “Lock Up Your Chickens and Daughters, H’ard and Andy Are Come to Town,” won an Asimov Readers Award in 2015. His works have been finalists for the World Fantasy, Stoker, Nebula, Hugo, International Horror Guild and Theodore Sturgeon awards.

JDG

JDG is an author with a simple mission: To entertain. To enlighten. To reveal the human condition and to create imagined worlds. All this and so much more. Maybe it’s not so simple...

Buy the newly released novella “That One Time I Broke into a House, Killed the Homeowner, and Took His Family Hostage” on Amazon.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08H1SN3L9

Max Gladstone

Max Gladstone is the author of Empress of Forever and the six novels of The Craft Sequence. The 2019 novella, This is How You Lose The Time War, co-written with Amal El-Mohtar, won the Hugo, Nebula, BSFA, Locus and Prix Aurora Awards. He also created Bookburners and The Witch Who Came in from the Cold for Serial -31-.

Sally Wiener Grotta

Sally Wiener Grotta is an award-winning author, photographer and speaker. Her numerous books include The Winter Boy (a Locus Magazine’s 2015 Recommended Read) and Jo Joe (a Jewish Book Council Network book). Her story “One Widow’s Healing” won a 2100 Health Odyssey award from Thomas Jefferson Hospital in 2019. Her hundreds of stories, columns and essays have appeared in scores of magazines, newspapers and journals. Sally has traveled on assignment throughout the world to all the continents (including three trips to Antarctica), plus many exotic islands (such as Papua New Guinea and Madagascar), covering a wide diversity of cultures and traditions. Her far-ranging experiences flavor her stories and presentations with a sense of wonder and otherliness, plus a healthy dose of common sense. A member of SFWA and The Authors Guild, Sally is co-curator of the Galactic Philadelphia author reading series and co-chair of The Authors Guild Philadelphia Chapter. (SallyWienerGrotta.com)

Savan Gupta

Professional emcee, author, game developer. Former Wizards of the Coast employee. Entering the realm of fandom from a prior background in Financial Operations and Business Management, he delights in bringing proven expertise to these geeky endeavors. Quite the fan himself, Mr. Gupta has mentored generations of gamers and contributors into the roleplaying and speculative fiction genres. President & CEO of Steam-Funk Studios and founder of the ‘Living Multiverse’ brand with its six related performance troupes, nationwide. Furthermore, he has personally created and implemented an array of nationwide marketing campaigns, for a variety of clientele, spanning game designers, event producers, and non-profit organizations. A veteran emcee and keynote speaker at many events across the country, Savan has had a hand in many projects, from Standup Comedy, LARP Production and some RPG products to the launch of the new online magazine, as Editor-in-Chief of a study in ‘Fanthropology’ dubbed “The Unconventional”.

April Grey

April writes as April Grey. Her short stories can be found in various anthologies, both in print and on-line. Her collections of short stories, The Fairy Cake Bake Shoppe, and I’ll Love You Forever are also available through Amazon. She is the editor of Hell’s Garden: Bad, Mad and Ghostly Gardeners; Hell’s Grannies: Kickass Tales of the Crone, Hell’s Kitties and Other Beastly Beasts; Hell’s Bells: 15 Tales of Wicked Tunes, Mad Musicians and Curled Instruments; Hell’s Heart; Twisted Tales of Amour Fou; Hell’s Highway: Terrifying Tales of Tormented Travels; as well as being a co-editor for New York State of Fright. She is also the author of three urban fantasies: Finding Peridita, Chasing the Trickster and St. Nick’s Favor.

She is a member of Board Universal and HWA.

Carol Gyzander

Carol Gyzander writes horror, dark fiction, and sci-fi stories from her couch, with a Velcro cat firmly attached to her side. She also co-hosts the monthly Galactic Terrors online reading from the HWA NY Chapter, on second Thursdays (see HWANY.org). As co-founder of Writerpunk Press, she’s edited four anthologies of punk stories inspired by classics.

She’s in a dozen anthologies, including Across the Universe: Tales of Alternate Beatles (featuring stories by Cat Rambo, Spider Robinson and David Gerrold), The Devil’s Due from Valhalla Books released on Halloween (Faustian tales where nothing is ever as it seems!).

www.CarolGyzander.com Twitter: @CarolGyzander https://amzn.to/2WG4oZA

Elektra Hammond

Elektra Hammond emulates her multi-sided idol Buckaroo Banzai by going in several directions at once. She’s been involved in publishing since the 1990s. Now she writes, conceots and edits science fiction for various and sundry. When not freelancing or appearing at science fiction conventions, she travels the world judging cat shows. Elektra is a graduate of the Odyssey Writing Workshop and an associate member of SFWA. She lives in Delaware with her husband, Mike, and more than the usual allotment of felines. You can find her on Facebook (Elektra Hammond), Twitter (elektraUM), LiveJournal (elektra_h), g+ (Elektra Hammond), and building her website at http://www.untilmidnight.com.

Eric Hardenbrook

Eric is a fan, an author and an artist, usually in that order. Eric lives in central Pennsylvania with his gorgeous wife and daughter. He writes to try to get the stories out of his head. When he’s being a fan he helps run Watch The Skies and assists in the publication of their monthly fanzine. Eric can be found (at least some of the time) at The Pretend Blog. When not working on those things, Eric enjoys the occasional video or board game and is an old-school role player.

Erin M. Hartshorn

Erin M. Hartshorn did her graduate work in fish olfaction (and yes, she’s heard all of the jokes about how fish smell) before turning to words to make her living. Her freelance business makes others’ words look good through copyediting, proofreading, and indexing. Her fiction has appeared both online and in print, placed in the PARSEC short story contest, and been shortlisted for the Universitat Politcnica de Catalunya Award for science-fiction novellas. She currently serves as Vice President for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA). She also publishes mysteries under the pen name Sara Penhallow. Erin lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and their two kids, who are gradually being inculcated in the joy of all that is science fiction and fantasy, as well as one cat and one dog.
**Yui Haruhara**

Hit My name is Yui! I’m a panelist, YouTuber, and streamer.

I’ve been a panelist for eight years, starting in January 2012 at Ohayocon. Since then I’ve been on a dozen other panels, doing 50+ panel hours over my lifetime.

I do a series on YouTube called “English Dub History”, going over the history of anime in English like Hakuson Daimou, Doraemon, and Chibi Maruko-chan.

You can find me on Twitter to keep up with the stuff I do (and to see me post about Yuru Camp, lol).

**Orenthal Hawkins**

Orenthal Vance Hawkins is a Project Management professional with 20+ years of experience delivered in IT, financial services, publishing, journalism and Pharma. His pop culture knowledge is only exceeded by his tendency to descend into nostalgia. The possessor of a multitude of fandoms and at least 2 IMDB entries (i.e., “The Chronic Rift” and “HG World”), he spends a lot of time enjoying the former and almost as much time pondering how the latter happened.

He’s also been a participant on “The Temple of Bad” podcast where he discussed movies “so bad they’re almost a religious experience”. He writes about his experiences in pop culture and as a widower navigating grief, healing, dating and now being engaged at multimediumrare.com.

**Sara Henya**

Sara Henya is a singer and harpist from Philadelphia. Her music can best be described as Fantasy-pop, combining the fun of pop music and the ethereal sound of the harp. Sara grew up attending conventions and it shows; she incorporates magical topics into her songs and has adopted a fairy character. Her first EP Small World Alabehny is available on all streaming services, as well as her new single Pancakes, released Nov 20th 2020.

“But why should I, a fairy, be making you pancakes?”, you might ask. You should come to hear songs that make you happy, and to see a girl dressed as a fairy singing her heart out about why she’s going to make you pancakes.

**Lisa Hertel**

Lisa Hertel is an artist working in clay, alcohol inks, encaustics (painting with hot wax), watercolors, and wire. She enjoys teaching art to all ages, and believes everyone has the ability to make art. Lisa maintains a studio in Haverhill MA (aka Riverdale). In her free time, she often helps run science fiction conventions. Before she became an artist, Lisa was a pharmacist. Visit her website at www.cogitation.org.

**James “Shep” Hicks**

James “Shep” Hicks is the resident Historian, Sports Fanatic, and all-around Otaku of the east-coast based panelist troupe Winning The War On Pants. Shep can usually be found reading diaries from the Revolutionary War, attempting to use Sabremetrics to prove Asuka is the worst Evangelion pilot, or in the bar closest to your convention asking them to put the Caps game on.

**Heidi Hooper**

Heidi Hooper received her Sculpture degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, and had conducted her work at the Massachusetts College of Art. She has taught for some time.

After cancer removed much of her arm, she had to find a new medium and after a while, discovered dry-er lint.

She is now known as “the Dryer Lint Lady” for the ornate work she does with the material. Her work has been featured in Ripley’s Believe it or Not books and museums around the world, and Consumer Reports has called her “The Andy Warhol of Dryer Lint.” She has won two Niche Awards for her work, and has appeared on ABC TV’s “To Tell The Truth” where celebrities had to guess who the real dryer lint artist was.

She was the artist guest of honor at Albacore and Heliosphere. Her web page is www.Heidi-Hooper.com.

Robert Hranek

Six years of computer programming started my professional career, followed by thirty years as an intelligence analyst, systems engineer, and program analyst. I’m a vocal Space Exploitation Advocate, read hard-SF whenever I have time, give blood five times a year (204 pints & counting!), run & drink (at the same time!) with Hash House Harrier groups, and judge at several Science Fairs every year. At an in-person PhilCon, you’re likely to see me hanging out in my Lunar-kilt if I’m not setting up/tearing down the Art Show or on a science-oriented panel. I’m also an avid Wargamer (decades long member of the Eastern Pa Gaming Society, www.EPGS.org) and became an official US Army “Mad Scientist” when they published 2 versions of my entry in their “Mad Scientist Science Fiction Writing Contest 2019”.

I’m currently a manga script writer for Seven Seas Entertainment. Previously, I managed the SoHo Gallery for Digital Art (NY Arthouse) in New York City. While there, I also ran AniMini-Con SoHo, an anime/manga convention that sold to capacity for three consecutive years. I have also been a digital producer at Simon and Schuster Interactive, where I worked on products about Star Trek and Farscape. I’m a Master-level costumer who has competed at WorldCon and CostumeCon. I’ve published several media tie-in books for young readers based on X-Men, Powerpuff Girls, and Looney Tunes.

**Anna Kashina**

Anna Kashina writes historical adventure fantasy, featuring exotic settings, martial arts, assassins, and elements of romance. Her Majir Code series, published by Angry Robot Books, UK, received two Prism Awards in 2015. She is Russian by origin, a biomedical scientist in her day job, and freely draws on these backgrounds in her writing. She lives near Philadelphia.

**Brad Jennings**

Brad Jennings is a member of Million Year Picnic

**Anna Kashina**

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**Tauney Kennedy**

Living Historian, co-owner of Big Bear Trading Company, troupe manager for Steam-Funk Studios, and office manager at The Nerdy Duo Productions. Recruited in April of 2013, Ms. Kennedy is a veteran performance director for Steam-Funk Studios, having co-written and produced portions of the firm’s stable of content at events spanning the continental United States.

As a historian, Ms. Kennedy has taught adults and children alike to find inspiration and wonder in the events of the past, as well as lending her insights for content for The Unconventionals and many aspects of The Living MultiVerse.

**Daniel M. Kimmel**

Daniel M. Kimmel is the 2018 recipient of the Skylark Award, given by the New England Science Fiction Association. He was a finalist for a Hugo Award for Jar Jar Books Must Die… and other observations about science fiction movies and for the Compton Crook Award for Best first novel for Shh It’s a Secret: A Novel about Aliens, Hollywood, and the Bartender’s Guide. In addition to short stories, he is the author of Time on My Hands: My Misadventures in Time Travel and Father of the Bride of Frankenstein. His column on classic SF film, “Take Two on the Movies,” appears in Space and Time magazine. His reviews are posted at NorthShoreMovies.net.

**Kim Kindya**

I’m currently a manga script writer for Seven Seas Entertainment. Previously, I managed the SoHo Gallery for Digital Art (NY Arthouse) in New York City. While there, I also ran AniMini-Con SoHo, an anime/manga convention that sold to capacity for three consecutive years. I have also been a digital producer at Simon and Schuster Interactive, where I worked on products about Star Trek and Farscape. I’m a Master-level costumer who has competed at WorldCon and CostumeCon. I’ve published several media tie-in books for young readers based on X-Men, Powerpuff Girls, and Looney Tunes.

**Anastasia Klimchynskaya**

Lawrence Kramer

Dr. Lawrence Kramer has had a lifelong interest in science, sparked at a young age by avidly reading science fiction. He worked in the pharmaceutical industry followed by a career as a programmer analyst for a Fortune 500 financial company. However, the lure of science was too great to resist, and Larry returned to college and earned his PhD at Rutgers University where he taught genetics and published research looking at proteins involved in signaling at neuronal synapses. He previously taught at Drew University, and currently loves teaching and mentoring students in biology courses at Ramapo Valley, a nationally recognized community college in NJ. A frequent guest at science fiction conventions, he has spoken on topics including scientific accuracy in fiction, science education, gene testing, genetic engineering, ethics/trends in biology, antibiotic resistant bacterial strains, and occasionally on some of his favorite books and media.

**Chris Kreuter**

I got a degree in Ocean Engineering, which I soon used to go play with trains. I’ve been a rail transportation professional for the past fifteen
Joann Lawler
Joann’s first Philcon was in 1973. She joined PSFS in 1979 and was quickly suckered into becoming secretary, and eventually president in the days when that automatically made one Philcon chair. Not long after that, she took an extended GAFIA. Dragged back into PSFS several years ago, she’s Philcon chair again. She is an analyst for a broadband network consulting company and geeks out on fiber-optic equipment. Her hobbies are SF&F reading, needlepoint, and being a lap for her cat Penumbra.

Paul Levinson
Paul Levinson, PhD, is professor of Communication & Media Studies at Fordham University in NYC. His science fiction novels include The Consciousness Plague, The Pixel Eye, and the Sierra Water trilogy: The Plot To Save Socrates, Unburning Alexandria, and Chronica. His novel, The Silk Code, won the Locus Award for Best First Novel of 1999. His stories and novels have been nominated for Hugo, Nebula, Sturgeon, Edgar, Prometheus, and Audie Awards.

His nonfiction books, including Digital McLuhan, McLuhan in an Age of Social Media, and Fake News in Real Context have been translated into fifteen languages. He co-edited Touching the Face of the Cosmos: On the Intersection of Space Travel and Religion in 2016. He appears on numerous TV and radio programs, and was president of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, 1998-2001. He reviews television in his InifiniteRegress.tv blog, and was listed in The Chronicle of Higher Education’s “Top 10 Academic Twitterers” in 2009. His 1972 LP, Twice Upon a Rhyme, was re-issued in 2010, and his new album, Welcome Up: Songs of Space and Time, was released in 2020.

Debby Lieven
Debby is the laziest fan on the planet. Her bio is intentionally short. I play role-playing games, read, and watch entirely too many tv series and movies.

Gordon Linzner
Gordon Linzner is founder and former editor of Space and Time Magazine, and author of three published novels and dozens of short stories appearing in Fantasy & Science Fiction, Twilight Zone, Sherlock Holmes Mystery Magazine, and numerous other magazines and anthologies. He is also a copy editor, a licensed New York City tour guide, a sound technician, and lead singer for the Saboteur Tiger Blues band, among other odd jobs. He is a member of HWA and a lifetime member of SFWA.

Celestial Echo Press
Gemini Wordsmiths, a women-owned editing, copywriting, and proofreading business, was founded in 2011 in Abington, PA. As karma would have it, Ruth, Ann, and Gemini Wordsmiths were all born under the astrological sign of Gemini.

Every project is given the same intense review, regardless of whether it is a one-page document or a 100,000-word novel. And instead of getting one editor for their dollars, our clients receive a second set of eyes at the same cost, as both editors review each project separately and then collaboratively. Celestial Echo Press’s first anthology, The Twofer Compendium, was published in December 2019. Their second, The Trench Coat Chronicles, will be published before the end of the year.

Ruth Littner penned Living with Ghosts, a nonfiction narrative that weaves the experiences of three generations to detail the negative effects unwittingly transferred as a result of the Holocaust. A partner in Gemini Wordsmiths and Celestial Echo Press, two of her short stories and one YA story have been published. Ruth co-published The Twofer Compendi-
Gail Z. Martin

Gail Z. Martin is the author of the Vendetta: A Deadly Curiosities novel in her urban fantasy series set in Charleston, SC (Dec. 2015, Solaris Books); Shadow and Flame, the fourth and final book in the Ascendant Kingdoms Saga (Orbit Books); and Iron and Blood, a new Steampunk series (Solaris Books) co-authored with Larry N. Martin. She and Larry are featured authors in two writing critique groups. Find her at www.AscendantKingdoms.com, on Twitter @GailZMartin, on Facebook.com/WinterKingdoms, at DisquietingVisions.com blog and GhostInTheMachinePodcast.com, on Goodreads https://www.goodreads.com/GailZMartin and free excerpts on Wattpad http://wattpad.com/GailZMartin.

John Gerard McDaid

John G. McDaid is a science fiction writer, folk/filk singer-songwriter, and freelance journalist from Rhode Island. A 1993 graduate of the Clarion science fiction workshop, he sold his first short story, the Sturgeon Award-winning “Jigokun no mokushiroku” to Asimov’s in 1995. In 2017, his songs won both the topical and Iron Filker contests at the Ohio Valley Filk Fest. In 2020, he was nominated for the Pegasus Award for best writer/composer. His debut studio album, Trail of Mars, is available at johnmcdaid.bandcamp.com

Andrew McManus

Andrew McManus is a member of Million Writers Coffeehouse in Willow Grove PA, and two writing critique groups. For more information, call 215-605-5231 or visit geminwordsmiths.com.

Perrianne Lurie

Perrianne Lurie recently retired from the Pennsylvania Department of Health where she was a public health physician and infectious disease epidemiologist. She’s been active in fandom for far too long, working on ICon (information desk, newsletter), Disclose (Filk, program book), Capclave (Game Room), Balticon (Green Room) and the Worldcons in Toronto (Hugo Ceremony Director), Baltimore (email liaison and assistant program chief), Philadelphia, and many others. She's active in the Games Club of Maryland and has been a GM at Euroquest and Congress of Gamers events. She watches way too much television and (mostly art house) movies (or she did before COVID).

Lynati

Lynati is a freelance writer, artist, costumer, and event organizer in the Philadelphia area who is currently serving a sixth year as the head of Philcon’s programming division. “I only know how to think deeply about fifty eels.”

Steve Macdonald

Gail Z. Martin is the author of Vendetta: A Deadly Curiosities novel in her urban fantasy series set in Charleston, SC (Dec. 2015, Solaris Books); Shadow and Flame, and Iron and Blood, a new Steampunk series (Solaris Books) co-authored with Larry N. Martin. She and Larry are featured authors in two new anthologies: The Weird Wild West and The Side of Good/The Side of Evil which debut at Philcon. She is also author of Ice Forged, Reign of Ash and War of Shadows in The Ascendant Kingdoms Saga, The Chronicles of The Necromancer series (The Summoner, The Blood King, Dark Haven, Dark Lady’s Chosen); The Fallen Kings Cycle (The Sworn, The Dread) and the urban fantasy novel Deadly Curiosities. Gail writes three ebook series: The Jonmarc Vahanian Adventures, The Deadly Curiosities Adventures and The Storm and Fury Adventures.


John Gerard McDaid

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Andrew McManus

Andrew McManus is a member of Million Year Picnic

Valerie J. Mikles

I am a PhD astronomer who defected from academia to work on weather satellites for NOAA. I’m the author of The New Dawn science fiction series, so named because every new dawn is a new chance to make things right. Have hope, people. While developing my novels, I wrote and produced a series of comedic films about asexuals surviving the hypersexual world, inspired by my own journey. My motto in life is that I can be everything I want, just not all at the same time.

Sam J. Miller

Premeem Mohamed

Premeem Mohamed is an Indo-Caribbean scientist and speculative fiction author based in Edmonton, Alberta. She is a social media manager and associate editor for the short audio science fiction venue Escape Pod, and was a Capital City Press Featured Writer for 2019/2020 with the Edmonton Public Library. Her short fiction has appeared in both print and audio in a variety of venues, including Analog, Escape Pod, Augur, Nightmare Magazine, Shoreline of Infinity, PodCastle, and others. Solicited anthology and other project appearances include Drabblecast, A Secret Guide to Fighting Elder Gods, Jo Walton’s New Decameron, and others. Her debut novel, Beneath the Rising, is out now from Solaris Books, with the sequel A Broken Darkness due out in 2021. In her spare time, she also paints and occasionally does pen and ink illustration. She can be found on Twitter and Instagram at @premeemohamed and on her website at www.premeemohamed.com

Deirdre Murphy

Christine Norris

Christine Norris is the author of several novels and short stories for young adults, including the Library of Athena series and the YA historical fantasy, A Curse of Ash and Iron (Curiosity Quills), as well as several short stories. She hides her author self behind her secret identity of mild-mannered school media specialist. She also cares for her family of one husband-creature, a son-animal, a canine named Elvis (he thinks he’s the King) and two small felines who are secretly agents of Chaos. She is represented by Jordy Albert of the Booker Albert Literary Agency.

This is Christine’s eleventy billionth Philcon appearance, and she is very happy to return.

To learn more about Christine Norris, please visit http://www.christine-norris.com, Like her page on FB or follower her @cnorrisauthor on Twitter

Anne E.G. Nydam

Anne E.G. Nydam has been creating imaginary worlds since she could hold a crayon, bringing them to life in both art and writing. She makes relief block prints celebrating the wonders of worlds both real and imaginary, and writes books about adventure, creativity, and looking for the best in others. To see her art and books, please visit her web site at www.nydamprints.com.

Ian O’Donnell

Chris Ochs

Chris’s foray into writing began with his epic fantasy Prindlebyth of Lenzland. He combined his knack for telling stories in the Lehigh Valley Storytellers Guild with his writing style to craft If I Can’t Sleep, You Can’t Sleep, a collection of the mirthful macabre. His latest novel is My Friend Jackson, an urban fantasy/horror. Indies Today compares Ochs favorably to Stephen King. His short stories have been published in several anthologies by the Greater Lehigh Valley Writers Group; along with Unbentheft, Finalist in Killer Nashville, and Once Upon a Time, both by the Bethlehem Writers Group. Chris has too many interests outside of writing for his own damn good. With careers in physics, EE and software, and his incessant dabbling as a CGI artist, classical organist, and the “Voice of OTAKON”, it’s a wonder he can remember to pay the dog and feed his bills.

Visit www.ChristopherDOchs.com

Joshua Palmatier

Joshua Palmatier is a fantasy writer with a PhD in Mathematics. He currently teaches math at SUNY Oneonta. He has nine fantasy novels published—the Throne of Amenkor trilogy, the Well trilogy, and the Ley trilogy—most with DAW Books and/or Baen Books. He is currently working on a new trilogy for DAW Books for release in 2022. He has also published numerous short stories. In addition, he is the founder of the small press Zombies Need Brains, focused on publishing SF&F themed anthologies. The most-recently released anthologies are Apocalyptic, Galactic Slew, and My Battery Is Low and It Is Getting Dark. Find out more at www.joshuapalmatier.com and www.zombiesneedbrains.com. Find us on social media on Facebook and Twitter (@bentateauthor, @ZNBLLC).
The Baltimore Science Fiction Society Invites You to
The Maryland Regional Science Fiction Convention

BALTICON 55

Guest of Honor

Seanan McGuire

Artist Guest of Honor

Alyssa Winans

Music Guests of Honor

Margaret & Kristoph

2019 Compton Crook Award Winner

R.F. Kuang

Fan Guests of Honor

Bruce & Cheryl Evry

Special Guest

Petra Mayer

2020 Compton Crook Award Winner

Arkady Martine

May 28-31, 2021

Memorial Day Weekend

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Due to uncertainties regarding COVID-19, the Balticon 55 membership rates have not been determined. Sign up on the website for a notification email when membership is open.

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Dan Persons

Film & TV journalist and critic Dan Persons is a regular contributor at tor.com, and his film and TV reviews can be heard regularly on New York’s WBAI 99.5FM’s “Hour of the Wolf.” If you can’t find him there, try saying his name three times into a mirror. Probably won’t work, but if it does, he promises to bring freshly baked chocolate chip cookies with him.

Sarah Pinsker

Sarah Pinsker is a Baltimore-based singer, songwriter, and author. Her short stories have been published in Strange Horizons, Asimov’s, F&SF, and Lightspeed, among others. She’s been nominated for two Nebulas and won the Sturgeon Award for her novelette “In Joy, Knowing the Abyss Behind.” Find out more at www.sarahpinsker.com or follow @sarahpinsker on Twitter.

Jennifer Povey

Dr. Jim Prego

Dr. Jim Prego is a naturopathic doctor from Long Island, NY. He is currently an adjunct professor of Biology at LIU Post, Molloy College, and Nassau Community College. Dr. Prego had a private medical practice for nine years and is a past recipient of the NYANP’s Physician of the Year award.

He spent ten years as the New York Delegate to the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians and spent six years as a board member of the New York Association of Naturopathic Physicians. Dr. Prego has given talks, written articles, and been a guest on radio and television shows.

He also has interests in acting/shadowcasting, EMT volunteering, alternative lifestyles, LARP-ing, gaming, and more.

Tom Purdon

Tom Purdon’s first published story appeared in the August, 1957 issue of a magazine called Fantastic Universe. His latest can be found in the November-December issue of Asimov’s, now on sale. His contributions to the science fiction scene include novels, short stories and novelettes, magazine articles, book reviews, two terms as vice president of SFWA, three years as Eastern Regional Director of SFWA, and approximately fifteen years of volunteer work for the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society and Philcon. In the last twenty-eight years, he has produced a series of short stories and novelettes that has appeared in Asimov’s, Jim Baen’s Universe, and anthologies such as the year’s best series edited by Gardner Dozois and David Hartwell. Fantasic Books has published two collections of his stories: Lovers and Fighters, Starships and Dragons and Romance on Four Worlds, A Catanova Quartet. He lives in center city Philadelphia where he devotes himself to a continuous round of concerts, social events, and other urban pleasures.

Sindhu Reddy

Sindhu Reddy is a member of Million Year Picnic

Rhiannon’s Lark

Have you ever wanted to hear a Disney princess singing about the things you love...board games, ninjas, and krakens? Rhiannon’s Lark is happy to make your wish come true. This geek-goddess-girl tackles everything from t-rexes to moral dilemmas with insightful lyrics, gorgeous vocals, and gentle humor.

Creator Alyssa Yeager is both a professional musician and practicing music therapist. In 2007, she released her first album, an all–origin children’s album, Normal is Boring, inspired by her work at Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital in Cleveland, OH. Later that year, things got a little heavier (musically speaking) as she joined up with world class drummer Sue Balaschak of Primal Rhythm and Burning Sage. As the duo Telling Point, Alyssa and Sue began touring the festival and convention circuits with their unique brand of tribal rock. Five years and two albums later, Alyssa headed back to her home state of New York to pursue personal and professional goals.

In 2013, Alyssa’s solo project, Rhiannon’s Lark, was born, bringing together her unique perspective on nerdery, spirituality, and moral choices in a chaotic world. Over the last several years, Rhiannon’s Lark has made appearances at sci-fi, fantasy, and gaming conventions as well as pagan–centered events including Gen Con, DragonCon, Sirius Rising, Origins, the Northeate Fire and Arts festival, and Pagan Prides. Her first EP under the new project, “Initiative” showcased exactly what you can expect from a Rhiannon’s Lark show: a deep–dive into board games and general geekery, some sweet personal stories, and a questioning look at society’s current values.

Since then, Rhiannon’s Lark has released two music albums (Sky Full of Phoenix and Sugar and Spice and Dinosaurs) as well as a guided meditation album with themes from fantasy and science fiction, Meditations for Geeks. Alyssa’s Kickstarter for her new album, The Long Road will be live during Philcon.

Music for streaming and download at Bandcamp!

Bruce Ritch

The Atlanta Radio Theatre Company (ARTC - pronounced “artsy”) have been creating new audio theatre since 1984 -- specializing in SF, fantasy, horror, detective stories, and the occasional Regency romance. We have been on the actual radio. Our plays are available at Audible.com, and we have been performing LIVE at many conventions, including some WorldCons, the Heinlein Centennial, every DragonCon since the first, a lot of south-eastern cons, a few virtual cons, and at local theatres. We also create a daily podcast: Mercury, a Broadcast of Hope.

Find us at www.artc.org !

Rebecca Robare

Dr. Rebecca Robare has a PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience and has worked as a college professor, camp counselor, science writer, library book-shelver, dishwasher, brain wave recorder, and cognitive simulation builder, and statistical analyst. She currently works as a research analyst and science writer for ECRI Institute. She is always willing to consider changing careers for a well-paid sinecure, however.

Charlie ‘Rock’ Robertson

Robertta Rogow

Robertta Rogow writes mysteries using historical or SF settings. Robertta is also a well-known filker, inducted into the Filk Hall of Fame in 2013. In her real life, Robertta is a retired children’s librarian, living in New Jersey.

Robert C Roman

Robert C Roman is an author of science fiction, fantasy, steampunk, space opera, superheroes, and paranormal romance. Robert has taken a long and winding path to get where he is today. Finally growing tired of a life of adventure, Robert settled down with the Ur-Goth and began spawning and writing. Both have borne fascinating, humorous, and occasionally, horrifying fruit. He tells stories, plays games, and raises children and Hell (in that order). Robert has been a staff writer for Steam-Funk Studios since November of 2014, to the benefit of many of their collective projects.

Aaron Rosenberg

Aaron Rosenberg is an award-winning, #1 bestselling author. He has written over two hundred original novels and short stories, tie-in novels and short stories, children’s books, educational books, and roleplaying games. Aaron is a founding member of Crazy 8 Press and lives in New York. You can follow him online at gryphonrose.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/gryphonrose, and on Twitter @gryphonrose.

Michael Ryan

Mike Ryan is a Twitch streamer (https://twitch.tv/toanstation) using playing games a vehicle to talk about games. He has been a fan of science fiction ever since the age of six. His love of the genre has expanded to include tabletop games, video games and anime.

Kara Sapp

Kara Sapp is a member of Million Year Picnic

Lawrence M. Schoen

Lawrence M. Schoen holds a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology, is a past Astounding, Hugo, and Nebula nominee, twice won the Coyote award for best novel, founded the Klingon Language Institute, and occasionally does work as a hypnotherapist specializing in authors’ issues.

His science fiction includes many light and humorous adventures of a space-faring stage hypnotist and his alien animal companion. Other works take a very different tone, exploring aspects of determinism and free will, generally redefining the continua between life and death.
Sometimes he blurfs the funny and the serious. Lawrence lives near Philadelphia with his wife and their dog.

**Darrell Schweitzer**

Darrell Schweitzer is the author of four novels, *The Dragon House, The Mask of the Sorcerer, The Shattered Goddess,* and *The White Isle,* and about 350 published stories. He is also an essayist, interviewer, poet, reviewer, and famous for rhyming Cthulhu in a limerick. He was co-editor of *Weird Tales* (1988-2007), for which he won the World Fantasy Award, and is an active anthologist. His most recent anthology is *The Mountains of Madness Revealed* (PS Publishing, 2019). He has written books about Lord Dunsany and H.P. Lovecraft. PS Publishing recently published a two-volume retrospective of his short fiction, *The Mysteries of the Faceless King and The Last Heretic.* He has attended every Philcon since 1968.

**Miriam Seidel**

Miriam Seidel’s novel *The Speed of Clouds* was published in 2018. Her stories have appeared in *Into the Ruins* and the anthology *Breathe* (as Mir Seidel), and elsewhere, and she wrote the libretto for *Violet Fire,* an opera about Nikola Tesla, performed in Belgrade, New York, and Philadelphia. She’s working on a fantasy novel with a multiverse theme. She blogs at miriamseuillez.com, and tweets as @Mir_QueenofMars.

**Peng Shepherd**

Peng Shepherd is a speculative fiction writer. Her first novel, *The Book of M,* was published in 2019 by Neukom Institute for Literary Arts Award for Debut Speculative Fiction, and was chosen as a best book of the year by Amazon, Elle, Refinery29, and The Verge, as well as a best book of the summer by the Today Show and NPR On Point. She is the recipient of a 2020 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as the Elizabeth George Foundation’s emerging writers 2016 grant. Her second novel, *The Cartogaphers,* is forthcoming from HarperCollins in fall 2021.

**Dr. H. Paul Shuch**

Dr. SETI is the name of the blunt exhibitionist who inhabits the body of noted author and educator Dr. H. Paul Shuch. A cross between Tom Lehrer and Carl Sagan, it is said that Dr. SETI sings like Sagan and lectures like Lehrer. Armed with a laptop computer and an acoustical guitar, Dr. SETI travels the world, making the search for life in space accessible to audiences as diverse as humanity itself.

A retired academic, Prof. Shuch serves the nonprofit, membership-supported SETI League as executive director emeritus, coordinating its science mission and delivering hundreds of Dr. SETI (R) presentations since 1994, to thousands of enthusiasts, in dozens of countries on six continents.

**Alex Shvartsman**

Hildy Silverman

Hildy Silverman was the editor-in-chief of *Space and Time Magazine* for twelve years. She is a short fiction author whose recent publications include, "Raising the Dead" (2020, *Bad As Moms, Fan, ed.*), "Divided We Fell" (2020, *Dystopian States of America, Bechet, ed.*), and "Sidekicked" (2019, *Release the Virgins, Ventrella, ed.*). Her nonfiction articles have appeared in numerous legal and medical professional journals and blogs. In the mundane world, she is the digital marketing manager for Oticom Medical US.

**John Skylar**

John Skylar, Ph.D. is an infectious disease scientist, medical writer, and author of both fiction and nonfiction. His work has appeared in *Strange Bedfellows* (Bundoran Press 2014), *The Future Embodied* (Simian Publishing 2014), *Perihelion SF, Mashable,* and *The Huffington Post.* He lives in New York along with his wife and their ramen soup.

**Ann Stolinsky**

Ann’s most recent publishing credit is a story published in March 2020 in *Klarissa Dreams Redux,* a charity anthology. Her publishing credits include a story published in April 2019 *by Tales from the Canyons of the Damned,* and another in *Flash Fiction Addiction,* also in April 2019. Other credits include a short story in *We Will Not Be Silenced,* and a short story in *Fireburst,* an anthology by Clarendon House. Another short story was published in *Curiosities #2,* an anthology published by Gallery of Curiosities in March 2018, and also narrated on their website. Another short story was published in December 2017 in an anthology by Clarendon House, *Condor.* Her short story, “Lost Children,” was published on the With Painted Words website in August 2017. Another short story was published in March 2017 in the *Running Wild Anthology of Stories Vol. 1 with Running Wild Press.* A poem was published in the Fall 2015 issue of *Space & Time Magazine.* She is a graduate of the Bram Stoker award-winning author Jonathan Maberry’s short story writing class. Jon McGoran and Don Lafferty were the other teachers. Ann is a member of the Writers Coffeehouse in Willow Grove PA, and two writing critique groups.

Ann Stolinsky also is a partner in Gemini Wordsmiths, a full-service copyediting and content creating company. Gemini Wordsmiths formed a publishing imprint, Celestial Echo Press, in May 2019.

**Richard Stout**

Richard premiered his trilogy of kid spy movies featuring James Blond, Agent Uh-Oh 7, at Philcon beginning with 1993’s *Learner’s Permit to Kill.* His horror makeup/special FX workshop “Monsters, Aliens, and Spirit Gum” has been popular both here and at I-Con. *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* has published Richard’s work several times, most recently in the March/April 2020 issue. He and his wife Kathryn run an educational publishing company, and while she is the brains of the outfit, she allowed him to co-author *Movies As Literature.* Richard has also published the occasional cartoon. Oh, and his singing voice has been heard by hundreds of thousands: Howard Stern once played one of his song parodies on the air.

**Jim Stratton**

Jim Stratton was a government lawyer specializing in the field of child abuse prosecutions, and lives with his wife in southern Delaware. But he’s been an avid fan of speculative fiction all his life, and began writing genre fiction 20+ years ago. In recent years he’s been forging his dark alter ego of genre fiction author through publication of his tales in venues like *Dragons, Knights & Angels Magazine,* *Gnome* (published in Athens, Greece) & *Nth Degree Magazine.* His stories appeared in 2011 & 2012 in *Tower of Light Online Magazine,* *Big Pulp E-zine* and the *Paper Blossoms, Sharpened Steel anthology* of Oriental fantasy of Fantastik Enterprises. Since, he was a co-author and co-editor of *Fantastic Futures 13* published at Balitcon 47 (2013) by Padwolf Press, and had stories published in *Nth Degree E-zine* and *Bad As Fairies IV.* He currently has several stories scheduled to be included in each of the Best of Big Pulp anthology and the Best of Nth Degree E-zine, both due out soon.

**Ian Randal Strock**

Ian Randal Strock is the publisher and owner of Fantastic Books (www.FantasticBooks.biz). Previously, he published and edited *Artemis Magazine* and *SFXscape.* He also served on the editorial staffs of Analog, Asimov’s, *Absolute Magnitude,* *Science Fiction Chronicle,* *Bacn Books,* KISS, *Realms of Fantasy,* and a slew of other publications. As an author, he considers himself a science fiction writer, even though 98% of his published works have been non-fiction. His fiction has appeared in *Analog* (from which he won two *AnLab Awards,* *Nature,* and a slew of anthologies. For more information, see www.IanRandalStrock.com.

**Kathryn Sullivan**

Kathryn Sullivan writes young adult science fiction and fantasy, including fantasy novel *The Crystal Throne* and short story collection *Agents, Adepts & Apprentices.* Her Doctor Who-related works include the essay, “The Fanzine Factor”, in the Hugo winning *Chicks Dig Time Lords* and essays in *Children of Time: Companions of Doctor Who and Outside In: 160 New Perspectives on 160 Doctor Who Stories by 160 Writers.* She also has reviews in the Star Trek-related *Outside In Boldly Goes and Outside In Makes It So* and the X-Files related *Outside In Truth No One.* She is owned by a large cockatoo, who graciously allows her to write about other animals, as well as birdlike aliens. Kathryn lives in Winona, MN, where the river bluffs along the Mississippi River double as cliffs on alien planets or the deep mysterious forests in a magical world. http://kathrynsullivan.com

**Ginny Swann**

Long time sci-fi fan and annual participant of Philcon since 2000. Big time gamer girl, she and her husband John now manage the gaming suite. Ginny is also an actress and singer.
Michael Swanwick
Michael Swanwick is one of the most respected writers of his generation. He has received the Nebula, Theodore Sturgeon, and World Fantasy Awards as well as five Hugo Awards. His most recent novels are The Iron Dragon’s Mother, which completes a trilogy of stand-alone fantasies begun twenty-five years ago and City Under the Stars, co-written with the late Gardner Dozois. He lives in Philadelphia with his wife, Marianne Porter.

Amy Thomson
Amy Thomson is the author of Virtual Girl, The Color of Distance, Through Alien Eyes, and Storyteller. She is the 1994 recipient of the Campbell Award, and won the 2013 Anlab award from Analog Magazine for her novelette “Buddha Nature”. Currently, she is collaborating on a fantasy novel with her husband Edd Vick. She lives in Seattle with a dog, a cat, and four very spoiled chickens.

D.H. Timpko

Michael A. Ventrella
Although primarily known as “that guy who predicted the Hodor plot,” Michael A. Ventrella would rather be known for his humorous novels like Big Stick, Bloodsuckers: A Vampire Runs for President and The Aces of Evil. He edits the Tales from Fortannis anthologies as well as the Baker Street Irregulars with NY Times Bestselling author Jonathan Maberry. His latest anthology is Release the Virgin! His short stories have appeared in other collections such as Dreamers in Hell, The Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences Archives, and Rum and Runestones.

At his website (MichaelAVentrella.com) he interviews other authors, editors, agents and publishers to get advice for the starting author.

In his spare time, he is a lawyer.

Ted Weber
Ted Weber has pursued writing since childhood, and learned filmmaking and screenwriting in college, along with a little bit of physics. His first published novel was a near-future cyberpunk thriller titled Sleep State Interrupt (See Sharp Press). It was a finalist for the 2017 Compton Crook award for best first science fiction, fantasy, or horror novel. The first sequel, The Wrath of Leviathan, was published in 2018, and the final book, Zero-Day Rising, on Oct. 1, 2020. He has other books on the way as well. He is a member of Poets & Writers and the Maryland Writers Association, and helps run writing workshops and critique groups. By day, Mr. Weber works as a climate adaptation analyst, and has had a number of scientific papers and book chapters published. He lives in Annapolis, MD with his wife Karen. He enjoys traveling and has visited all seven continents. For book samples, short stories, and more, visit https://www.tcweber.com/.

Dr. Jay L. Wile
Dr. Wile holds an earned PhD in Nuclear Chemistry and is an adjunct professor of chemistry and physics at Anderson University. He has published more than thirty articles in the peer-reviewed scientific literature and has written fifteen award-winning science textbooks for K-12 students.

Alyce Wilson
Alyce Wilson is the editor of the online literary magazine Wild Violet, as well as a poet, humorist, essayist and former president of the Penn State Monty Python Society. In December 2019, she published a volume of poetry by her third great-grandfather, Reading’s Physician Poet: Poems by Dr. James Meredith Mathews, which also contains genealogical information about the Mathews family. This book, along with her newest poetry collection, Owning the Ghosts (2020), can be ordered from her Web site, AlyceWilson.com.

A.C. Wise
A.C. Wise’s fiction has appeared in publications such as Clarkesworld, Uncanny, and several Year’s Best anthologies. Her work has won the Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of the Fantastic, as well as twice being a finalist for the Sunburst Award, twice being a finalist for the Nebula Award, and being a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. She has two collections published with Lethe Press, and a novella published with Broken Eye Books. Her debut novel, Wendy, Darling, is forthcoming from Titan Books in June 2021. A new short story collection, The Ghost Sequences, is forthcoming from Undertow Books in August 2021. In addition to her fiction, she contributes review columns to The Book Smugglers and Apex Magazine. Find her online at www.acwise.net and on Twitter as @ac_wise.

Morgan Wolfsinger
Morgan Wolfsinger (Cathy DeMott) is a long-standing member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, where she writes and sings original ballads and songs based on legends, myths, Faery tales, and pure imagination. She has seven CDs of original music to her credit, and is currently considering an eighth. When she’s not roaming feast halls and other gatherings in the Current Middle Ages, she works as a small animal veterinarian in southwest Virginia. She also helps proofread, playtest, and assemble wargames for her husband Greg Porter’s gaming company, BTRC.

Simone Zelitch
Simone Zelitch is the author of five novels, most recently Judenstaat, an alternative history about a Jewish state established in Germany in 1948 which is forthcoming in paperback in 2020. A National Endowment for the Arts recipient, her work as appeared in Art Papers and The Forward, Lilith Magazine, and National Public Radio’s The Best of Channukah Lights, and she chronicled a 2015 trip to Jerusalem, Hebron and Jaffa in a series of articles in Jewish Currents. A former Peace Corps volunteer, she has taught at Community College of Philadelphia for over twenty years where she established their creative writing program. She manages to write during the summer, mostly. Read more about the author and her work at www.simonezelitch.com.
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All our guests (media, authors, artists, scientists) have confirmed their intent for next year!

Brandon Routh
Superman Returns – Clark Kent
Arrow – Ray Palmer/The Atom
Chuck – Daniel Shaw

Alex Kingston
Who – River Song
Arrow – Dinah Lance
Discovery of Witches – Sarah Bishop

Brent Spiner
Star Trek TNG – Lt. Cmdr. Data
Warehouse 13 – Brother Adrian
Threshold – Dr. Nigel Fenway

Gates McFadden
Star Trek TNG – Dr. Beverly Crusher
Marker – Kimba
Hunt for Red October – Caroline Ryan

Denis Lawson
Star Wars – Wedge Antilles
Bleak House – John Jarndyce
New Tricks – DI Steve McAndrew

Adam Baldwin
Firefly – Jayne Cobb
Chuck – John Casey
The Last Ship – XO Mike Slattery

Jewel Staite
Firefly – Kaylee Fyfe
Stargate Atlantis – Dr. J. Keller
The L.A. Complex – R. Westbrook

Robbie McNeill
Star Trek VOY – Lt. Tom Paris
Chuck – Operative
24 – FBI Agent

Barbara Luna
Star Trek – Marlena
Buck Rogers – Ko’ori
Zorro (1958) – Theresa Modesto

Eddie McClintock
Warehouse 13 – Pete Lattimer
Supergirl – Col. James Harper
Agents of SHIELD – Vin-Tak

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Eddie McClintock
Warehouse 13 – Pete Lattimer
Supergirl – Col. James Harper
Agents of SHIELD – Vin-Tak
Kira Navárez dreamed of life on new worlds. Now she’s awakened a nightmare.

To Sleep in a Sea of Stars is a brand new epic novel from the author of Eragon, Christopher Paolini. Hardcover, eBook, and Macmillan Audio AVAILABLE NOW

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The Stormlight Archive continues in Rhythm of War, the eagerly awaited sequel to Brandon Sanderson’s #1 New York Times bestselling Oathbringer, from an epic fantasy writer at the top of his game. Hardcover, eBook, and Macmillan Audio AVAILABLE NOW

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—N. K. JEMISIN, New York Times bestselling author

"A classic space opera...a universe we’ve never seen before."
—DELLILAH S. DAWSON, New York Times bestselling author

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- Non-Fiction Articles
- Fiction Stories
- Art Gallery
**Non-Fiction Articles**

Articles written by many talented amateurs and professionals from the Philadelphia region

Each author chose their own approach on topics including PSFS, Philcon or the field of science fiction and fantasy. Many were written for this occasion and some were previously published

**Contributors:**
- Michael Swanwick
- Elektra Hammond
- Suzanne Rosin
- Miriam Seidel
- Lee Weinstein
- Tom Purdom
- Lew Wolkoff
- Sean Swanwick
- Darrell Schweitzer
- Stephanie Lucas
I
t has a happy ending. That has to be said first, because for almost fifty years that looked to be the least likely possible outcome for what eventually became City Under the Stars. Because my co-author, Gardner Dozois, was not known for lighthearted, upbeat stories. Because if you read it, it will soon become obvious that there is no way on God’s green earth that it could possibly end anyway but bleakly. But mostly because if you don’t know this fact, you might find it hard to read the book all the way through. One chapter from the end of the novel, my wife Marianne looked up from the typescript and said, “This doesn’t end well, does it?”

But it does, it did, and for everyone, whether they deserve it or not! Not that this was obvious when Gardner began writing the book.

Back in the very early 1970s, Gardner started to write a novel. His peers—people like Joe Haldemann and George R. R. Martin and Jack Dann—spoke of the opening chapters with awe. It begins in a weary future America where ancient utopian machines that nobody knows how to build anymore work in tandem with horse-drawn wagons and sweat labor. A man is toiling like an animal, endlessly shoveling coal into a hole. On the horizon can be seen the glowing walls of the City of God, where God and all his angels live and from which they never emerge.

In the opening pages, Hanson—for that is the man’s name—is taken apart and destroyed, right before the reader’s eyes. When he puts down his shovel at the end of his shift, there is nothing left for him to do but die. Instead, he goes on.

Things get worse for him.

Then worse again.

It has a happy ending. I feel this has to be repeated, lest you give up on City Under the Stars before even reading the first page. It has a happy ending and that ending is earned. Anybody can write “and they all lived happily ever after.” Only a true artist can take a life as miserable as Hanson’s and a world as grim as the one he inhabits and convince the reader that redemption and healing, not only for him but for the planet, really are possible.

Inevitably, Hansom enters the City of God. Which is where City Under the Stars stalled. For more than two decades. Gardner tried everything he could think of to get it going again. He workshopped the novel fragment. He asked his friends for advice. Finally, there came a day when he admitted that he was never going to finish it.

So he handed it over to me. “See if you can turn this into a novella, Michael,” he said. Then, as I was holding the typescript with hands grown cold with awe, he said, “But I’ll tell you what. Just in case we ever decide to make it a novel, leave it open-ended.”

Blam! In that instant, I saw the solution to the stalled plot and saw, too, the novella’s theme and resolution. Gardner and I passed the manuscript back and forth for a few months, Gardner did the final polish draft, and then it was done. We titled it “The City of God” because that came closest to summarizing the ambiguities of the text. I had the satisfaction of knowing that I had accomplished something of moment.

It had only taken something like 25 years from inception to publication.

More years passed. They were very busy years. Gardner and I were both constantly working, often on several projects at once. But we often talked about writing “The City of Angels” and “The City of Men,” two more novellas that could be sold as stand-alone stories and then merged with “The City of God” into a single, coherent novel. Gardner had a vision for how it would end—the same ending that the novel has now. He talked it out in detail. I thought it was the perfect conclusion for the series. But we kept putting off writing the new novellas because we each had other things we had to finish first.

You can see where this is going, can’t you?

Three or so years ago, I got serious about “The City of Angels,” took our notes out of archive, and went to work. Gardner and I passed the manuscript back and forth, building on each other’s words. Things were going well and the novella was half-finished when, suddenly and without warning—

Gardner died.

He had entered Pennsylvania Hospital with an eminently treatable ailment. But the doctors kept postponing his release for another day, another three days, the rest of the weekend, and he caught an opportunistic infection. The kind of thing that lingers in hospitals and
makes them such dangerous places.

A tremendous number of people showed up for Gardner’s memorial service. He had a great many friends, most of whom were heartbroken that he was gone. Afterward, on the way home, Marianne turned to me and said, “You have to finish that novel. Soon.”

She was right.

So I did. I knew that the third novella could never be written by me alone. Gardner was a master stylist and the shift in mood would have been too great. So I shortened the plot, sparing Hanson a great deal of suffering (which I’m sure he would have been just as glad to have missed), and sailed the plot into a safe harbor at the end. The one the book had been aiming at for so long. The one Gardner had been talking about for years.

Have I mentioned that The City Under the Stars has a happy ending? It does! It really does. The last thing that Gardner ever wrote has an ending that is joyous and open-hearted and very much Gardner’s creation. Let that stand as a memorial to him.

As a longtime friend, I was present at more than one funeral where Gardner was asked to say a few words for the deceased. Always, he ended, with typical New England terseness, by saying that the deceased’s grandchildren loved them. “Not bad,” he would say. “You could do worse.”

All of Gardner’s family loved him, his grandchildren most emphatically included. As did a great many of his friends, including Marianne and our son Sean as well. Also me. So…

Not bad, Gardner. You could do worse.

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About Michael Swanwick

Michael Swanwick came to Philadelphia in the winter of 1973, in the middle of a recession, with fifty dollars, a pack-a-day cigarette habit, a friend who let him sleep on his couch for two weeks, and the conviction that he could become a science fiction writer. By spring, when he finally found a job, he’d lost forty pounds. Six years later, he sold his first story.

Today he has ten novels, 150 short stories and novellas, five Hugos, a Nebula, a Theodore Sturgeon, a World Fantasy Award, and too many flash fictions to count. He has been married to Marianne Porter for over forty years and they have an adult son, Sean. Michael still lives in Philadelphia.
In 2014, I had published exactly one semi-pro story, in a steampunk anthology I’d been invited to submit to. I’d worked with my writing mentor on the story, doing enough research (at her direction) to write a novel, while eviscerating and rewriting the story.

I needed to up my game.

I wrote a story for an upcoming open call and sent it to the Writers’ Workshop. When Philcon Saturday morning came, I was excited to hear what folks had so say. Some small bits of it were good, most less so—all of it was astute critique on the story. Much of it I’m still fighting to correct in my writing to this day.

Things I remember were there was general agreement that the eighteen page story began on page eleven. There was one too many points of views—I needed to figure out whose story this was. Things that were clear in my head hadn’t come across on paper, confusing everyone who’d read it.

I absorbed every word.

I took every bit of the advice. I rewrote the story with one POV (and starting at page eleven). Exactly one week later, I submitted it, from another convention hotel.

One month later, it became my first professional sale.

Major props to Darrell Schweitzer, Oz Drummond, Jack McDevitt, Dina Leacock, and especially Greg Frost, who named my story: “Salamander Bites.” Note: if you submit a story to the workshop without a title, Darrell will dub it: “Revenge of the Zombies.”

Three years later, I came back to the workshop, and joined the pros critiquing manuscripts.

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About Elektra Hammond

Elektra Hammond emulates her multi-sided idol Buckaroo Banzai by going in several directions at once. She’s been involved in publishing since the 1990s—now she writes, concocts anthologies & edits science fiction for various and sundry. Her Philcon workshop story “Salamander Bites,” appears in Temporarily Out of Order edited by Joshua Palmatier and Patricia Bray.

Elektra is a graduate of the Odyssey Writing Workshop and an associate member of SFWA. She is quarantining in Delaware with her husband, Mike, and more than the usual allotment of felines.
After 72 hours of little sleep, poor eating, sore feet, a headache and dealing with lots of issues, I ponder why I put myself through this every year. There are easier ways to enjoy my hobby. Then that one person comes up to me and says, “thank you, I had a good time.” I smile, thank them for coming and chat with them a bit to find out more about their time at the convention. I then ask them to send/post something before they walk away.

That’s it you ask? That is what makes you come back every year? Answer: Yep, and I blame Hugh Casey. This is why...

I have been attending science fiction conventions since the mid-1980s and attended my first Philcon in 1994 with friends. They introduced me to this guy Hugh, who was vending at the time. From there our friendship grew and we would meet up for meals and hang at other conventions after he was done vending for the day.

In 2000 Hugh approached me and asked if I would come to a Philadelphia Science Fiction Society (PSFS) meeting, become a member and help vote him into office as President. I had just stepped away from helping run other organizations and was pondering what to do. Since he was a friend, I said ok. That kinda did not work out as intended, as I did not attend enough meetings prior to the election meeting to help vote him into office. In fact, the meeting that made me a member was the election meeting. Oops. Hugh was elected President anyway and I was now a member. No one really knew me except that I was Hugh’s friend, while others remembered seeing me at Philcon. Within a year I agreed to be the treasurer at Philcon, then within a year after that the President of PSFS.

To anyone who wants to learn how to run cons, do not do what I did. Do not start at the top. Those were the toughest, most thankless years I had since no one knew me or trusted me. I was grumped at, had to deal with the emergency emails and phone calls, and learned that I inherited and had to fix a few long running issues. Hugh constantly thanked me for being on the boards and not losing my cool while striving to get the things done.

I guess during those years, I did something right since they elected me for a second term. After 2 terms as President, I then held various positions as vice-president, director, head of media, as well as various positions on the Philcon committee. Call me a glutton for punishment but, even with dealing with the issues, I was still enjoying myself.

From PSFS and Philcon I then started attending other cons up and down the east coast, including tabling at those cons. When the big media cons came to Philadelphia, I started tabling with Hugh to promote PSFS and Philcon. Tabling with Hugh was always a trip. He kept things amusing but also had a habit of wandering off with his latest friend or to visit other groups’ tables schmoozing and working on cross promoting. Usually I heard “I will be right back…” which in Hugh terms meant anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour or so. People would stop by the table asking for him and I would give the general wave towards the convention floor. Everyone seemed to know Hugh or knew of Hugh. We started a joke that a lot of my friends were based on degrees of how we knew Hugh.

From working PSFS and Philcon with him, I started working with other groups, doing various things that I never thought I would. These jobs included running con suite, hotel liaison and stage manager, as well as Head of Registration or even Head of Programming. It is one thing to be the presence behind the scenes putting together and fixing issues, it is another being the face of the con to the public. Hugh and I both knew whatever we faced, we had each other’s backs, even when we disagreed on how to do something.

So what does it take to run a science fiction convention? In short, patience. You are there for the congoers, to make sure they are having a good time. This means answering questions such as, where is room one thousand and one, not ten oh one (1001) without cracking up in their face, pointing to the bathroom, apologizing that they had to wait in line to check-in because they did not pre-reg, as well as a host of other issues all with a smile on your face and a pleasant tone in your voice. Yes, it is easier being that person handling the con issues, so it does not reach the public. The public demands more personal attention, even if it is just a smile and nod as they tell you about their issue that has nothing to do with the convention.

The funny thing you are all probably thinking while
reading this is, then why do it at all? In short, for you. The person reading this. We all do this for you so you have a good time and can enjoy yourself.

So are you interested yet in helping? I hope so. If so, start with an “I’m here to volunteer” and do the gopher work. Meet the people and look around to see what needs to be done. If you put in enough time, the con might feed you and let you attend the following year for free.

So what do you get out of helping? You learn about yourself. You learn how to work with others with various backgrounds that include a menagerie of social issues while surrounded by people who are there for one purpose, to enjoy science fiction. You learn that the smallest issue can be a huge frustration to someone because they have never faced it before and have no clue how to fix the issue. You also learn about friendships.

Fandom is family, a family of volunteers that come together to make sure the attendees have a good time. We all do this for our love of science fiction and all its subgenres. Yet in fandom you are never alone. We are all in this together, including the lack of sleep, poor eating, headaches and dealing with all the hubbub. The friendships you make are just about forged in fire. I have seen friendships end over this while others become stronger. No matter what happens in the future, those friendships that survive do not end because of what we all went through.

So next time you see that person rushing past you or sitting behind a table looking fried, know that they are doing this because of their love of the genre so that you can enjoy yourself. Do not forget to thank them at some point.

For me personally, I do this because I enjoy it overall. I enjoy knowing that all the hard work we all do makes someone’s world even better.

Would I have stepped into this world if I were not prompted all those years ago? I do not know… but whatever happens I am glad I did, and I blame Hugh for putting me on this road I travel.

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About Suzanne Rosin

Since 1994, I have volunteered for and sat on the boards and committees of various Non-Profit Organizations including American Jewish Congress (AJC), Philadelphia Film Festival, Philadelphia Science Fiction Society (PSFS), Philcon, Greater Delaware Valley Costumer’s Guild, Pennsylvania Browncoats as well as volunteers for various cons up and down the east coast.

When not working cons, I have a habit of being a talking head on various TV topics as well as how to run a con, copyright law and internet privacy (or the lack thereof).

When not volunteering, I pretend to be a research law librarian for an international law firm based out of Philadelphia.
Cosplay in the Time of COVID-19

by Miriam Seidel

I’m not a cosplayer myself, but I am a huge fan of cosplay. I love seeing people at cons who have taken the time to create their elaborate outfits, transforming themselves into a beloved character or denizen of an imagined world. Steampunk ladies in top hats! Full-body furries, equipped with forest gear! Klingons! Princesses, female and male! Elves, Batmen and Sailor Moons! All sashaying through the halls, posing on stage, ready and willing to be admired.

That’s something I’m missing this year, the year of COVID-19. With convention organizers canceling or postponing their in-person events, the live experience of cosplay has ground to a halt.

I attended my first masquerade at Shore Leave, the fan-run con in Towson, Maryland. It was a fully produced, onstage event with prizes for best costumes in different categories. The experience stuck with me, and I ended up reimagining it as a scene in my novel, *The Speed of Clouds*, the story of a sci-fi fan finding herself as she’s accepted into a motley fan group. Before the Shore Leave masquerade, I had admired fully dressed Federation crew members, Klingons, and Borg mingling at Philadelphia-area Star Trek cons.

The cosplay tradition in sci-fi fandom has evolved since its origin over eighty years ago, though it wasn’t called cosplay then. In 1939, Myrtle R. Douglas (who went by the nom-de-fan Morojo) and Forrest J. Ackerman caused a sensation when they showed up at the very first Worldcon dressed in dashing “futuristic costumes” inspired by the movie *H. G. Wells’ Things to Come*. The idea caught fire, leading to an annual Worldcon masquerade. Lee Weinstein, a long-time Philcon staffer and PSFS member, recalls a “very elaborate” Worldcon masquerade from the early 1970s, with people portraying characters in books. It also included some nudity, which he notes was later banned. Since then, masquerade rules have grown up that usually require pre-vetting of costumes. They allow participants to move through experience levels, and lay out costume categories, such as originals and re-creations. Philcon has a decades-long history of hosting masquerades, along with Balticon and others.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, costuming jumped over into Star Trek fandom at emerging Trek cons, and also emerged at the newly formed San Diego Comic-Con. Both played a big part in growing the phenomenon of media-based fandom. It was only in the 1980s that the term “cosplay” appeared, coined by Nobuyuki Takahashi after he attended the 42nd Worldcon in Los Angeles. His report crystallized and expanded on an existing fan costuming scene in Japan, centered on characters from anime and manga. The new wave of cosplay then rolled back to the US and Europe in the 1990s, exciting participation by younger fans of Japanese media, particularly women.

The cosplay phenomenon has attracted the attention of academics in the fields of media studies and anthropology. Some, like the Dutch media-studies scholar Nicolle Lamerichs, emphasize the process of embodiment, with the cosplayer bringing an imaginary character into the physical world, building it out from their own body. She sees this fandom activity, like fanfiction, as part of a “community of imagination,” one that allows fans “emotional ownership” of the original source as they elaborate on it for themselves. Emma Louise Backe, an anthropologist, also sees cosplaying as a process of empowerment, with the cosplayer absorbing some of the power and confidence of their chosen character. She finds this relevant to the movement of the more female-dominated world of cosplay into the male-dominated arena of comics fandom.

I see cosplay as taking part in a very old human process, of using ritual performance to merge with the sacred. Back when humans all lived in small villages and performances involved whoever could fit around

Figure 1 Forrest J. Ackerman and Myrtle R. Douglas (Morojo), first known sci-fi cosplayers, at the first Worldcon © 2020 Photo copyright Ted Carnell Collection
the fire, people put on masks, painted themselves, and wore whatever also helped to transform them, allowing them to merge with the god or natural force they sought to call into being. Through the process of dancing and singing, they became physical aspects or avatars of that sacred force, allowing those who watched to feel its presence, right there with them. This is why I respect cosplayers and what they’re doing. Of course they’re not trying to become gods, and I don’t think they would call cosplay a sacred activity. But they’re willing to do this deeply nerdy thing, which risks ridicule among the uninitiated, because it means so much to them. In some way they’re reenacting an ancient process that connects us with other worlds.

This process is behind the importance of cosplay, although now it forms a bridge between the virtual world (of movies, television, games, the internet)—and the physical (the individual human fan), creating the shared physical and psychological fan space. It’s a powerful ritual of connectivity, and an antidote to the increasing virtuality of our everyday experience.

And that is what’s been profoundly disrupted this year, with the advent of a world pandemic and the ensuing social restrictions. In the early months of the new reality, a number of convention organizers canceled their events, often transposing their programs to the following year in the hope that a physical event can be held then. Others have taken their events online, just as much of work activity and other socializing has done where possible. But what to do with cosplay? Some online cons, including Philcon, have canceled their costume events. A few, including Shore Leave and Comic-Con, have held virtual masquerades with videos submitted by cosplayers. Norwescon is currently planning a virtual masquerade as part of its 2021 event.

Figure 2 Static-Chu, a Pokemon-mashup cosplay with static shockwaves
© 2020 Photo copyright Akeelah’s Cosventureous Journeys

Clearly, this isn’t the same. Cosplaying is a live performance art, like theater. And as with theater, which has seen an explosion of online experiments in Zoom-based performances, cosplayers have been adapting. They’ve kept congregating online, sharing skills in maker forums as they already were doing. Some have moved more into role-playing games. And some are pushing their personas back toward the virtual, posting photos enhanced with sparkles and other atmospheric graphics that you couldn’t produce in a live situation—not yet, anyway.

Cosplay is evolving. I hope it won’t be too long before cosplayers and their fans can congregate non-virtually again.

Links for more information:


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About Miriam Seidel
Miriam Seidel’s novel The Speed of Clouds was published in 2018. Her stories have appeared in Into the Ruins and the anthology Breathe (as Mir Seidel), and elsewhere, and she wrote the libretto for Violet Fire, an opera about Nikola Tesla, performed in Belgrade, New York, and Philadelphia. She has reviewed dance and performance art for the Philadelphia Inquirer and other outlets, and has a long interest in the connections between art, performance, and ritual. She blogs at miriamseidel.com, and tweets as @Mir_­QueenofMars.
Back In 1973 when I was a grad student at Villanova, I met a fellow student on the campus named Darrell Schweitzer, who some people here may have heard of, and he soon introduced me to the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. I attended a few of their meetings, during which there was a lot of discussion about something called Philcon, that they were busily preparing for.

A few months later, it was November and Philcon was about to start on an upcoming Friday evening. I had no idea what a science fiction convention was like, but I decided to go, both out of curiosity and out of a lifelong interest in imaginative fiction.

The convention was held in the old Marriott hotel on City Line Ave, across the street from where the Target store is today and where the old Adams Mark hotel, which was to host many later Philcons, used to be.

Registration for the weekend was all of four dollars, and the badges were blank white rectangles of cardboard on which we wrote our names before putting them into the plastic badgeholders.

The Marriott sprawled out in a seemingly endless mass of corridors, but several of us from Villanova managed to find the programming, the dealers room, and the art show. I still remember some of the programs. The Principal Speaker was A.E. van Vogt. I had read some of his short stories, but it was an experience to see him in person. During his talk, he mentioned The Female Man by Joanna Russ, which was soon to be published. He described it as a “white hot feminist novel.”

Lin Carter was a name I knew as the editor of the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series. I had read several of them and enjoyed Carter’s introductions. A friend and I had wondered a year or so earlier whether Carter was a man or a woman. Well, I now saw that he was a slightly older man with slightly longish hair and a goatee, who smoked with a cigarette holder. He was friendly and very approachable. I was to have many short discussions with him over the following years. But I found it fascinating to see the names I had only seen on books come to life as actual people.

I saw L. Sprague deCamp for the first time there as well. He was tall, elderly and very formal. I remember a Sunday afternoon panel titled the “Lovecrafty Panel” with him and Lin Carter. I also briefly met Gardner Dozois, who had just been on a panel titled “Will the Real Gardner Dozois Please Stand Up.” It was quite funny.

During the festivities I met some new friends who I was to keep in touch with for years to come. Being an impoverished student, I ended up crashing in someone’s room on Saturday night rather than driving home late at night.

I was amazed at the books and magazines for sale in the dealers room and I still have the Sam Moskowitz-edited issues of Weird Tales issues I bought there. The art show impressed me and introduced me to the work of some wonderful artists. A young woman I met there bought a back and white print of a centaur, which I borrowed to make a photocopy since I was short on cash by then.

Then there were the parties. But I don’t remember the specific parties so much as the time my friends and I spent searching through the maze of corridors trying to find each other. But it was all part of the fun.

By the end, on Sunday afternoon, I was pretty tired out, not having gotten much sleep during the con. But it had been more than just an enjoyable weekend. It was in a real sense a gateway into another world for me. It was a world called Fandom. It was a world where I was to meet numerous fans, authors, editors and artists over the years, and ultimately become involved in writing, editing, and years later, networking to bring professional guests to the meetings of PSFS. Years later, it was at another convention in another city that I first met my wife-to-be.

I suppose you could say that my first Philcon, which I attended on a whim, turned out to be a life-changing event.

© 2020 Article copyright Lee Weinstein
It’s a strange sensation when long-hidden memories suddenly surface, seemingly from out of nowhere. I can think of several occasions, when short fragments of long forgotten songs began to run through my head. One, which popped into my head in 2011, was something I hadn’t heard or thought about since 1963, as I soon discovered. I was able to identify it only by typing the fragments of the few lyrics I remembered into an online search engine.

Several years ago I started thinking about a space opera I had read while in elementary school. The only specifics I could remember were a couple of distinctive technical terms. The characters used something like a Star Trek shuttlecraft, but they called it a “landing boat.” And later on they flew small maneuverable fighter craft they referred to as “snapper boats.” Just as I had used the remembered lyric fragments to find my mysterious song a few years earlier, I typed those two terms into Google, and immediately, the full text of the novel came up. It was called Assignment in Space with Rip Foster, (aka Rip Foster Rides the Gray Planet), was first published in 1952, and was by “Blake Savage” (Harold L. Goodwin). He was also the author of a series of juvenile adventure novels about a young inventor named Rick Brant, some of which were science fictional in nature, but this was his only space opera and his only book under the Blake Savage name. A few years later I found an actual copy of the 1958 reprint and recognized some of the illustrations. I had had a vague mental picture of the landing boats and snapper boats and I saw they matched up with the illustrations.

But another hidden memory that emerged one day wasn’t so easy to trace. In the 1980’s, I had found a copy of David Starr: Space Ranger at a yard sale. I had fond memories of reading this series of juvenile space adventures by Isaac Asimov (hiding under the pseudonym Paul French) as a child. In fact, this was the first book of the series and the only one I had never read, because my local library didn’t have it. So I immediately bought it. When I began to read it, I felt a moment of surprise when the protagonist, David “Lucky” Starr, meets his sidekick-to-be, John Bigman Jones. I was surprised because I realized I had been expecting him to be a green-skinned alien. I stopped reading. Why had I been expecting a green-skinned alien? It came back to me that Bigman was a short, but entirely human man who had been born on Mars. But a space opera I had read as a child, with a green-skinned alien sidekick, clearly came back to me as well.

It was as vivid as though I had read that book yesterday, just like the tune that started playing in my mind in 2011. But it was something I had read as a child in the late 1950’s. I often took out science fiction novels from the children’s section of my local library and this had been one of them. I concentrated on the memory. It was a space opera, and I remembered the hero traveling through space with an alien humanoid who had green skin. I also remembered that his skin was green because it contained symbiotic algae. I further clearly remembered that that this alien had a special layer of subcutaneous musculature, which enabled him to withstand the vacuum of space. But that’s as far as the memory went. It was vivid, but tantalizingly fragmentary. If it wasn’t a Lucky Starr novel, what had it been? It began to nag at me the way one tries to remember a word or name just beyond the tip of one’s tongue. I was extremely curious. But try as I might, I could remember nothing further.

I imagined it must have been a far-flung space opera, with a hero on a galactic mission, who had a green-skinned sidekick on board his spaceship. I had read a lot of science fiction novels when I was a kid, most of which I no longer remembered at all. I wondered why this one had stuck.

Fortunately, I was in a position where I could ask other science fiction readers. Being a member of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society and a regular convention goer, I began to ask people I knew. However, although I asked a good many people over the ensuing years, no one recognized the book from my descriptions.

The internet, and its search engines came along a decade later, in the 1990’s. I began to feed descriptions of what I remembered into Webcrawler, AltaVista and whatever other search engines I could find. I used various permutations of terms like “symbiotic algae,” “green skin,” “alien sidekick,” and so on.

I had no luck.

I also pursued other avenues of inquiry. I remembered having read library books from the Winston company’s series of juvenile novels, with its distinctive Alex Schoenberger illustrations inside the front covers. I leafed through them whenever I saw one in a used book store.

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Lee Weinstein continued

or a convention dealer’s table. Nothing I found rang a bell. I even looked up the plot descriptions, online, of those I hadn’t found in hard copy.

Perhaps it had been one of Heinlein’s juveniles. I didn’t remember reading them, but it was a possibility. So I looked up their plots. Nothing sounded similar.

The answer did eventually did turn up, but not until years later, 2013 to be exact, and when it did it came about in through a fortunate coincidence.

Back in the 1980’s, in addition to the Lucky Starr book, I had also picked up, somewhere, a used children’s book from the 1950’s called Zip Zip and his Flying Saucer. It looked possibly interesting at the time, but I put it aside on a shelf and there it remained until 2013, when I pulled it out on a whim. I leafed through it and looked at the cover flaps. And on the inside back cover flap was an advertisement for another book from the same publisher. It was called The Green Man From Space and it was by one Lewis Zarem. The author’s name was not familiar to me, but the title was very suggestive. The description of the content was also suggestive but didn’t tell me enough to determine if it was the book I’d been looking for. However, I could enter the title and author into an online search engine, and this I promptly did.

There wasn’t much information about it to be had, but I did find a photograph of the cover. And the picture of the alien on the cover rang a bell in my memory. There was something very familiar about the alien’s completely round head, facing away from the reader. I searched further online and I found a brief description of the book which mentioned algae. Bingo! I was now sure it had to be the book I remembered.

My next stop was ABEBooks, and I found a copy for sale for a very reasonable price. I don’t generally like to order things online, but for this I made an exception.

The book arrived within a week and I read it immediately. It was indeed the book I remembered, although most of it was now unfamiliar to me. It wasn’t a far-flung space opera at all. It concerned a Martian, named Brotor, who had crash-landed on earth and was rescued by a test pilot. The pilot, as it turns out, was employed by a company, which was just in the process of developing and finishing the world’s first experimental space ship. The first mission for this pioneering ship became a voyage to Mars to return our visitor to his home.

As I was reading it, another brief scene came back to me, well before I got to it in the book. I remembered the hull of the ship was somehow breached during the voyage, and the alien was able to use his body to plug the hole. Sure enough, the scene eventually played out later in the book when the ship was struck by a meteor. Brotor was able to save the day with his vacuum-resistant musculature.

The book had quite a bit of science in it, on the construction of spaceships as well as speculation as to how the Martians had evolved a symbiotic relationship with algae as Mars had gradually lost its atmosphere and free oxygen.

Lewis Zarem was an Ohio-based writer who had majored in journalism. He was born in Milwaukee in 1915 and died in Arlington in 2006. A review of one of his non-fiction books from the 1950’s notes that he was associated with the Wright Air Development Center, near Dayton, at the time. He specialized in books on aeronautical topics, with such titles as, The New Era of Flight: Aeronautics Simplified, (1956, written in collaboration with Robert H. Maltby), New Dimensions of Flight (1959) and Careers and Opportunities in Astronautics (1969). The short bio inside the book said that before he went into the army he had written “fact detective” pieces that had appeared in national magazines, although I haven’t been able to find any further evidence of this.

As with Harold L. Goodwin / Blake Savage and his Rip Foster book, this was Zarem’s only space opera. In fact, it was his only science fiction novel. His only other novel was called Superjet: A Spy-Ring Thriller (1954) written in collaboration with a writer named Ray Cantrell. This explained the difficulty I had finding people who could recognize the description of the book. It was pretty obscure. But as I discovered, it had enjoyed some degree of success at the time, in that the copy I had purchased was a tenth anniversary edition.

It rated a review in the New York Times book review section (November 13th, 1955), which noted that the author was an aviation authority and described it as “excellently plotted and vividly written.” The New York Herald Tribune on the same date said that “Zarem is more careful than most about the plausibilities of space-flight.” A review in Galaxy (February, 1956), said that the dramatic situations fell flat, but nonetheless commended the author’s inventiveness, notably “the symbiosis between the Martian and the oxygen-producing algae that live like hair on his body.”
Why had it fallen into obscurity? It is possibly significant that 1965, the year the 10th anniversary edition came out, was also the year that we got our first actual look at the surface of Mars, when Mariner flew by and revealed a surface that appeared to be as cratered and desolate as the moon. Then, too, despite all its inventiveness, it reads, as did much of the juvenile science fiction of the period, a bit like a sugar-coated science lesson.

But most importantly, this book was a one-hit wonder, so to speak. It was a footnote to a writing career that went primarily in another direction.

Why had I suddenly remembered fragments of a book I had read thirty-some years earlier and hadn’t thought about since? I’d read hundreds of science fiction books since my childhood over the decades. Why this one? Did this book strike a subconscious chord in me? It seems apparent that, I had somehow conflated the character of John Bigman Jones, who was a human, but born and bred on Mars, with Brotor, the green alien, who was also a modified human of sorts and also from Mars. I had obtained both The Green Man and the Lucky Starr books from the same library in the same time period: the late 1950’s. Both involved space travel in the solar system. Reading the Lucky Starr book had evidently tripped a subconscious trigger that unlocked this long-buried memory.

In the end, it was an enjoyable experience to rediscover a long-lost book and put an end to my curiosity. It also underlined how different publishing was back when I was growing up. Both Zarem’s and Goodwin’s books were one-shot ventures, which would probably have been passed over by today’s publishing houses, with their demands for endless series. Finally, by re-finding this book, I was able to contribute some new information about it and its author to the history of the genre.


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Poor Lee cartoon
© 2020 Cartoon copyright Darrell Schweitzer

About Lee Weinstein

Lee Weinstein is a retired librarian who has had a lifelong interest in science fiction, fantasy, and horror. He has edited several short story collections and his non-fiction has appeared in Studies in Weird Fiction, Supernatural Fiction Writers, New York Review of Science Fiction, Horror Fiction through History and elsewhere. He is an ongoing contributor to the online third edition of the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction. He has also dabbled in oil painting since the mid-1990’s. He lives in Philadelphia.
These pieces were all written for Broad Street Review, an online publication that reviews the arts in Philadelphia. I normally write about classical music for BSR but I throw in pieces on other subjects when there’s a lull in the music season. These pieces are all being reproduced as I submitted them, with some references to other BSR contributors. I should also note that they were addressed to a general arts audience—to people with a good knowledge of art and literature who might not know much about science fiction.

Tom Purdom

Ray Bradbury, Science Fiction Writer

by Tom Purdom

Ray Bradbury had to overcome some serious resistance when I first encountered his stories in 1950, shortly after I became a fourteen year old science fiction fan. Like many science fiction readers, I felt he labored under handicaps that would have condemned most writers to the outer darkness reserved for science fiction writers who slept through high school physics.

His biggest liability was his cavalier attitude toward the Prime Directive of the genre—the requirement that a story has to limit itself to real possibilities. Of his two most famous works, Fahrenheit 451 is definitely a science fiction novel. It depicts an all-too-possible future. The Martian Chronicles, on the other hand, rests on an outdated view of Mars that the astronomer Percival Lowell popularized in the early years of the 20th century.

By 1950, we knew Mars was a cold desert with a thin atmosphere that couldn’t possibly support the events depicted in Bradbury’s book. Real science fiction writers like Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke set their stories in that kind of environment when they wrote about the red planet.

Bradbury’s other handicap was the irritating attitude of the literary establishment, which enshrined him as the only science fiction writer worth reading. A friend who majored in English in the Sixties was given a list of subliterary fiction that included “all-science-fiction-except-Ray-Bradbury.” That was the standard attitude in the Fifties and Sixties among the people who set the agenda for literary discussion.

It wasn’t his fault. He never mocked other writers. But the adulation of the literary mavens reinforced the feeling that he wasn’t a hardcore member of our literary subculture, even though most of the stories in The Martian Chronicles had originally appeared in the science fiction pulp magazines despised by his upscale admirers.

So why did I devour Bradbury’s stories just as ardently as I gobbled up Heinlein and Clarke? How did he vanquish stigmata that would have condemned other science fiction writers to eternal oblivion?

The literary pundits took up Bradbury partly because they believed he shared their distaste for technology. Clifton Fadiman summed up this attitude in a preface to The Martian Chronicles. Bradbury was telling us, Fadiman argued, that “the place for space travel is in a book.”

“Mr. Bradbury has caught hold of a simple, obvious but overwhelmingly important moral idea,” Fadiman wrote. “That idea...is that we are in the grip of a psychosis, a technology-mania, the final consequence of which can only be universal murder and quite conceivably the destruction of our planet.”

You could certainly build a case for an anti-technology message if you focused on the appropriate aspects of Bradbury’s work. Mechanical hounds chased hapless nonconformists. Crass humans threw coke bottles into beautiful Martian canals. But the literary intellectuals overlooked his very unintellectual attitude toward his art.

Bradbury himself said he wrote for fun. He was obviously fascinated by stories. All kinds of stories. Shuddery stories. Sentimental stories. Gee-whiz marvel stories. His output encompassed the whole range.

Usher II pits an Edgar Allan Poe enthusiast against puritans who would obliterate literature that traffics in horror and depravity. King of the Gray Spaces captures the feelings of boys who build model rockets and dream of becoming astronauts. Small Assassin depicts a murderous baby with the emotions of an infant and the cunning of an adult. Way in the Middle of the Air sends Southern blacks marching down rural roads toward the rockets that will carry them to a new life on Mars. Icarus Montgolfier Wright celebrates all the heroes who have ridden experimental machines into the sky. There Will Come Soft Rains transforms the aftermath of nuclear war into an elegiac prose poem.

In Bradbury’s stories, technology was an endless source of monsters and marvels. The technology that defiled the
Martian canals in one story could be exalted in another. He never outgrew the boy who shivered over classic horror tales and reveled in pulp space sagas.

The pundits completely misjudged his attitude toward space travel. In 1969, when most of our intellectual leaders were decrying the wastefulness of Project Apollo, Bradbury emerged as an eloquent champion of the space program. In lyrical speeches and essays, he depicted space travel as our species' bid for immortality. We would outlive the Earth by colonizing the Solar System. We would outlive the sun by expanding through the galaxy.

His literary supporters may have been surprised by this development, but I wasn't. They had read the words but they hadn't heard the music I had heard when I read his stories as a teenager.

In 1950, I joined the ranks of the first young people to approach adulthood knowing that our species could leave its home planet, and would probably do it sooner than most of our elders realized. Heinlein and Clarke pulled out their slide rules and excited kids like me with visions based on real technological possibilities. Bradbury skipped the slide rule phase but he captured our allegiance because he loved science fiction and shared our feelings about its basic subjects. He was fascinated by the future. He had heard the call of the stars in his heart. He was one of us.

Science Fiction: the View from Inside

by Tom Purdom

Why do people read science fiction? Anthropologist Christine Folch tackles this pressing issue in a column on the Atlantic website and bases her diagnosis on the theories of the 19th century German sociologist Max Weber.

According to Folch, Weber believed people in the West were “disenchanted.” Science has presented us with a world that is “explainable, predictable, and boring” and this has led to a widespread loss of wonder. This woeful state has been abetted, furthermore, by the rise of government bureaucracies and impersonal market economies.

Science fiction restores that wonder, Folch argues, by reinserting “the speculative unknown into the very heart of the scientific process.”

Folch is primarily writing about science fiction movies and she has some interesting things to say about the reason movie science fiction sells in some cultures and falls flat in others. But outsiders never see things quite the way insiders see them. For me, her analysis seems naggingly out of focus.

When I started reading science fiction in 1950, I didn’t succumb to its charms because I was bored. You have to be semi-comatose to be bored at fourteen. The world around me hummed with interesting attractions. The most fascinating (and puzzling) attractions came packaged in skirts and dresses, but my personal list included activities like model airplanes, rod and reel fishing, and all the books I hadn’t read.

I don’t think most of the adults I knew were bored either. Intellectuals and artists seem to be born with a hard-wired assumption “ordinary life” is boring. They know they’d be bored working at most jobs, so they assume everybody else is, too.

But are they right? Consider accounting—the classic example of a boring occupation. Do you really think people who wrestle with the complexities of the tax code are bored? Exasperated, perhaps. But none of the accountants I’ve known seemed bored.

Science fiction appealed to me as a teenager because it added a new type of excitement to my reading. It exposed me to the romantic and awe-inspiring possibilities inherent in its two basic subjects: the huge, mysterious universe that surrounds our tiny little planet and the infinite, unpredictable future that stretches before us.

A science fiction writer named Joanna Russ once argued that new forms of literature come into existence to express new feelings. The emotion that generated science fiction, she said, is “awe and wonder at the physical universe, not as it is revealed to the senses, but as it is revealed to the mind.”

For me, the major insight in that statement is contained in the last phrase. In the past, a poetic soul might feel awed by the few thousand stars you can see when you step outside at night and look at the sky. Today, you can stay indoors, curled up with a book about modern astronomy, and confront the far more awesome knowledge that you live in a galaxy with two hundred billion stars, in a universe teeming with billions of galaxies.

You can’t see that vision of the universe with your senses. It exists only in our minds. It’s a mental picture.
pieced together with painstaking logic based on observations made with instruments that detect phenomena no human eye can detect.

And once you’ve seen that vision, questions arise. What’s out there? Are there other worlds? Other civilizations?

The future raises similar questions. We have now lived through 250 years of steady technological change and all the social and political upheavals it creates. We know the future will be just as different from the present as the present is from the past. What will the world be like if we double our IQs? How will three-dimensional printing transform our economy and the day-to-day lives of the people who depend on it?

When people live on the shores of unexplored seas, they make up stories about the marvels and monsters that may be hidden on mysterious islands and unknown continents. Modern humans live, in effect, on the edge of two seas: the galaxy and the future. Science fiction writers spin stories about those two seas in the same way the Greeks told stories about islands in the Mediterranean and Shakespeare wrote about the wizards and spirits who inhabited an island in the Atlantic. Their work arises from an impulse that’s been part of our makeup since we first started sitting around campfires.

When I was fourteen, science fiction wooed my adolescent mind because it offered me visions of the future I was going to experience. Today, at seventy-seven, it offers me vicarious adventures in the futures I won’t live to see. But the underlying message hasn’t changed. The universe is an exciting place. Human history has just begun. What’s past is prologue.

**Avoiding the Downside of Good Memories**

*by Tom Purdom*

When you read a lot, you never know where you’re going to find the tips that get you through major changes. Robert Silverberg might be surprised to learn that he’s helped me cope with one of the pitfalls of age.

Silverberg is one of the leading science fiction writers of the last sixty years—a polished, highly literate writer who is, in my opinion, one of the best writers in the United States. If he worked in another genre, he would enjoy the kind of following literary crime writers like Elmore Leonard attract.

Just after the turn of the century, one of the science fiction specialty houses issued a multi-volume edition of Silverberg’s massive short fiction output. In one of his columns for *Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*, he described how it felt to read some of his stories as he prepared them for reprinting. He hadn’t read many of them for decades and he could read them, he said, as if they had been written by someone else. When he read one of his best novellas, *Born with the Dead*, he was surprised to see just how good it was. He found himself wishing, as writers will, that he could do something that good again.

Then he realized he didn’t have to do it again. *He had already done it.*

A couple of years after I read Silverberg’s column, my wife and I ate our last Valentine’s Day dinner in a restaurant. We didn’t know it would be the last time we would eat out on Valentine’s Day but I knew it would be one of the last. The streets were full of young couples when we walked back to our apartment and I started wishing we could be one of those couples, with decades stretching ahead of us.

Then I remembered Silverberg’s column. *We had already done that.* We had once, in our turn, been one of those young couples. In our life together, in fact, we had done most of the things they hoped they would do.

There have been other times since then when Silverberg’s useful little thought has eased me past the temptation to shed tears over vanished glories. It’s natural to look back at the big moments in your life and wish you could relive them. But the good times shouldn’t weigh you down. Enjoy the memories. Be glad they happened. Concentrate on what comes next.

**Growing Hoarse in Cherry Hill**

*(Philcon 2008)*

*by Tom Purdom*

The women who participated in the Women in Science panel at the Saturday session of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference all agreed the federal government is a good employer for married women. It provides daycare and flexible hours and makes other accommodations for women with children. Academic institutions, on the other hand, earn low marks for their attitude toward the “Two Body Problem”. Universities still tend to offer ma-
jor appointments to the husband of an academic couple and assume the wife will take something less.

The panel had attracted about ten women, all of them scientists or technologists. The moderator of the panel was a NASA astrophysicist and the audience included a nuclear engineer and a molecular biologist who had switched to medicine after several years in pure research. They had all overcome the barriers that confront women scientists, including the junior high “boys don’t like smart girls” syndrome. They had stuck it out, from what they said, primarily because they had become fascinated by a scientific field when they were young and decided they were going to work in it no matter what.

For a writer, a science fiction convention is primarily a talkfest. You talk on panels. You sit around the restaurants and bars talking to writers, editors, and the friends you’ve made in the community of readers that’s grown up around science fiction. You talk at parties. You also spend a lot of time listening. In this milieu, almost everybody has something interesting to say.

I mostly listened during the Women in Science panel and I had listened for most of the panel that preceded it. That one explored current views on the structure and ultimate end of the universe and the guy who did most of the talking was Tony Rothman, a cosmologist/science fiction writer who was holding forth on his specialty. The other writer on the panel was a technical administrator named L. Hunter Cassells and she and I limited ourselves to a few thoughts on the meaning of our contemporary struggle to understand a universe that is bigger and more complex than anything our ancestors ever imagined.

Science fiction conventions are founded, like many literary events, on the assumption readers develop a burning desire to meet writers. They thrive because the genre attracts readers with wide ranging interests and a burning desire to talk about their interests with people who share them. The US science fiction calendar includes a couple of dozen regional conventions and an annual World Science Fiction Convention which attracts several thousand people and justifies its title by moving to sites like Tokyo and Melbourne at least once every four years. Contemporary American science fiction writers can receive invitations to speak at local conventions in most of the countries capable of publishing translations of their works, including Russia and China.

And the whole thing started right here in Philadelphia. The history of this peculiar cultural phenomenon began in 1936 when half a dozen young SF fans came down from New York, rendezvoused with half a dozen young Philadelphians, and dubbed their gathering the first science fiction convention. The first world convention took place just three years later, in New York, and attracted about two hundred registrants.

Like most of the activities generated by special interests, the Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference exists because hard working enthusiasts make it happen. It’s been an annual event for seventy-two years because volunteers from the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society negotiate with hotels, and engage in all the scheduling and managing a convention requires. In peak years, their efforts can bring one or two thousand visitors into the region. This year they attracted about seven hundred.

This year the convention took place outside the city for the first time in its history. According to some members of the convention committee, they had to move to Cherry Hill because the demand for Philadelphia’s limited hotel space is so great the city can no longer accommodate a November convention as small as the Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference.

The literary and scientific talkathon is only one aspect of a contemporary science fiction convention. The convention activities also include special areas for people who like to play complicated games, programming tracks for people who are into anime and media science fiction, and a costume competition (the aspect that traditionally fascinates the news media). For those of us who are primarily interested in reading and writing, however, a science fiction convention is an intellectual smorgasbord. The other panels I participated in included a session on the economics of interplanetary and interstellar trade and a look at the career of Robert A. Heinlein, the writer who had been the dean of the profession when I first started reading SF in 1950. In other rooms, inquiring minds could listen to writers, editors, and scientists holding forth on topics that included the probable lifespan of electronically stored materials, the demographics of the science fiction audience, the open source revolution in software, future religions, and the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft. During most of the hours between ten a.m. and ten p.m., conventioneers had their choice of four panels, in addition to readings, screenings,
Tom Purdom continued

Readers may attend the panels at science fiction conventions so they can listen to writers talk but the audience is often just as interesting as the panelists. The highlight of a panel on “Science Fiction and the Cold War” was an unexpected statement from the floor. One of the panelists had referred to a study that indicated the personnel who controlled our missile force might not have obeyed a command to launch. A member of the audience raised his hand and let us know he had spent four years in a missile silo and he and his fellows would definitely have turned the keys if they had been given the order. They were trained to do it, he emphasized, and they had been through the procedure many times in simulations.

For most of us, nuclear war was essentially a theoretical possibility during the Cold War. This was the first time I had ever talked to someone who had actually manned the front line of the balance of terror.

For me, it was an exchange that defined the difference between science fiction and fantasy. Pure fantasy currently outsells science fiction by a wide margin and fantasy enthusiasts like to insist there is no difference between the two genres. I had spent most of an earlier panel defending the special nature of science fiction against fantasy writers who upheld the pernicious doctrine that science fiction is just fantasy with a different set of trappings. But no fantasy reader has ever met a vampire or a noble warrior armed with a magic sword. If you read science fiction, on the other hand, sooner or later you will find yourself talking to some of the people you’ve read about. There was a time, after all, when women who worked on interplanetary spacecraft only existed as characters in science fiction stories.

Texting for Posterity
by Tom Purdom

When I was a teenager living in a rural area of Florida, I used to listen to the local Bible experts explain why certain passages in the Book of Revelations proved the world was going to end in ten years. They would sit on their porches on balmy Florida nights, with fireflies playing on the lawn, and you could hear the pleasure in their voices as they described the events that would destroy that comfortable, agreeable scene.

There are many reasons why people like to contemplate a final cataclysm. We all love melodrama, for one thing. And who can resist the soul-satisfying knowledge that we possess the inside information the ignorant masses have failed to grasp?

As I grew older, and encountered non-Biblical prophets of doom, I came to think there’s a deeper reason why so many people want to think they’re living at the end of human history. They are shying away from the terrifying knowledge that they are going to end and the world will roll on without them, century after century, millennium after millennium.

When they go, everybody has to go.

Some of us, on the other hand, take comfort from the thought that repels them. We reject the more dismal visions of the future because we like to think our contributions will have some meaning as long as human society exists.

In her comparison of Emily Dickinson and Joyce Carol Oates, Carol Rocamora quotes Oates’ assertion that she writes for posterity. Personally, I’ve never been attracted by the conventional version of that writerly ambition.

I’ve never envisioned a future in which readers absorb my words (and my byline) long after I’ve slipped into the Great Dark. I renounced that fantasy when I decided to write science fiction.

Science fiction can survive for a few decades. I still get requests to autograph books and stories I wrote forty years ago. But sooner or later it dates. There comes a day, inevitably, when younger readers pick up a story you wrote in your youth and wonder why the super geniuses of the twenty-third century are calculating with slide rules and fretting over problems that could be resolved by a single call on a cell phone.

The rest of my literary output doesn’t give me much hope for immortality, either. It falls into two categories—journalism (including reviews) and commercial items, like brochures and handbooks, written for businesses and institutions. The life expectancy of both categories can be measured in years, at best, and days much of the time.

When I ponder my relationship to the future, I don’t think about survival. I think about connection. I think of links in a chain, runners in a relay race, a few bricks added to the grand edifice we call civilization. My personal contribution will maintain its value as long as the chain remains unbroken, the race continues, and the edifice stands.
Many of the science fiction writers I read when I was a teenager have already faded into obscurity. But the effect of their work still echoes through the years. They developed techniques and explored subjects that contemporary science fiction writers continue to exploit. Bits of them live in every line the writers in my age group write. Those bits, along with bits of us, will live on in the works younger writers produce.

And science fiction is only a segment of a larger literary culture, which is, in turn, part of a great intellectual and cultural epic that began when the first sparks of intelligence lit the brains of the first proto-humans.

A few years ago, a reader in Argentina posted a note on Spanish literary history on the online forum supported by Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine. During the Franco years, it seems, the Spanish censors ignored science fiction. They didn’t realize the American books translated into Spanish included political satires, speculations about alternate forms of society, and sagas about heroic rebels overthrowing future dictatorships.

“Of course, only dumb nerdy kids read science fiction,” the reader wrote. “It’s just that dumb nerdy kids have this weird habit of becoming lawyers and scientists and politicians and teachers and writers in their own right. If there’s one country where you can truly say that SF made a difference, it’s Spain.”

And once those books were translated into Spanish, they could be exported to the dictatorships that infested South America.

For me, the post added an extra fillip to a pleasant personal memory. In 1965, I received a small (very small) check for my share of the Spanish rights to a best-of-the-year science fiction anthology. My story led off the anthology and it dealt with politicians using computer models and advanced psychological techniques to manipulate the electorate in a New Jersey Congressional district.

At the time, my wife and I felt the sale was a career milestone. It was my first foreign rights sale. But we also felt it should be greeted with a smile, given the size of the check. We celebrated by spending the entire sum on an inexpensive (very inexpensive) bottle of Spanish wine.

Thanks to the reader from Argentina, I now know the event had a larger significance. I had made a small contribution to a literary phenomenon that helped prepare the Spanish people for the revival of parliamentary democracy.

To me, that’s a lot more satisfying than the hope that some kid may be forced to read one of my stories in an English class ninety years after I’m dead.

The Necronomicon Quartet

by Tom Purdom

H.P Lovecraft wrote horror stories, fantasies, and borderline science fiction for the pulp magazines in the 1920s and 30s. Most of his work appeared in Weird Tales, a magazine which specialized in stories that involved mysterious happenings, evil sorcerers, and adventures in ancient devil-ridden kingdoms. The Library of America series recently added a collection of Lovecraft’s stories to its offerings-- a development that means he now sits on the same shelf as Henry James and Ernest Hemingway.

I haven’t read much of Lovecraft. I don’t like horror stories and I’ve never understand why anyone does. To me, Lovecraft has always been a creepy guy who lived on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches while he sat in an attic penning endless letters to his fans and writing unpleasantly squirmy opuses for penny a word magazines. I read every word of L. Sprague de Camp’s 1975 biography of Lovecraft and it only reinforced my bias.

Lovecraft’s prose style is one of the great jokes of the science fiction community. His critics like to note that his favorite adjective was “indescribable.” The typical Lovecraft story, according to the parodists, is a narrative about indescribable monsters who engage in unspeakable acts while they perform nameless rites.

Still, anyone who started reading science fiction in the 1950s, when I did, automatically acquired some knowledge of Lovecraft’s work. He had been a well-known writer during the pulp era that spawned modern science fiction and he had a vocal following among science fiction and fantasy fans.

Lovecraft’s best-known creation is a series of borderline science fiction stories that became known as the “Cthulu mythos” (choose your own pronunciation). In these stories, the underlying horror is a vision of the universe in which human beings are no more important than cockroaches. The monsters in the stories are the survivors of an ancient super race that may have come here from Outside.
At the heart of the mythos is a book of ancient lore called the *Necronomicon*. The writers in Lovecraft’s circle picked up the title and had a good time including references to the *Necronomicon* in their stories.

This non-existent book has become so famous that composer John Zorn has now given us a *Necronomicon* Quartet. Howard Philips Lovecraft has once again risen from his grave and triumphed over those who say unspeakable things about his contribution to American culture.

Or has he? The violist for the Miro Quartet, John Largess, spoke for several minutes before the Philadelphia premiere of Zorn’s quartet and didn’t mention Lovecraft once. Largess described the *Necronomicon* in general terms, as a book of ancient spells used to call up demons. For all the audience learned, it could have been a standard feature of the Arabian Nights. When I discussed the quartet with several members of the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society audience, I discovered none of them had even heard of Lovecraft.

I attended the concert with my friend Michael Swanwick, who is probably the most renowned science fiction and fantasy writer currently living in Philadelphia. As Michael notes in his blog, “clearly Zorn had not actually read Lovecraft’s works, but only heard about them second hand.” The composer’s comments available on the Web support that conclusion.

The quartet itself is an outstanding success. As Largess noted, its five movements run the gamut from the beautiful to the deliberately ugly and create moods that range from the serene to the string-breakingly furious.

The second and fifth movements are good examples of the quartet’s range. The second movement, *The Magus*, is a beautiful evocation of mystery. It is eerie and solemn and it creates its effects with understanding and imagination, the way a good poet chooses words that are both accurate and unexpected.

The final movement depicts the raising of a powerful demon and it has the most affinity with *Necronomicon*’s literary origins. It is crude and melodramatic— as it should be— with touches such as a moment when the four instruments rasp like saws ripping in unison.

The standard repertoire contains a long list of pieces inspired by fantasy and even horror. It is a musical tradition that goes back to the Renaissance. If I had to choose between Zorn’s *Necronomicon* and Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, I would give the prize to Zorn’s quartet. *Necronomicon* is a better expression of the true spirit of fantasy and magic.

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About Tom Purdom

Tom Purdom’s first published story appeared in the August, 1957 issue of a magazine called *Fantastic Universe*. His latest appeared in the July-August issue of *Asimov’s*. His contributions to the science fiction scene include novels, short stories and novelettes, magazine articles, book reviews, two terms as vice president of SFWA, three years as Eastern Regional Director of SFWA, and approximately fifteen years of volunteer work for the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society and Philcon.

In the last thirty years, he has produced a series of short stories and novelettes that have appeared in *Asimov’s*, *Jim Baen’s Universe*, Clarkesworld, and anthologies such as the year’s best series edited by Gardner Dozois and David Hartwell. Fantastic Books has published two collections of his stories: *Lovers and Fighters, Starships and Dragons* and *Romance on Four Worlds, A Casanova Quartet*. His first novel, *I Want the Stars*, has just been reissued by Journey Press, 56 years after its first publication as an Ace Double. He lives in center city Philadelphia where he devotes himself to a continuous round of concerts, social events, and other urban pleasures.

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The Clubhouse: A PSFS Legend

by Lew Wolkoff

In the 1980s, the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society discovered that it shared its initials with a certain local literary group. Us; the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, Since the two groups were so similar in size, organization, activities, and financial resources, the Savings Fund Society sent the Science Fiction Society a letter warning us about ever pretending to be them.

A letter was sent in response saying that the Science Fiction Society had never had any intent to pretend, in any way, to be connected with the Savings Fund Society. That letter was unknowingly, incorrect.

A quick word about the Savings Fund Society; it was formed in 1816, the first savings bank in the U.S. By the mid-twentieth century, it was one of the largest banks in the country and a Philadelphia institution. The Savings Fund Society's headquarters was the PSFS Building built on Market Street in 1932. The PSFS Building was the first International style skyscraper constructed in the United States. It was a in the shape of a “T”, topped with the PSFS initials in giant red neon letters that are visible for twenty miles.

The PSFS Building was later declared a national historical landmark. In 1992, the bank and its building were seized by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). When the building was later sold to become the Loews Philadelphia Hotel, a condition of the sale was that the letters remain.

The Science Fiction League was one of the earliest associations of science fiction fans. It was created by Hugo Gernsback in May 1934 in the pages of Wonder Stories, an early science fiction pulp magazine. The Philadelphia Science Fiction League was (PSFL) formed by Milt Rothman as the 11th chapter of the League.

In October 1935, the PSFL merged with the Boy's Science Fiction Club, which had been founded at about the same time. When the national League fell into neglect in 1936, the members of the Philadelphia chapter went independent. John Baltidonis, one of the founding members, suggested the new name Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. “That way,” he explained, “when out-of-town fans come to Philadelphia, we can show them the PSFS Building and claim that it’s our clubhouse.

So far as I know, the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society never met in “Our Clubhouse.” However, during the planning for the 2001 Millennium Philcon, several meetings were held in the PSFS Building.

The Stuff of Legend

by Lew Wolkoff

I’d like to use this space to commemorate three of the earlier members of PSFS, members long gone, but who shouldn’t be forgotten.

Ozzie Train

Ozzie was a founding member of the PSFS in 1935. He’s one of the men featured in the “Picture of the First SF Convention” taken in October 1936. At the first World Science Fiction Convention, held in 1939 in New York, Ozzie was catcher for the PSFS Panthers in a softball game with the Queens Science Fiction League Cometeers.

World War II called a rough break to the growth of science fiction fandom. Most fans were young men who soon found themselves in military uniforms. Ozzie was the only member of PSFS who wasn't in uniform. He was also the editor of the PSFS News. From time to time during the war, the other PSFS members found copies of the News in their mail, keeping them in contact with each other and with what was left of fandom.

In 1947, Ozzie and James Williams founded Prime Press, a small press specializing in science fiction and fantasy. Prime published the first books by George O. Smith, Lester del Rey, and Theodore Sturgeon. It also published classic works by L. Sprague deCamp, Dr. David H. Keller, Eando Binder, Nelson S. Bond, and Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint.

In the 1950s, Ozzie starred in a now-lost science fiction short filmed by the club.

I knew Ozzie as a quiet, gentle man who mostly sat in the back at PSFS meetings. He listened a lot more than he talked, but when he talked, we listened.
Lew Wolkoff continued

Harriet Kolchek

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Philcon was a lot simpler event than it is today.

One of the features of the convention was the party at Harriet Kolchek’s house. You went there by subway. When you got off, the only instructions that you needed was “Follow the Cat Smell.” Harriet had over two dozen cats, some of them crippled to the point that they could barely walk around.

But when you came to Harriet’s house, you went into her garage. Laid out on tables were boxes of used books, hardback and paperbacks, and SF/Fantasy magazines. Harriet sold them for ridiculously low prices, while she plied you with homemade cookies and jello shots.

The book sale was for a purpose. Harriet ran a one-woman “Fannish Travelers’ Aid.” If you needed help at a convention or found yourself short of funds, Harriet was there to help.

In the mid 1970s, Harriet was diagnosed with cancer. She invited fans to her house to say goodbye. And to adopt pieces from her extensive collection of fanzines (amateur science fiction magazines). I walked away with a big box of books, including “The Double Bill Symposium,” a symposium of how to write SF between many of the leading writers of the day, and “The Enchanted Duplicator,” a Pilgrim’s Progress satire on fandom in the 1950s. Sadly, she knew what she was doing. After her death, her mundane husband burned what was left of her collection.

Jack McKnight

Jack McKnight along with Ben Jason and Peter Weston are the only three persons mentioned in the World Science Fiction Society’s Constitution.

When the 1953 Worldcon (Philcon II) decided to present awards in various categories, they turned to Jack and Ben to design and build those awards. Jack and Ben spent most of Philcon II working on the awards and, so, missed most of the convention. Peter later refined their design for the Science Fiction Achievement Award, now known as the Hugo Awards.

Jack was club curmudgeon. He had definite ideas on how things should be done, and he was in no way shy of telling why they should be done that way. When I was President of PSFS in the late 1970s, I got several calls from him arguing this or that point. Sometimes, he could be a real pain in the butt.

On the other hand, if he was arguing that something should be done, he was the first to volunteer to help get it done. He had a good sense of humor that was even – on rare occasions -- self-deprecating. He was willing to be convinced if you had really good arguments. And there was never any doubt that his only agenda was working for the good of the PSFS and its members.

My First PSFS Meeting

by Lew Wolkoff

I attended my first SF convention, Lunacon, in March 1968. While I was there, I heard about PSFS and Philcon, and I attended my first Philcon that November.

A few weeks before the convention, I attended my first PSFS meeting.

At that time, PSFS met in a room at the downtown Y. When I walked in, I was met by a very pretty young woman, who greeted me in Elvish. She was learning the language and wanted the practice of talking to people. A number of others came over and introduced themselves.

As a neo (a new fan), I couldn’t follow the topics discussed at the meeting, but I do remember two things about it. The first was the now-discontinued practice of the “Pun Fine.” A person was fined a quarter for making a pun. However, the fine was appealable. The membership could overrule the chair in leveling the fine if they judged that it was a good one and deserved appreciation. I also saw one speaker go over to the jar where fines were placed and drop in a quarter when he was about to make a real whopper.

The other was the sign-up sheet. The sheet was for the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Philcon. Times were broken into four hour blocks, and EVERYONE was expected to initial as many blocks as he or she was willing to work. It was considered very bad behavior to not initial at least one or two blocks. I even signed up for a couple.

After the meeting, most of the club adjourned to Cavanaugh’s Railway Restaurant, a few blocks away. The restaurant was cafeteria style, with food items behind windows. You picked what you wanted and paid a cashier at the end. Several club members came over to introduce themselves. The conversations were still going on when I left an hour later.

Fifty plus years later, I’m still attending PSFS meetings -- now driving in from Harrisburg. I’ve been President
and Con Chair and Committee Chair and a bunch of other things, as well. It’s been a great way to spend those fifty years.

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About Lew Wolkoff

Lew Wolkoff attended his first convention in 1968, and he’s been going ever since. He’s a past president of PSFS and was a member of both successful and unsuccessful Philly Worldcon bids. At Philcons, he’s generally in Con Ops doing the newsletter or working to promote the PSFS Young Writers’ Contest. Retired from the PA Department of Health, he lives in Harrisburg, where he spends too much time on the internet, sometimes writing SF, which hasn’t sold. Yet! His daughter, Rose Anne, attended her first convention postnatally at the age of nine days.

Bonzai Pin
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The Greatest Editor SF Has Ever Had: Gardner Dozois

by Sean Swanwick

You can’t talk about Philadelphia’s science fiction scene without mentioning the greatest editor the genre ever had, Gardner Dozois. I’ve got the receipts to prove it.

1979: a photo from the first Philphord, a secret science fiction convention in the first floor of the home of Marianne Porter, then the girlfriend of Michael Swanwick and in possession of what no one else in the photo had: a few spare mattresses and a living room that could hold a writing workshop.

At the top left we can see Mr. Dozois, who put the workshop together. He’s surrounded not by big names in the field, but writers he thought could help one another improve their prose and develop practical skills. His goal, then and for the rest of his career, was to help people write the best science fiction they could.

It’s an image which highlights Gardner’s success. There’s Samuel “Chip” Delany, who had already won two Nebula awards, and went on to be buried in praise for his socially conscious writing, including the title of SFWA Grand Master. The old man to the side was Tom Purdom, who hasn’t aged a day since that photograph was taken, and went on to a prolific career in short fiction and music criticism. In the back is David Hartwell, also there to help these star-eyed new writers become publishable, who went on to spend another thirty-seven years working before dying under an avalanche of books. Jack Dann’s in the front, Gardner’s best friend and confidant, who went on to become the Grand Old Man of Aussie SF.

Also pictured is my dad Michael Swanwick, who at the time was a scrawny gonna-be who had never been published. But Gardner thought ole’ pops had some potential in him. Dad’s since won Hugos, a Nebula, a bunch of Russian literary awards, and a truly ugly World Fantasy Award he keeps a blindfold on. Also he married the woman who owned the Philphord’s venue. I’m somewhat fond of him!

Later in 1980, Michael Swanwick was kvetching that even though he had sold “Ginungagap”, he was the only person at the table who hadn’t won any awards. Gardner and Tom Purdom whipped together an award out of a paper plate, had it illustrated by Susan Casper, and hosted a ceremony for “The Coveted Rizzo,” for Best Novellette in an Uncontested Category. If dad was only writing science fiction to get awards, Gardner announced he should get enough awards to keep him writing, to general merriment.
Decades later, Gardner told me that every writer who had seen the Rizzo presented had approached him later on to see if they, too, could have one.

Fast forward another thirty-eight years. The Philphord crowd had scattered across the globe. Gardner’s closest friend Jack Dann had moved to Australia, chasing love after heartbreak in the nineties. Chip lived a few blocks away, but he couldn’t get around as well as he used to. The same with Tom, who had suffered slightly after being killed when a cyclist collided with him. He came back from the dead, but even Tom Purdom showed some wear after that. Meanwhile Gardner had broken a foot in dozens of places in a bad fall. Even going to the deli downstairs in his apartment building was daunting. Michael Swanwick had moved to Roxborough, a neighborhood Gardner felt so remote as to be interchangeable with Ozarks.

None of this slowed Gardner at all. The Philphords were long dead, but Gardner never stopped helping aspiring writers become the best versions of themselves. Confinned to his apartment, too stubborn to move to New Jersey (can there really be a place so remote from civilization?) Gardner hired an office manager, me, a punk about the age most of the Philphord crew was in 1979. I helped him with incidentals, and he lived planted in front of his computer. He was soliciting submissions for anthologies, he was teaching new writers how to fix their stories, he was working with George R. R. Martin to put out new collections. From the light of his computer screen, in a small apartment he never left, his work continued. He was corresponding with about eighty writers at the start of 2018, continuing the work he founded the Philphord to do.

But age took its toll. Gardner was doing so little physical work his body grew weaker and weaker, until one day he couldn’t get out of bed at all. The hospital saw a fat old man and didn’t take his condition seriously. After largely ignoring him for nearly a month, he caught an opportunistic infection during a routine procedure and died. I had been in the hospital two days prior, helping him get his email working over the hospital internet. He wanted to keep helping all the writers he respected so much.

Two years later, and SARS-CoV-2 has given us all Gardner’s life. Stuck indoors, watching the world pass by our windows. Our friends a few blocks away and our friends in Australia are both equally distant. Sometimes it seems like we’ll never leave our homes again.

Gardner didn’t resent the lockdown lifestyle. He was still bright and energetic, cheerful and inquisitive. His work continued. Our work continues. We can, all of us, get on the internet and reach out to the writers and editors and artists we admire, to help and be helped by them, to become the best versions of ourselves. We can still pour our energy into making the best art we can, no matter what wild changes happen in our lives. Gardner has passed, and he’s still showing us that we can write science fiction that inspires and surprises.

But for God’s sake, be sure to get some exercise.

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About Sean Swanwick

Sean William Swanwick is the son of established science fiction writer Michael Swanwick, and grew up in Philadelphia surrounded by writers, editors, and artists. Sean was working as Gardner Dozois’s office manager until his death, and Sean took up writing seriously after Mr. Dozois’s passing. For most of his life he was convinced that, were he to try to write, he would be a shoddy knock off of his father. But when he wrote, “Humans and Other People,” appearing in Asimov’s this January, it was a pleasant surprise that his style was substantially different from any of the writers who raised him.
I discovered Philcon through PSFS, not the other way around. A friend I had known from grade school, who collected comics, read Edgar Rice Burroughs, and had some copies of George Scithers’s fanzine Amra, told me about it. He was marginally in touch with fandom. I already knew what fandom was, thanks to Lin Carter, whose “Our Man in Fandom” column in Worlds of If magazine explained it all, very entertainingly. I had already joined the National Fantasy Fan Federation and begun to receive fanzines. But this was my first meeting with fans in the flesh.

There are two stories about my entry into the world of PSFS and Philcon which deserve to become legends. One is that shortly after I joined the club, the members took a vote to determine if I should be drowned, like an unwanted puppy. Given that I was a pedantic 15-year-old with few social graces, I can almost sympathize. I was told about this years later. It was decided, presumably in favor of my survival, by one vote.

I also distinctly remember that the first time I met Tom Purdom, probably at my first PSFS meeting, he growled, “I eat fans for breakfast!” Decades later I finally gave him a good reason to be glad he did not eat me, which was that I was the editor who acquired his first (and monstrously overdue) short story collection (Lovers & Fighters, Starships & Dragons) for Fantastic Books in 2014. He has always denied that he ever entertained such a notion as devouring me along with coffee, pancakes, and scrapple. I admire his restraint, which finally paid off.

As for the history of Philcon, I am not a large part of this story. Think of me as the star-struck fly on the wall who noted all those big names and celebrities in attendance. Admittedly some very important things happened to me at Philcons. It was there that I made the professional contact which resulted in the publication of my first fiction books, We Are All Legends and The Shattered Goddess in the early eighties. It was there too that I met my wife Mattie, or to be precise, it was there that she set her eyes on me, for all I was too dense to appreciate my good fortune for a couple years after that. Yes, Philcon changed my life in a lot of ways.

My first Philcon was 1968. It was held in the basement of the Sylvania Hotel, which was on Broad Street, at about Walnut. The entire convention was occupied in one large hall, and I mean the entire convention. I didn’t know it at the time, but I had arrived just in time to catch a glimpse of a vanishing world. From fan memoirs and histories I have read since, I gather that all conventions, even worldcons were like that: essentially a big meeting. The chairman’s job was to act as master of ceremonies, to introduce speakers, and direct them on and off the stage. There was of course only one track of programming. If there was a business meeting, I don’t remember it. As a teenaged suburban kid, I did not exactly get a hotel room. I came and went on the train, to Suburban Station. If there had been a business meeting early in the morning, maybe I missed it. There were presumably parties at night, but I did not know about them.

The principal speaker at my first Philcon was James Blish, the author of Cities in Flight, A Case of Conscience, and, yes, most of the earliest Star Trek books. It was the only time I ever saw him. He moved to England shortly thereafter. Years later I found a very early SFWA publication and read a transcript of his speech, which was to the effect that if SF stories were to contain protest signs, “they should be blank.” He didn’t want SF to be too didactic or political. (Remember that this was the year that the famous pro-and-con ad about the Vietnam War ran in various science fiction magazines. The SF scene was very political.)

Other famous SF folk present included Lester del Rey (I remember getting his autograph, on a 1940 Astounding), Robert Silverberg, and Forrest J. Ackerman. Tom Purdom was, even then, one of our local celebrities, as was of course L. Sprague de Camp, who lived nearby, in Villanova, at the time. I admit I have no specific memory of Sprague from that first Philcon, though I got to know him fairly well later on. There were, I am sure, a lot of other top professionals there. This was a time in which there were only a very few SF conventions annually, so writers who could afford it attended them all, and thought nothing of flying in from the West Coast for a Philcon. They would then go up to New York to see their publishers the following Monday. There would be so many SF folks in New York that day that a tradition arose of holding a pro party the Monday after Philcon, which evolved into the SFWA reception informally known as the “Mill ‘n Swill,” but more formally as the Science Fiction Writers of America Authors and Editors’ Reception, which went on for many years, eventually...
detached itself from the date of Philcon, and has since (I think) gone extinct.

I have one memory of Robert Silverberg at the 1968 Philcon. He was a dashing, Mephistophelian fellow with jet-black hair and a pointed beard (he would have been 34 at the time). He was sitting in the front of the room, waiting for a panel to begin. I was in the front row, paging through a copy of the May 1934 *Weird Tales*, which I had obtained in a swap from local fan/publisher/book-dealer Oswald Train, one of Philly fandom’s leading lights. (For years it was a tradition that when my family went on vacation in Maine in every summer, I would find something in the junk shops there to bring back and trade with Ozzie Train for something I really wanted. I think I swapped a Doc Savage magazine for that *Weird Tales.*)

Anyway, there was this kid in the front row with a glorious 1934 *Weird Tales* (the cover of which illustrates Robert E. Howard’s “Queen of the Black Coast,” showing a rather anemic Conan the Cimmerian and a naked lady confronting a winged monstrosity.) Silverberg noticed the magazine, made eye contact, and winked. I think he appreciated that I was where he’d been at the same age. (I gather from some of his Asimov’s columns that he has been a lifetime collector of sf/fantasy pulps.)

There were, incidentally, pulp magazines on sale at the convention. I was later told that this was the first time there had ever been hucksters at Philcon. There were two or three tables along the back wall of the hall. One dealer had a whole table full of pulp-sized *Astounding*, which were all from the John Campbell era, and so couldn’t have dated back much before 1938. Of course they were only thirty years old at the time, no more exotic than 1990s *Analog*s would be today, although they had more allure, I must admit. Such magazines were a gateway into science fiction’s past. But I had already discovered mail-order dealers through the classified ads in SF magazines, and so I thought that the asking price, $2.50 a copy, was a bit steep. I bought only a couple that I needed to complete serials. (Indeed it was a bit steep in an era when a new science fiction magazine or paperback book cost 50 cents. Five times the normal cover price, or about $32 in today’s money, given that a current *Analog* sells for $7.99.)

After the Cold War ended, we learned that the Sylvania Hotel, where that Philcon was held, was a leading rendezvous point for Soviet spies, because it was convenient to both New York and Washington and inconspicuously out of the way. I can’t help but wonder if any KGB agents scarfed up some of those *Astoundings* and how much they got for them on the black market back home. Did any of them become science fiction fans?

I also saw Walter Kubilius at an early Philcon, maybe 1968 or 1969. His is not a name to conjure with today, but he was a Futurian and a contemporary of Frederik Pohl and Isaac Asimov, who wrote some pretty good
Darrell Schweitzer continued

stories for *Super Science Stories* in the 1940s. I’d discovered him when I started to collect *Super Science Stories* for the uncollected Bradbury items found in its pages. I particularly remember one story based on the premise that the universe is like a house of mirrors, and there are only about a dozen stars. The rest are all reflections. I didn’t say anything to Mr. Kubilius. What could I have said? But I did know who he was and he might have been pleased to find out that somebody of the younger generation actually read his work.

I also saw Joanna Russ at a Philcon. Memory fails me as to precisely what year it was, but I think it was before 1970. She was the Friday night speaker. As with James Blish, this was the only time I ever saw her in public. In those days the convention did not use the big room in the hotel on Friday nights, but held a regular PSFS meeting, in the hall we used for that, which was in a YMCA at 13th and Arch Streets. Ms. Russ was not yet 40, but held a regular public. In those days the convention did not use the big room in the hotel on Friday nights, but held a regular PSFS meeting, in the hall we used for that, which was in a YMCA at 13th and Arch Streets. Ms. Russ was not yet the outspoken feminist she was to become, but she was already pushing envelopes. I remember that her speech was either entitled or on the subject of “Dirty Words in Science Fiction,” as she phrased it, i.e. taboo language and what could and could not be said. One thing I particularly remember is an anecdote she told about sitting in a faculty lounge (she was a teacher at the time) reading a science fiction magazine. The story in question had to do with “homosexuality on Mars,” i.e. not among the Martians but among the human scientists stationed there, even more isolated than those in an Antarctic base. This was the “problem” of the story, which will make sense if you realize that the American Psychiatric Association only stopped classifying homosexuality as a disease in 1972. The magazine might have been dated about 1960. It seems that the artist who illustrated the story was so worried about not making the hero look swishy that he piled muscles upon manly muscles to a grotesque extreme. Along came one of Ms Russ’s colleagues, who looked at the illustration and said, “Oh, I see! That’s an alien!”

I’ve never actually tracked down that story. I think Russ’s speech was published in *Luna Monthly*, which was a neatly produced digest of SF news and reviews published by a New York fan named Frank Dietz. What I remember about Frank Dietz is that he had been a friend of the great fantasy artist Hannes Bok and had an original color Bok drawing tattooed on his upper arm. Frank is dead now. I wonder whatever came of the artwork.

Another memory I have of a very early Philcon is meeting Marion Zimmer Bradley there. She was an established writer by then, but not the fabulously successful bestselling author she later became. She was trying to sell some books. She had found some fabulously rare Arkham House volumes (one of them was Clark Ashton Smith’s *Out of Space and Time*) in a bookstall in Paris for a few francs, and I think she hoped to pay for her trip to Philcon by selling these to one of the book dealers. Marion was not a special guest at that particular Philcon, just one of the pro regulars who attended every regional in the country. I do not remember if she was on the program.

By way of programming, the all-around funniest program item ever at a Philcon must have been about 1972. Gardner Dozois was by then emerging as a powerful writer, with impressive, if strikingly grim stories in anthologies like *Orbit* and *New Dimensions;* but in person he was a famous, manic wit, so much so that whenever he was “on” in public fans would gather around to hear what he said and watch what he did. Those of you who never knew Gardner or never were entertained by him this way have really missed something. I can only compare him to Harlan Ellison in this aspect of his persona, only without the quarrels and controversies.

So Philcon held a “game show” panel called “Who is Gardner Dozois?” It was formatted like *To Tell the Truth* or something like that. There were four or five contestants and a moderator. All of the contestants and the moderator claimed to be Gardner Dozois. One of them was, indeed, the real Gardner. I think the moderator was a prominent fanzine publisher of the period, Gary Labowitz. One of the contestants was a woman. All of them took questions from the audience, challenging them to prove that they were Gardner Dozois. One such question was, “If you are really Gardner Dozois, let us see the autograph of Stanton Coblentz tattooed on your left breast.” (This was already an established part of the Gardner Dozois legend. Stanton Coblentz was an old-time SF writer.) Each of them made a crafty excuse to avoid this revelation. The woman said, “Well, since the sex-change operation, I don’t think this would be appropriate.”

Then someone from the audience said, “Wait a minute. If all of you are Gardner Dozois, why can’t we extend the concept so that *everyone in this room* is Gardner Dozois?”

At that point a New York fan named Michael Moslow
ran screaming out of the room.

Gardner (the real one) grabbed the microphone and shouted, “Stop that man! He’s Gardner Dozois!”

It’s hard to top that for a Philcon story, but I am sure others will try. There are some things I am glad didn’t come off at Philcon, like the time I asked to read a story of my own to keep an auditorium full of people entertained until the principal speaker Larry Niven (who was late) showed up. I was ready to do it, but it probably wasn’t a good idea.

Over the years I met (and often interviewed) lots of famous science fiction people at Philcons. Some early principal speakers included Anne McCaffrey, Keith Laumer, Alfred Bester, and A.E. van Vogt. In 1976 we were the first convention to feature John Varley. We had a streak thereafter of featuring the hottest new talent. The two principal speakers after Varley were Michael Bishop and Joan D. Vinge. By the mid-’80s I was helping to run Philcon, editing the program book, and sometimes as chair of programming. I was once on the phone with Daniel Pinkwater, trying to talk him into attending. He didn’t, but he was present in spirit a couple years later when we hired a professional acting company (Marvin Kaye’s The Open Book group) to perform the operetta of The Hoboken Chicken Emergency at a Philcon. In the 1990s, Philcon waxed huge, and became the multi-tracked circus it is today. Attendance approached two thousand a few times. Guests included Bruce Sterling, Poul Anderson, Robert Sheckley, Ian Watson, Fred Saberhagen, Emma Bull, Will Shetterly, Jack Williamson, Philip José Farmer, Bruce Sterling, and many more.

It has been a long and strange trip for me, and it isn’t over yet.
One fantastic panel which PSFS presents every year isn’t heard here at Philcon. Each summer for the last forty years, the panelists of the Hugo Review Panel have discussed the finalists for the Hugo Awards prior to the close of voting.

2012 was my first summer living in Pennsylvania. Having seen the Hugo Awards mentioned on book covers for decades, I was thoroughly infatuated with the idea of discussing what was under consideration, but it hadn’t really sunk in that these awards were a participatory sport. I knew they were voted on by the members of the World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon), but without the resources for global travel, I didn’t think that could have anything to do with me.

Watching the Hugo Review Panel is like watching a play from the wings. You get to see a beautifully staged presentation, but you also see the stage crew moving the scenery around and you get a sense of the work that goes into it to get to the final product.

Each year, five panelists and five alternates commit to reading, watching, or otherwise experiencing all the nominees in seven major categories: Novel (40,000 words or more), Novella (17,500 to 40,000 words), Novelette (7,500 to 17,500 words), Short Story (under 7,500 words), Graphic Story, Dramatic Presentation: Short Form (less than 90 minutes) and Dramatic Presentation: Long Form (over 90 minutes). That’s a lot of words and a lot of time – especially in the years when an entire season of a television show is nominated under Dramatic Presentation: Long Form, and most notably in 2014 when the entire Wheel of Time series was nominated under Novel. All of the panelists are supposed to read every word and watch every minute, but anyone who can’t finish a category is allowed to step out for that category and let an alternate step in. The panelists change from year to year, to bring in fresh viewpoints and give everyone a break. Organizer Terry Graybill is the only constant fixture.

In 2012, there were five finalists for each of the seven categories. For each category, one panelist got five minutes (seven minutes for the novels) to explain their criteria for judging the works in addition to summarizing all five finalists. Then five panelists ranked the finalists plus “No Award” (always an option for every category on the Hugo ballot, every year). While the average scores were calculated, the remaining four panelists responded to the comments of the panelist who presented the category. Then the results of the vote were revealed. This is not a prediction about the actual award. The panel in any given year doesn’t necessarily have the same tastes as the Hugo voters in that year.

Once all the categories were finished, the alternates (who do all the work with less recognition) were given a chance to add comments regarding any of the items from any category. Then all ten voiced their opinions on some additional categories: actual predictions, what should have been nominated which didn’t make the final five, and the Dragon, the one work which felt like it dragged on the longest, regardless of its actual length.

I was fired up by the end of the night, and that’s when I absorbed the life-changing news: you don’t have to attend Worldcon to vote on the Hugo Awards. There’s a category of membership called Supporting Member, which is usually only about $50 and allows you to vote, and to nominate for the following year, in addition to a few other benefits. Also, you get to download the Hugo Voter Packet, which contains electronic copies of many of the finalists for all of the categories, not just the ones covered by the PSFS panel.

I went home that night with two new life goals, one short-term and one long-term. There were still nine more days until the close of voting that year, and I was unemployed. I paid for my membership, downloaded the Voter Packet, and went to work. I didn’t try to read the novels. I read quickly enough that I might have been able to complete them all, but then I wouldn’t have had much time for the other categories. I also skipped the Graphic Stories, which I don’t connect with as well. Instead, I tried to absorb enough to form educated opinions in as many as possible of the other fourteen categories that year.

My other goal was to get to be a panelist for the Review Panel myself. As it turned out, I had to turn Terry down the first year that she asked me to participate due to other commitments, but in 2018 I got my chance. By then there were six nominees per category, and while the panelists only committed to the same seven categories, we also wanted to touch on two new categories for written works, Series and Young Adult Book.

If you think that this sounds easy, you’re probably underestimating part of what’s involved. I was. The reading wasn’t too onerous for me. I even ended up liking a
couple of the graphic stories enough to continue collecting them, although I’m behind in reading by now. I had already seen about half of the dramatic presentations, and two weekend days spent in viewing parties with the other panelists got me up to date. It turns out that I really dislike The Good Place, no matter how often people explain to me that I am wrong and it’s wonderful.

I didn’t have too much trouble articulating my criteria for voting. By then I’d watched the panel for five years, so I knew I needed this and I worked on it ahead of time to be sure that what I said I cared about reflected what I really thought. My criteria include, not necessarily in this order:

**Is it speculative fiction?** The Hugo Awards were originally science fiction awards, but per the official website at [http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-categories/](http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-categories/), “Works of fantasy or horror are eligible if the members of the Worldcon think they are eligible.” Alternate history and other subgenres also fit under the speculative umbrella.

**Is it a complete work?** Don’t just stop when you reach the publisher’s preferred word count. The first book in a trilogy usually can stand alone, even if it’s obvious that the story isn’t over. If the nominated work is book 2 or 3, give me a two-page recap of what happened before, but that should be enough. And it’s just disappointing how often the final book has serious pacing problems.

**Is it new or notable?** Book N+1 in a series may be popular and feel good, but it’s probably not introducing anything significant to our world.

**Is it well written?** One would hope this wouldn’t need to be mentioned, but I’ve been surprised more than once by a finalist that needed either good editing or just a rejection letter. I certainly won’t vote to give an award to something that I don’t believe was ready for publication.

**Did I like it?** Just as being a lot of fun doesn’t necessarily make something award-worthy, being a difficult read or having unlikeable protagonists doesn’t mean it doesn’t deserve recognition. I don’t let my subjective feelings control my decision-making, but I don’t pretend not to consider them.

I have also added two variations on the above in response to specific works in the last few years:

**Is the speculative fiction aspect what makes the work new, notable or award-worthy?** New take on an old story is fine. But if the plot actually hinges on the speculative portion being a recognizable cliché, I don’t think that the Hugo is the correct award.

**Will it stand the test of time?** Topical references, in-jokes and the like can be really powerful in their time, but may either fall flat or be incomprehensible in thirty years. I don’t want someone in the future to look at this year’s winner and wonder how nothing better could have been written in an entire year.

No, what I failed to prepare for adequately was that five-minute time limit. I really thought I had. I had all my notes and I practiced with a timer the night before. I’ve done public speaking before, and I know that one of my flaws is that I tend to speed up and become hard to understand or trip over my own words. I must have overcorrected for that, because when it came time for me to present the Novella category in 2018, I ran out of time before mentioning the sixth finalist at all. I was, and am, so embarrassed. When and if Terry allows me to participate again, I know that I will need to practice much more to meet the standard set over the last forty years. It’s such an exhilarating experience to be part of a collaborative effort that has been going on for most of my lifetime.

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**About Stephanie Lucas**

Stephanie Lucas is a lifelong fan of speculative fiction, tabletop role playing and most things geeky. Her first science fiction convention was Philcon in 2009. She has worked for Philcon since 2011 in several capacities, most notably as the Chair of Philcon 2015. Her mundane cover identity as a corporate paralegal does not appear to be fooling anyone.
Tonopah, Nevada
July 1-4, 2022
Westercon74.org
Tonopah Convention Center
Mizpah/Belvada Hotels
and other hotels to be announced
Fiction

Short fiction written by many talented amateurs and professionals from the Philadelphia region

Most pieces were previously published. A few are newly presented on this occasion. Short fiction includes flash fic, short stories, novelettes and novel excerpts.

Contributors:

• Gregory Frost
• James Harper
• Sally Wiener Grotta
• Abby Cohen
• Marilyn “Mattie” Brahan
• Michael Swanwick
• Darrell Schweitzer
• Andrew Michael Levin
• Lawrence M. Schoen
I think the cat’s caught something again.”

“What?”

“A mouse, I think.”

“Well, open the door and see.”

She had been looking through the window in the storm door. Not wishing to have a mouse dragged through the living room, she opened the door just an inch or two.

The sky outside threatened rain.

“No, it’s not a mouse, it’s—” She stopped, crouched down. The cat was sitting on the small concrete porch, triumphant over his prey. “Oh, my God. Honey—Ted, I think you’d better come here.”

The newspaper rattled. Making grumbling noises, her husband walked down the steps to the landing. “All right, what?”

“Here, look.”

He knelt beside her, groaning slightly at the effort. “Where?” She edged out of the way to let him see through the crack in the door. The first thing he saw was Edgar, the cat, squatting on the concrete with eyes huge—ly black, wild and crazy. He had to reach past his wife and push the door further open to see the other thing.

At first he doubted his own eyes. Then he figured out that the cat had picked up a piece from some neighbor kid’s playset. “It’s just a toy,” he said annoyedly, and reached out. The cat growled, and he drew his hand back.

Esther said, “Wait, I’ll take care of him.” She opened the door wide and stepped out. “Good kitty. Oh, good boy.” She stroked Edgar’s head. He stood, raising his tail, mincing in place, proud and happy to be made a fuss over. After all, he’d brought his kill all the way home just for them. “Let’s give you some food, monster,” and she swept the fifteen–pound tabby up in her arms. He glanced back worriedly at his abandoned kill as she carried him inside.

Ted put one foot out onto the stoop to prop the door open while he scooped up the unicorn. The instant he touched it, he almost flung it away in disgust. “Ugh,” he said. He overcame his revulsion, and brought it closer.

The unicorn was very dead. It had bled from puncture wounds at its throat, and its neck appeared to be broken. It was still warm. Ted took one finger and nudged its legs, noting its unshod hooves, its tufted fetlocks. He prodded its tiny muzzle with his pinkie, pushing up the lip to see its very real teeth and lolling tongue. Carefully, he pressed at the tip of the spiraled golden horn. “Esther,” he said, then realized he’d barely made a sound, cleared his throat and shouted, “Esther, come here!”

“Just a second,” she replied, “I’m giving him his treat.”

That second lasted a million minutes for Ted. Crazy thoughts banged all around in his head like BBs in an engine, tearing up the works.

“All right,” she said, “what?”

He showed her.

They sat on the couch, both hunched over the little corpse, which lay on a china plate on the coffee table. “What if he’s the last one? The last unicorn?” she asked, breaking the silence. Ted frowned at her. “Well?” she said, “We haven’t seen exactly a thousand of the little things prancing around, have we? It could have been the last of its kind.”

“We’ll have to call The Smithsonian.”

“I’ll pay to hear that call. ‘Hello, Smithsonian? My name’s Ted Heubler and I have this unicorn lying on my coffee table.’ Remember what happened in the Thurber story?”

He remained silent, briefly mulling over the term “booby–hatch”.

“Okay, suppose it isn’t the last one,” she suggested. “What if there’s a whole herd of ‘my little ponies’ out there? What are we going to do about Edgar?”

“Edgar?” He glanced at the cat, who solemnly met his gaze, having heard his name. They traded judgmental looks.

“He’s going to keep hunting them,” she explained.

Ted pursed his lips. All of a sudden he smiled. “That’s right,” he said. “That’s right, he will. He will. Won’t you, you good kitty?” He reached over and patted the cat’s head. His wife stared at him as if he’d gone mad; he never talked to the cat like that. “Good kitty,” he said again. He grinned at her. “All we have to do is follow him, don’t you see? The next time he goes out? He’s going to go hunt in the woods again, and we just follow him, right to where he caught this critter.” She blinked. He repeated, “He’s going to keep hunting them.” He stood. “I’ll go get our coats.”

“What if he doesn’t want to go out?” she asked, but
the cat, anticipating things, bounded out of the room and down the stairs to the front door. Esther looked over the railing at him making figure eights on the landing. “Okay, get our coats. I’d better get my hiking boots, too. God knows where we’re going.”

Rain drizzled erratically out of the gray sky. She wore a green vinyl poncho and he an oilcloth coat from Australia that he loved, even though he had to treat it periodically and it made the rest of his coats smell like a dock.

The cat drove them crazy, checking every piece of ground, every bush, on his trek across the various front lawns. “He thinks he owns the whole damn development,” Ted grumbled. At one point a raindrop must have nailed Edgar, because he suddenly bolted as if he’d been electrified and ran for the hills.

The houses edged a large wooded area that wrapped around the hillside. They felt fortunate that it hadn’t been cleared in the traditional manner when the development had been erected. At first they speculated that the developers might have been ecologically conscious, but one of the other neighbors cleared the matter up, explaining that a farmer who ran a dairy on the far side of the woods owned the stretch, and that he’d flatly refused to sell. Esther and Ted were glad of it, frankly, since there was nothing they liked more than the smell from those pines wafting through the windows on a breezy night.

The cat prowled slowly, errantly, pausing to sniff at leaves. At one point, they stood around while he dug himself a little toilet in the loose detritus. He pretended all the while that he didn’t see them, just as they pretended not to be there.

He took them through rusted and forgotten barbed wire, strung like a wicked trap in the dimness of the deeper woods. The trees on the hillside were enormous, without branches for a good twelve feet overhead, and seemed to absorb the sound of their footsteps. The air was full of pine and earth.

After awhile, Ted muttered, “I didn’t know he went this far.”

“I didn’t think the woods did, either.”

They came to where the forest floor leveled off in a narrow valley covered mostly by short, broad-leaved green vegetation. The cat stopped suddenly. He crouched down low, ears flattened. Like two secret agents, his owners pressed back against two trees. “What’s he got?” she hissed.

“I don’t see anything …”

Edgar’s hind end pistoned furiously, and then he pounced. He ripped through the plants at full speed. Something ahead of him sprang for its life in a flash of tan. Spying it, they jumped from hiding and sprinted to keep up. The cat looked like a leopard in a documentary. His prey turned, bounding into view for a second; it was another unicorn all right. Edgar agilely cut back, too, right on the unicorn’s heels. Esther couldn’t believe the gracefulness with which he maneuvered his bulk, the ripple of muscles in his back.

The race led right up against an outcropping of rock. By the time Ted and Esther got there, the cat and his prey had disappeared. They ran around the face of the rock, which was sharp, layered, and black, like an exposed bed of shale. Ted ran around the side and climbed up on top. No cat.

It was Esther who finally made the discovery. She got down among the ground cover and found the opening. “Ted!” she cried, and the urgency in her voice brought him sliding down on his rear.

He crawled up beside her and looked. At the base of the outcropping, there was a hole. It was much like the entrance to a small animal’s den, except that light was pouring out of it.

“What is this?” Ted asked incredulously. He skooched up on his soggy knees and pressed his face against the rock.

Through the hole he could see a broad rolling field of grass, and a beautiful blue sky, and, way off in the distance, a castle.

Withdrawing, he looked at Esther and laughed. “I know,” she said. “I don’t believe it either.” She leaned in for another look, and yanked her head back with a cry as the cat came shooting out of the hole. He blasted through the woods, his tail stiff and big as a boa.

“At least we know where he went,” Ted observed.

Esther was about to lean back down, when the sharp-pointed striped tip of a long stick emerged from the hole, followed a heartbeat later by a miniature galloping destrier and armored knight. The knight reined in the horse and lowered his lance. “Whit ha’e, that’s vanquished the beastie!” He pushed up his visor and looked about himself. “Odd’s bollocks, now! Whit manner of

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place be this?” His attention caught on Esther’s flannel sleeve rising up out of the leaves, and he followed it with his eyes, tilting his head, until he was staring into her eyes, which must have seemed the size of dinner plates from his perspective. His face went pale as milk. His lips trembled. Gently, he jiggled on the reins to turn his horse; surreptitiously raised his lance till it rested against the rondel on his breastplate. “Methinks we’ll gae back inside now, Averil,” he announced to his mount, “before we give the wrong impression that we’re trespassing, which we’re definitely not, gracious, no.”

Ted leaned down. “Wait a second,” he said.

“Ted!” Esther snapped.

The knight shrieked, “Ah, God save me!” and kicked his horse into high speed as the giant made a grab for him. Lance, horse and rider shot back into the hole.

“Damn it!” Ted cursed. He had caught only a fistful of dirt.

“Nice going, dear.”

“Well, you would have let him turn around and get away.”

“He did turn around and get away,” she said acidly. Muttering, Ted stared with her into the hole. A horde of people were approaching across the field from the castle, tiny men and women dressed in strange clothes. The knight rode back to them, then dismounted and began talking frantically to a bearded old man in the lead, while gesturing back toward the hole. More circumspectly thereafter, the crowd drew near the entrance. The bearded leader came forward alone, scowling. He studied the edges of the hole but seemed unaware of Ted and Esther watching from the other side.

“I see,” said the little man. “Do we have young Megistus among us today?”

After some mumbling among them, the crowd pushed forward a skinny, pimply young man wearing tights and a red leather jerkin.

“You did this, didn’t you?” accused the old man. “You stole my book and broached the sky, didn’t you, you walking pottage?”

Megistus put a bold face on it. “Yeah, as I’m apprenticed, ain’t I?”

“Apprenticed? You recreant, the only thing you’re good for is test ammunition for a ballista!” Almost nonchalantly, while he spoke, the old man made a few peculiar gestures with his hands, the shapes of which hung in the air like clouds. Then the clouds began to expand. A few pebbles trickled down the face of the outcropping; one bounced off Ted’s skull. He drew back, saw what was happening, and snatched Esther away just as the whole trembling, sparkling face of rock cracked and thunderously collapsed. The entire hillside flushed with a light like a hundred flashbulbs going off, the glare sizzling up the trees and into the sky like inverted lightning. Shadows shot through the woods as a booming echo rolled through the hills.

“Oh, no!” Esther cried and attempted to scramble back, but he wouldn’t let her go until the last bits of rock had stopped falling. The hole had disappeared. Whole slices of shale had slid out like shelves and buried it. Esther wanted to get picks and shovels. Ted told her she was wasting her time.

“It won’t be there anymore, no matter how far you dig. It’s gone.” She said nothing. Of course he was right. The old man had been a magician and had repaired whatever rent in space the boy had caused. She got up and hugged her husband.

“I’m glad I didn’t see it alone. You wouldn’t have believed me.”

“Let’s try to find Edgar,” he said.

“All right.”

They tramped home in a light rain. The woods seemed to thicken at the approach of evening. A thin mist curled in the valley, but they soon transcended it. They came within sight of their home without a sign of Edgar.

Ted started chuckling. “I can’t help it,” he said when she stared at him, “I’m forever going to see that stupid cat come tearing out of that hole with his fur standing up and that teeny little knight chasing after him.”

Esther thought about it and started laughing with him. “He probably ran right through the kitty door in the garage and into the house.”

“Lucky we had one or he might have gone straight through the wall.” They laughed a little more.

Once inside, they called his name but Edgar didn’t come out. Without removing her coat, Esther went in search of him. Ted fixed himself a drink. “Well,” he crowed, “at least we’ve got ourselves a real live—well, dead—unicorn. We’ve got proof.” He took his drink into the living room. “Yessir, we’ve got that.”

He sat on the couch. For a few moments he just stared at the plate and blinked. Then his face swelled with rage. “Where’s that cat?” he yelled, standing again. “You find him? I’m going to kill him!”

She poked her head out of the den. “What’s wrong now?”

Gregory Frost continued
He picked up the plate and carried it to her. “This is what’s wrong. Look!”
All that remained on the plate were four little hooves and a small gold horn, and a tail. “Oh,” she said.
“He’d better hide, the little sonofabitch. I get my hands on him, I’ll—”
“We left it out on the table. It’s not his fault. Besides, we don’t know he ate it—maybe it just disintegrated.”
“Why do you always take the cat’s side?”
“He can’t defend himself.”
“Oh, so you’re the Perry Mason of the furball set?”
She knew his mood—there was nothing to gain by trying to reason with him. She searched for the cat some more, but he was nowhere to be found. It was as if he’d disappeared along with the unicorn.

Ted rolled over. The light glared at him. His wife lay propped up beside him, neither reading nor trying to disguise the concern tormenting her. He was exasperated with the cat, but knew better than to express it. Instead, he said tenderly, “He’ll come back.”
She wouldn’t look at him, but she replied, “The woods got him. When the big light flashed, it got him.”
“Kind of a leap in intuition, isn’t that?”
“I don’t care. I know.”
He opened his mouth to reply when there came a heavy pounding at the front door. “What was that?” he muttered. They traded looks. The pounding returned, hard enough to shake the foundations.

Ted sat up, grabbed his robe from the chair beside the bed, and stuck his feet in his slippers. “Somebody’s at the door,” he said, declaring the obvious.
He shuffled down the hall, Esther following him, and down the stairs to the split-level landing. Yawning, he peered out through one side window while Esther peered out the other. Neither could see a thing, even after Ted switched on the yard light. Warily, he unlocked the door and opened it a crack. “There’s nobody there,” he said, although there was something odd about the trees across the yard that he couldn’t quite place. He stuck his head out.

“Excuse me,” a voice called. It was a big, deep voice, although it didn’t sound terribly intelligent. The thing about it was, it seemed to be coming from the roof.
Together the two of them stepped out onto the stoop and looked up.
An enormous, bearded face, bigger than the moon, stared down at them. The moonlight outlined the shoul-der and bent back, which they traced down through the dark to the legs, which looked like a pair of extra trees—which, of course, was what Ted had seen but not comprehended. He tried fruitlessly to speak.
The giant said, “I brung ya back the littul kit-te.” He lowered his hand, unfolded log-sized fingers, and Edgar jumped down and fled for his life between them. “I didn’t want he should get lost, ya know?”
“Thank you,” Ted squeaked.
“Yes, thank you very much,” Esther whispered. “We were worried about him. It won’t—won’t happen again.”
“Oh, youse are very welcome, I’m sure.” The giant straightened up, his head vanishing into the sky. His feet emerged from behind the trees and he tramped off across the lawn, leaving wading-pool size depressions in the sodden turf.

Like a fairy couple enclosed in their cocoon of floodlight, Ted and Esther watched as the giant picked his way gingerly between the other houses, then merged into the blackness of the woods. A moment later the trees lit up in a bright silent flash that soared into the sky like an aurora and was gone.

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The Story Behind “The Hole in Edgar’s Hillside”

Sometime in late 1991, I attended a reading-series event at the Borders Bookstore in Philadelphia. I don’t recall who was reading that night—it might have been Tom Purdom or John M. Ford—but Gardner Dozois (at that time editor of Asimov’s Magazine) and Michael Swanwick were on hand, too. We got into a discussion with Gardner about a theme anthology he was co-editing with Jack Dann on Unicorns. He was looking for a 3000 word story for it ASAP as the cutoff date was the following Tuesday. This was Friday night. He went off to talk with someone else and Michael and I stood in the book stacks for another ten minutes and talked out a story, at the end of which Michael said, “You have to write this. It’ll impress the hell out of him because he respects when someone can draft a workmanlike piece on a deadline, like ‘Give me 5000 words on cranberry...”

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Gregory Frost continued

bogs by Wednesday!”

So I went home and wrote a draft of the story before I turned in around 2 a.m. Revised it Saturday and Sunday, and walked the final draft to Gardner’s place on Monday. He liked it so much he bought it on the spot for both *Asimov's Magazine* and for *Unicorns II*. I’d just sold it twice. As Michael had predicted, he was delighted by this. It was just 20 words over his 3,000 word limit. I never attempted this again. And I still have not written the article on cranberry bogs.

-Gregory Frost

About Gregory Frost

Gregory Frost’s most recent novel-length work is the *Shadowbridge* duology from DelRey. It was an ALA Best Fantasy Novel pick. His latest short fiction appears in the September/October *Asimov's Magazine* and in issue #364 of the revamped *Weird Tales*, due on the stands November 16th (and here’s hoping that’s true).

His collaborative novelette with Michael Swanwick, “Lock Up Your Chickens and Daughters, H’ard and Andy Are Come to Town,” won an Asimov Readers Award in 2015. His works have been finalists for the World Fantasy, Stoker, Nebula, Hugo, International Horror Guild and Theodore Sturgeon awards.

*Gift of Useless Man*

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Even on the moon there was trash. From food wrappers to an entire spider-legged descent stage of an ancient lander, foil glinting in the earthlight, the Tranquillity region was littered with detritus. Xiu Li moved among it in a bouncing lope, stopping every so often to stuff a camera case or bag of desiccated faeces into her Digester; such were the joys of the second human on the moon in almost a quarter millennium.

“Anything yet?” said Vao, stiffly posed on the horizon, the banner in her hands emblazoned with the hideous yellow-green logo of Sansobal-Tiaga. “Is this useful, or are you just leaping about?”

“You can’t rush art,” said Li, and could almost hear the giggling from Earth. Everything they said and did was being watched by millions, and she’d said that phrase so often on the ascent that the public had decided it was her catchphrase.

“No, but artists are fair game. Besides, we have more than enough cleaning time lined up for us after this photo shoot.”

Li picked up a crispy wet wipe, squeezed it tentatively, and dropped it into her Digester. “It’s not a photo shoot,” she said, and gazed at the banner-bearing astronaut on the horizon. A gibbous Earth hung huge in the sky. She wished she could do nothing but stare at it, let her suit’s camera record the image and be done with it. But Sansobal-Tiaga had brought her up here to create art, not send back a few shaky photographs that any drone or amateur astronaut could have taken.

Trash art, or wuyongyishu, was usually just a phase young artists went through, capturing the beauty inherent in the ugliness of an electronics graveyard or a woodland choked with plastics. Li had found a way to expand on the concept by photographing the trash most people forgot even existed: the Kessler belt.

Look up at the sky and it seemed as blue as any photograph from the past. But in truth humans had found a way to fill the sky with trash, tens of thousands of tons of it, orbiting the Earth with such speed that it shredded any satellite or spaceship that tried to pass through.

She took many photos of Kessler belt debris before she conceived of her award-winning photo. It had taken Li several months of telescope time and several more tracking orbits before she succeeded: an astronaut’s discarded glove, captured just as it was crossing the penumbra of a half-moon. The result had become an icon of Sansobal-Tiaga’s Kessler Clean Up campaign, almost as recognisable as the crescent-smirk bisecting Sansobal-Tiaga’s logo.

Li had never had much interest in space; to her the Kessler belt had merely been another source of trash with hidden beauty. But that photo made her practically synonymous with Sansobal-Tiaga’s nascent space program, and now that the Kessler belt was no longer impassable, they had come to her. They needed another iconic image, one to symbolise the re-exploration of the solar system, and they wanted her to create it.

She’d made thousands of sketches in the past few months, trying to capture the energy of that glove against the moon. Even when she’d settled on a design she’d had her doubts, but she’d convinced herself that when the time came it would be a simple matter to identify what was wrong and fix it. Now she was standing on the moon, hearing nothing but the bubbling of her suit and her own breathing, and she couldn’t figure out what was wrong. Structurally the composition was competent enough: Vao bearing the Sansobal-Tiaga banner in front of the Earth, flanked on one side by an ancient descent stage and the iconic basket-shaped Digester on the other. But there was still something missing from the tableau.

The only possibility Li could think of was to add a piece of trash in the foreground. But which one? Crumpled insulating blanket? Torn backpack strap?

“Fifteen more minutes,” said the voice of Sansobal-Tiaga from Earth, as crisply as if they were standing beside her. She jumped; it was all too easy to imagine she was alone in this desolate landscape. “You promised it would be done by now.”

“Yeah, hurry up,” said Vao. “My arms are getting tired.”

“Just a little longer,” said Li as she leapt, swooped and landed next to a shovel, speared into the lunar soil and still standing upright after all this time. She pulled it out and pushed it into the Digester, the long handle vanishing as if she was a magician making a pole disappear into a hat. Every scrap of trash she picked up and destroyed was another couple of seconds where she didn’t have to...
think about the photograph.
A hammer. A film magazine as wide as her palm. They were all dusty, and the moondust clung to her suit when she picked them up. Already her silver suit was spattered grey, as if a bored child had started to colour her in with a pencil. She thought she ought to feel dirty, but she didn’t. Inside the suit there were no concrete particulates or smartpollen. She was breathing pure oxygen. This was perhaps the cleanest she’d ever been in her life.

She looked up at the tableau again. Vao was still standing there like a Roman standard-bearer, the smirking Sansobal-Tiaga logo clashing horribly with the sedate landscape around it. Perhaps the scene was too calculated, needing an element of spontaneity. But Li’s works always had an air of calculation, of control. Spontaneity wasn’t what they expected from her.

“Five minutes,” said the voice of Sansobal-Tiaga. As if Li wasn’t watching her oxygen as closely as her Earthly voyeurs. She began to stop picking up things, leaping hastily to every scrap of trash she saw, barely pausing before moving on again. Urine bag. Tripod leg. Spacesuit boot; perhaps as homage to her first photo?

Then something caught her eye that stopped her from moving on. At first she took it to be a stray towel, but when she picked it up she found it was connected to a telescopic pole with a horizontal bar sprouting from the top, stretching the towel flat.

It was a flag. Cosmic rays had long since bleached the colours out of it, leaving it an unbroken sheet of wrinkled nylon. More than one organisation in the distant past had landed rovers and planted flags in the Tranquillity area; she’d need chemical analysis to tell if it was Indian, American, SpaceXheng or any of the others.

Li straightened up and looked at her canvas again. Vao, the lander, the Digester, the banner with the smirking yellow-green Sansobal-Tiaga logo.

She grabbed the flag and began running in long, leaping strides, putting such force into her footfalls that she was irrationally afraid she might push herself off the moon altogether. “Vao, I’ve found it!” she shouted as she ran. “Catch this!”

The flag flew like a drunken javelin over the rocky surface. Vao dropped the Sansobal-Tiaga banner to catch the falling flag in both hands.

“What’s this for?” she asked, a question no doubt being echoed by every watcher on Earth. In Li’s ear the voice of Sansobal-Tiaga began to jabber; she turned the channel off. Ever since she was offered a place on the expedition she knew she would be making history, but this was the first time she truly felt the weight of responsibility that entailed.

Now that the Kessler belt could be traversed, the entire solar system beckoned. The ships to Mars and Venus and Europa were already being constructed, and more would follow. Perhaps it was a good thing that the Kessler belt had locked the Earth away from it all, waiting until ships could be built that wouldn’t spoil these new worlds with trash. Think how few times her ancestors had come to the moon, and they had still managed to leave two hundred tons of debris smeared across the surface. The rest of the solar system had been saved from becoming Earth. But that didn’t mean Sansobal-Tiaga owned the future.

“It’s a clean start,” she said, as the flag devoid of nations fluttered in the non-existent breeze.

THE END

Amazing Stories, November 2016
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About James Harper

James Harper is a member of PSFS and helps run the PSFS book discussion. He has been a panelist/backup reader for the PSFS Hugo Panel for several years.
He writes sporadically about fiction at tentoinfinity.com. ‘Last weekend he discovered the artist Harrison Cady. Imagine The Far Side as illustrated by Sir John Tenniel and you’ve got a good idea of his early newspaper strips.’
The day finally came when I gave up and decided to suicide. Not that I hadn’t considered offing myself before, but heck, I’m an optimist, or at least I’ve always tried to be – as foolish as that can sound even to me.

What is it to be an optimist, anyway? In the face of the ugly realities of this life, I guess it’s the ability to come up with something, anything that might convince you that the day to day deadening drone is just the veneer of the world. That maybe, just maybe, being alive can have meaning beyond the Corp’s bottom line.

I know; that’s stupid.

Do your job, they tell you, get it right, and the rewards will be yours. What rewards? Better food? Longer rec time? More access to VR escape? And if you’re very lucky and last long enough, when this asteroid is played out, you might – just might – get a chance to be relocated to one of the in-system planets they’re terraforming with all this stuff we’re mining.

Didn’t sound worth it to me. Not when I knew I was and would always be an empty shell, alone within myself.

Even so, I tried really hard to believe there might be something more. So I told myself tales to try to fill the hollowness, like my childhood memory of my spacer.

It was back on Earth, when I was pretty young, probably no more than five years old. My mom’s hand slipped from mine, and I was swallowed up by the pathway crowd. All I could see were lots of legs pushing me here and there and everywhere, so I couldn’t get back to the safety of mom’s hand. I should have been terrified, but it turned out to be my first real adventure, all by myself.

That’s when I met her, an honest to goodness spacer, who rescued me and told me about the stars. I’d never seen stars or bare sky or anything outside the warren of buildings that was my entire world.

My space hero had a metal hand, a lopsided beat-up face and a faraway look in her eyes, like all she could see were the stars that were hidden to everyone else on Earth. She lifted me high onto her shoulders so I could see over the crowds that swarmed around me, far above all those legs and feet pushing me around. And while she carried me to the nearest safestop, she told me stories about her stars. Yeah, I liked that, and I never stopped thinking about her, but I never learned her name or anything else about her.

Mom didn’t believe me, that I’d met an authentic spacer. But that didn’t matter, because I knew she was real, and I could hold that memory inside me.

So that’s what I mean. Being an optimist is like finding a treasure invisible to everyone else — like my space hero, like her stars — hidden because the world is so crowded with big, ugly things, and life keeps kicking you around. An optimist can find that treasure when everyone else has given up — even when it seems impossible that anything like it could exist.

I never saw anyone like my spacer again. Not on old crowded Earth where the food riots and water bounties pitted even mothers and daughters against each other – well, at least my mom and me. And not on Zoras 7734 where our tunnels in the seismic ground are more the maw of a coffin than living space.

I’d been on 7734 for about three years cognitive, give or take a Zoras month. Long enough to rate a private room, even though it meant giving back a slew of credits every month. That morning when the lights came on for my shift, I couldn’t drag myself out of bed. I lay there on that hard shelf, in the itchy sack that they give us for bedsheets, and I couldn’t move. My arms, legs and torso felt like separate, disconnected lead weights, as though 7734 were three times Earth gravity, rather than 0.67 EG. My head was swathed in the fog of lights that were too bright, dull walls that were too grey, and yet another drab day that wouldn’t be any different from the hundreds before it and the many thousands to come.

I was already late. Jim Thomas, my supe, was sure to dock me a bunch of credits and give me an extra bit of shitty code revision that would tangle up my day — unless the bastard was feeling particularly “friendly.” But I was* in no mood for his shenanigans. Hell, the Corp already owned my body; what right did Thomas have to consider it one of his job perks?

So I lay there in my bedsack, not wanting to move, knowing that every second I delayed the worse it would be when I logged in late for my shift. And that’s when it finally got through my thick noggin: mom had probably been right all along. There are no hidden treasures, nothing beyond the struggle to stay alive for one more day, then another, then another. Why bother?

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The only answer was to drag myself out of bed, get dressed, and, instead of slumping off to work, grab the lift up to the surface and go for a long walk.

I'd heard it isn’t such a bad death. A stroll under the stars until my air supply dwindles and my body starts shutting down. It'd be like falling asleep, but with no more nightmares and the promise of never again having to get up.

Sounded good to me.

#  

When I first got to 7734, I’d save my credits to fill a couple of air tanks, and go up to the surface every off-shift I could. I'd gaze at the swirling stars, so bright against the black sky, and I’d make up stories about constellations that hadn’t been named yet. After all, I figured, somebody had to do it. Right? Like those ancient Greeks or Egyptians or whoever it was who first used the stars to navigate the human heart. So I’d figured we need those kinds of stories now, to become our myths, our guides to the future.

My first constellation — and I guess my favorite — was a group of 10 stars that I called My Space Hero, because I thought they looked like a woman pointing to some faraway unknown. The Wanderer’s Eyes were two unusually bright stars surrounded by faint glimmers. Baby’s Breath was a shimmering nebula. I found so many stories in the sky swirling around me; all I had to do was listen carefully. I hadn’t gone up to the surface for... oh, I don’t know how long. Initially, I told myself it was just good to know it’s up there, and I could see such wondrous sights any time I wanted. But that wasn’t it. I no longer knew why I’d want to gaze at the stars or create myths or whatever it was I thought I was doing up there. Besides, I was always too tired after my shift to do anything but eat, sometimes have a quick screw and then sleep. Sleep got to be the best part of the day — if I didn't dream.

So I decided that morning I'd go back up to the surface and see my stars one last time. A stroll until I slept forever under my private constellations whose names would die with me.

I reached into the cubbyhole under my bed and grabbed the first clothes my hand touched. Not that there was much to choose from. All the same regulation gear: tough sensible underwear, faded blue shirts and pants. Mine varied only in the patterns of stains or wear. As luck would have it, the top shirt was one that used to belong to Jonesy’s old live-in before he croaked. I didn’t remember his name or what he looked like, but he was a real loser. Still, Jonesy liked him for a while. The night he didn’t come back inside, she bawled her head off, right there in the rec hall, not caring who saw her. Then she got over him, and a new guy moved in with her. She put out the dead man’s stuff at last week’s swap meet, and I traded a stupid old food transport bottle I’d carved up for his shirt. Didn't know if she really wanted the trade. My guess was she was just tired of seeing me dressed in stains and rips.

Anyway, I put on that shirt for the first time that morning. That’s when I found it, when it knocked against my left breast with a sharp thump. An honest-to-goodness photo in a genuine Earth-grown wood frame, about the size of my palm.

The picture was of a woman. I guessed she was about my age, in her thirties; something about her made me feel that it was an honest picture, no rejuve or retouch. Just her, for real. Her head filled the frame so I couldn’t see any hints about where she was or when. And it was a flat picture, not a holo, like hobby antique buffs make. I fooled around with a guy like that in school for a couple of weeks. He once showed me a print he’d made from an old-fashioned computer he'd cobbled together from junk parts, the way they used to be built centuries ago. This was that kind of flat print.

Can you believe it? This dead guy brought something like that in his pack. Geez, when I’d weighed in at the spaceport on Earth, I had to toss my hairbrush to come within regulation mass for liftoff. So what did Jonesy's dead guy throw away at the spaceport when it was either that or this picture? And set in real wood, too, to protect it, I guess. That wood must’ve cost him more credits than I’ve ever had to spend.

The woman in the wood frame smiled at me, and somehow it made me feel the way I did when I was a kid and my spacer lifted me high above the crushing crowd. Not that she looked anything like my spacer. This woman had a smooth, unscarred face and thick, dark, unruly curls. But it was her eyes; they held me, as though she could see me clear across the years and space that separated us. No one except my spacer had ever looked at me like that. I mean really looked right at me, into me. Not mom, not any of my so-called lovers and certainly no one here on 7734. We’re all taught young to let our
eyes slide over people, to avert our gaze rather than en-croach. But my spacer, and now the smiling woman in this picture — they looked, they saw me.

I put the picture back into the skirt pocket where it belonged and headed for the nearest air lock. She'd be good company for my walk.

Funny, but once I decided that it was my last morning, that I was ready to die, I was really okay with it. More than okay; I was looking forward to it. Every nerve in my body seemed to be firing at once, making me feel more alive than I ever remembered being. I even had a sort of bounce in my step that made the photo in my pocket thump pleasantly against my breast.

That was it! I realized with each thump. I wasn't alone anymore.

I'd go up to the surface, and tell this smiling woman about my constellations. It would be a good death, far better than any life I'd ever known.

At the air lock vestibule, I squirmed into a suit, listened as each seam confirmed auto-seal, then swiped my ID to fill the air tanks. All I needed was a half tank, but the airlock wouldn't open unless both were topped up.

"Insufficient credits," the suit's comm blared at me in that high-pitched tinny tone that could scrape the hairs off your neck.

What the blazes?! I was never very good at watching my accounts, but hell, I earned 12,500 a year baseline plus overtime, and it wasn't like I was a spend-thrift. Now this stupid machine was claiming I didn't have 275 to buy some extra air.

I'd be damned if I was going to let a 'bot tell me I couldn't kill myself. I yanked the suit's gloves off and tore open the wall panel, so I could get at the controls. Hell, changing the cost of two tanks of air would be child's play compared to the routine reprogramming I handled daily.

"960 credits charged to your account for unauthorized access. 2,500 credits for attempted embezzlement. Report to your supervisor at once."

All that energy that had surged through my nerves now balled up into a tight nail-gouging fist. I punched and kicked those damned controls, each blow reverberating in my bones.

That lousy piercing disembodied voice screeched, "1,300 credits for vandalism. Cease at once and report to your supervisor."

One last futile kick that had little heart in it generated a parting, "875 additional credits charged to your account for vandalism. Report immediately to your supervisor." I peeled off the suit, left it on the ground where it crumpled at my feet, and clumped away.

What can you do when you're determined to die, but you live anyway despite your best efforts? On the one hand, nothing changes, yet everything does. I had all this pent-up energy and nowhere to take it. So it just looped through me, drilling holes until I felt emptied, vacant.

I walked numbly for some unmeasured time, shuffling one foot in front of the other, moving autono-mically through the same old corridors, sidestepping other meat bodies and mechanical 'bots without seeing them.

Eventually I found my way to my monitoring station for the simple reason there isn't much of a choice of places to go on this claustrophobic asteroid. Thomas sneered then leered at me, but I let my eyes slide away from him. When I tried to walk past him, he clenched my upper arm and hissed in my ear, "Just got a report on you, Smith. Shit, woman! Never took you for a saboteur. Vandalism? Embezzlement?" He liked the sound of those two words and drew them out so his stinking hot breath sprayed my neck and cheek. "Your ass is going to be glued to that seat for a dead man's age if you ever hope to clear your credit deficit. Add 97 credits for being late and 134 for making my team look bad." Before he let go, he shoved me toward my station, then smirked when I stumbled.

The first day I had arrived on 7734, I had been assigned to monitor Extractor J23-987, and that's what I've been stuck doing every day since. To my left sits the schlump who keeps an eye on Tunneler J23-986. On my other side is the handler for Sorter J23-988. That's how it is up and down our row of stations — the crew for our particular bore sitting in the order that our mining machines follow into 7734's dark underworld. All surrounded by dozens of rows of other crews, in a low-ceiling room too large to fill with anything but grunts and curses.

Like everyone else, I stare at readouts hour after hour. If they vary more than 5% from the acceptable efficiency range, I punch in the code for a troubleshoot routine. It's sort of a relief when that fails, when the 'bot can't deal with an unexpected incident, like an earthquake or
tunnel collapse. That’s when I get to justify my existence on this damned rock by creating the kind of oblique code only our irrational human minds can concoct. If I’m lucky, it’s a real crisis that paralyzes the ‘bot, and I get to redefine its primary instructions to teach it how to handle the new situation. But that causes problems all down the bore, and I get blamed for reducing the whole crew’s productivity and the resulting lost credits.

You quickly learned that the way to survive was by not caring, by not noticing when the guy to the left or right screamed holy murder at his or her machine, by sinking deep into a grey fog where nothing could touch you.

The day I failed to kill myself was no different from any other. I fell back into the same old routine like the organic ‘bot the Corp demanded I be. No immediate mishaps required attention, so my mind wandered, adding up the hours I would need to clear my debt.

If I signed up for lots of overtime, and if I were very careful, avoided getting fines, didn’t spend any credits on extra food or rec time, and gave up my private room, maybe, just maybe I could get back up to zero in about a year and a half. Probably more. If I put up with Thomas’ friendly moods, I might cut it by a month or two. Then, if I worked and saved at the same pace, I just might have enough credits for my long walk in another half year. Realistically, it would be at least two years, maybe even three before I could shuck this life.

That really burned me — that the Corp owned me so solidly that I had to work just for the right to die. And to make matters worse, Thomas was leering at me again with that lopsided grin that meant he was about to make a move.

I guess I couldn’t figure out some other way to off myself, but I really wanted to see my stars just one more time before the end. Stupid, right? I mean, what difference could that make? But once I got the idea in my noggin, I couldn’t stop picturing sitting on some rock on the surface and telling my stories to the woman in the picture, just like my space hero once told me.

During a piss break, I hid in a toilet cubicle so I could take the picture out and look at it. Her smile broke something inside me, like a foot kicking in a door in my gut. But instead of wanting to puke, I felt a warmth that bubbled through those holes that my failed death had drilled into me.

It was those eyes of hers, looking right out of the picture at me. Somehow, they changed things, because she saw me. Yeah, I know, she never knew me, not to look at. And if she could’ve ever seen me, probably wouldn’t have noticed me, not for real. Still, I couldn’t help wondering what she might have said, what she would have seen if she were truly looking at me.

Then I realized I had things turned upside down. I was the one who was seeing her. Or at least, her picture. Seeing her made me notice other things too. Like when I got back to my station from the toilet, for some crazy reason, I saw the operators on either side of me. I mean, really saw them for the first time, as more than meat bods handling the machines closest to mine.

The Tunneler was hunched over, shaped like a question mark. Her long straggly brown hair curtain her pale sallow face, so she could see only straight ahead, and no one could pry into her private world. Were her eyes as glassy as mine usually felt?

The Sorter’s thick lips were scabby with nervous bite marks. His dark skin had a cloudy ash overtone. His grunts came out squeaky, as though he was trying to swallow his frustration but it forced its way out anyway.

The strange thing was that seeing them for real didn’t depress me further. Not when I felt the small rectangle in my breast pocket.

A week later, when my clothes were too dirty even for me, I moved the picture to a cleaner shirt. I carried it everywhere I went. I’d take her out and look at her when I was alone. It made things feel... I don’t know what... just not as bad as before. It’s really something, how heavy a real treasure can be, even one as small as that picture, when you’re weighing out your life and trying to tip the balance away from everything and everyone that wants to drag you down. Yeah, a smile can be like that.

I ached to know more about her. Not only because her smile was so alive, but realizing how much she’d meant to someone. A man had loved her so much that he couldn’t live without her picture. Why did he leave her behind? Was she dead? Or was she with someone else, and all this guy could do was dream of her? Maybe it got so painful, he finally left Earth, and he brought this picture, so he could imagine her smile was for him alone.

Okay, I’m not a kid. I know I’m making up fairy tales about her and him. But I had to somehow fill the not knowing. How else could I imagine someone ever loving me like that? And, yeah, the more I looked at the picture, the more I wanted whatever it was that she’d had
that had made her smile like that.

Now, to look at me, you wouldn't believe I had no luck with men. I mean, I'm not bad looking, right? At 39, I've still got curves in the right places. Sure, I've lost lots of weight; mass loss is unavoidable out here. But my breasts still perk up instead of fall. The lesser gravity's got to help with that. My face might not be pretty by Earth standards, with eyes that are too big, too brown and too sure. I never learned to flutter my eyelashes and talk softly like the popular girls back home. But heck, I'm one of the more attractive ones here. Or so the guys told me when they were putting the move on me.

It didn't help that the scums out here were real losers. Sure, I tried a few, but only for a tumble, not for a live-in. What I didn't get was no one here wanted to move in with me. They talked a good tale until we had our sex. Then they moved on. Maybe that was my fault. I never knew that dead guy was anything but a loser. But looking at my smiler, I realized he must have had something. I'd hold the picture and wish I could remember his face, so I could understand what I'd missed when I had looked at him.

I needed to know about that guy, and the only person I could ask was Jonesy.

I'd known Jonesy since the spaceport. We'd arrived on 7734 in the same shipment, and were thrown together a lot during our orientation. We even bunked in the same dorm for a while, and sometimes we'd chat. About nothing. Just the kind of noise you share when you're tired of talking to yourself, and the person in front of you is a familiar sort. I suppose you'd say she was my friend, as much as you could be friends with anyone on 7734. The Corp found ways to keep us too busy for anything like a real friendship. Still, I guess it'd have stuck my neck out for Jonesy, if she needed me to. And, yeah, I suppose I knew she might've done the same for me, if I really, really needed it. But that wouldn't've meant I'd have had to ask her, and I had a hard time asking anyone for anything.

Anyway, soon after I found the picture in the dead guy's shirt, I steeled myself to ask Jonesy about the man who'd owned it. Often as not, I'd sit with Jonesy in the cafeteria, if our shifts coincided, and if she wasn't in the honeymoon phase of a new guy. So I sat at the opposite side of the cafeteria. She ended up punching him in the nose and stomping away. Never did find out why.

A few days later, Jonesy was alone having dinner when I came into the cafeteria for mine. Well, she wasn't really alone. The guys were hovering as usual, but she was sitting at a small table for two, and a bunch of them were fighting over who'd get the other chair. I filled up a tray and slipped into the seat opposite her before any of the men could.

"Hey, Smith, looking good," she said, as she checked out my garb and saw nothing really out of place or too dirty.

"Yeah, well, I'm trying, Jonesy."

"Sure can tell." She nodded while she speared a piece of indistinguishable preformed protein that was supposed to look like a slab of meat. "Why? Got a new lover or something?"

"No, nobody special. But you never can tell. I mean, maybe I haven't given these guys a chance." I gestured to the room full of losers, including the ones who were still - continued p. 86 -
fighting over her even though I had taken the seat. “Like that fella you had. What was his name?”

“Well, yeah. Al was special.” Her voice actually cracked saying his name.

“I played with the lumpy goo that was supposed to remind me of macaroni and cheese. At least, it was something to do, while pretending I didn’t care what she said.

“Can’t really explain it.” Her head was turned toward me, but her eyes focused on something not there in the room. “Al was a bit of a mystery,” she said in a soft, dreamy voice. “Much smarter than the average asshole around here. Smart enough to get posted anywhere he wanted. So, why’d he choose this hellhole? And, why wasn’t he running it?”

“If he was so smart, why’d he suicide?” I asked her.

“I think you know the rules; 7734’s a clean slate for all of us. The only person who could’ve told you Al’s history is Al, and he’s dead.” Her voice was gentle, in a way I’d never heard it before. “The only story I have the right to tell you is my own, and it starts with Al. If you want to hear that one, you’ll have to come with me to my room. Only there can I tell it.”

At the end of the meal, I followed Jonesy through the rock-blast corridors to her cubicle. When she opened the door and let me walk in ahead of her, I couldn’t believe my eyes. It didn’t look anything like the bare, boring cells we all have. The walls were painted with panoramas of an Earth I’d never seen. Mostly trees and meadows, with blue skies, but also a house with a face looking out through a window at birds flying on the ceiling. That face was my smiler, the woman in the photo. But the birds were wild, fantastical creatures, like I’d never imagined, except maybe in dreams. I’d forgotten that so many colors could exist, could really be seen by the human eye, certainly not in my grey life.

“Al did it,” she said without me asking. “He used almost dry surplus pigments from maintenance with other stuff he got in trade. He even blended in leftover food and other trash to make the colors.”
She pointed at the ceiling where she'd hung my carved bottle from the luminant panel. When she touched the bottle to make it swing, the dancing light made the flowers seem to move as though there was a breeze, and I could swear that a couple of the birds flapped their wings. Geez! Did I create that?

She gestured for me to sit on a chair that was covered with patched-together pieces of old clothing, so it looked much more comfortable than its hard frame was ever meant to be. When I sat down, I realized that under the cloth it was just like my regulation chair. All the wrong angles for a human body, designed instead to come apart easily and stack neatly. Still, it felt good to sit on it and know someone had found a way to make it different, make it her own.

Jonesy sat on her oversized bed; I guess her series of live-ins had helped with extra credits to pay for it. She reached for a sack, pulled pieces of different materials from it, and began to sew them together, while she talked to me.

"Smith, I was as dead inside as they tell us we are when I met Al, dead as you were before you got that picture. But you're not any more, are you?"

I stared at her. I didn't know how to answer.

"Al did that to people... made them feel alive," she explained while she sewed. "That's why I'll never believe he did it on purpose... suicided. He wasn't that stupid, that deadened, the way the guys are who take that walk." She pointed at the wall opposite her where a child played with a small furry animal in a field of tall green and gold grasses. "I mean, look at all this. How could the man who painted these things want to die? He was too full of life, too excited about finding out what might happen next."

"Wha? ... Why?" I stammered, not knowing how to form the questions that swarmed in my head. I looked around, but I couldn't take it all in. It was like trying to see the stars when you're a small kid surrounded by legs.

"Like I said before, Smith, I can't tell you about Al, except that he was my beginning. After meeting him, I knew that I didn't really leave everything behind on Earth, because I brought myself here, the heart that is me. As long as I know that, the Corp has no power over me to make me less than I am." She put down her sewing and looked me in the eye... I mean really deep, so I couldn't turn away. Like she held me in her grip and wouldn't let go 'til she was finished with me.

"Look around us, at Al's painting... and your jug, too. What 'bot could do that? Al told me that they used to try to program robots to make art, but it came out dull, repetitive and predictable. They were missing the juice, the 'creative chaos' is what Al called it."

"Creative chaos?"

"Yeah. It's that stuff in us that they try to drive out or dry up, to make us good reliable meat 'bots. The part of us that can't be programmed, because you never really know what you're going to think of next, or want to do, or how you'll react. It's why we make mistakes, because we're only human. But it's also how we make art, or jokes, or love. That's what Al taught me... he reminded me how to be human again. And what that picture in your pocket taught you."

I didn't realize I was crying until I tasted tears on my lips. But I was smiling too. I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs. Instead, I laughed and laughed and laughed, until my stomach ached and my head buzzed.

We talked late into the off-shift, until eventually we fell asleep curled into each other on that oversized bed. I didn't learn anything more about Al or my smiler. But when I woke up the next morning in that room, surrounded by the life that had poured out of him onto Jonesy's walls and into both our hearts, I knew she was right about Al. Nah, he couldn't have suicided. Maybe, it had to do with his creative chaos, with the fact that he was so fully, truly human. Maybe, he just made a mistake.

Or, did someone make that mistake for him? #

Things didn't turn around right away after that evening with Jonesy. Heck, how could it? I was still stuck on the treadmill of 7734, following the same deadening routines as always, and now buried under a mountain of debt that made me even more a slave to the Corp.

But deep inside, I could feel a kernel of something pushing at me, making me think about things that I'd never considered before. And it grew little by little. I couldn't avoid the hard realities; I had to give up my private room. I dreaded returning to the dorm where you're nothing more than one of the many processed bods slotted into Corp pegholes even when you sleep. But I had no choice if I ever planned to get out from under my debt.

Then Jonesy came up with the suggestion that I move in with her.

A part of me loved the idea. Imagine living in - continued p. 88 -
Al’s painted room! But I was worried about what the cost would be. I mean, she had to have something she wanted to get out of it. And that oversized bed wasn’t very subtle.

But would that be so bad?
I couldn’t stop thinking about what it had been like sharing that bed with Jonesy, how she held me until my tears dried up and how the sleep we shared was deeper, softer than any I had ever known.

In the end, I moved in with Jonesy, because it was that or the dorm. And I could always walk away if it got too weird. Besides, we were on different shift schedules which meant I’d have to deal with her only every few days.

The sex was pretty good. Heck, she understood a woman’s body better than any man could, or at least any man I’ve ever known. But it was our talks that made the real difference. That and when she sat quietly sewing her pieced together cloths, giving me the space to think. At one point, she traded a patchwork shirt she’d made for another food transport bottle. After that, I carved while she sewed. I was a really slow carver, because I preferred losing myself in Al’s painting, and making up stories about what I saw.

Like the tale of the young girl in the tall grasses. I imagined that she was chasing a star that had fallen to earth. When she finally caught it, she held it to her heart, and it burrowed into her.

The stories grew until I couldn’t keep them inside any more. Not even when we sat in the rec hall which we did more and more. I guess our honeymoon phase was over.

By then I knew the painting so well that I could see it in my mind wherever I was, just like my spacer who could see stars hidden to everyone else.

Jonesy and I had a favorite quiet corner in the rec hall where we would sit. While she sewed, I played at carving, and I told her my stories. I kept my voice low, because the tales were for us alone, creating a cocoon around us that was as warm as that deep sleep we had shared that first night.

I guess that’s why I didn’t really pay attention when folks moved some chairs closer to us, then more of them closer still. Not until the night I told Jonesy a story about My Space Hero constellation.

A palpable silence formed around us as I spoke, almost as though our cocoon had become a living, growing creature made of about eighteen people breathing in concert with my words.

“…and when I looked up one last time, I saw her stars. No longer hidden from view, they formed a gateway in the dark expanse. Then she was gone, beyond the stars where her dreams carried her. Maybe someday I’ll follow her.”

I paused, resting in the quiet of my finished tale as I usually did. But it was broken by a sigh behind me to my left. Then a soft sob further back, to my right. And a “yes!” whispered almost like a gasp from behind Jonesy.

The unexpected sounds pulled me outward to gaze around me. Mostly men, but some women too, sat looking at me, directly at me, like they were absorbing me into themselves. When our eyes met they didn’t turn away. Several wore patchwork shirts. I guess Jonesy had been busy trading away her put-together cloths. But I noticed that some of the crowd around us were sewing stuff, too; others were carving.

One was using a utility knife to scratch a small broken plex slab. I realized with a jolt that it was the scabby-lipped Sorter who sat next to me daily, but his lips were no longer raw and broken, and his dark skin shone with life. When did that happen? Why did it bother me that I hadn’t noticed the change in him? He was nobody to me.

When he saw me watching him, he held the plex up so I could see he was etching a face. At first, I thought it was my smiler he was drawing. Then I looked closer, and it was me! Not me as I had always been, but the me I would have liked to dream myself to be.

“I’ve never seen stars,” he said. “I never knew I wanted to see them.” I was surprised that his voice was mellow, wistful, nothing like the squeaky grunts that had been all I’d ever heard from him when he fought with his machine.

From the other side of the jumbled circle, another guy piped up. “I saw them once, on the surface, but I didn’t understand. All those points of light… they meant nothing.” He put down his sewing and closed his eyes for a moment. “I didn’t hear them, not the way you do Smith.” When he opened his eyes to look at me, they burned. I wasn’t sure if he was angry or sad. “How come they tell you stories like that, but not me, not any of us?”

What could I say? All I wanted right then was to hide, to bury my stories deep inside where no one would ever hear them again. But I was surrounded by that swarm of chairs pulled close around me, and all those
people looking at me. Geez, I didn't have any answers. I
didn't even know what the questions should be.

“It’s like Watkins said… we didn’t know to want
it.” The man who said that pointed at the Sorter from
my team.

Watkins and I had worked side by side for three
years, and I had never known his name. Never asked
anything about him. He grinned but said nothing more;
he just bent down to work some more on his plex etch-
ing.

“Yeah. How’d they do that?” asked a woman
with the shaved head of a reclamation worker. “How’d
they make us stop wanting?”

“Because we let them.” Jonesy stared at me, al-
most as though it were a dare or maybe a promise. “But
we want now.”


Suddenly, several people were talking back and
forth, the way I never saw any group chatter, not since
coming to 7734. So many voices that I could hear only
snippets coming from all directions.

“How can we know what we want, if we’ve never
had it?”

“Like Watkins not knowing to go look at the
stars.”

“Or wanting to hear Smith’s stories.”

“Or make my own… stories and stars.”

“You know the Corp isn’t going to like this,” one
guy warned, and it turned everything on its head, tearing
our cocoon apart, letting in cold reality. “We’re gonna be
branded troublemakers if we don’t watch out.”

“Why? For telling stories, sewing, carving? That’s
stupid.”

“For talking, dreaming, thinking for ourselves.”

“People have disappeared for less.”

Jonesy shuddered when she heard that last one. I
knew what she was thinking, because I was thinking the
same thing… Al. If he didn’t suicide, what did happen?

One by one the same folks who were so animat-
ed and happy to be chattering together slunk away. Their
eyes down, no longer looking at each other, their shoul-
ders hunched. I didn’t blame them, I felt the same way.

For a few moments, I had thought maybe, just
maybe we could get out from under the Corp’s fist, be
something more than meat 'bots. But naw, I realized,
that would never happen.

Jonesy and I gathered our stuff and shuffled back
toward our room. Watkins caught up with us. Without
a word, he handed me the plex portrait, then took off.

Darn if he didn’t have a bounce in his step.

The next day started out much like any other,
except that Watkins was late signing in. I was busy with
a breakdown, coaxing my Extractor with some new code
to get it to ignore the cave-in that blocked it in all direc-
tions except backward. So I didn’t see how the trouble
started. Not until I heard our supe Thomas hissing at
Watkins.

“Docked 101 credits for being late. 132 credits
for non-reg clothes.”

Thomas was tugging hard at Watkins’ patchwork
shirt. What the hell did he think he was doing wearing
that damn thing to work?

Even when Thomas ripped the shirt, Watkins
just smiled, and that got Thomas more steamed.

“Insubordination, too, huh, Watkins? Another
187 credits.” He clenched Watkins’ arm and put his oth-
er fist in the man’s face. “I’d wipe that grin off your face
if you know what’s good for you. The Corp don’t waste
resources on troublemakers. All I gotta do is report you.”

Thomas must have been really riled. I’d nev-
er heard anyone say it out loud like that. I mean, was
he really saying what it sounded like? Would he really
arrange to “disappear” Watkins? Again, I thought of Al,
and something in me just cracked.

I jumped up from my bench. But a bunch of
other people got to Thomas before me, surrounding
him, pulling him off Watkins. What had gotten into
them? Everyone knows the only way to survive is to
stay quiet, unnoticed, whatever happens. Instead, they
swarmed around him, yammering all at once.

“Get your grubby hands off him, Thomas!”

“What’s it to you what he wears?”

“Big mouth, little man.”

“If you know what’s good for
you, you won’t say
a word about this to nobody, Thomas.”

“Yeah, Corp ass-wipers can disappear too, ya
know.”

Freed from Thomas’s grip, Watkins strolled to his
station, assessed the situation in our bore and coded his
Sorter to help my Extractor dig out.

It was over as quickly as it had started. Everyone
got down to work. Thomas didn’t bother anyone else all
day, but I worried what he was inputting into his sys-
tem. Was he reporting all of us? Or did he fear that as
our supe, he’d be blamed for the lost productivity if too
many of us were reported as unsuitable.

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Sally Wiener Grotta continued

Heck, the loss of one bad egg – an Al or someone like him – might be discounted as suicide. But now that a group of us was asking questions, watching, seeing, talking – well, that’s got to make it harder for them, right?

The following morning, I decided to wear one of Jonesy’s patchwork shirts to work. I’m not sure why I did it. Maybe, I was just tired of Thomas’s jibes and demands, and I wanted to rub his nose in it. Yeah, I know, a stupid thing to do.

The minute I signed in, Thomas grabbed me.

“Smith, you’re cooked!”

But he didn’t get to say or do anything else to me, because Watkins came in next, wearing the same shirt as yesterday, with the rip fixed. Our bore’s Tunneler had on short cut-off pants. Someone from another team had a strange multi-colored woven pulldown. Suddenly, everyone poured in, not one by one, but as a crowd. Almost all our bore and a bunch of bods from other bores, many wearing non-reg clothes of one sort or another. And they were noisy, talking and laughing at how silly we all looked.

“Shut up, shut up, shut…! Troublemakers! Saboteurs! You’re on report…!” Thomas yelled, but we were louder and could pretend to not hear him.

You should have seen him, all red-faced and sputtering curses, turning round and round trying to focus on individuals and seeing only the crazy, chattering crowd.

Watkins took Thomas gently by the shoulder and guided him to his station.

Watkins is one strange guy. I mean, he was smiling the whole time, but he wasn’t poking fun at Thomas. Just helping him get out of the way, settling him in to his work. Did Watkins care or was he just making sure Thomas didn’t cause problems?

Or was it his way of trying to force at least this little corner of the Corp to accept a new normal, whatever that might be?

No way I could believe it would be that easy. Thomas might be subdued for the moment by our derailing of his routine. That didn’t really mean we’d broken him or the Corp’s stranglehold over us. Just that, for this one day, folks around me were smiling at each other. Even the Tunneler to my left (her name’s Jensen) looked out from under her curtain of hair and sat just a bit taller. Whatever punishments the Corp would throw at us, we’d reclaimed something of our own. Damn the repercussions!

As I returned to work, I glanced over at Watkins who winked when he noticed me looking. Yeah, I liked that guy’s style. Who would have thought? Maybe someday I would show him Al’s painted room. I knew Jonesy would be okay with that.

#

Eventually, I did return to the surface, sometimes with Jonesy and Watkins by my side. Always with others, different others every time. Not that I got out from under that huge debt any time soon. The Corp made sure of that by fining me at every real or trumped-up infraction. But folks wanted to see what I saw, hear my stories about the stars and what might be beyond this existence. They even made up their own, not just stories, but ideas and plans for the future. So they got together to pay for my air tanks, and we gathered on the surface.

Of course, my smiler came too, hidden in my breast pocket where she belonged. Like a constellation snuggled against my heart.

So, yeah, I am an optimist, and damned proud of it. And you know what? It looks like it might be contagious.

– END –

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About Sally Wiener Grotta

Sally Wiener Grotta is an award-winning author, photographer and speaker. Her numerous books include The Winter Boy (a Locus Magazine’s 2015 Recommended Read) and Jo Joe (a Jewish Book Council Network book). Her story “One Widow’s Healing” won a 2100 Health Odyssey award from Thomas Jefferson Hospital in 2019. Her hundreds of stories, columns and essays have appeared in scores of magazines, newspapers and journals. Sally has traveled on assignment throughout the world to all the continents (including three trips to Antarctica), plus many exotic islands (such as Papua New Guinea and Madagascar), covering a wide diversity of cultures and traditions. Her far-ranging experiences flavor her stories and presentations with a sense of wonder and otherliness, plus a healthy dose of common sense. A member of SFWA and The Authors Guild, Sally is co-curator of the Galactic Philadelphia author reading series and co-chair of The Authors Guild Philadelphia Chapter. (Sally-WienerGrotta.com)

The Shadow of the Unattained: The Letters of George Sterling and Clark Ashton Smith

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Six Shorts

by Abby Cohen

Chilly Hallway

The black cat is staring at me. I stare back. There’s nothing else to do, after all. I’m stuck in this hallway waiting. It feels like I’ve been waiting for a long time. I am starting to wonder if I’ve been forgotten. I fidget a little. I would like to sit down, but the only chairs look fragile and possibly historic. I stand and look around. Above me stares down an old portrait of the founding father of the family, a ruthless baron of industry who made his pile of money on the breaking backs of the people, quite literally in a few cases. He sits in his formal living room glaring balefully at the portrait painter, hands with brass knuckle rings holding the edge of a table. In the background there’s a cat who looks like the same cat staring at me. An ancestor presumably. Not this cat of course. But it does look eerily like the same cat. I shift uneasily and look away. I look back at the cat in the picture and the one perched on the mantelpiece. I hope they come to get me soon.

Halloween In The Vegetable Garden

The vegetables in the garden patch began to murmur among themselves. The Great Pumpkin is a silly story from the brain of Charles Schulz. But the fact is on Halloween, the garden comes to life. The herbs that we think of growing for flavor in soups and stews begin to wave their leaves where there is no breeze to propel them. They giggle and gossip among themselves, the low rumble of the basil adding a bass note among the light trills of the mint and cilantro. The tomatoes and zucchini roll back and forth playing little games of bocce. Not very strenuous games. After all, they must all be back to normal in the morning. This is only for one night. In the morning they must all be back as they were the day before, unbruised and still attached to their respective vines. Still, they do like to have fun for this one night.

The pumpkins rumble about being the stars of Halloween, somewhat hollowly. After all, they haven’t been picked to be jack-o’lanterns. Everything else is second best to a pumpkin. Maybe they’ll still be picked to be part of some fall decorations. Or some old-fashioned soul will actually make homemade pie with the guts and then roast and salt the seeds. They sigh and rumble. Just for tonight they are still the stars. Might as well rub it in while they can.

The Enormous Zucchini

The enormous zucchini grew in the garden. At first it was funny. Thoughts of obscene YouTube videos danced in her head. Potential revivals of ancient Greek comedies where men running around the stage hitting each other with giant phalluses was considered the height of humor. If you thought that sort of thing started with Black Adder or Benny Hill you would be wrong.

It just kept getting bigger. She contemplated carving a message in it and roasting and serving it like the pumpkin in Little Men. But then it got bigger.

It was a shame people didn’t take things to the county fair anymore. At least not in her tidy little suburb.

But the whole thing was very odd. The seed packet had declared these to be ordinary sized squash. This one was clearly a mutant. All its relatives lay there in the garden looking microscopic in comparison.

She began to feel like one of the teenagers in the beginning of The Blob movie. She had a monster growing in her backyard and no one would believer her. Not even her husband, who sadly, looked nothing like a young Steve McQueen. Or even the way her spouse had looked back when they were both young and silly enough to think bells going off with nothing there was a good reason to get married.

She sighed again and stared out the window. She could swear she saw ripples moving back and forth inside the thing. She should get a knife and cut it into pieces but now she was afraid of what would happen if she tried.

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The Girl With Superman Eyes

by Abby Cohen

She had Superman eyes. It's what she called it. But different. Superman had x-ray vision and heat vision but not like this. Her eyes flamed. Literally. Flames shot out at things. It took forever to learn control. When she was a baby, her parents had a special water bed where she could float in water and not set anything on fire but not drown. Until they had it worked out they had to hire special baby sitters so that day and night someone held her facing the lake. The neighbors had gotten used to the shooting flames after a bit and were sad when it ended. They missed the evening pyrotechnical display.

Now she was 15 and almost grown, but her parents were really nervous about letting her date anybody. It was humiliating. She was about to turn 16 and she'd never been kissed. But her parents were sure her control wasn't that good yet, and if she set someone on fire, she'd be so traumatized that she'd never let herself get close to anyone again. It was totally annoying. They wanted to fix her up with some distant cousin who was a troll just to be safe. Some totally dumb rock jock who had about 1 idea an hour. But safe.

She walked along the circumference of the lake muttering to herself and kicking little pebbles along the pathway. 16 years old next month! Well anyway at least cousin Slate was cute. It would be something to brag about at school anyway. She sighed deeply, kicking pebbles. It could be worse, she supposed. Slate's big brother Granite was pitted with permanent acne scars. His parents kept debating about whether to get them smoothed down and couldn't make a decision. At the rate they were going, Granite would be able to decide for himself when he turned 21 and the rest of the family could shut up about it. Or not. They could go on rehearsing it forever about how it should have been done when he was younger, whether he got it done or not. Nothing was ever really over in her family. Look at the way they kept talking about the time she set the porch on fire. She was only 3 years old, for crying out loud. Nothing like that had happened lately. And poor cousin Windy who accidentally knocked down some neighbor's silo when she was 5 and they kept talking about that. And Windy was old. She was 32 last Halloween and nobody ever let that go either. She sighed. She wondered if all families were like this. She thought again about Slate's big hard muscles and his big hard skull where hardly anything ever went in and sighed again. It wouldn't be all bad. All the girls at school would be really jealous. She kicked the pebbles and meandered toward home.

The Sound Was Faint But Definitely There

by Abby Cohen

The sound was faint but definitely there. It was hard to define. There were rustles coming from corners of the room, but nothing there when she looked. Not quite like the crinkling of leaves. More like the rustling of ladies' dresses. Which was even more odd. Ladies never wore dresses like that anymore. Except to awards ceremonies or fancy fundraisers. And less and less even there. And this was not that sort of place in any case. Just a little old house that had never seen anything fancy in its whole life. No lady with wealth had ever set foot in here. It had always been the domain of the working class. Both parents factory workers or a lady renting out the spare bedrooms for room and board. Maybe even putting the odd stray in the basement for a lesser sum of money. Would those sorts of women have had dresses that rustled like this? And why was she thinking about it? It must be an odd noise coming from the ventilation system. Some piece of paper stuck against a duct was making that whispery sound. It had to be. After all, she was a realtor and a realist. While she didn't believe in ghosts, she knew some people did. She had researched and no one had died here. No appalling crime had ever happened in this house.

But still this faint little noise continued. She whirled about her and looked again. She decided to wait outside for the client.
What’s Behind the Door?

by Abby Cohen

What’s behind the door? Why is it closed? Is there something on the other side people are hiding? Or someone? A fugitive from justice or the law—not always the same thing. A refugee from a bad marriage, bad parents, a bad life? What’s behind that door? Illegally gotten gains, paintings displaying a horrifying inner life, science experiments beyond all acceptable codes of ethics?

What’s behind that door, why is it closed? To keep us out. Some outcast of the freak shows at the circuses we no longer have. Someone who simply can’t cope with human contact and has arranged for his/her whole life through the mail and meals through a slot on the door.

What’s behind that door? Why is it closed? A visitor from outer space who controls the people of this house. Or are helping voluntarily keep it safe from the government or corporations who might do ghastly experiments on it.

What’s behind the door? Why is it closed? It might be mundane. Mounds of dirty laundry and so forth. But maybe not.

What is behind that door? Why is it closed?

About Abby Cohen

Abby Cohen was the owner of Abby’s Bookcase, a used bookstore, for 25 years. Currently, she can be found at Steel City’s Open Mike performing every Thursday and every 4th Sunday at their spoken word open mike run by the Affinity Colab. Some of her work has appeared in the Affinity CoLab online magazine. Her memoir piece, Seven Scenes From My Life appears in an anthology titled queerbook available at Philly Aids Thrift @ Giovanni’s Room. She is on the board of the Creative Light Factory, a writer’s room in Spring City. She encourages people to come visit the Creative Light Factory online or in person and join in the various writing and creative workshops being offered. Her latest addiction is joining too many book clubs.

Abby will appear on Friday afternoon in Philcon’s filk program.
Sister Miriam hated autumn. She knew the good Lord saw fit to color the trees in a blaze of red, yellow and orange, but so did He color the flames of Hell. It was appropriate, a warning to all good Christians. Halloween was coming, and she hated Halloween, the Devil’s own holiday, and nothing holy about it.

Miriam trudged over to the bus stop, lugging her “Repent, Sinners, or Suffer Everlasting Torment” sandwich board. She had added biblical verses to the backside board, exhorting the lost souls to accept Jesus as their savior. When she got on the bus, dropped token and forty cents into the box, and was handed her transfer, she blessed the driver. This one didn’t say thank you. He would roast, oh, sweet Jesus, he would roast. She could tell which ones would fail on Judgment Day.

The bus took her, as always, to the elevated train, the transfer bought her passage, and she rode above ground until the train descended into the tunnel beneath Center City Philadelphia and brought her to 15th Street. Her major audience awaited her there, those sinful commuters, leaving their jobs, going home for the day, thinking of mortal concerns and pleasures and nothing more. Well, when she finished with them, they might open up the bible instead of turning on the TV.

She got off the train and positioned the sandwich board around her body as people pushed by her, boarding the train. Miriam was feeling particularly fine about her calling. That morning, as she read her own bible, opening it randomly to see God’s special message for her, the passage had blared: “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.”

Miriam needed no microphone or bullhorn. The noise she was capable of making was well-known in Center City. And they couldn’t stop her. She was in the Lord’s service.

She took a deep, lung-stretching breath, and her voice covered the enclosed station like a net seeking fish.

“YOU’RE ALL GOING TO HELL!”

* * *

When the fish—or commuters—dwindled to a trickle, Miriam crossed the overpass to the other side of the tracks. The train pulled in, half-empty at 7:00 p.m. Miriam stepped in, took off her sandwich board, and sat down. At 2nd Street, a young white man came on board and leaned near the door, ignoring the available seats. He spoke out in a moderate, calm voice. “Excuse me, people. What would you say if I told you I’ve brought a bomb on this train, right here in my knapsack?”

Miriam checked him out: olive green pants, white short-sleeved shirt, clean brown loafers. He carried a leather jacket in his hand. The knapsack, same color as the pants, rested on his back. He had short blond hair, neatly combed, a thin face and skinny body. He wore silver-framed glasses. He didn’t look like a terrorist.

The other people on the train ignored him, but Miriam caught a few worried looks among their faces.

“If you were going to die,” the boy said, “right now, would you be ready to face God? Have you lived a life in the service of your Maker if a bomb went off on this train? Could you face Jesus and be welcomed by Him into Heaven?”

A woman two seats down turned to a girl next to her and said, loud enough for others to hear: “Just what we need after a hard day’s work. Someone trying to push their religion on us with scare tactics.”

The boy took this as a call to arms -- rightly, Miriam thought, although she hoped he was joshing about a bomb. Never could tell with folks today.

The boy looked at his challenger. “The Lord says I am the light and the way. Follow me or burn in the fires of the Beast.” The woman stared back at him, defying him and denying him, another sinner, as sure as Jesus died for our sins. Miriam watched her pull a book out of her tote bag and open it to some page tagged by a bookmark. It sure as hell wasn’t the Good Book. Then the woman spoke, louder than before, but she wasn’t shouting. An actress’s voice, that’s what she had, and it carried: “We are all God’s children. The only sin here is the sin of pride, pretending you know which of those children God loves.” Then she went back to reading her book.

It was more than Miriam could bear. She rose up, dragging her sandwich board over to the woman. “The Good Book tells us which ones Jesus loves,” she bellowed. “Good deeds will avail you nothing. Good intentions will fling you into the pit. Only accepting Jesus Christ as your savior will bring you to the promised land.” The woman cast her eyes at her, one brow arcing, then continued to read. Miriam felt a shaking rage build in her heart. She wanted to smite this unbeliever, but she
knew the law. She could only wish she’d see this woman writhe in Lucifer’s lava pits, boil in the volcano that awaited her.

Miriam walked over to the young man. “Jesus will reward you for speaking the truth.” She lowered her voice now, speaking only to him. “Let the Devil take them if they won’t believe.”

The youth smiled at her. “God will reward me indeed very shortly.” He looked at his watch and spoke softly now. “It’s due to go off in about seven minutes.”

Miriam stared into those cool grey eyes. “You don’t have to play around with me, son. I’m a believer.” The kid just stared back at her, calm and certain of grace. Miriam repeated, “I’m a believer. But it’s up to God to punish the sinners, boy, not us.”

The young man slowly shook his head. “It’s war. The only way to teach those who defy Jesus.” He turned slightly away from her, his face determined.

Miriam stared at his knapsack. “You gotta teach them the right way. Like every Halloween, those kids come, and I give out Chick pamphlets, to get them on a path to Jesus.”

The youth checked his watch again. “Five minutes.” Five minutes. It would take her at least eight to her stop. “I hope you’re not crazy, boy.”

He turned back to her. “Aren’t you ready to meet Jesus?” His tone taunted her. She stared at him and dragged her board over to a seat and sat down.

Three more stops to go. She glanced at the kid, but he was staring out the window, his back with the bulky knapsack turned to her. There was maybe two minutes left if he was serious. Not enough to make it home. What was in his sack? Did he really have a bomb?

The train pulled into Allegheny station, slowing down. Miriam picked up her sandwich board and got off the train.

The woman who had sassèd her, the girl beside her, and the kid with the knapsack all looked at her on the platform as the train doors shut and it pulled away. Miriam watched it disappear down the track and stood there waiting, waiting for the explosion, but none came. She cursed the grey-eyed kid then, a tool of the Devil, trying to tempt her through mortal fear. What good was she to Jesus dead? The dead can’t preach to the sinners.

The little pamphlets were stacked on a card table, set up near the front door. They told the story of Jesus, and the stories of those who had rejected the Lord and the punishment they suffered for their willful ignorance. They told how to get salvation, and how not to fall into the clutches of the false religions. The doorbell rang, and Miriam answered it.

A boy dressed as a Ninja and a girl done up as a flapper from the Roaring Twenties greeted her. “Trick or Treat?” Miriam took two pamphlets from the table. “Ain’t no devil to do tricks here, and the only treat is saving your soul for Jesus.” She dropped one pamphlet each into their bags. “God curses Halloween. You kids go home and find Jesus.”

The children stared at her, then down at the pamphlets in their bags. They turned, disappointed, and left her house. Going to some other house, looking for devil’s food to rot their teeth and souls.

She dropped more pamphlets into more outstretched Halloween bags, exhorting the children to abandon the witches’ sabbath and seek the Lord. A few kids bad-mouthed her, but she stood there like a rock, unmoved, unwavering. One little girl insisted that Jesus already loved the little children. Miriam told her sternly, “Not when they kiss Lucifer’s backside on Halloween. He’s looking to snare you, girl, to take you to Hell and away from Jesus!” The child started crying, and Miriam thought perhaps the girl saw the error of her ways, but her friends drew her close and whispered to her, and the girl spat “You’re crazy!” at her. Another lost one.

Around 10:00 p.m., the doorbell stopped ringing. Miriam began to put the rest of the pamphlets away. She locked her door and sat down in her easy chair, lifting the bible off the end table beside it. She opened it randomly to the 24th Psalm. “To you I lift up my soul, Oh, Lord, Oh, God. In you I trust; let me not be put to shame, let not my enemies exult over me. No one who waits for you shall be put to shame; those shall be put to shame who heedlessly break faith.” She stopped reading it aloud; the last line was troubling. The doorbell rang.

She put the bible down, grabbed another Chick pamphlet and unlocked the door to stare at the man outside. He was dressed in a creamy white robe belted with a rope; his brown hair and beard cascaded down upon it. His brown eyes stared sadly into her own. He held an opened green knapsack in his hands, which he thrust forward at her. “Trick or treat.”

“Trick,” Miriam muttered. “You’re a trick. Be gone from me, Lucifer.”

The man didn’t leave. “David also wrote: “The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not, in your kind-
ness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord,’ and ‘For your name’s sake, Lord, you will pardon my guilt, great as it is.’ How could the Lord be as unmerciful as you paint him, Miriam?’

“You . . . you’re the Lord? Did I die? Did I stay on that train and get blown up?”

“You got off the train, Miriam. You had to wait for another one to complete your journey. Nothing exploded.”

“You’re not real. You’re the Devil tricking me.” She tried to close the door in his face, but he held out his hand. He didn’t touch the door, but it moved back, out of her hand, opening fully up.

She peered at him, and that’s when she saw the others, the creatures behind him. One looked like a human bat, another, a green ghoul; another was a shapeless mass with three eyes midway, watching her mournfully.

“You’re the Devil!”

He reached out to the three-eyed thing and gently stroked its quivering flesh. “Do you think I or my father would turn away from those who seek us from a different pathway than your own? Or hate them because they do not bow before us?” He moved into her living room with the monsters, pushing her backwards as he moved forward. And from behind them, children in Halloween costumes entered, crowding the small room, holding out their bags to her. Their eyes cut into her soul, demanding, angry.

Miriam backed against the wall. “Lord, save me!”

“I cannot save you, Miriam. Save yourself. Empty your heart of pride and prejudice and arrogance toward the children of the Creator. You are not their judge.”

One by one, the children began emptying their bags. Candy bars, boxes of candy, lollipops, gum in balls, sticks and chicklets, jawbreakers, popcorn balls, apples, candy corns, marshmallow pumpkins, gummies shaped like worms and other wriggly things both sweet and sour, pretzels, potato chips and pennies began to pile up around Miriam.

Jesus spoke again as the wall of Halloween treats rose around her. “Even in the depths of Hell, where souls have lost their way, does the true Creator of all life reside and send spiritual succor to its inhabitants, so they might follow a thin thread of hope. How can a father abandon children, no matter how errant? How can a father deny creations who seek a different mode of praising him from other creations who have decided what that mode shall be? And who are you to decide another creation’s path to his, her or its creator?”

The Halloween treats pillared up around her eyes. The children floated to the top, building her a prison of sugar and starch. And now they drew Chick pamphlets from their bags, raining them down on Miriam. The small space between her, the wall and the mounds of treats began filling up with the booklets. “Please, dear Lord! Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me!!!”


No answer.

Miriam pushed at the mountain of goodies surrounding her. She tried to climb up it, but the treats she stepped into avalanched, tumbling down into the cushion of Chick pamphlets, knee deep around her. A second attempt buried her to her waist.

“Jesus! Jesus? God! Is anybody there?!”

She gave in to a couple of good crying jags over the next hour. Her body ached with weariness from standing up, stuck waist deep in the Halloween treats, but she feared sleep, feared falling into them, being suffocated.

She finally reached out and picked up a chocolate bar, slowly unwrapping it. She ate it slowly, then carefully lifted an apple from her Halloween prison cell.

Eventually she fell asleep, wondering if asphyxiation by treats would be painfully slow or painlessly fast.

Outside of Miriam’s world, the trick-or-treaters were now asleep, some with the lingering taste of sweets on their breath. Their parents had checked their booty and put the good stuff away to be doled out over a reasonable period of time, saving their children from extra cavities and extra pounds. And inevitably, those parents snitched a candy or two, knowing their kids wouldn’t mind, would let them taste a treat of Halloween and so remember their own pleasure in this night when they were young. On this night when the gates between the dimensions are opened and all manner of spirits can visit our world as if they’d never left it.

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About Marilyn “Mattie” Brahan

Marilyn “Mattie” Brahen has published fiction in 13 magazines and anthologies in the US and UK to date. Her novels Claiming Her, Reforming Hell, and Baby Boy Blue were well received. Her short story collection, Seastruck and Other Fantasies, was published in Autumn, 2019. Mattie is also a singer/songwriter/guitarist and artist and lives with her husband, author/editor Darrell Schweitzer in Philadelphia.
It is a strange and terrible thing for a writer to be afflicted with a knack for flash fiction. We are routinely paid by the word, which means that even if the rate we're offered is munificent, the check received usually is not. Nevertheless, some stories are worth writing even if it's too much trouble to bother selling them. When such a work pops into my head, I'll jot it down in my notebook and then, later, copy it into my computer. Trusting that someday I'll find a worthy use for it. As I did recently when I was asked to contribute some original fiction to the Philcon Program Book.

Here are five of the better flash fictions on my hard drive, each in a different genre:

**Fish Story (Tall Tale)**

It's a proven fact that liars and tellers of tall tales are drawn to bodies of water—streams, rivers, lakes, and even oceans. Which is why the National Weather Service makes a point of notifying them first about flooding conditions, so they can get out of the way.

Alas, nature is not always predictable. Nobody could have called the April Fool’s Day Flood of 2015. The rain came down so hard and the water poured off of the hills in such profusion that every steam and river in Southeastern Pennsylvania was inundated. Wissahickon Creek was a long and winding lake. The Schuylkill River was so wild it washed away entire towns, and so choked with dirt that farmers drowned trying to plow it.

So fast and unexpected was the flooding that every liar in the lower part of the Commonwealth was swept away, leaving nobody behind but truth-tellers.

The other day I heard a fisherman say he'd pulled the largest trout of his life out of the Delaware. “It was nine inches long,” he bragged, “maybe eight.”

**Drinking With Godzilla (Pulp Horror)**

I met Godzilla at a monster bar in the Village. The Times wanted two hundred words on him for a where-are-they-now? item. The Big G was a notoriously bellicose interviewer, so I had the recorder going when he walked in the door. There was no telling how quickly he might cut me off.

“People are saying you're racist,” I said, “because of the whole destroying-Tokyo thing. Are you?”

Godzilla looked embarrassed. “Naw, it's not that,” he said. “It’s... well, I got a thing for cities, okay? Tokyo, Paris, Cairo, it makes no difference. I see it, I gotta destroy it. Simple as that.”

“So the whole H-bomb origin story—?”

“All bull. I’m a metrovore. No big deal.”

The waiter chose that moment to show up. “What’ll you gents have?”

“A daiquiri,” I said.

“And you?”

Godzilla grunted. “Manhattan.”

**Pirates! (Mainstream)**

Pirate treasure! The heart sings at those words. But would a pirate actually take all his hard-won loot, cram it into an old sea-chest, and then bury it in the shifting sands of a desert island? Would you?

What pirates actually did—and this is true, you could look it up—was to place their money in bank accounts. The governor of New York was corrupt and in exchange for a cut of the action, maintained New York City as a free port for all pirates. They came there to resupply their ships. The local financial institutions were only too eager for their business.

All this I know because my great-many-times-great-grandfather was the notorious Captain Death, who after a blood-soaked career achieved every pirate’s dream by retiring to raise a family in wealth and comfort. Which he did for a good six months before, ironically, dying of cholera.

I’m a bit of an amateur historian. I found his uncanceled bank book among the family papers, and did some research. When I was done, I made an appointment with an executive at a certain bank, and brought along my documentation.

“My ancestor died leaving twenty-three thousand dollars—a fortune at the time—in the Third Mercantile Bank of New York,” I explained. “Which, in 1848, was bought out by...” Carefully, year by year, I traced the possession of Captain Death’s fortune right to the institution in which I sat. Finally, I concluded, “So I’m here to...” 

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Five Flash Fictions in the Key of G

by Michael Swanwick
Michael Swanwick continued

claim my inheritance. Which, with compound interest, will amount to a great deal, I should imagine.”

“Our story has been very entertaining,” the banker said. “But I must point out three things. First, forget about the compound interest. After five years, we stop paying interest on inactive accounts. Second, after ten years’ inactivity, an account is declared abandoned property by the state, and if it’s not claimed in a timely manner... well, the state simply keeps it. Third and finally, your ancestor was by your own admission a criminal – and thus his ill-gotten gains, if they still existed, would be automatically seized by the Federal treasury.”

“So the treasure simply disappeared without doing anybody any good,” I said sadly.

“Oh, no. The bank made out quite well at every step.” The banker favored me with a sharkish grin my ancestor would have understood well. “And it’s all perfectly legal, too.”

**Hard Boiled Fiction (Noir)**

He was a dick on a case. She was a dame with a past. A shot rang out. A body fell to the floor. He smiled enigmatically. She lit a cigarette. We all know how this goes, and so did they.

The villain was a piece of work. He knew the score. He had blood on his hands. His enemies knew better than to cross him. The cops knew enough to stay bought.

But guilt will out. Bodies wouldn’t stay buried. Somebody had to take the fall. The dame was in the way. The dick was sticking his nose where it didn’t belong.

Something had to give.

They met in the back room of a smoke-filled speakeasy. Guns were drawn. Threats were made. Deals were cut. Everybody double-crossed everyone else. By the end of the act, they were all dead but one.

The dick retreated to his office. He got out the bottle. He slammed the wall with his fist. A single tear ran down his cheek.

It was a slow Tuesday night in the city.

**Sidewalk Survey (Science Fiction)**

“Excuse me, sir. I’m taking a public opinion survey and I’d be grateful if you could spare just a few minutes of your valuable time.”

“I suppose so.”

“Excellent. First question: In the event of an alien invasion, would you prefer to be incinerated by sheets of radioactive fire from above or hunted down by killer robots in the ruins of your own cities?”

“Sheets of radioactive fire, I guess.”

“Next question: In the unlikely event you survived the invasion, would you prefer to be taken to an extermination center where your body would be rendered down for its essential elements, or enslaved into a life of grinding and never-ending labor?”

“That’s a tough one. Uh... enslaved. Maybe I’d be able to escape.”

“That’s the spirit, sir! Would you rather be put to work in a factory assembling components of incomprehensible alien devices or in a mine, plundering your planet of its dwindling resources?”

“Well, I’ve got claustrophobia, so it would have to be the factory.”

“I’m afraid the factory would be cramped and windowless, so it really wouldn’t be any improvement over the mine.”

“In that case, none of the above.”

“Oh, ha ha ha, sir, that’s not an option! I’ll simply put you down as ‘undecided.’”

“That’s quite a costume you’re wearing. How do you see out of it?”

“I don’t rely on limited human senses such as ‘sight,’ sir. One last question: If you had to choose a specific date for your planet to be attacked by the battle fleet of an overwhelmingly superior alien race, would it be A) this Saturday, B) Sunday, or C) next Monday?”

“Well, see, I like to sleep in on weekends, so it would have to be C.”

“Monday it is! Thank you for your time, sir, and we’ll see you then.”

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About Michael Swanwick

Michael Swanwick came to Philadelphia in the winter of 1973, in the middle of a recession, with fifty dollars, a pack-a-day cigarette habit, a friend who let him sleep on his couch for two weeks, and the conviction that he could become a science fiction writer. By spring, when he finally found a job, he’d lost forty pounds. Six years later, he sold his first story.

Today he has ten novels, 150 short stories and novellas, five Hugos, a Nebula, a Theodore Sturgeon, a World Fantasy Award, and too many flash fictions to count. He has been married to Marianne Porter for over forty years and they have an adult son, Sean. Michael still lives in Philadelphia.
I remember —

I remember a rowhouse in West Philadelphia where the stained wooden paneling and reproduction antique furniture and the fire in the fireplace on a dark November evening all conspired to produce the pleasant, if incongruous, atmosphere of an Olde Country Inn. I remember sitting by that fire so many times in a padded chair, listening to the flames crackling, and the sounds of my wife preparing dinner in the kitchen at the back of the house.

I remember my wife, too. Her name was Martina, but at times it seems I have only one image of her remaining: that of her bringing me my slippers and the newspaper as I sit in that chair by the fireplace after a long day’s work. That isn’t right. It makes her seem more like a faithful dog than a person, but she really did do those things, from her own sense of routine, infusing order into the world around her. I remember the repeated things. Most of the rest melts away, like mist before the sun.

I remember, finally, the pair of slippers she brought me on a particular, foul November evening. They were made of brown leather, with white fur around the edges, and were very worn.

I held them up.

“But these aren’t mine.”

She shrugged. “Whose are they then? It’s your feet that have been going in them all this time.”

“All what time?”

Now she looked at me strangely. “Since the summer before last, when we got them at that Indian place in Maine. Don’t you remember?”

I put the slippers on. They certainly felt as if I’d been wearing them since the summer before last. I retreated into making a joke about it.

“Ah, yes, the Squash-a-ma-quoddy Indians. How could I forget?”

She didn’t laugh. She just said, “Alan, your brain is going soft,” and went into the kitchen to resume her cooking, leaving me sitting there, staring down at the slippers. Now there is little terror in a pair of slippers, but I felt a touch of unease just then, like that first, subtle, downward jolt when the elevator cable begins to fray.

I must have known somehow that right there it began. From that instant, we began to drift apart.

I try to remember.

“Gabby stayed late at school for band practice,” Martina said over dinner. “Then she’ll be at Alice Conover’s for a while.”

Gabrielle was our daughter, aged eleven, and Alice Conover was her best friend. I still remember that much, although I can barely call them to mind.

“Oh, and by the way, Joe Meese called from work after you left, and said he’s hosting another of his poker parties tonight. Why don’t you go? I wanted to watch something on PBS anyway.”

I went. By the time we had finished eating and the dishes were cleared away, the wind was gusting outside, and rain and sleet rattled against the windows, but I had decided that, yes, a night of gambling away pocket change and telling dirty jokes was the very thing for the indefinable unease which had come over me. I put on a coat and a thin plastic raincoat over that and went to the door.

“Don’t be out too late,” Martina called. “It may be Friday, but we have that flea market tomorrow.”

“Yes, yes, I remember. See you about eleven.”

I stepped out onto the porch and locked the door. It was as I turned and reached for the iron porch gate that I noticed a man standing on the sidewalk in front of the house, huddled in a shapeless coat, bareheaded and dripping in the savage weather.

He was old, perhaps sixty-five, and disheveled, but he wasn’t threadbare or filthy, and he lacked that empty look the city’s population of homeless lunatics usually have. He wasn’t a bag person. He just looked ... lost as he stood there, not exactly staring at me, or anything in particular. The thought came to me that he might be a burglar scouting out the neighborhood, but I flinched inwardly at the sheer absurdity of the idea.

I stood with one hand on the gate.

“May I help you with something? Are you looking for someone?”

His eyes met mine briefly, and for an instant his face came alive, first something almost like joyful recognition, then sadness, then that blank expression again. He merely stood there in the rain and cold, and I was the one who began to shiver.

“I said, may I help you?”
Still he stood there silently. I debated going back into
the house rather than leaving Martina alone with this
guy just outside, but I didn’t. I tried to shrug him off as
one of the city’s peculiar sights. So I opened the gate,
stepped through, shut it again, and walked briskly down
the steps, and started to get into my car.

Then I noticed that the man was pointing at me. His
hand was shaking, not from cold, but for gentle empha-
sis, as if to say, yes, I know you. I know everything.

I got into the car quickly, slammed the door shut, and
locked it, then looked up to see the stranger walking
away from me toward the end of the block. I watched
him go until he was around the corner. Then I started
the car. When I got to that corner, I looked for him, but
he was gone.

There. There, too, it began.

Joe Meese lived in the Germantown section of the
city. It was an easy drive, the streets empty because of
the weather. Joe’s street was lined with trees, so many of
them that in the darkness and the wind they whipped
and writhed and swayed like waves in a hurricane. The
rain came in curtains, then sleet again, rattling like peb-
bles on the car’s roof.

I ran to Joe’s front porch, rang the bell, and stood there
shivering, nervously hopping up and down, muttering to
myself, “Come on. Come on — ”

There was a familiar barking on the other side of the
doors. Heavy claws scratched wood. It was Woof, the
Meeses’ oversized setter/collie/whatever. If I stood on
tiptoe I could see the eager brown-and-white face staring
up at me through the door’s glass panels.

“Hey! Bark louder. Make them let me in.”

The tone of the barking changed, no longer a chal-
lenge, but instead an expectant yelping.

“Glad to see you, too. Now, make enough noise so Joe
can hear you.”

The dog obliged, and I rang the bell again.

The door swung open, and there was Joe, cigarette in
one hand, beer in the other.

He didn’t stand aside. I made to step past him, into the
house.

“Jesus, Joe, you pick the damndest nights — ”

His hand slammed into my chest, cigarette and all.

“What?”

I was so flabbergasted I didn’t know what to say. I just
let him push me back through the doorway.

“I said, what do you want here, mister?”

“But — but — ”

“Look, whoever you are, I don’t know who you are
or why you’re here, but I’ll just have to ask you to leave
or — ”

The dog jumped up, trying to lick my face. Joe
shoved it aside with his foot, and said, “Sit!” very firmly.

Woof sat, looking up at me longingly.

“If this is some kind of joke,” I managed to say, “I
don’t get it, Joe. Please stop.”

“I don’t get it either,” he said, pushing me back into
the rain. I could tell by his voice and his face that this
was not a joke, that he was on the edge of being scared
and trying not to show it. And in his eyes, there was no
recognition at all.

“Joe — ”

“You must have come to the wrong house. This must
be a mistake,” he said.

He slammed the door in my face.

I stood there in the rain, looking no doubt as lost as
the old man I’d seen in front of my own house. What
had happened was so contrary to all expectations that
I didn’t feel anything just yet. My mind tried to shut
it all out while my body went on auto-pilot, and the
next thing I knew, I was sitting in my car, staring up
at a streetlight through the rain as it rippled down the
windshield.

I sat there — I don’t know how long — just numb,
trying to cling to the feeble excuse that it was all an
extraordinarily tasteless joke, for all Joe Meese had
never been one to play stupid jokes, and, in any case,
he wasn’t that good an actor; or that somehow, inex-
pliably, I had lost my way in the dark and the rain (or
maybe bratty kids had turned the street signs around)
and found myself on a very similar street, but not the
right street, and by one of those incredible coincidences
which would be rejected by Ripley’s Believe It Or Not for
implausibility, there just happened to be a total stranger
living there who looked exactly like my long-time office
buddy, Joe Meese.

* * *

There was a lighted window at the end of the street.
I leaned forward, peering through the rain, and recog-
nized the grocery store at the corner. Often, during Joe’s
Darrell Schweitzer continued

parties, someone had been sent to that store to pick up extra dip or ice or whatever.

Almost before I realized I was doing it, I got out of the car again and ran to the grocery store. I burst through its door, and stood there, panting for breath, surveying the familiar shelves and counters.

“Nasty one out there tonight,” the clerk said.

“Yeah,” I said, and hurried over to the pay phone, which was in the back by the store’s single video-game machine.

I hesitated for a moment, as if before some irrevocable decision, and then dialed Joe’s number. Luck was with me. He was the one who answered the phone.

“Very funny,” I said.

“What? What’s funny?”

“Joe, this is Alan Summers.”

“Alan! I hope Martina told you about the party. Come on over, old pal, old buddy! Fred’s here, and Roger, and Bob Steele. You know how hard it is to make them wait on a good poker game.”

“I’m at the grocery down the street. I have already been to your house, but you turned me away like I was a complete stranger barging in uninvited. Now would you mind telling me why?”

There was a pause.

“Joe?”

“Alan ... I don’t get what you’re saying. I have been here all along, with the others, and no one has come to the door since half an hour ago, when Roger arrived. I think you are the one who needs to explain.”

“I can’t,” I said. “I’ll be right over, okay? Then maybe this’ll make some sort of sense.”

“Okay.” His voice was cold, uncertain.

“I hung up and leaned against the wall by the phone, swaying, both hands pressed against my temples. I wondered if I had gone completely mad. But that was a feeble excuse, too. I knew perfectly well I hadn’t. Nobody who is crazy thinks he is crazy. The complete raving loony thinks he is the only sane person in the world, surrounded by nut cases too stupid to understand him. I was beginning to be genuinely afraid.

“You all right?” the clerk at the counter asked.

“Yeah, sure. Thanks.”

I hurried from the store.

When I got back to Joe’s house, my gut-level instinct told me that the most sensible thing to do, the safest thing, the way to escape, was to just get into my car and drive home and tell myself lies over and over until I was convinced this had never happened.

But it had happened, and I knew it had, and something else inside me drove me to walk up to that door and ring the bell again. I rang it. Once more the dog enthusiastically announced my arrival.

The door opened, and there was Joe again, holding the dog by the collar. I stared, sure I was seeing things.

It wasn’t the same dog. It wasn’t Woof at all, but a large, purebred, yellow-and-white collie which also, somehow, seemed to know me.

“Why have you come back?”

I pushed my way past him, into the living room. He had his hands full trying to restrain the dog, which was still trying to lick my face, yelping excitedly all the while.

“Joe,” I said, turning to him. “I don’t know if I’ve done something wrong, but if I have, I’m sorry. Still, no matter what it was, you don’t have to treat me like I’m some bum in off the street. What is going on?”

I felt the fear again, the cords of the elevator cable snapping one by one, faster now, the plunge beginning.

He was obviously afraid too.

“I don’t know how you know my name,” he said, “and maybe this is a mistake of some sort, but I still don’t know who you are, mister, or why you are here or what you want, but I want you out of my house right now!”

“Joe! It’s me, Alan Summers, your friend! What is this?”

“Joe? Who’s at the door?” a woman called from the next room. I knew the voice, of course. It belonged to Alice, Joe’s wife. I’d known her as long as I’d known Joe, eight or nine years. She was my one hope.

“Alice!” I yelled. “Alice, come here please.” She came, saw me, and stopped.

“Joe, who is this man? Some friend of yours?”

“I swear to God,” he said. “I’ve never seen him before in my life. Only he was here five minutes ago, trying to get in like he owned the place.”

She began to back away, one hand over her mouth, staring at me wide-eyed. “Do you want me to call the police?” she said.

“No,” I said softly. “You don’t have to do that. It’s all a mistake. I’ll go. I’m sorry to have disturbed you.”

A minute later I was on the sidewalk, making my way slowly back to the grocery store, running my hand along the wooden fence in the front of my friend’s yard. I wanted to go back to the store, to call him on the phone again and plead with him, but I couldn’t. I just stood
there, cold and wet and afraid. I must have stood still for five or ten minutes. Then I was in my car, completely drenched, my teeth chattering, crying like a lost child.

I got home very late that night. It must have been past two. I spent the hours just driving aimlessly, trying to think, to make sense out of what was happening to me. I kept coming back to the fact that the dog knew me, as if that meant something, as if that were the key, but it meant nothing and there was no key. And the dog had changed between one time and the next, which was completely impossible, of course, but no more impossible than the idea that some malign, cosmic equivalent of Nixon's secretary Rosemary Woods had performed incredible contortions to erase part of my life, leaving these inexplicable eighteen-minute gaps. No, it wasn't that.

I remember sitting at a stoplight on an empty, rain-slick street, gazing up at Billy Penn's statue atop City Hall, wondering if it really was the same statue I'd always known, or one which was, somehow, different.

When I finally turned the bolt on the door and stood in my own living room, Martina called down from the top of the stairs. "Alan? Is that you?"

"I ... think so."

"Alan, are you all right? I got worried, so I called the Meeses, and Joe said you’d called once but never showed up. I didn’t know what to do next."

"I don’t know what to do next either," I said softly.

"What?"

I took off my raincoat and my regular coat, which was also wet, and looked around for a place to put them. There was none, so I hung them on the doorknob.

"Martina ... Marty ... please come down and talk to me. Just come down." My voice broke. I was crying again.

She came down, in curlers and bathrobe and slippers, a concerned expression on her face. For an instant I felt the most hopeless, helpless terror I had ever known, as I was certain she didn't recognize me and was about to run up the stairs and call the police. But she merely paused, two steps from the bottom, then continued cautiously, startled, bewildered, but not acting at all like a woman who confronts a total stranger in her house late at night.

"What's wrong, Alan?"

"Something ... very disturbing has happened. Just sit with me."

We sat on the sofa in front of the fireplace, across from my so familiar armchair. The newspaper she'd brought me that evening was still there.

I told her what had happened that evening, all of it, as best I could.

"It's like I've lost my grip," I said, "like I'm drifting out of the lives of the people around me, just drifting away. I don't know what I've done or what the reason is, but Joe and I, we were not in quite the same world anymore —"

I couldn't say anything more. I sat still, interlocking my fingers, joining my hands together, then moving my hands until some of the fingers missed, and more did, until I was grasping my left thumb with my right pinkie.

Then I spread my hands apart, palms up, and looked into Martina's eyes.

"It's all crazy," I said. "It can't happen, but it's happening. I want you to tell me it's not, but I know better. It would just be a lie."

I embraced her then, my head upon her shoulder, and once more I wept like a child. She put her arms around me lightly.

"What I'm most afraid of is that somehow everything will change, and Gabby won't know her father anymore ..."

She sucked in breath suddenly, stiffened, and let go of me. I drew back, and as I looked into her face, I saw the change taking place, right there. The concern faded. The expression became totally different, a kind of shocked bewilderment, a sense of being imposed upon, something bordering on rage.

"How can you do this to me?" she said. "You promised me you would never mention that name again. Remember? Our daughter’s name is Julia. Gabrielle died when she was a baby. You know that."

She rose from the sofa and turned her back on me, and I knew then, with the utmost certainty, that there was nothing more I could do. It had happened, completely and totally, whatever it was.

"Go to bed," I said in desperation. "Go to sleep and in the morning everything will be fine. None of this will have happened."

She backed away from me. I got up and shooed her up the stairs. "Go on," I said. "I’ll be a little while yet."

I waited until I heard her close our bedroom door behind her, and then I slowly made my way up the stairs.

I walked very quietly past our bedroom, down the hall to the end, and there, as carefully as I could, I opened another door and peered in.

Our daughter was asleep amid huge pillows, beneath an E. T. bedspread I could recognize even by the dim - continued p. 106 -
Darrell Schweitzer continued

glare of her nightlight.
I slipped into the room, but I didn't turn the overhead light on. I was afraid to, lest I see her too clearly, and she turn out to be too tall, or a blonde instead of a brunette, or merely a stranger to me. I groped around for one of her school copy books, tore out a page slowly, and crouched by the night light, writing a short note with a felt-tip pen:

DARLING, YOUR FATHER LOVES YOU VERY MUCH, BUT HE HAS TO GO AWAY. TRY TO REMEMBER HIM.

I picked up her alarm clock and placed the note under it. The clock said 2:45. It was no more than ten and a half hours since this had all begun, but the elevator cable had snapped now, and I had fallen very far, very fast. I was beyond trying to understand.

I stood for a few minutes, gazing at the sleeping girl, and then I left the room.

I did not look in on Martina again. Instead, I went downstairs, got a dry coat out of the closet, and left the house. The rain had stopped by then, but the wind was bitterly cold.

I walked the streets for hours, taking note of all the familiar houses in the neighborhood until, after a while, they were no longer familiar. Once a police car cruised right by me, very slowly, but I stood motionless until it was gone. I had not been seen. How very appropriate, I thought to myself, that I was becoming invisible, too. It was, after all, the next logical step.

Dawn had just begun to break when I boarded a streetcar, and sat in a kind of stupor as it rushed into the tunnel at 40th Street. It was somehow comforting to be inside the tunnel, with the world shut out and concrete walls whizzing past, blurring into a featureless grey. I listened numbly as the stops were called out: 37th Street, Sansom, 35th, and Saint Mary’s Academy — it no longer mattered that there was no 35th Street stop on this line nor any place called Saint Mary’s Academy.

I got off at 30th Street, and walked slowly along the traffic island between the huge main post office and the equally monumental 30th Street train station. I thought of them as two vast tombs, containing the bones of all the kings of the Earth.

After a while, I stood on a bridge, staring down into the Schuylkill River, watching the colors and the waves, the light and shadow, and the occasional bits of debris. The pattern was always changing, never the same from one moment to the next, never, ever returning to what it once had been.

Another police car went by, ignoring me.

Some days passed. I had some money with me, so I ate in restaurants, among crowds of strangers, until my increasingly unkempt state made waiters shy away from me. I tried to keep clean, using the sinks in the men’s room at the train station. I lived in that station, like so many others, who were also lost, but for different reasons.

Once or twice I saw people I knew, co-workers from the office passing through on their daily commutes. The first time this happened, I hid myself. Afterwards, I always carried a newspaper to hide behind when the time came. I never dared to approach any of them, for fear of what they might say if I asked them if they had ever known someone named Alan Summers.

After a while I saw them no more, and all the people around me were strangers, the great masses of them flowing, changing, changing again, until I never saw the same face twice and all the faces blended into a sameness, like the blur of the rushing subway tunnel.

I slept on a bench once, and dreamt that I was the old man, standing in the rain outside my house, slowly dissolving in that rain like a candy man, a figure of hard sugar discarded in a gutter. And I dreamt that my daughter sat up suddenly in her darkened bedroom, and called out, “Daddy, are you there?” I tried to answer, but my voice was lost in the rain, in the rushing water, and I seemed to be falling away from the front of the house. Again my daughter called out, and again, and I could not reply, until the front of the house rippled and blurred, like something seen through rain streaming down an automobile windshield. Then there was only darkness, and a sense of drifting, and my daughter’s name, and her face, and all my memories of her began to slip away. I could not cling to them.

It was then that I awoke to the touch of a gentle hand on my shoulder. I sat up abruptly, with a startled grunt, and found a woman standing over me. She was probably in her early twenties, and she wore blue jeans and an army jacket and a stocking cap. A knapsack hung from one shoulder.
She was a traveler, I thought. Yes, someone who travels far, who travels without ever stopping to rest, or to find a home. I could tell all that about her, somehow, as if I were developing a new sense.

“Perhaps I can help you,” she said, and as we beheld one another, we both understood, she why I was there, and I why she had selected me among all the shabby denizens of the train station benches.

She had done so because I was a traveler too, and she had that same special sense, which enabled her to recognize one of her own kind.

“Come,” she said. I rose and followed her, out into the enormous main hall of the station.

It took me a moment to recognize what was different: there had been a war memorial inside the station, a colossal bronze statue of a winged Victory lifting a fallen soldier out of flames. That was how I remembered it. Now the figure was a charging World War I doughboy.

Outside, on the bridge over the river, the old man was waiting for us. He, too, knew me for what I was, and I knew him.

“There are not many like us yet,” he said, “but we are like you, all of us. Like you, we move on. We never stay in one place very long.”

We are a family, the young woman and the old man, and the others I met in a cellar, where our band gathers at certain times, when each of us knows deep inside that it is time for another meeting. Sometimes the meeting place is not a cellar at all, but an inn or a courtyard or a field or even the deck of a ship at sea. But always the faces are there, twenty or so familiar to me, and always one or two new ones.

My eyes are newly opened. I see for the first time. The woman’s name is Mara. She reached into her pocket once and showed me a Woodrow Wilson dime. The old man is Jason, and he is eighty-two and our chieftain and priest and rememberer. It is he who keeps and reads aloud from the book of our lives, in which is written all that can be recalled and preserved. I lived in Philadelphia. Jason was born in New Orleans long ago, shortly after the triumphal entry of the emperor Napoleon IV.

We are alone, but we are together, and the true things about us are written and remembered. The rest drifts away like mist rising from a perfectly still lake.

Remember. That’s all we have. Cling together and remember.

* * *

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About Darrell Schweitzer

Darrell Schweitzer is the author of four novels, The Dragon House, The Mask of the Sorcerer, The Shattered Goddess, and The White Isle, and about 350 published stories. He is also an essayist, interviewer, poet, reviewer, and famous for rhyming Cthulhu in a limerick. He was co-editor of Weird Tales (1988-2007), for which he won the World Fantasy Award, and is an active anthologist. His most recent anthology is The Mountains of Madness Revealed (PS Publishing 2019). He has written books about Lord Dunsany and H.P. Lovecraft. PS Publishing recently published a two-volume retrospective of his short fiction, The Mysteries of the Faceless King and The Last Heretic. He has attended every Philcon since 1968.
Philcon 2020 - November 20-22, 2020 - A Virtual Philcon

Game Changers (excerpt)
by Andrew Michael Levin

This is a piece from book 4: Game Changers, of the Runic Warriors series. In this scene, Ohdinn, the leader of a council comprised of nine Norse Gods, is explaining the origin story of the Runic Warriors’ powers. Freyr, another council member, adds an extra twist that explains how the power of the predecessors of the warriors, the Knights of the Runes, could be used to enhance the warriors’ powers. This is actually expanded from the text in book four and explains where the warriors’ powers came from and who the Knights of the Runes were.

All five books of the Runic Warriors series can be found exclusively on Amazon, written under the pen name Mickey Wren. For more information go to www.mwmusicandfantasy.com.

Sowelu looked at Nauthiz, “The power of the knights is not less than the warriors’ powers, it came before the warriors and could be used to enhance the warriors’ powers and envelope them in the knight’s armor. Great Ohdinn, would like to elaborate for our fellow council member.”

Ohdinn took control, turned to the junior member of the council, and recalled the tale, “Centuries ago, back in the time the Earth knew as the middle ages, or Medieval times, this council ruled from a grand palace. It was called Asgard Castle. It had fortified walls and was guarded by a platoon of twenty-five known as the Knights of the Runes. The knights defended the castle against all enemies for many years. Each knight embodied the energy of a different Rune, including one for the power of the unknowable. On a particularly dark day, Gierrod and an army of giants stormed Asgard Castle. The knights fought harder than ever before, but they were quickly overwhelmed and many of them perished. Luckily the castle held and stood tall, but we lost most of the knights. Only six of the knights managed to survive. Devastated by all that was around them, they gathered the dead and contained the energies of the fallen as best they could. With their own knowledge and the energies of their fallen brethren they went down into the catacombs of the castle and forged the rings and amulets to be certain the powers of the entire Elder Futhark could still fully guard Asgard Castle, or wherever the council would rule from in the future. They came to the council when their work was done and presented a full report, including that they were the only survivors, and what they had done to ensure the security of the council. The council had mixed emotions about the report. We were saddened by the loss of so many of the knights, but admired the ingenuity of those that had survived. The council dubbed those six survivors as the first Runic Warriors and gave them new weapons and abilities to allow them to defend the castle with the spirits of the fallen to help them.”

Freyr then added, “The council back then had learned that when those surviving knights created the rings and amulets, they also made a promise to each other as a prophecy of the future. They vowed that one day there would be a large platoon of twenty-five again. The Knights of the Runes would stand tall to defend the council as they had before. As Sowelu stated earlier, the Knights power and armor would help to reinforce and strengthen the warriors’ powers.”

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About Andrew Michael Levin

Andrew Michael Levin was born in Philadelphia, PA. Throughout his life he’s been seen as very eclectic and unusual. In high school, he found a way to get across to people what he was thinking and feeling by writing song lyrics and singing a capella for friends and family. In college he got into short stories and fiction, and eventually began to write the Runic Warriors stories. Also spending time through his life as a member of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and trying to keep afloat, his writing took a backseat for a while. About six years ago, he rediscovered the Runic warriors project and it grew exponentially into the Novella series available today under his official pen name of Mickey Wren.

Throughout his life he has been a creative man and for many years has read science fiction/fantasy and Mystery novels. He currently works at the airport as a ground service equipment fueler.
Getting arrested a few days before I was to head back to Earth was the last thing I had in mind. I’d been working the Lil Doggie, the only spaceport lounge on Gibrahl, for the past three and a half weeks. My contract called for two shows a night, with an additional matinee on Saturday. I had Sundays off. A day on Gibrahl runs near enough to twenty-four hours as not to quibble, but the weeks last for eight of them instead of seven. My agent back on Earth hadn’t bothered to look into the extra day issue before booking me into a contract that paid by the week. It meant that the two shows I was required to do on Gibsdays were freebies; all the work for none of the pay. 

The marquee out front read 

THE AMAZING CONROY, 
MASTER HYPNOTIST

and cycled through a googol of colorful hues in a blatant attempt to remain eye-catching. It worked. My smallest audiences were decent, and the large ones packed the place. Venues like Gibrahl are always hungry for any kind of entertainment, and a stage hypnotist can make a good buck. 

The humans in my audience were all on Gibrahl for the same thing. Every one of them was in some way involved in the buffalo dog trade. The buffalitos were the only resource on Gibrahl, the single commodity responsible—directly or indirectly—for bringing people here. It was a colony world, and it wasn’t our colony. Gibrahl belonged to the Arconi, and the human presence was limited to a single square kilometer base. The Arconi laid down the rules, and as long as they had something Earth wanted we abided by them like good little humans. Which is why I got arrested. 

Earlier in the day the Arconi had arrested a buffalo dog courier for attempted smuggling. The Terran consulate insisted it must have been a paperwork snafu, but the Arconi possess a limited psychic faculty concerning truthfulness and discovered otherwise. Arcon justice is as swift as it is certain. The man had been tried, convicted, and executed before the end of my dinner show. 

Everyone needed a distraction, and for better or worse I was it. I began with a few jokes to break the tension and put people at ease. Seeing a hypnotist, even as entertainment, tends to make some folks nervous, as if with just the lift of an eyebrow I could make men reveal their darkest secrets or women throw themselves into my arms. Don’t I wish. They say Anton Mesmer could do that sort of thing centuries ago. More likely he just had a better agent than I do. Me, I need a compelling induction and a good five minutes of relative quiet, not to mention a waiting car if the thing doesn’t work. Hypnotic blackmail and seduction may make for good vids, but in real life sticking to the script is a lot safer. That’s not to say I never dabble or dally, just never during a show. Later on, that’s a different matter. I always install a post-hypnotic backdoor when I’m performing; you’re back in a trance and wonderfully open to suggestion. What can I say, I love my work. 

That night there were several tables of Arconi present, as there had been at all of my performances. Fifty shows, and none had ever laughed, never so much as cracked a smile. And they could smile, I was fairly certain of it. The Arconi look like tall, stretched humans, like something in a funhouse mirror. Their skin tone runs through a range of whitish shades, from eggshell to ecru, and their body hair is generally the blue-black of comic book heroes. They have mouths and lips and teeth, and as far as I knew they used them for all the same things we did, but I’d never seen them smile. It wasn’t that they didn’t enjoy the show, they just couldn’t understand it. It was that truth sense of theirs. Arconi always know whether or not they’re being told the truth. Among themselves they never lie; they simply can’t. It’s a small thing, but when you start to work out the incidentals you discover just how ubiquitous deception is in human history. 

Arcon society has almost no crime. Sure, they have crimes of passion, same as us, but anything premeditated gets nipped in the bud when the local magistrate asks you if you did it. For the Arconi, the concept of lying didn’t come up until they started dealing with humans. They find us fascinating, utterly bizarre. It’s like knowing how gills work, a nice safe objective knowledge that you know doesn’t apply to you but that opens up interesting theoretical possibilities just the same. 

Quite a few Arconi had put great value on seeing a hypnotist make people believe things that were obviously false. They’d flocked to the human district to catch my shows every night since I’d arrived. The first two nights
Lawrence M. Schoen continued

I brought a few up to the stage. They went under just like humans. I had no trouble getting them to cluck like chickens, but they couldn't accept any suggestions that violated their objective reality. They couldn't believe they'd actually become chickens. No imagination, totally grounded. Bottom line, they made for a dull show, and I stopped taking them as volunteers.

Anyway, I was doing my usual show for the last week of a gig. Ten minutes into the performance I had two young secretaries, an elderly bank loan officer, and a middle-aged security guard on stage with me, all of them deeply entranced. I'd told the secretaries they were Arconi diplomats and had them explain the Arcon plan for human enlightenment. There's no such thing of course, but neither secretary/diplomat knew that, and they elaborated and expounded on all sorts of made-up nonsense with great sincerity while the human portion of the audience hooted and laughed.

The secretaries finished their presentation and received thunderous applause from the humans in the audience. I thanked them and escorted them back to chairs on the stage which I'd already assured them comprised the lush Arcon embassy back on Earth. I returned them to a deep trance. They'd done a great job, surprisingly original and clever, and the audience was breathless to see what would happen next. I turned to the security guard and, after a wink and grin at the audience, began her instructions.

"Butterscotch Melpomene," I whispered to her, using the key phrase I'd implanted at the start of the show. Her posture changed, not so much a movement as an attitude. Though completely relaxed she was now almost painfully alert. I turned back to the audience and waved them in, as if inviting them along for the gag.

"You're a native of Gibrahl," I said in my stage voice, all mellow tones and booming resonance. "You're intelligent and articulate, educated and urbane." The security guard sat up straighter in her chair, her face composed and confident, her eyes still closed. "I'd like you to tell us about Gibrahl from your own unique perspective, if you don't mind. Would that be all right?"

She nodded, licked her lips, and raised one hand in the start of a gesture.

"That's fine. You'll begin to do so when I count to three," I said. "Oh, and one more thing. You're not human, you're a buffalo dog. One... Two..."

"STOP!" An Arcon at one of the rear tables was on his feet. I recognized him. He was a real regular; he'd come to at least one of my shows each day since I'd arrived, always sitting at the same table, always watching with rapt attention. He'd even been a volunteer, a pretty good subject for an Arcon. His name was Loyoka, and he stood pointing a weapon at me. Most of the audience laughed, assuming it was part of the act. I knew better.

"Everyone on the stage is under arrest," he continued. "Do not move. Cooperate and you will not be injured."

Loyoka made his way to the stage, those long long legs allowing him to mount the platform without effort. I'd frozen as soon as I saw the gleam from his laser sight. He approached the security guard, squatted until they were on the same level and asked, "Are you a buffalo dog?"

There was a ripple of laughter from the audience; most still thought the Arcon was part of the act. The woman didn't answer him. She couldn't answer. The only voice she could hear at the moment was mine. Loyoka figured this out pretty quickly and turned to me. "Why won't she speak? You indicated she was articulate."

"I haven't finished counting," I said. "She won't follow the instructions until I do."

"Three!" said the Arcon, his eyes fixed on the security guard. Nothing happened. More snickers from the audience. "You say it," he said to me, without turning his head.

"Three," I breathed, and the guard opened her eyes, smiled brightly, and nodded into the Arcon's face scant inches from her own.

"Are you a buffalo dog?" repeated Loyoka.

"Oh my, yes," agreed the guard. "I was born here on Gibrahl, and let me tell you, it's not an easy life. It's a wonder I'm still here at all. I've seen all of my litter mates and all of my childhood friends shipped off to other planets by you Arconi. Shameless, I tell you, just shameless."

She rambled on and on, confabulating a complete history as an alien creature with a brain no bigger than a walnut. The Arcon's jaw dropped lower and lower as he listened, his psychic faculty assuring him that the human believed every word of it, that despite appearances she was a buffalo dog.

Ten minutes later I was in Arconi custody and sitting in a detention cell. My four volunteers were no longer entranced and as far as I knew were being similarly 'detained' by the authorities. My out-system visa had been confiscated. The Lil Doggie was closed, pending the outcome of the investigation. The management lodged a complaint with my agent, and filed a lawsuit against the interstellar stage performers' union. There's no business
like show business, especially when it comes to blackballing. Even assuming I got out of the current predicament it was highly unlikely I would be able to get work anywhere off Earth again. For the moment though, that was the least of my problems.

Hours passed. I spent the first few going over the show in my mind, again and again, trying to figure out what had pissed off the Arconi. I couldn't think of anything. I dozed, off and on, and jerked fully awake when the door to my cell finally opened and Loyoka entered with two other Arconi, each dragging a short stool. They perched on the stools, feet flat on the floor, their long legs bent, knees at shoulder level. It left them at eye level with me as I sat on my bunk. They stared intently, all of them.

“Tell us... a lie,” said the one on my right.

“A lie?” I asked. My gaze moved from one stern face to the next. Their eyes looked just like human eyes, but it wasn’t comforting.

“Yes, Mr. Conroy, tell us something you do not believe is true. Do it now,” he said.

My mind went blank. The only thing I could think of was the aborted show.

“I’m an Arconi diplomat,” I said. “I have a plan for human enlightenment.”

The two newcomers frowned at that. Loyoka recognized the line from tonight’s show and the corners of his mouth turned up ever so slightly. They could smile.

“You are lying,” said the one on the left, his frown deepening.

“You told me to lie.” I shrugged.

“Yes, and we know you are lying. In your performance, you tell other humans to do things. These things are not lies.”

I shook my head. “I’m sorry, I’m not trying to be difficult, but I really don’t understand what you’re getting at.”

“Are you a smuggler, Mr. Conroy?” asked Loyoka. “Am I what?”

“Are you a smuggler of buffalo dogs? Please answer ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”

“No!” I said, feeling a growing dread.

“But you turned that woman,...” Loyoka glanced at a small palm-padd, “Carla Espinoza, into a buffalo dog. It was truth. I saw it in her mind.”

“But, she wasn’t really a buffalo dog!” I grinned. This was all some sort of joke, right? I stopped. They looked deadly serious.

“She was. I saw the truth myself. She was a buffalo dog. An unlicensed buffalo dog, Mr. Conroy.” He frowned then, making a complete set of them. “Do you understand the severity of this crime? There are allegations that you are attempting to export a stolen and fertile buffalo dog to Earth.”

My mind reeled. The buffalo dogs were one of the few lifeforms native to Gibralh, and unlike anything else in known space. They looked amazingly like American bison rendered at one fiftieth scale. They were adorable creatures with cute woolly heads and tiny blue tongues that stuck out when they bleated. They could eat anything, anything at all, and thrive. And most amazing of all, they farted enormous volumes of pure diatomic...
Lawrence M. Schoen continued

oxygen, which made them incredibly useful to terraformers. Not to mention the significant dent they were making in problems of landfill and toxic waste sites back home on Earth. On any given night at the Lil Doggie fully one quarter of the people in the audience were couriers, slated to return to Earth on the next ship out, a thin portfolio of transfer licenses under one arm and a buffalo dog tucked under the other. The Arconi controlled the only source of the beasts, and exported them, infertile, at ten million credits a head. At that price smuggling the little guys had become quite attractive, and several sterile pups had been stolen. Not surprisingly, the Arconi government had responded with extreme prejudice. Even suspicion of involvement with black market buffalo dogs could bring a death sentence. I was in deep buffalo chips.

"But she wasn't a buffalo dog," I protested, half rising from the bunk. "She wasn't, not physically."

Loyoka brought a hand down on my shoulder, pushing me back. "I know what I saw in her mind. She was a buffalo dog. On Gibrahl, if a human is in possession of a buffalo dog he is either a smuggler or a courier. I can see the truth in your mind, Mr. Conroy. You are not a smuggler."

He paused and looked to either side at his companions. A silent confirmation passed among them and all three rose to their feet.

"We are very troubled by all of this, Mr. Conroy. We take even the suspicion of crime very seriously. While you've been waiting we've done a full search of all registered facilities. None report any missing stock; you're not being charged with theft. The only reason that you have not been prosecuted and convicted on the remaining charge is that Carla Espinoza is infertile."

It was just getting weirder and weirder. "How would you know that?" I asked.

Loyoka barely glanced at me. "We did a complete examination of her. Any human in possession of a fertile buffalo dog is instantly guilty of a capital offense. But, as I said, she's incapable of conception. Infertile buffalo dogs may be transported by licensed couriers. That just leaves the matter of clearing up the paperwork. We have gone ahead and tagged Carla Espinoza and drawn up the appropriate paperwork for your license."

It was just getting weirder and weirder. "How would you know that?" I asked.

Loyoka barely glanced at me. "We did a complete examination of her. Any human in possession of a fertile buffalo dog is instantly guilty of a capital offense. But, as I said, she's incapable of conception. Infertile buffalo dogs may be transported by licensed couriers. That just leaves the matter of clearing up the paperwork. We have gone ahead and tagged Carla Espinoza and drawn up the appropriate paperwork for your license."

One of the other Arconi presented me with a palmpadd and stylus. I glanced at the document and signed. They'd transferred the bulk of my earnings on Gibrahl out of my account—and placed a lien on future income for twice that amount—to cover the balance due for my license. I was now an authorized courier.

"Congratulations, Mr. Conroy. You've acquired a buffalo dog without paying the usual ten million credits." There wasn't a hint of sarcasm in his tone. He really meant it.

"But she's not a buffalo dog now, right?" I said. "She's out of the trance, she knows who she is."

All three Arconi frowned again and fidgeted nervously. The other two left, taking the stools with them, leaving Loyoka to bestow a few parting words. "We admit there is much about your abilities which we do not understand," he said. "While it is clear to me that your subject tonight knew she was a buffalo dog, it is equally obvious that in some ways she was not. This is new territory for us, Mr. Conroy. We'll be watching you closely for the remainder of your stay. I'd advise you to be quite careful."

"You're free to go now," he said, holding the door open for me. "Speak to the clerk at the front desk. He'll return your visa and provide you with a hard copy of your licenses. You can pick up Carla Espinoza there as well."

He pointed me to the right and sent me on my way. He headed off to the left and vanished around a turn in the corridor.

Carla Espinoza sat on one of a bank of interlinked chairs in the lobby. She was a bit pale but otherwise appeared unharmed. Dangling from her left ear was a two centimeter disk of bright red plastic. She'd been tagged for transport. There was an angry look on her face, diffused at first but quickly focusing when she saw me approach. I started making apologies as soon as I was close enough to be heard.

"Ms. Espinoza, Carla, please, I'm terribly sorry. I had no idea any of this was going to happen, you must believe me."

She rose to her feet and glared. She was a head shorter than me, and twenty years older. I had no doubt she'd spent most of that time bouncing from one security position to the next. She outweighed me by a good ten kilos, all of it muscle. The look in her eyes made it clear that she could beat the crap out of me without breaking a sweat.

Her hands lifted, tugging at her ear lobe and the plastic tag. It unclipped and she threw it at me. "If this was Earth I'd sue you and your next three generations for everything you had," she said. "You're lucky the Arconi don't permit lawyers here."

I caught the tag and put it in my pocket. It was an expensive souvenir. I handed her my credit chip. "There
isn’t much left in there, but you’re welcome to it. They took most of what I had to cover license costs.”

“License costs?” she said.

I gave a weak smile. “They determined that since I was in possession of a buffalo dog, and I wasn’t a smuggler, that I obviously had to be a courier and charged me accordingly.”

Her anger melted away at this and she laughed. She’d been on Gibral long enough to know just how expensive a courier license was. That seemed to satisfy her. She pocketed my credit chip. “I’m going to let this go,” she said, “provided I don’t see you again. Otherwise I’m going to tear you a new hole. You’ll be hurting so bad that a walk in vacuum would feel like a welcome relief. Are we clear?”

I nodded, trying hard not to flinch. She gave me another look up and down and stormed out. The clerk seated behind a desk at the back of the lobby had watched the entire scene without comment. He looked pale, even for an Arcon. And why not? He’d heard her every word, and knew it was all true. I collected my hard copy and left.

Judging by the position of Gibral’s wan star high overhead it was nearly noon. I had nothing to do, no money to spend, and a full day before my ship back to Earth left. I started making my way back toward the spaceport proper, hoping to bum a meal and some crash space in exchange for a few hypnotic parlor tricks when a man in a painfully new suit locked step with me. My first thought was that the manager of the Lil Doggie wanted a piece of me, but the fellow was too small to be a goon, too preppy. He was a polished, clean-cut, silver spoon archetype who doubtless had an MBA from some prestigious Ivy League university’s online degree program. I’m not a tough guy, but compared to me he was a weenie.

It took a moment, but I recognized him from a show. I’d hypnotized him. He was a corporate type, a middleman in the transfer of buffalo dogs to Terran business concerns. He had been at the Lil Doggie during my opening show, part of a larger party of still more corporate suits and prospective clients. I’d hypnotized half the people at the table. The clients had been marvelously entertained and this fellow had arranged a generous tip to show his appreciation. Even a small percentage from Gibral’s buffalo dog traffic translated into vast amounts of cash. He could afford to tip big and to wear new suits.

“Mr. Conroy,” said the tipper, “I apologize for contact- ing you so crudely, but I very much need to speak with you. I have a proposition.”

Just when you think things can’t get worse, corporate hustlers show up. Great. “I’m sorry, but I’m tired and I’m hungry and I’m really not in the mood for whatever it is you’re selling,” I said.

He persisted. “Mr. Conroy, my name is Jensen. Please, just hear me out. Why don’t we get a nice comfortable table at The Prairie. My treat, of course. You can have a nice meal, relax, and after you’ve listened to my proposal if you’re still not interested, well, that will be it.”

That stopped me. The Prairie was the only five star restaurant on Gibral. That put it two stars above everything else in the kilometer city. The cost of the appetizers alone would have wiped out a week’s salary. I slipped an arm around his shoulder and mustered up a tired smile. “Mr. Jensen, if lunch is on you, I’m all ears.”

He looked relieved and escorted me to The Prairie. The maître d’ fitted me with an appropriate jacket, and in short order I was sitting at an elegant table enjoying an amuse-gueule of potato cornets layered in crème fraîche, salmon, and caviar and sipping the most delicate wine I’d ever imagined. My cares evaporated but I kept a wary eye on my host. The other shoe was about to drop.

True to his word, he had let me get comfortable before he started his pitch. I was well into the first course—black-eyed peas arranged with antelope sweetbreads, mushrooms, and wild raspberries—when he reached into his breast pocket and withdrew a palmpadd.

“Mr. Conroy, allow me to be direct. My superiors at the Wada Consortium are aware of your recent change of fortune, and the juxtaposition of circumstances that put you there, all through no fault of your own. We’d like to help, if you’ll let us. We want to hire you.”

I almost choked on my wine when he said that. I set down my glass and wiped at my mouth with my napkin. “You need a hypnotist, Mr. Jensen?” I said.

“No, Mr. Conroy, we need a courier. The corporation we represent is scheduled to transfer thirty-two buffalo dogs off Gibral on tomorrow’s ship. All of them have already been sold, and we’ve guaranteed their delivery. The Arcon government allows only a single buffalo dog per licensed courier, and at present we have only thirty-one couriers available.”

I gave him a puzzled frown. “Then why did you sched- ule thirty-two buffalitos?” I slipped another forkful of sweetbreads into my mouth.

Jensen sighed. “Because until yesterday afternoon we..."
Lawrence M. Schoen continued

had thirty-two couriers, Mr. Conroy.”

Which was about the time I remembered the execution of a smuggler. I put my fork down. My appetite vanished. That thirty-second pup was worth ten million credits to someone back on Earth, and the penalty for nondelivery was going to cost Jensen’s company at least half that much.

“I’m a hypnotist. I don’t know much about buffalo dogs or being a courier,” I said.

“There’s not much to know, Mr. Conroy. The buffalo dogs themselves require minimal care. All a courier does is carry the creature onto the ship and stay with it in his stateroom. For the duration of the voyage to Earth you simply monitor the room’s atmospheric regulators to prevent excess oxygen buildup. Upon arrival you carry it off. I’m sure that’s well within your talents.”

“Why don’t you just run someone else through the licensing procedure?” I asked.

“It takes five years to apply for a license, Mr. Conroy. Quite frankly, we’re amazed you’ve acquired one, but we won’t question it. For whatever reason, the Arconi suddenly consider you a courier, and they’re the only ones we have to please to get that thirty-second buffalo dog to Earth.”

He slid the palmpadd across the table. A contract glowed up at me. “I’m prepared to offer you compensation in the amount of one hundred thousand credits in exchange for you acting as our courier.”

That was a lot of money, especially since I was broke and soon to be blacklisted. Still...

“Is that the standard rate for a courier?” He nodded. I paused, pretended to read over the contract while I wracked my brain, trying to remember that very first show I’d done on Gibrahl. I looked at the sweetbreads on my plate and it came to me. Spicy Egyptian. I leaned forward and whispered, “Jalapeño Osiris.”

Jensen slumped back in his chair, his eyes closed. I reached a hand into his jacket and found his wallet. I flipped through it, and checked his corporate ID to learn his first name, as well as the balances on his corporate and personal credit chips. Ken had a lot of credit at his disposal.

“Can you hear me, Ken?”

“Yes, I hear you.”

“That’s good. We’re very good friends, you know. We tell each other everything. There are no secrets between us, Ken. No secrets at all. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” he murmured.

“Tell me, what’s the standard fee for a courier? One who’s carrying a buffalo dog from Gibrahl to Earth for your company?”

“Five hundred thousand credits,” he said. No hesitation at all.

“And yet you offered me only a fifth of that, Ken. Is that any way to treat a friend? Why’d you do it?”

Jensen shrugged, looking embarrassed despite his closed eyes. “We figured you wouldn’t know any better and were so far down that you’d jump at a hundred.”

“You’re probably right, Ken. It hasn’t been my day. But things are looking up. When I count to three you’re going to have a change of heart, Ken. You’re going to decide that you really don’t want to screw me like that. You realize that I’m saving your ass, and you’re going to rewrite this contract for the full five hundred thousand. Plus you’re going to throw in your corporate credit chip, just so I have some walking around money until it’s time for me to leave. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand.”

I returned his wallet to its proper place, sat back, and counted to three. Ken Jensen blinked rapidly and sat up straight, acting like a man who had briefly dozed off and looks around to see if anyone noticed. I was staring down at the palmpadd, pretending to study the contract and shaking my head. “I just don’t know...”

“Let me have that back,” he said. “I think I can sweeten the deal. You’re really getting us out of a bind, so why don’t we call it five hundred thousand, instead?”

He made the changes to the contract and slid it back to me. His company credit chip was sitting on top of the palmpadd.

“Mr. Jensen, you’ve got yourself a courier.” The look from across the table was one of relief and satisfaction. I tried hard to keep my face from showing the same emotions.

Jensen left me to enjoy the rest of my meal, but not before he outlined the plan. I was to present my courier license at any of the Arconi registered facilities, where I’d be free to select the doggie of my choice. Before boarding my ship home I would again show my license and be questioned by an Arcon customs officer. Then, presto, five hundred thousand credits upon arrival on Earth.

I confess, I lingered over the remaining courses. I’m enough of a gourmand to know that proper appreciation requires a respectful span. Jensen had already paid for the meal, and I used his corporate chip to add to the tip before leaving. My new profession beckoned. I was off to
begin life as a courier.

It didn't matter to me where I got the buffalo dog, though most couriers have all sorts of superstitions about such things. My ship departed at 1:00 a.m., leaving me nearly ten hours to kill. I took my time, decided to enjoy a good walk after a great meal. Pedestrian traffic was light. I passed several other couriers, identifiable by the doggies tucked comfortably under one arm. Eventually I found my way to the facility farthest from the space port's customs gate. I stopped in front of a kiosk and a short, bored looking Arcon regarded me from within.

“You're a courier?” he asked, barely glancing at me.

“You bet,” I answered, and he waved me through, the truth of my statement as obvious as daylight.

There was a brief flight of stairs down to the holding area and sheer chaos waiting at the bottom. Thousands of bleating, yipping, scampering buffalo dogs filled a shallow area the size of an Olympic pool. Holographic signs projected warnings of extreme combustibility and the sounds of exhaust fans provided a constant background of white noise. The buffalitos cavorted, none of them able to climb up the two foot height of their pool, though they could see the area surrounding it. They eagerly approached anyone, human or Arcon, who drew near the perimeter. The humans, a dozen or so, were couriers. I watched as they reached in to lift up one creature after another. The selection process appeared to involve hefting the buffalo dog under consideration, tucking it under first one arm and then the other, peering into its eyes, and checking the shade of its blue tongue. Superstitious ritual, but conscientiously observed nonetheless. Eventually, each courier selected a doggie and carried it over to an available Arcon for processing.

After witnessing several variations on the process I followed the example. A very enthusiastic doggie spied me as I approached the edge of its enclosure and plowed through the nearer pups, desperate to reach me. I picked it up. Cute. Adorable really, but for five hundred thousand credits it could have been ugly as sin and I'd have done the job.

“C'mon, little darling,” I said to it, barely resisting the urge to use baby talk, “you'll do as well as any other.” It farted some oxygen, bleated at me from out the other end, and stuck out its tiny tongue. Cerulean. Fine with me. I looked around for one of the Arconi that wasn't busy, found one, and walked up to her.

“You are a courier?” she asked, her tone only slightly less bored than the fellow at the door.

“I'm a courier,” I said, “The Amazing Conroy, Master Courier, at your service.” She didn't look the least bit amused.

“And this is the buffalo dog you've selected?”

“Absolutely,” I said. “Do I get to name her?”

She shrugged, “That is the custom, sir. I'll prepare her tags once I verify the animal's health and administer a sterilizing agent.” She took the doggie from my hands and pressed a medical scanner deeply into fur.

“Then I'm going to name her Regina. Regina Catherine Alyosious Nantucket Bitter Almonds St. Croix. What do you think, is it too much?” What can I say, I was on my way to being a half-millionaire, well fed, and in a great mood.

The Arcon frowned. “I would recommend a more masculine name, sir. You've selected a male. He is in excellent health, but if you'd prefer a female instead you are free to put him back and bring up another for verification and sterilization.”

I shrugged, “What's in a name? No, this one is fine, I'll just call him Reggie. Go ahead, you can sterilize and tag him.”

She shook her head. “I'll be happy to tag him for you, sir, but only the female buffalo dogs are sterilized.” She handed the doggie back to me. “If you'll come this way, I'll prepare Reggie's tags.”

Five minutes later I exited with Reggie tucked complacently under my left arm, the blue plastic disk of his new tag hanging prettily from his left ear. The entire process had taken barely a quarter of an hour. It was a long walk back to the port, and more than once I had the feeling that someone was following me. I made my way to customs and immediately recognized the officer on duty. He was the fattest Arcon I had ever seen, and for that reason alone I'd had him up on stage as a subject during my first week. He'd gone under easily and loved the experience. After the show he came back stage and shook my hand, something the Arconi simply never did. He did it again now when it was my turn at the customs gate, and added only the second smile I'd ever seen from an Arcon. I was in the presence of a fan.

“Mr. Conroy, I was so sorry to hear about your recent problems with the authorities,” he said. In the little kilometer square city rumor traveled at the speed of light, and buffalo dog gossip maybe even a bit faster. “But you've bounced back nicely, I see. I'm delighted to have the privilege of clearing you. This is your first trip as a courier, isn't it?”

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I searched my memory again, using the same mnemonic tricks that let me remember thousands of individual key phrases and their respective hypnotic subjects.

“Thank you, and my last, I suspect. I’m a hypnotist, really. Sergilo, wasn’t it?”

He beamed, standing a bit taller and straighter as if I’d just made him godfather to the Prince of Gibral.

“That’s right, Mr. Conroy. I’m flattered you remember. Well, let’s get you processed and cleared without delay. I just have a couple quick questions and you’ll be free to board your ship. Ready? Are you a licensed courier? Did you obtain this buffalo dog in the prescribed and lawful manner? And is this the only buffalo dog you’ll be transporting? Just answer ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ please.”

I replied yes three times. The Arcon kept eye contact with me and nodded at each answer, confirming the truth in my mind. I grinned and asked, “Aren’t you going to ask me if the critter’s sterile?”

He shook his head, “There’s no need, Mr. Conroy. You’ve got a male there.”

“How can you tell under all this fur?”

“Blue tag. Blue for males, red for females.”

“Handy system,” I said.

He glanced at my visa and consulted a schedule. “Your ship doesn’t leave until one this morning, so you’ve got plenty of time to settle in. I’m on duty here till midnight if you need anything. And if I don’t see you again, well, you have yourself an enjoyable trip home, Mr. Conroy.”

A few minutes later and I was in my cabin on the good ship Bucephalous. The economy class cabin I had shared with three other travelers on the trip in had been upgraded to the more spacious and private accommodations typically used by couriers, courtesy of Mr. Jensen and the Wada Consortium. It included a separate pen and restraining couch for Reggie as well as special atmospheric controls to ensure his flatulence didn’t cause any problems.

My luggage had been impounded when the authorities closed the Lil Doggie, and apparently released when I was. Jensen had arranged for its transfer and everything was right where it should have been in the cabin. Reggie settled into his pen, bleating happily, and I laid back on my own couch to go over recent events. I was about to be wealthier than I had any right to be, though I was still probably blacklisted from ever performing again. That irked me. I’d just told an Arcon that I wasn’t going to remain a courier, I was a hypnotist. Still, at five hundred thousand per doggie it was tempting. But, I asked myself, was it any kind of life for a hypnotist? I held up two images in my mind, courier and hypnotist, comparing and contrasting. An idea bloomed. It was risky, a gamble, but it combined the best of both worlds, if I didn’t end up executed.

I got up from my couch and checked on Reggie. He had curled up on a blanket in his pen and fallen asleep. I slipped into the cabin’s tiny bathroom, regarded myself in the mirror. I created a new trigger phrase and started to implement my idea.

A half hour before midnight I left the Bucephalous and quickly made my way to the nearest registered facility. Barely a block from the space port, this one was even larger than the last I’d visited. It was like a vast buffalo dog warehouse with humans and Arconi scurrying about. I tried not to look nervous, and figured as long as I didn’t lie I’d be fine. I presented my papers at the door, confirmed that I was a courier, and was in. Time was short and I wasn’t very choosy. There were dozens of smaller pens, with the doggies in each assigned by particular combinations of height, weight, tongue color, and so on. I looked for one that was more or less the same size as Reggie, scooped it up and headed for an available Arcon on the far side of the pens.

“You are a courier?” he asked, and I nodded an assent. “This is the buffalo dog you’ve selected?” Again I nodded. “Fine, let me have it.” He wielded his medical scanner with professional boredom, studied the readout and turned back to me. “You’ve made a fine choice. She’s in perfect health. Give me a moment to administer a sterilizing agent and you can take her.”

“A female?” I said, trying my best to look disappointed. “I’m sorry, I wanted a male. It’s a Friday, you know, unlucky day for females. I’ll just carry this one back.”

The Arcon dismissed me with a shrug, likely having heard far stranger courier superstitions. He didn’t spare me a second look as I carried the doggie back toward the pens; there was plenty of other work for him. I made my way past the pens of doggies but didn’t stop to replace the female. Instead I walked toward the exit, trying hard to keep my pace natural and unhurried. No one stopped me and I was back out onto the street without incident. I was now a smuggler.

The trip back to the port was the longest block I’d ever walked. That feeling of being followed returned, and as I rounded the corner I caught a glimpse of two Arconi in my peripheral vision. The trigger phrase leapt to my mind, but it was too early to use it. It was useless until
after midnight. Instead I took the red tag out of my pocket and affixed it to the buffalo dog’s left ear. According to the tag she was now Carla Espinoza. I entered the space port and detoured into a small pub with an elaborate exhaust system and took a seat at the bar. Most of the clientele were couriers, each with a buffalito tucked under one arm. It was common for couriers to enjoy a drink before boarding the ship home to Earth. Say one thing for the Arcon psychic faculty, it made clearing customs efficient and quick. We’d all be able to get through in under ten minutes. Well, maybe not all of us. It was still a bit before midnight and Sergilo, my fat and friendly Arcon was still on duty and sure to recognize me. I ordered an overpriced beer, put it on the Wada Consortium chip and settled in for a half hour’s wait just to be safe. I was on my second beer when four Arconi entered the pub. One of them was Loyoka.

“Put down the buffalo dog and step away from the bar!”

There were other couriers in the room and none of them seemed the least bit alarmed. Those at the bar were all setting their doggies down and keeping their hands in plain view as they moved away. I did the same, sliding a bowl of peanuts under Carla Espinoza’s woolly beard to keep her happy. This was it. “Spumoni Heimdahl,” I whispered to myself. I blinked and almost stumbled. Something had happened, but I wasn’t sure what.

Ignoring the other couriers, Loyoka came for me. “I told you I’d be keeping an eye on you, Mr. Conroy. Is that your buffalo dog?”

“Yes,” I said. His gaze never left mine. “Though technically I suppose it belongs to the Wada Consortium. I’m just the courier.”

“The same Wada Consortium that recently employed a courier found to be a smuggler? Don’t you find that a bit of a coincidence, Mr. Conroy?”

“No, it’s not,” I said. “That courier was executed. They needed another one fast and I was available. I don’t see anything coincidental about that at all.”

He pushed past me to the bar and picked up the buffalo dog, studying the tag on her ear. She gave a bewildered bleat as he pulled her from her bowl of peanuts. “And this is Carla Espinoza?” His eyes narrowed.

“Yes, she is,” I said, giving him a quizzical look.

“This is the woman you had on stage during your performance last night?”

I laughed. “No, this is a buffalo dog I selected from one of your registered facilities. I just named her after that woman.”

He grunted then, and thrust the buffalo dog into my arms. “Then let’s get you safely through customs, Mr. Conroy. I wouldn’t want you to miss your ship.” He nodded to the other Arconi who lined up to either side and behind me and together we all marched over to clear customs.

It was after midnight and the customs officer was a short and attractive Arcon, almost human looking. The name Sergilo came to me as I waited in line, but I couldn’t place why. I was fairly certain I’d never met her; not all the Arconi had come to my shows. When it was my turn I presented my courier license.

She glanced at it, at me, and then at Loyoka and his friends. “Mr. Conroy,” she said, reading my name from the license, I have just three questions for you. Please respond ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Are you a licensed courier? Did you obtain this buffalo dog in the prescribed and lawful manner? And is this the only buffalo dog you will be transporting?”

“Yes, I am a licensed courier. Yes, I acquired this doggie appropriately, and yes, this is the only buffalo dog I’m transporting.”

Loyoka stared at me. His face bore a look of surprise and stunned amazement. The customs officer nodded and waved me through, but Loyoka stopped me as I tried to go past, turning me back to him with a hand on my arm.

“One extra question for you, Mr. Conroy, if you please,” he said. His eyes burned into mine. “Are you a smuggler, Mr. Conroy? Yes or no.”

Irritably I pushed his hand away. “You’ve asked me this before. I am not a smuggler.”

He blinked and then turned to the other Arconi he had brought with him. Three other heads gave slight shakes and Loyoka returned his attention to me. “My apologies, Mr. Conroy, I appear to have misjudged you. Please, no offense intended.”

“Right, you were just doing your job. Fine. Are we finished?”

“Completely. Safe travels to you, Mr. Conroy.” With that he turned and left, the other three Arconi leaving with him. The customs officer gave me a perplexed look and signaled for the next person in line. I turned, and with Carla Espinoza safely under my arm, boarded the ship.

I proceeded to my assigned cabin and let myself in. My first impression was that I was in the wrong place.

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Lawrence M. Schoen continued

Or perhaps some other courier had mistakenly claimed my cabin. For whatever reason there was already a buffa-lo dog in the room, secured to a makeshift acceleration couch in a pen. I spun around to leave and saw a hand made sign I’d missed before because it was pinned to the back of the door. SPUMONI HEIMDAHL it read in large thick letters. I blinked, felt a moment’s dizziness, and realized I was in the right room after all. I locked the door and moved to reset the cabin’s atmospheric con-trols.

Many hours later, long after the Bucephalous was on its way back to Earth, one of Gibrahl’s registered buffalo dog facilities discovered it was missing a doggie. Reggie and Carla were getting along fine, enthusiastically doing their part to ensure the first litter of buffalo pups born off Gibrahl. To his courier, Reggie was worth five hun-dred thousand. To a smuggler, plucking an extra buf-falito was worth ten million. But I’m a hypnotist, and I was coming away with Earth’s first fertile and soon-to-be pregnant buffalo dog. I figured I could set my own price. That’s show biz.


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Smofcon 37½

A free event on conrunning to be held December 5th, 2020

https://sites.grenadine.co/sites/conzealand/en/smofcon-37-14/

(try clicking the URL, if that doesn’t work, consider it an advanced conrunning skill test)
Art Gallery

Art in many forms created by many talented amateurs and professionals from the Philadelphia region as well as Art Show regulars and previous Philcon Artist Guests

These pieces of art may be long-time favorites or newly created works. All choices were made by the individual artists.

Contributors:

- Bob Walters
- Janet Kofoed
- Jennifer Wilson
- Diane Weinstein
- Karl Kofoed
- Tess Kissinger
- Fran Wilde
- Rebecca Marcus
- Terry Sisk Graybill
- Jason Van Hollander
- Jim Tigar
- Heidi Hooper
- Lee Weinstein
- Michael Swanwick
- Darrell Schweitzer
- Sara Felix
- Anne E.G. Nydam
- Janny Wurts
- Don Maitz
- Lisa Hertel
- Richard Hescox
- Alan Beck
- Sarah Clemens
About Bob Walters

Bob Walters began drawing dinosaurs when he was 4 years old and first saw “The Age of Reptiles” by Rudolph Zallinger on the cover of Life Magazine. He illustrated his first dinosaur book, Dinosaurs, the Terrible Lizards for E.P. Dutton in 1979 and since then, he has illustrated more than 20 books as well as innumerable magazine articles and TV shows for PBS, A&E, and the Discovery Channel.

He often works with his life partner, Tess Kissinger. The couple first collaborated in 1995 on the murals and illustration program for the dinosaur hall at the Creative Discovery Museum in Chattanooga. Since then they have worked together recreating paleo environments for the NMNH, The Academy of Natural Sciences, Taiwan National Museum of Natural History, Delaware Museum of Natural History, Southwest Florida Historical Museum, Idaho State Museum of Natural History, USGS, Utah Field House of Natural History, The Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and Dinosaur National Monument. They have won 2 Lanzendorf 2D Awards for their murals in the past. Bob is an alumnus of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, where he studied painting. You can visit them online at www.dinoart.com.
Bob Walters continued

Demon
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Undertaker 1
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Crystal Dragon

© 2020 copyright Janet Kofoed
Janet Kofoed continued

Nest & Branch Chain
© 2020 copyright Janet Kofoed

Flamingoes
© 2020 copyright Janet Kofoed

Dragon Abalone
© 2020 copyright Janet Kofoed
About Janet Kofoed

The daughter of a military officer and NASA engineer, Janet Kofoed’s work is influenced by the many countries where she has lived. Her love of science and nature is also reflected in her jewelry, often casting natural textures and objects in silver and incorporating them into her designs. She studied jewelry making at the Smithsonian Institution, and has been creating unique pieces in silver, bronze, copper and semiprecious stones in her Drexel Hill studio for more than thirty years. She is married to sf artist and writer Karl Kofoed
Diane Weinstein

Philcon 2025

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About Diane Weinstein

Diane Weinstein was assistant editor for *Weird Tales* magazine from 1989 to 2005 and also as art editor for the last eight years. She was also a general editorial assistant at Wildside Press until 2005. Some of her projects there included collections edited by her husband, Lee. She has exhibited her own paintings in convention art shows. She has been the Art Goddess (that’s her official title!) for *Space & Time* magazine since 2007.
About Karl Kofoed

Karl Kofoed is a science fiction illustrator and writer. He is well known to the East Coast SF community and has done scores of book covers and interior illustrations for magazines like *Analog* and *Asimov’s SF Magazine*. He currently has six novels published by Baen eBooks; *JOKO*, *Deep Ice*, *Jupiter’s Reef*, *Farthest Reef*, *Infinite Reef*, and *Ark*.

Karl is perhaps best known for his lavishly illustrated Galactic Geographic feature which has appeared in *Heavy Metal Magazine* in two incarnations. It began in 1980 and ran for two years, then resumed in 1998 and continued until 2008. His pieces feature diverse and imaginative views of living alien worlds and a distinctive documentary style, which have set Karl’s work apart from others in his field. Karl has always regarded the Galactic Geographic material as a single work of art, and using his computer he single-handedly designed, wrote, illustrated, and produced the *Galactic Geographic Annual 3003*, which he describes as a nature magazine from the future. Published by Chrysalis/Paper Tiger Books in 2003, it is still available. It is in the Library of Congress.

Karl’s artwork became part of NASA’s Cassini mission to Saturn, providing what were deemed by the head of the mission to be highly accurate surface views of Saturn’s moons. When the probe found the famous geyser-like plumes on the moon Enceladus, Karl’s art was water cooler discussion among scientists the world over.

Karl and his wife Janet, a popular jewelry designer, live in Drexel Hill, PA. They each have a daughter named Lisa, from previous marriages.
Karl Kofoed continued

Announcer

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I'm Tellin' Ya

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Millennium Worm

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Tess Kissinger continued

About Tess Kissinger

Tess Kissinger attended art school at Carnegie Mellon University. She originally intended to explore personal interests in fine art painting and sculpture, but at Philcon in 1980 she met Bob Walters and other paleontologists who also are avid science fiction fans and a new circle of friends and new interests captured her. She continued on her own track until 1995 when she and Bob Walters formed a company and worked together on the paleo hall at the Creative Discovery Museum in Chattanooga. After that the couple continued to work together on museum projects and a best-selling children’s book, Discovering Dinosaurs. She and Bob live in East Falls in Philadelphia with their two cats who both like Bob better than her. You can see more of Tess’ work at their website, www.dinoart.com.
Many writers keep journals. I’m one of them. I use journals to plot and plan (books, I promise, not murders), to figure out what I’m thinking about a particular topic or on a particular day, to remember what I’ve seen, or to look more deeply at what I’m experiencing, especially as I travel. Later on, I’ll go back through these journals and develop ideas into stories, essays, and more.

In early December 2018, I joined fellow authors Naomi Kritzer, Tang Fei, Sam Murray, Han Song, Su Wanwen, Carolyn Ives Gilman, Lei Zhao, and Liang Ling in Guanzhou, China for several days during one of the harvest festivals for which the region is known. While there, we met cultural knowledge historians, village elders, local artists, tea farm supervisors, and one groundskeeper. The trip was sponsored by the Future Affairs Administration (FAA), who has published a short story of mine, and WANDA group and focused on an area that has been designated for cultural support. Before going, and while there, I was very aware that this would be a highly curated trip—we saw and learned incredible things with the help of our guides.

Throughout our travels all of us talked about the role that science fiction plays in different parts of the world. I was particularly excited to hear from Han Song (I’ve read “The Wheel of Samsara” in 2009 The Apex Book of World SF – Lavie Tidhar, ed; and would like to read more of his work.) and Tang Fei (whose stories I’ve read in Clarkesworld (“A Universal Elegy”), translated by John Chu, and in Apex Magazine (“Call Girl”), translated by Ken Liu.

Getting to better know authors from China as well as the US and Australia was a joy. Many of us took a lot of pictures and notes as we walked and drove and talked about what we were experiencing. And I, as I said above, kept a journal, as always.

But something about this trip shifted my usual word-and-doodle note-taking into overdrive. The notes became more of a story than I’d planned, right on the page. I didn’t notice it until later, but I was increasingly using frame and image over and around words … and that use of frames — what was inside and outside the frame of the page, or the frame of each image, may be related to the fact that we were only seeing one area of China. Learning more about the region we visited, and about the many cultures living in the valleys and mountains away from the big cities was a wonderful opportunity.

I find it difficult to keep my mind off what was, and is, happening elsewhere that we were not seeing.

They exist now both as a record of the time, and a way to think about how storytelling and notetaking, especially as an outsider, is part of noticing details and thinking through experiences. The following are a few of them.

(The notes are my own speedy impressions at the time — spelling and likenesses may vary. I’m not sure what else will happen with these pages yet, but drawing this way was a decidedly different means of creatively experiencing a place.)
Day 1
(and a little of days 2 & 3…):

Danzhai, Tea, Many Official Meetings

We watched as author (and incredibly kind person) Han Song was named mayor for a day and planted a ceremonial tea tree; later, we traveled up a mountain to see a wall containing Miao history; spoke with the Danzhai Writer’s Council; and ate a traditional Miao (a cumulative term used in China for cultures in the region including the Hmong and Mong) feast.

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Fran Wilde continued

A Map of Where We Went:
Many of us flew into Beijing, then took another plane to Guiyang, then drove several hours to Dazhanzi (Carolyn and I arrived at 3am after almost 30 hours of travel each). Over the course of the next several days, we took a small van through tea-growing areas, up into the mountains, and to an abandoned mineral mine.

Day 2:
The Mine & More
We walked throughout an old mineral (a search says gold and mercury) mine, then drove in the van through a mineshaft (I still can't believe we did that), before ending up at a place none of us had expected to see: an abandoned (mostly) political prison. Han Song mentioned that at one point 800 prisoners had lived there, up to ten in a cell. Standing in the prison (I couldn't climb the stairs with the others), I started to draw and noticed especially how far away the sky felt.
Day 3:

Scenes from around Danzhai.

I began sketching these at breakfast, and it took several different drawings for me to realize how deeply integrated the horn designs were in every part of the local structures.

One thing I like about sketching: it makes me look more closely at everything… and it sometimes helps me notice what I’m not seeing.

Pictured: Drums around Danzhai; Danzhai Cultural Center; shops; Legend Tea; Danzhai’s water wheel; a bridge outside the hotel; Mountain’s End (Pai Zuo)

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Day 4:  
Time to go home.

On our way back to the airport, Naomi Kritzer, Carolyn Ives Gilman and I discussed a lot of what made the SF Week organized by the Future Affairs Administration (FAA) a powerful and thought-provoking experience. We talked about the people we’d met and what we’d learned. Among many questions, we wondered if we would return. We wondered whether we’d be asked at some point “where was the Science Fictional Element?” since this was a science fiction writer’s trip… and as we said that, we passed an amusement park outside the airport, where a giant robot rose over the nearest bridge. It was a moment of realization that science fiction elements always surround us, especially if we look at things from a slightly different angle … and I re-envisioned some of the places we visited with a little bit of that filter… including a papermaking cave because that was just cool (there probably weren’t that many bats)… as SF settings.
As with all journals, all drawings, all stories, all experiences, some things are left out of the frame, missed, or excluded for reasons including personal ones. Just before we departed, a few more things happened that I didn’t draw. My passport was taken at the regional airport coming home, and returned only after an argument — I was told because I was traveling with a cane and needed assistance. (I got it back, but I’m flagging this for those considering traveling with a disability.) We arrived home to news that more crackdowns were happening, especially in the northwest. All of this is part of the story too – as much as all the places we visited, and I am working hard to increase my

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About Fran Wilde

Two-time Nebula award winning author Fran Wilde’s novels and short stories have been finalists for six Nebula Awards, a World Fantasy Award, three Hugo Awards, three Locus Awards, and a Lodestar. They include her Nebula- and Compton-Crook-winning debut novel *Updraft*, and her Nebula-winning debut Middle Grade novel *Riverland*. Her short stories appear in *Asimov’s*, *Tor.com*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Shimmer*, *Nature*, *Uncanny*, and *Jonathan Strahan’s 2020 Year’s Best SFF*. (Bibliography.)

Fran directs the Genre Fiction MFA concentration at Western Colorado University and writes nonfiction for publications including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *Tor.com*. You can find her on Twitter, Facebook, and at franwilde.net.

You can find her on Twitter & Instagram (@fran_wilde), Facebook, and at franwilde.net.
Red Dragon

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Amphora of Love
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Reflection
© 2020 copyright Rebecca Marcus
About Rebecca Marcus

I have been doing needlework since 1997 starting with needlepoint, then moving to cross stitch, surface embroidery, and finally a foray into making costumes. Thankfully the fiber arts lends itself to the SF/fantasy world so easily. I am never at a loss for things to do in my preferred genre. It’s an opportunity for me to be creative and express my love for design and colors. Any writer who has struggled with a single word can appreciate the challenge of deciding what shade of red to use for Superman’s cape, or the shades of green for that perfect ombre’ effect on a mermaid’s tail, or what type of stitch pattern would convey what fairy wings should look like. It’s a joy to have such a creative outlet.
I Guess We're Not in Kansas Anymore

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Terry Sisk Graybill continued

Modern Gorgon
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A Dream of a Snat on a Brancusi Ball
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Terry Sisk Graybill
The Collected Fiction of CLARK ASHTON SMITH

The Collected Short Stories of CLARK ASHTON SMITH Volume One

The Collected Fiction of Clark Ashton Smith Volume One
© 2020 copyright Jason Van Hollander
About Jason Van Hollander

84 Years of Philcon

Jim Tigar

Philly Rocket
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Jim Tigar
About Heidi Hooper

Heidi Hooper’s is known as the “Dryer Lint Lady” for her unusual art. Consumer Reports calls her the “Andy Warhol of Dryer Lint.” She’s a two time winner of the prestigious Niche award and her work can be seen in Ripley’s Believe it or Not Museums all over the world and in their books. A few years ago, she appeared on ABC TV’s “To Tell The Truth” where she showed off her art to celebrities like Mel Brooks. She’s recently been featured on “60 Second Docs” and has been the artist Guest of Honor at Albacon and Heliosphere. Heidi has a Bachelors in Sculpture from Virginia Commonwealth University and Master’s in Metalsmithing from the Massachusetts College of Art. Her web page is www.heidihooper.com.
Dead Landscape

© 2020 copyright Lee Weinstein
About Lee Weinstein

Lee Weinstein is a retired librarian who has had a lifelong interest in science fiction, fantasy, and horror. He has edited several short story collections and his non-fiction has appeared in Studies in Weird Fiction, Supernatural Fiction Writers, New York Review of Science Fiction, Horror Fiction through History and elsewhere. He is an ongoing contributor to the online third edition of the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction. He has also dabbed in oil painting since the mid-1990’s. He lives in Philadelphia.

Philecon Building Floating
© 2020 copyright Lee Weinstein

Philecon Hi-Rise
© 2020 copyright Lee Weinstein

Philecon World of Tomorrow
© 2020 copyright Lee Weinstein
Gripped by that phrase, science fiction author Michael Swanwick began to go into parks and cemeteries and find fallen leaves on which to write the word, “Death.” Each fall he would repeat this art project, and it grew more elaborate as time went on. One year he had rubber stamps made to put LIF” or DEATH on individual leaves, in black block letters. Another, he wrote the leave’s mournful last words upon them. Or he would label some ORIGINAL and some COPY. Always the leaves would be left to drift away, to perhaps bring wonder into the life of a passerby.

Michael Swanwick’s leaf project this year was a story about Jack Frost, himself putting stories word by word on individual leaves and scattered to the winds. As always, the beauty and transience of this art project is matched only by how difficult it is to share with an audience. Please enjoy these photographs of his latest story in its original form, written on the corpses of trees.

The entire project by Michael Swanwick is in a separate bonus file! Be sure to download that file when you download your Philcon Souvenir Program Book.

Jack Frost’s Wake

by Michael Swanwick

Jack Frost’s Wake

© 2020 copyright Michael Swanwick
**Cartoon: Aztec**
© 2020 copyright Darrell Schweitzer

**Cartoon: Take Over Fandom**
© 2020 copyright Darrell Schweitzer

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**Cartoon: Homes & Dino**
© 2020 copyright Darrell Schweitzer

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*Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?*

*To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.*

*The dog did nothing in the night-time.*

*That was the curious incident.*
Cosmic Egg

© 2020 copyright Sara Felix
About Sara Felix

Sara Felix is a Hugo and Chesley nominated mixed media artist working in primarily inks and resin. She also creates a weekly tiara for Tiara Tuesdays and has a very popular tiara giveaway on the Concellation facebook group.

She has designed the Hugo and the Lodestar award and is the president of ASFA (The Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists).
About Anne E.G. Nydam

Anne E.G. Nydam makes relief block prints celebrating the wonders of worlds both real and imaginary. She carves her original designs into blocks of rubber or wood, rolls with ink, and presses by hand in limited editions. Everything in the block that is carved away becomes white in the finished print, while the areas that are left uncarved become the color of the ink. She especially enjoys mythical, magical creatures. Her block prints invite imagination and evoke stories, and she also writes and illustrates books about adventure, creativity, magic, and looking for the best in others. See more at nydamprints.com.
One Giant Leap
© 2020 copyright Anne E.G. Nydam

Feathers to Light the Way
© 2020 copyright Anne E.G. Nydam

Umbrellaphant
© 2020 copyright Anne E.G. Nydam
Janny Wurts

Black Bergen
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Janny Wurts

Mara of the Arcoma
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Janny Wurts
Burn It All the Way
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Cildein Gale
© 2020 copyright Janny Wurts
About Janny Wurts

Janny Wurts made imaginative subjects her primary creative focus. Facile with both with brush and pen, she's authored nineteen books, a short fiction collection, and contributed to thirty six SFF anthologies. Translated into fourteen languages worldwide, most editions feature her own jacket and interior art. HarperCollins Voyager UK publishes her Wars of Light and Shadows series, nearly completed.

Cover paintings for a special edition of Daughter of the Empire, a new short story, “Black Bargain,” and a recent novella, The Gallant, are exhibited in PhilCon’s program book.

Her paintings have showcased in NASA’s 25th Anniversary exhibit, the Canton Art Museum, Hayden Planetarium in NYC, also recognized by two Chesley Awards, and three times Best of Show at World Fantasy Convention. Her oil painting, Dragon’s Run, remains in the collection of the Delaware Art Museum. Website to read excerpts and purchase ebook shorts and prints: www.paravia.com/JannyWurts
Golden Moment
© 2020 copyright Don Maitz

There Be Dragons
© 2020 copyright Don Maitz

Sharing a Book
© 2020 copyright Don Maitz
Don Maitz continued

About Don Maitz

International acclaim surrounds imaginative paintings by Don Maitz. He created the Captain Morgan Spiced Rum character, provided conceptual art for two animated feature films, and covers for over 250 books. National Geographic, The History Channel, and three illustrated editions by Stephen King have presented his work. Awards include three Hugos, a Howard, the Silver Medal from the Society of Illustrators, ten Chesleys, and an Inkpot from San Diego ComicCon. Maitz’s paintings have hung in forty museums. He’s a Signature member of the American Society of Marine Artists and married to author/artist Janny Wurts. Website: www.paravia.com/DonMaitz

Don’s art, The Reaper, for Stephen King’s The Stand disturbingly reflects the arrival of COVID-19. Golden Moment is the subject of an artist interview at: https://art4erth.com

Don and Donato are among artists donating art for downloads to benefit environment issues including efforts to clean waters flowing to the Philadelphia Area. Don normally attends Illuxcon in Reading which has gone digital this year his booth can be found at https://ix-online.com

The Stand: The Reaper
© 2020 copyright Don Maitz

Potions Charms Lucky Trinkets
© 2020 copyright Don Maitz
Mug
© 2020 copyright Lisa Hertel

Tree on Circuit Board: Rise of Technology (series)
© 2020 copyright Lisa Hertel

Blue Weave
© 2020 copyright Lisa Hertel
Lisa Hertel continued

**About Lisa Hertel**
Lisa Hertel is an artist working in clay, alcohol inks, encaustics (painting with hot wax), watercolors, and wire. She enjoys teaching art to all ages, and believes everyone has the ability to make art. Lisa maintains a studio in Haverhill MA (aka Riverdale). In her free time, she often helps run science fiction conventions. Before she became an artist, Lisa was a pharmacist. Visit her website at [www.cogitation.org](http://www.cogitation.org).

*The Hummingbird’s Wedding (A Mayan Myth)*
*(watercolor)*
© 2020 copyright Lisa Hertel

*Leaves: Ceramic Leaf Bowls & Spoon Rests*
© 2020 copyright Lisa Hertel
Moon Spell

© 2020 copyright Richard Hescox
Richard Hescox continued

The Sea Bound Altar
© 2020 copyright Richard Hescox

Tree of Crowns
© 2020 copyright Richard Hescox

A Gift of Venom
© 2020 copyright Richard Hescox
About Richard Hescox

Richard Hescox’s first published work appeared on the cover of Marvel Comics Monsters Unleashed # 7 soon followed by his first paperback cover art, created for DAW books, appearing in 1976. Since then he has produced over 140 covers for nearly every major publisher of fantasy and science fiction.

While living in Southern California, he frequently illustrated for the motion picture industry. He created production illustrations for “The Howling” and “The Philadelphia Experiment”. His surrealistic paintings were featured as props in the film “House”. He has contributed artwork to the ad campaigns of many films including E.T., The Dark Crystal and The Fly, and painted the finished poster art for the films Swamp Thing and Death Valley. He also served as background painting department head for an animated science fiction series.

Richard has worked for several game companies, creating artwork for interactive computer games. At Dynamix Richard was Conceptual Art Director on the game RAMA (working with science fiction authors Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee), designing all of the visual aspects of the game and contributing to the gameplay design itself. He also served as Art Director on Gabriel Knight III. Richard has contributed conceptual designs to a wide variety of games, including Quest for Glory V, Cyberstorm II, Tribes, Socom 3 and MechWarrior.


His personal paintings and private commissions, featuring mythological women in mysterious and lyrical settings, have often been featured in Spectrum and have been selected as finalists in the Art Renewal Center’s Salon.

Richard’s artwork and prints can be viewed and purchased at his website: www.richardhescox.com

Carson of Venus: The Tree City
© 2020 copyright Richard Hescox
YoYo

© 2020 copyright Alan Beck
About Alan Beck

Alan F. Beck has been an artist, designer and illustrator for over thirty years doing work for many major corporations including book covers and magazine illustrations. His work has been exhibited in art shows and Science Fiction/Fantasy conventions all across the country. He has won numerous awards and honors including two Chesley award nominations and a Hugo Award finalist, and received a Body of Work Award at LA Con IV WorldCon Art Show, Anaheim, CA. Alan’s work tends to be realistic and surrealistic in nature, often whimsical and humorous. His paintings and prints can be found in collections in the US, Canada and Europe. He has recently published a children’s book The Adventures of Nogard and Jackpot and is creator of the “Mouseopolitan Museum of Art”. His artwork and concepts are produced using acrylics, watercolor, pastels, 3-D modeling and image manipulation programs. His art can be found in Space and Time magazine, The Fantasy Art Bible, assorted e-zines and various book covers.

Visit www.alanfbeck.com
Sarah Clemens continued

About Sarah Clemens

Sarah is best known for her award-winning paintings of her cat and dragon combo, Magnus and Loki. With her realistic style, she creates images of the fantastic, which include small paintings on stone slabs, large oil paintings, and digital artwork. Her fantasy art has won many awards, including a tie for Best Artist at ConZealand, but she has also exhibited and won national awards at the Seattle Erotic Art Festival and her erotic paintings are published in Volumes 2 and 3 of *The World’s Greatest Erotic Art of Today*. Sarah and her husband and cats and terrariums and carnivorous plants live in Mesa, AZ. Her prints for sale page is [http://clemensart.com/prints.htm](http://clemensart.com/prints.htm)
Philcon 2021
November 19-21, 2021
The Crowne Plaza Hotel, Cherry Hill, NJ

Max Gladstone
Principal Speaker

Romas Kukalis
Artist Guest of Honor

• Free parking & public transit access
• Panels, art show, masquerade, concerts, gaming, anime, writers’ workshop, meet the pros, filking, vendors and more!

Note:
We are planning an in-person convention but watch our website for the most current information.

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www.philcon.org
www.Facebook.com/Philcon.PSFS