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EDITORIAL



A Way of Life or a Goddam Hobby?

In the earlier days of science fiction fandom, some of the fans were arguing about their new interest and one of them said "Science fiction is just a goddam hobby." That sounds like a rather gauche statement to make, but it was probably a response to someone treating science fiction with piety and awe and saying that people should take every caution in approaching science fiction as an amateur writer and a novice to the art. The answer to the condemnatory statement was formulated by developing the notion that fandom was a way of life, something that should be pursued as much as anything else in life, and a thing of great profit to the individual who engaged in fandom activity, something that had its place in existence. Both people were existentially concerned with what fandom meant to them, and their concern spread to a lot of other people; these remarks were considered and discussed far into the future. And at times fandom seems to exceed its bounds and extend itself out into the world, influencing, perhaps, the world of affairs. They have an insight into things of this world that is not had by other people, and their perceptions might well be taken into consideration by other people who are concerned with the state of things in the world.

Seemingly science fiction writing is definite enough to have developed enemies, as we have observed a lot of condemnation of science fiction in various magazines of literary criticism, whose writers seem to be largely ignorant even of what science fiction is. I think some people in science fiction fandom got in conflict with these writers and the conflict developed into a form of warfare, and many things in fandom were intentionally put asunder by infiltrators, seduction-ists, obfuscation-ists and warmongers. Using literary tools they spread confusion about science fiction and uncertainty about its place in the world of letters. When these things happen, it is time for fandom to take another look at itself, and this is what I am encouraging in this

bureau, a revision of earlier entanglements which interfere with the development of science fiction fandom and a new evaluation of what science fiction does for us. Those who disagree with this statement very vividly may be those people who do not want us to proceed and find it against their interests for science fiction to get together and progress. The negative attitude comes from somewhere, perhaps from producers of negativity. We ought to study assaults that occur and see whether they are negative to science fiction. And we ought not to keep the company of people who are. We don't have the philosophy that leads to these attitudes and so we cannot be spoken to convincingly by those who find negative things about science fiction. They should take it into their minds that science fiction is a thing to be cherished. But they never will because it just doesn't suit them somehow. Perhaps they should be somewhere else than where people are trying to get a good science fiction thing going.

I think science fiction is enough a part of life to be a way of life that is appealing to certain individuals, and that these individuals should perpetuate it. The good thing would be to get it going again, to get some actual fan activity started and to gain a more vibrant existence for the science fiction art. It isn't hard to do if you aren't being beaten by some sociological magic. A man comes along wearing an anything suit and tries to baffle you into following a set of norms that relate to nothing in particular. Science fiction asks questions, for Pete's sake, it doesn't just experiment.

I hope I have gotten some people interested in my viewpoint in this editorial essay, and that we can find some fellow spirit within the science fiction venue. It would be nice to see things get going again, rather than just being stalled in a confrontational impasse. All the bear could see as it went over the mountain was the other side of the mountain, but what we can see is people coming up over the mountain to see what's on our side of the mountain. I think the bear was doing better than we are. We shouldn't be mocked up in a number of Serland and Ike fables. Haven't you ever heard of go? Or is all we know stop? Instead of no all the time, we ought to try a few yesses.

This fanzine and its bureau try to contribute to the uplifting of science fiction activity, and I feel very disappointed when people don't share in its viewpoint.

Try something you might like out, folks!



A LAND SOMEWHERE ON URANUS by Celine Rose Mariotti

Celine Mariotti is a writer who has been interviewed in a previous Ionisphere. She has shown interest in the NFFF, but is not sure about joining it.



It's "Keep Off" on that planet!

art by Décor Photo

The American spaceship Columbus was coming in for the first landing on the planet of Uranus. Dino Marchetti, the pilot and the Co-Captain, steered the ship in for its landing on the faraway planet of Uranus in the year of 2070. He had a crew of nine people and he and the Co-Captain, Mark Armano, were the pilots. The others were scientists and one was an engineer, one an artist, one a singer and an actor, and a lieutenant in the Royal Air Force. Most of them flew in their American spacecraft for the USA, but four of them were British.

Dr. Winifred Statton was a physicist, a scientist from Oxford University in Oxford, England. She was a very serious lady but from time to time she did have a little dry humor and she loved to talk about her garden and the many orchids she raised. She had been chosen for this journey to Uranus as she had conducted a lot of research on the surface of Uranus and on possible life on the planet. She even wrote books on the subject and was often on the TV both in Britain and America discussing her knowledge of the planet.

Captain Mark Armano was from Stratford, Connecticut, and his Co-Captain Dino was from Fresno, California. They had seen new developments on the planet of Uranus with all the many satellites being sent there. And they knew now that there was life on the faraway planet. Not only a form of human life, but animal life too. But Uranus was a cold planet, the coldest planet in the galaxy as it has no internal heat source. It is made up of 85% hydrogen and 15% of helium. Uranus was a mystery to most scientists, but it also

has many Moons. Dino looked out the window of their state-of-the-art spaceship. All was deathly quiet. He couldn't venture out till they put on their thermal, double-padded, double-insulated spacesuits to keep them warm. Captain Armano checked all the instruments on the panel and with their digital zoom camera snapped some photos of what they saw outside of their spaceship.

This mission would be a most dangerous and ominous one for all of them.

Margaret Zeller, from the state of Texas, came out of her cabin and she was fascinated by what she saw from their window. "Wow! That is the most amazing scene I ever saw in outer space! We will have a lot to study on this most unusual planet so far out in our galaxy." She was an aeronautical engineer, and she was recruited by NASA to be on this journey to Uranus because of all the research she had done about the planet. It was research she had compiled into a best-selling book. She made so many TV appearances that NASA decided they wanted her to be part of their project. Now she was an employee and astronaut working for NASA. She had been on two journeys to Mars and she had written about them too.

Captain Marchetti looked out on the terrain of this faraway planet. He wondered how long they would be able to stay there with the cold temperatures on this planet. Dino worried if all the hard double-aluminum insulation they had all around the inside walls of the spaceship would keep them warm enough. He worried what kind of life they might encounter on this ice-cold faraway planet. It had taken them three years to get there. He noticed a shadow somewhere in the distance. What was the shadowy figure? It could be an alien on this planet. If it is an alien, is he or she friendly or unfriendly.

Lieutenant William Harworth was a scientist and in the Royal Air Force. William had been training with NASA for this venture since 2051. He had been recruited because of the work he had done in Antarctica where he had set up high-powered telescopes to view the stars and planets from way down at the bottom of the equator where only penguins live. He had set up cameras so that NASA could view the barren land in Antarctica and obtain all the data they needed to compare with what the surface in Uranus might be. Lieutenant Harworth was most happy and proud to be on this journey to the planet of Uranus.

Professor Damien Chikowsky hailed from the state of Illinois, and he taught at a small university outside of Springfield. He taught astronomy and his students loved him. His wife Katie was sad to say goodbye to him knowing he would be away for at least seven or eight years. What would she do? Where would she go? She decided to return to her acting and so before he left for his journey to Uranus, she took the three kids and they packed up and drove to Los Angeles. Professor Chikowsky had been chosen for this trip to Uranus because in the many years he spent studying the stars and planets he had discovered a new galaxy now named the Copernicus Galaxy.

Another member of the crew was Akira Fujimoto, a Japanese American, who lived on the island of Maui and was a full-time artist and sculptor. Her many paintings of the planets and stars and the sculpture of Neil Armstrong had drawn the attention of many people at NASA and so she was chosen to go on this journey to the planet of Uranus. Akira was both flattered and scared. She wasn't married and had no children but her family, her Dad and Mom who both owned a hotel, her brother who played the nightclubs in Maui singing and playing his guitar, and her sister who was a librarian, all went to see her off. They were honored she was chosen but they were terribly worried about her and saddened that they wouldn't see her in seven or eight years. So much could happen to all of them in that lengthy a period of time—how quickly their lives could change.

Zeb Oxworthy was a singer and actor from Glasgow, Scotland. He was a rock and roll star, and he always drew big crowds wherever he performed. Many times, "Standing Room Only". Zeb often sang songs about outer space; a big hit was "I'm in Love with a Martian". It went all the way to number one on the charts. He also acted in a lot of sci-fi movies—some British films and others done out in Hollywood. He sang in some of the movies too. He was chosen by NASA to have an entertainer on board the spaceship that was heading to Uranus.

The other astronaut on board the spaceship was a college student from Swansea University in Cardiff, Wales. Samantha Stafford was a sophomore at the University, and she was studying astronomy and poetry. She also enjoyed singing and playing darts with her friends and family. Samantha spent a lot of time at the Observatory and her professors were impressed with her knowledge of the stars and planets. She enrolled in a contest to be chosen as the first college student to go to Uranus and she won the contest. Her Mom and Dad were both so proud of her. So was her grandfather and he was thirty years old when the first man stepped on Mars.

Professor Damien Chikowsky was at his table studying a book he had been reading about the many journeys through outer space since the late 1950s. He was disturbed when Zeb picked up his electric guitar and started playing his big hit. Zeb was having a lot of fun, but Damien was totally perturbed. "Stop that infernal noise!" he yelled.

"Mr. Professor, for your information, music is not noise! And I will continue to play to my heart's content and sing as well. Carry on with whatever you were doing, you crazy bloke!"

"Don't call me a crazy bloke! I'm a Professor with a PhD in Astronomy and I am a very intelligent person. You, on the other hand, are just a useless rock star!"

"Excuse me, there, Mr. Professor. Maybe I'm no Einstein, but I happen to be a very creative, artistic, talented person and I play four instruments—the electric guitar, the bass guitar, the clarinet and the drums. I can write songs and I've written many and I

even performed for the King of England. I bet you never met any Royalty, you crazy bloke!"

Just then Captain Marchetti came over and asked everyone to gather around so he could give them all some information.

"Zeb, Damien, please shake hands and stop fighting. We're here to work together on this very important mission to this very far away planet of Uranus. We need for at least two of us to put on our double-padded double-insulated thermal suits, our masks, our helmets, and venture out to this surface of Uranus and test the soil first and then have a look around for any sign of plant life, animal life, or even an alien form of life. Now Mark and Lieutenant Harworth have both volunteered to do this exceptionally important mission for us. So, let's give them both a hand," said Captain Marchetti. Everyone clapped for them. "Now, one of our Robots, Ptolemy, will accompany you. Our other Robot, Aristotle, will remain here with us."

"I've got a jolly good question. I did a lot of reading on this planet of Uranus. There's only seventeen hours in a day so the days here are seven hours shorter than what we have on Earth. So, life on this planet is a whole other ball game than down on Earth," said Zeb.

"Zeb is right. Plus, he must have read the same thing that I did, that Uranus is tilted on its axis by about 90 degrees, so it takes 84 years for it to circle the sun. And it has many moons, about thirteen of them, and about twenty-seven rings around the planet. So, like Zeb said, this is a whole other ball game on Uranus," said Akira.

"We know all that, dear, but we, most of us that is, with the exception of you and that Zeb, and Samantha, are all scientists. We know what this planet of Uranus is all about. It is far away from the sun, and a very cold planet. Its makeup is hydrogen, helium and methane. We need to be extra careful, and always totally protected with our thermal suits when we venture out of here. But we are all here to make discoveries, scientific ones that is," retorted Margaret Zeller, clearly annoyed with Zeb and Akira.

"You don't have to be so cruel, do you now? Just because Zeb, Akira and I are artistic people, not scientists like you. We're not stupid!" protested Samantha.

"Clearly, we're wasting precious time arguing," said Dr. Winfred Statton.

"We're clearly wasting time so Captain Armano and I will go get a head start," announced Lieutenant Harworth.

And so, Captain Armano and Lieutenant Harworth ventured out to the surface of Uranus. All was deathly quiet so far. The Robot, Ptolemy, followed Captain Armano and Lieutenant Harworth. Akira decided to set up her easel and do a drawing of the two men out there exploring this unique planet. Zeb decided to follow her example and he picked up his electric guitar and his music book and he started composing a song about Uranus. Samantha sat and wrote some poems about Uranus. All the artists were busy at

work creating.

Professor Damien Chikowsky kept reading the book about the many journeys to outer space. He tried not to let Zeb's music bother him. Maybe Zeb could bring some joy to all of them. Damien was so depressed to be so far away from his family. He missed his wife Katie and their three kids. She sent him videos on the Skype but the past six or seven months he no longer heard from her. His nephew Colton e-mailed him that she had filed for divorce and was marrying an actor she fell in love with. Only his youngest daughter kept in touch with him.

Captain Armano and Lieutenant Harworth were out exploring the surrounding area where their spaceship had landed. They used their tools to decipher the atmosphere around them. They were using their spectrometers to analyze the soil and the rocks—the whole chemistry of the terrain. They also used terrestrial lasers which enabled them to map the terrain in 3D. These lasers helped them to understand the topography for at least two hundred meters in the area around them. They had also used robotic orbiters and rovers to explore the surface and the composition of the soil on Uranus. Studying the rocks helped them learn the chemical makeup. So they had quite a job to do. And their spacesuits were pressurized so they would conform to Earth's pressure.

"Mark, this soil is hard," said William.

"Yes, it's like a big chunk of hard ice," added Mark.

"And the atmosphere here is made up of hydrogen and helium," added William.

"I doubt there's any real life form here," said Mark.

"It's probably too cold for there to be any kind of life form, at least not what we know of life on Earth," replied William.

Ptolemy the Robot picked up some rocks and he ventured a little further out than they could. He came upon a most unusual structure, almost like a tiny house. He used his bionic beamer to see what was inside and that's when he picked up that there was some kind of alien life form inside that most unusual structure. He returned to mark and William to let them know.

"Warning! Alien life form in odd-looking structure up ahead. Return to our spaceship!"

"Let's get back inside! Good work, Ptolemy," said Mark.

The two men and the robot returned to the spaceship.

Professor Damien Chikowsky was standing by the hatch to the spaceship, waiting for them to return. He had read so many books about Astronauts becoming sick on these alien planets where they are up against the elements of that particular planet. Some even died because of the dire circumstances they came upon and the dangerous aliens. Professor Chikowsky was more than concerned and relieved to see the both of them coming back towards the ship. So was Zeb. Even though they were from different worlds

and often got on each other's nerves, they were both worried about William and Mark. It had been a very long journey to Uranus and now they had to spend at least three months exploring this vast, cold, strange, mysterious planet. Dr. Winifred Statton came to the hatch to watch. She was both fascinated and a bit fearful of this planet.

"I wonder what they discovered out there. There's so much we don't know about this mysterious planet. I've written a lot of books and articles on the planet of Uranus. It made me famous, you know," said Dr. Statton.

"Quite so, Winifred. We're glad you're part of our team," said Damien.

"William, Mark, come on inside. This planet is so frigid. Come on. Set your bags down here," said Damien.

"Akira fixed you two blokes a spot of tea," said Zeb.

"We have to go through all those samples you gathered," said Margaret Zeller. Zeb knew how she was, so he returned to his cabin to play his guitar, and maybe write another song. He felt so lonely, and he just wanted to go home to Scotland, the United Kingdom, the planet of Earth. He longed to be on stage performing and he sure hoped people back home hadn't forgotten who he was.

Samantha came to sit with him. They had a lot in common.

"I was just reading some poetry by William Keats. I miss going to poetry readings," said Samantha.

"I miss performing," added Zeb.

"I miss Wales," said Samantha.

"I miss Scotland," replied Zeb.

Ptolemy and Aristotle the two Robots started to alarm everyone.

"Dangerous Alien approaching! Everyone, head to your cabins," said Aristotle the Robot.

Everyone did just that and secured themselves inside their cabins.

The creepy-looking alien, a Uranian, only three feet five inches tall, had a long nose like Pinocchio, eyes like a Zombie, a mouth and teeth like Frankenstein, ears like a Leprechaun. He had a bald head that illuminated like a light bulb. He carried a big high-powered, galactic gun and he shot off big, huge rocks that had fuses in them right at the spaceship. The spaceship was engulfed with smoke and fire. It burned for several hours. The fire ignited the Mission Control and the spaceship was reduced to pieces of aluminum. All were gone. The spaceship Columbus was no more. The Astronauts were no more. A land somewhere on Uranus.

TWILIGHT TRAILS by John Polsell



Grass reached up and touched the trees
While bluebirds winged among dark leaves.

Faces from another world
Passed by in cars whose wheels whirled

Like witches casting magic spells.
Down the road the old church bells
Were ringing like dark engines, mad,
While seven children, meek and sad
Were lost within strange reverie.

When the moon, peremptory,
Ascended to unstructured clouds
Three maidens wrapped themselves in shrouds

Arising to a slippery elm
Existing in an unknown realm.
And shadows creased like crooked whales
While I wandered twilight trails.



DOORWAYS by Will Mayo

At times
I feel like
I'm passing through
a revolving door.
People come and go.
I have only words.
Some who come my way die.
Some simply depart.
Again,
I have only words.
It matters not the coming, the leaving.
I am only passing through.
I have only words.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW Jean Lamb



Jean Lamb has been a longtime N3F member and has written and published a number of books. “I create worlds, and the people who live in them,” she says of her books. Her books include THE DRAGON’S CHILD in the series “Tameron and the Dragon”, DEAD MAN’S HAND in the “Ghost Ship” series, and PHOENIX IN SHADOW, the chronicles of the Phoenix Empire.

She may be contacted at tlambs1138@charter.net and her books may be found at <https://www.amazon.com/Jean-Lamb/e/B001Roy020> . You may also find her at www.jeanlambwriter@gmail.com .

IO: I’ve been seeing your name in the NFFF for a long time. When did you first join the NFFF. and were you in it constantly thereafter or off and on? Have you held positions in the NFFF?

JL: I’ve been in the N3F since the mid-1980s when I had small children and wanted to be active in fandom. I was in a non-N3F round robin, and the central mailer suggested I join the N3F (she had the fanzine **Seams Like Old Times** for costuming). After that, I was in

a number of round robins and enjoyed them very much. I have been secretary. Also, I am not the same person as Janie Lamb, who was a member since the solar system coalesced etc., though I have been asked if I was.

IO: I was wondering about that myself. That's kind of a coincidence in names. No relation to her, I suppose; did you have any acquaintance with her?

JL: I am no relation to Janie Lamb; in fact, when I joined the N3F she had already passed on.

IO: Do you read non-NFFF fanzines? What are some of the fanzines with which you are familiar?

JL: I don't read many non-N3F fanzines any more, not the way I used to. I loved being able to get them for sending in a letter (Here's to Harry Warner Jr., who must have had a huge collection of them). I was extremely active for a couple of decades in Junior Apa-5, which became Imaginapa, central mailer Eric L. Watts (who was also central to the running of DragonCon for many, many years). I was also involved in Eighth Domain, the Darkover apa, and then in Apparent Reality, a combination romance/sf apa (Emily Alward, central mailer). I once put together my zines using a Commodore 64 to create ditto masters with a Star Micronics impact printer (saved on fixing errors), and then using a retired ditto machine from a local school district, because I had to wet the sponge by hand (why the school district got rid of it). I was also central mailer in the N3F apa for a while, but then the computer where I had Acrobat Pro died and it was difficult to combine all the files without it. Much of that changed when things went online. I became more active on the internet (especially in Harry Potter fandom, where I have an account at fanfiction.net writing as excessivelyperky).

I gradually slowed down on participating in fanzines when I worked more on original fiction, both short stories and novels.

IO: That certainly is some very active fan activity. Seeing you were in the Darkover apa, did you ever have contact with Marion Zimmer Bradley?

JL: I wrote a fanfiction novel. Ms. Bradley approached me and wanted to buy the rights to it for \$500.00. I tried to negotiate either a shared byline or more money, both of which were refused. I was then excoriated in Darkover Fandom and threatened with a lawsuit if I didn't stop talking about what happened to me. That's when I left Darkover Fandom.

IO: What science fiction and fantasy books have been your favorites? What fantasy and science fiction magazines have you been a reader of? Do you still read science fiction magazines? Which do you now read?

JL: I grew up on Heinlein juveniles—my father was an SF collector, and I remember going out to the garage to read "Baby Is Three" and "The Lady Who Sailed the Soul" in prozine format. I know I was enormously lucky. I also started on the LORD OF THE

RINGS in junior high, was a major ST:TOS fan, and have been watching most of Trek ever since. My favorites now are mostly anything Terry Pratchett writes, Neal Stephenson (although I would like him better if his later work was properly edited), N.K. Jemisin, Bujold (member of the email list and Chief Birthday Tixie), Ben Aaronovitch, T. Kingfisher, Mary Gentle, Arkady Martine, Tamsyn Muir, Becky Chambers, Martha Wells, Rachel Caine, and George R.R. Martin.

I used to read Asimov's, F&SF and Analog, but now read only Analog (and Locus). I also read stories on the Tor website, and from Daily Science Fiction.

IO: The books you have published give me the impression that you may have been associated with some of the medieval societies and the Society for Creative Anachronism. Have you been, and have you read any medieval fanzines or done any fantasy gaming?

JL: Yes, I was Perrenelle Doublehanded in the Shire of Southmarch, Kingdom of An Tir. At one point I was Mistress of Arts, Seneschal, and Exchequer when all the other members wanted to go off gaming, while I was married and had two children. I became burned out then and haven't been too active since (though I still remember what fun I had at Egils one year).

As for fantasy gaming, do you count Nintendo? I worked my way through several of the Final Fantasy games (especially FFIII), several of the Dragon Warrior games, and spent a few years in fabulous, exotic Azeroth.

IO: Have you been to science fiction conventions or fan gatherings?

JL: My husband and I attended Rock*Con in the late 1970s (I was then on active duty at Little Rock Air Force Base). During that time, I reviewed SF and fantasy books for the Arkansas Gazette (free books and getting paid, whee!). In 1986, I attended my first WorldCon (ConFederation in Atlanta, where I shared a room with the Imaginapa crowd). I have attended a few WorldCons since then, though not in the last decade or so, due to my husband's health. I used to be a regular attendee and occasional panelist at OryCon, though not for the last several years due to husband's health.

IO: What have you most in mind in the books you have written? What kind of readers are you trying to influence?

JL: I have in mind telling the stories of my characters. Since I have two main characters in the fantasy universe I've constructed, I have a spreadsheet for them both, so I know how old they are and whatnot on the occasions they meet. I have a huge backstory for almost everybody in it, which I nobly refrain from inflicting on people through infodumps. I want my readers to be entertained and to care what happens to my characters.

IO: What got you started as a writer?

JL: I have always told stories and forced my friends while I was a kid to act out the

scenarios I made up for them. I grew up reading SF and fantasy on a regular basis (when I wasn't sneak reading my mother's James Bond books). I began with fanfiction and with book reviews, but knew I wanted to create original characters and universes. My first novel was written while I was in the Air Force (it is not true that I turned my CO into a villain so I could off him in glorious detail, though I really thought about it). So far, it's still stashed away out in the shop, where it will probably stay.

IO: Have you had good sales and gotten good responses on your books?

JL: I made a fair amount on HATCHLING, though not on the rest, unfortunately. I do get a little bump when a new one comes out, which I appreciate. I am concentrating on creating a backlist at this time.

IO: Where have your books been most publicized? I ask this because I've previously seen none of the publicity.

JL: I am my husband's caregiver, and if I have the time, I prefer to spend it doing the actual writing. I am likely to do more promotion if that situation ever changes, but right now I don't have the bandwidth to do much more than the writing when it comes to my books. I am probably too active on Quora and some other commentary sites, but I can do that while being interrupted. I need quiet time by myself for fiction writing.

IO: Anything further you would care to say to the N3F or about science fiction in general, what science fiction and fantasy means to you, what you think of the way things are going nowadays? How are you presently feeling about the N3F?

JL: I have, in the past, done some filking. I wrote the songs "Who Put the Tribbles in the Quadrotriticale?" to the tune of "Who Put the Overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder", "Oh Dear FanEd/Send Me a Zine", to "Mr. Sandman", "Jimmy T. Kirk" to "Johnny B. Goode" and "The Yellow Bloom of Kireseth" to "Yellow Rose of Texas", among some others. I have a few good songbooks, including The NESFA Hymnal, and performed at Orycon. I love the songs from the John M. Ford Trek novel HOW MUCH FOR JUST THE PLANET?

I have six fantasy novels on sale at Amazon. Other pro credits include "Galley Slave" from Man/Kzin Wars VIII, "The Broom's Tale" from Cemetery World, and "Esprit de Corpse" from Szereto's Women's Revenge Tales.

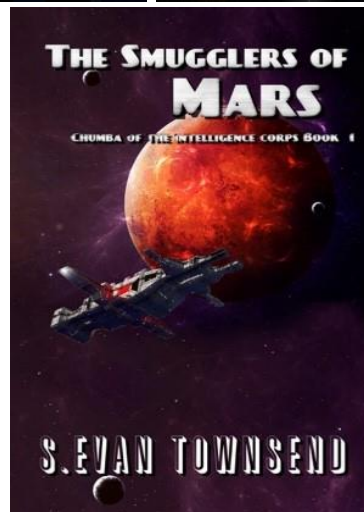
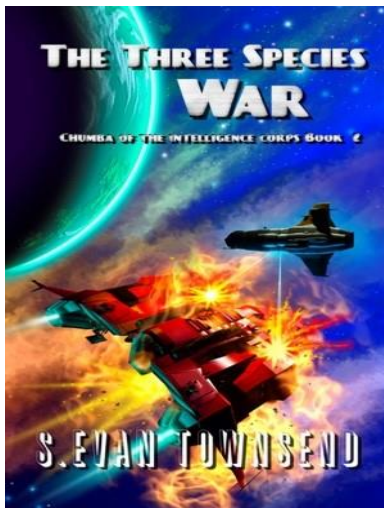
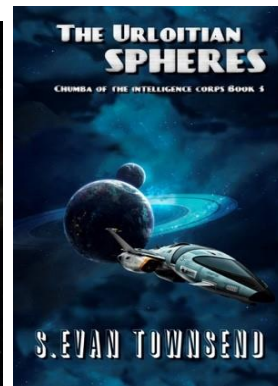
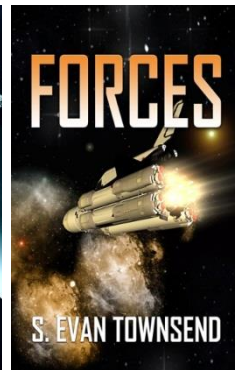
I have some Harry Potter fanfiction on Fanfiction.net using the name excessivelyperky. I am currently beta-ing a new HP fic by a friend of mine. Some day this year I will be current on reviews and chapter alerts from FFN.

I currently assist George Phillies by proofreading book reviews for the N3F book review supplement.

I am currently a caregiver, and it's been at least five years since I went to any cons.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

S. Evan Townsend



The author may be reached at evan@sevantownsend.net. He has a page at <http://sevantownsend.com>

IO: What do you think about being called “America’s unique speculative fiction voice?”
Did that give you a good feeling? Do you consider it an agreeable comment?

SET: I like it. That’s why I put it in my bio and other places. Yes, it gave me a good

feeling to be considered “unique”.

IO: Has being in the military had any influence on your writing?

SET: It has influenced my writing a great deal. I was in Military Intelligence and so I know a lot about how the intelligence game is played. I can’t think of a book of mine where there isn’t some military or intelligence component to the plot. In my first novel, HAMMER OF THOR, my hero is smuggled into Nazi-occupied France for a mission. I used both intelligence and military protocols for that.

IO: How did your radio interview turn out?

SET: It went well. Unfortunately the other author wasn’t able to join us but that did mean I got the entire time (90 minutes) to myself. I read a short excerpt from my science fiction novel SMUGGLERS OF MARS and we talked about a lot of things. It’s still available at <https://www.blogtalkradio.com/booksandentertainment/2022/04/27/books-entertainment-presents-whats-write-for-me-with-evan-and-paul> .

IO: Referring to your blog, what do you think about the Solar System, considering that it has only one planet with life on it?

SET: Only one planet with humanoid life but there could be moons with life. For example, Enceladus (a moon of Saturn) vents liquid water into space. The Cassini probe flew through one of those vents and detected organic molecules. So it’s possible that under the ice surface of Enceladus, there is life. There might also be life under the ice of Europa or Ganymede (both moons of Jupiter). Maybe not intelligent life, but life. There’s also speculation about Saturn’s moon Titan. But life there would have to be remarkably different than life on Earth, with its methane seas and water ice mountains. But, as I said on my blog, we might find life where we least expect it.

IO: What is your personal thought on the concept of “a war to end all wars”?

SET: There’s a passage in the Old Testament that says “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war...” I take that to mean that war was nearly constant in those times, as it has been throughout history. And it probably will be forever.

World War I was billed as “The War to End all Wars”. It obviously didn’t work. In fact, World War I allowed the communists to take over Russia, allowed the Nazis to take over Germany, and the fascists to take over Italy. It was a complete disaster that killed at least 20 million people. I don’t think there can be “no war”. Even with a world government (which would likely be tyrannical) there would be rebellions that would have to be put down, probably violently. As long as human nature remains the same (and no efforts to change it have succeeded) there will be wars.

IO: Have you seen THE END OF ALL THINGS by John Scalzi? What did you think of it? Does it compare in any way with your book on the war to end all wars?

SET: I’ve heard of that book (part of the OLD MAN’S WAR series) but I haven’t had a chance to read it (so many books, so little time). My short story “To End All Wars”, is a

fantasy taking place during various wars in history, including World War I. It is a companion piece to my fantasy novel GODS OF STRIFE. So I don't think they compare at all as The End of All Things is military science fiction.

IO: Espionage, intrigue and war. Why do you find these outstanding things to write about? What are your own feelings about warfare?

SET: General Sherman was right: "War is hell." It needs to be avoided as much as possible. Unfortunately, people are going to wage war as long as they think they can gain power or wealth from it. If you want peace, you have to prepare for war. Robert Heinlein said "the most expensive thing in the world is a second-best military." I'm a firm believer in "peace through strength". You have to be strong enough to deter anyone attacking you.

I write about espionage, intrigue, and war because those bring out the best and the worst in people. There are so many stories about people doing amazing things in war, and about people doing awful things.

IO: How did it come to pass that you came to be writing science fiction? What do you think of science fiction? Is it a form of writing that you greatly appreciate? Or did it seem a good means for writing what you think about?

SET: I'm old enough that I watched STAR TREK TOS in the first run. Science fiction has always appealed to me. The concept of "what if" really attracts me. The fact that Star Trek has always been optimistic about mankind's future also pulled me into science fiction. (I know, not all science fiction is optimistic.) I started reading science fiction and I love the adventure and the speculative nature of it and, in hard science fiction, the playing with science. I started wanting to write science fiction, What I think about sort of snuck into my writing.

IO: How did it come about that you became a writer? What drew you into being one?

SET: When I was young, maybe five, I was given a Lego set. Back then they just gave you a bunch of bricks and other parts with no instructions. I built worlds out of those bricks and told stories. That started me on the journey toward writing. When I was twelve, my sister was studying typing (on typewriters) in high school. I took her "touch type" instruction book and taught myself to type, because I knew if I wanted to be a writer, I had to know how to type. Then I started typing stories. I'm assuming what I wrote at age 12 wasn't very good. I'm sort of autodidactic when it comes to writing. I learned by doing and by reading authors I enjoyed.

IO: What do you think about the world situation at the present time, as reported in the news?

SET: The world is in a mess. But it usually is. Those who thought the end of the Cold War would bring peace didn't understand human nature. Putin wants to reclaim the old Soviet Union and use force to do it. There are wars right now in the Middle East and

Africa that the media aren't covering. A reviewer of my novel *Smugglers of Mars* said "it's a grim world" in my novel. Well, the world is grim and I don't think that's going to change in the future.

IO: What would you point out to readers as the best aspects of your writing?

SET: A reviewer of one of my books said I write action scenes that are "unputdownable". I love writing fun, scary, tense action scenes. I really enjoy putting my protagonist into a situation that it seems, at first, impossible to survive, but he (or she) manage to get out of it alive. In a way, writing is just a means for me to write action scenes. So I love hearing that my readers enjoyed those scenes.

IO: Do you have thoughts you are willing to convey by means of the novels you write, speculations about mankind?

SET: I think the universe of humans will go on being grim. How grim depends on what kind of governments and institutions we have. I don't think New Soviet Man (or New Star Trek Man) is possible. Human nature is unchanging and has been since someone first picked up a rock and hit another human on the head one hundred thousand years ago or so. I try to convey that there are good and bad people and if we aren't careful, the bad will win.

IO: Is there anything you would like to be asked that I have not asked you?

SET: "Tell us about your *oeuvre*."

I have thirteen published novels, seven by a small press publisher, six self-published (and a seventh coming soon). I am currently working on a science fiction novel about an asteroid that was being mined and it is hijacked and aimed at Earth. My heroes have to stop it in five days before it hits atmosphere. I believe in the "Dory" philosophy of writing: "Just keep writing, writing, writing" (you need to sing that). So I do, I just keep writing.



"We all wear cowboy hats in Houston."

AUTHOR INTERVIEW: Dan Melson



“Dan Melson lives with The World’s Only Perfect Woman and two daughters he is preparing for world domination”.

IO: I see that most of your writing is about intense warfare. The warfare is against the background of the empires created in the novels. Do you think that empires will be generally engaged in warfare?

DM: It’s a biased sample; I’m telling a story about people and character. Warfare and conflict in general is one of the places where true character emerges. I’ve completed two series of stories in the same timeframe of the Empire of Humanity. There is one more planned in a third. I also have at least three additional novels/series planned. All of them take place against a background where the Empire knows that war with the fractal demons is coming or is already in progress (The fourth Politics of Empire novel will be the advanced stages of that war approximately fifteen years subsequent to the events of The End of Childhood and Moving the Pieces). That said, in only one of the Empire of Humanity stories is the primary character in the military, although Grace (Graciela Juarez di Scimtar) has married into one of the Empire’s most important families so she is exposed to what happens militarily indirectly, and her husband Asto (Asto Scimtar di

Baryan) is in the military during the Politics of Empire series. But only roughly one percent of the Imperial population is in the military during the events chronicled thus far. In fact, if you read the novels you should get a strong sense that the higher up in the imperial hierarchy a character is, the more they do not want to be fighting wars at all.

I have two other settings I'm currently working in. In *CONNECTED REALM* (a multiple world setting inspired by Moorcock's *TANELORN* and Zelazny's *AMBER*), the setting begins with technology roughly equivalent to Earth in an age before the advent of gunpowder as well as wizardry. The viewpoint character, Alexan, is trying to understand the realities of the place as his personal primary goal, while also helping the inhabitants of the place he's working in to put themselves into a better place. The first of the series *THE FOUNTAINS OF AESCALON* was hijacked twice by Petra, who was originally supposed to be a minor character, and ends up being something of a romance as well.

The final setting I'm working in currently, *GATES TO FAERIE*, is our Earth with an urban fantasy twist. At the end of the first novel, Mark Jackson (the viewpoint character) is barely aware that there are violent conflicts in this new place he's been exposed to. I'm writing the second book in this now as my main work in progress; there is no plan for a military or war angle and I cannot see any of the substantial characters hijacking it in that direction.

On a more general level, Thomas Sowell asks us, "What is history but the story of how politicians have squandered the blood and treasure of the human race?" Force as a means of getting others to do what you want goes back before the human race. I see no reason for that to change; David Friedman's classic "Love is Not Enough" demonstrates that there will always be incentives for those with the means to see force as a shortcut to what they think they want. Empire, Democracy, or whatever else being the governing mechanism, war is unlikely to go away any time soon. This is not to say I wouldn't like warfare to vanish; I simply don't agree that any mechanism or principle we have discovered thus far shows anything like a path to that goal. In the ruling class of the Empire of Humanity, I have actually constructed a group that understands in great detail how counter-productive to their goals war is (something that shows through in several places); but that doesn't mean their opposition does.

IO: How would you compare your novels with the non-science fiction books concerning warfare, such as *THE NAKED AND THE DEAD*, *FROM HERE TO ETERNITY*, and *CATCH-22*?

DM: Of the three mentioned. I've only read *Catch-22* and only seen the movie version of *From Here to Eternity* once, decades ago. I tend to agree that for those who spend significant amounts of time in the conflict, it becomes a major defining point of their lives if not THE defining period. Also, in war the real person tends to show through attempts to disguise themselves. That said, the only one of my novels that has the

viewpoint character spending significant time in the military is WORKING THE TRENCHES, and that's at a time when the oncoming war with the fractal demons is not so visible to the average person of the Empire. Grace's enlistment is spent fighting in a couple of short "brushfire" conflicts with minor powers and (due to special talents) conducting intelligence gathering operations. As her twenty year enlistment expires at the opening of THE INVENTION OF MOTHERHOOD, her primary duty is support staff as the rough equivalent of a first lieutenant in our current military.

IO: Did you see the movie DR. STRANGELOVE? What did you think of that show?

DM: Absolutely brilliant satire, but not anything in the way of a useful or accurate treatise on the conflict of nations. There are some good illustrative moments in the bomber with Major Kong and crew, as humor is one of the important elements on a personal level, but that's about it.

IO: What thoughts do you have about STAR WARS?

DM: I loved the original trilogy when it came out. As I've aged, I've come to see how simplistic it is. I still like the original trilogy and consider it fun—especially EMPIRE and RETURN for the way the characters grow and learn—but if it vanished without a trace I wouldn't be heartbroken. The "prequel" trilogy tried, but failed, to bring it up to a more complex way of thinking. After watching THE FORCE AWAKENS, I realized I just didn't care enough to spend hours of my life on any further STAR WARS. The way everyone was making a fuss over "The Mandalorian", I modified this and watched the first season with The World's Only Perfect Woman; neither of us saw a reason to continue.

IO: Are all your various series books tied together in some way? I note that they are in the same universe, but in any way other than that?

DM: The eleven books I've completed in the setting of THE EMPIRE OF HUMANITY are in three series. REDISCOVERY (four novels) uses Graciela Juarez as a viewpoint character; we first meet her as a twenty-eight year old working college student on Earth. POLITICS OF EMPIRE (three novels out, one more planned) also uses her as a viewpoint character, but you don't need to have read the Rediscovery series to follow what's going on. The PREPARATIONS FOR WAR series (four novels) uses Grace's nephew Joseph Bernard as a viewpoint character.

Alexan (viewpoint character of CONNECTED REALMS) is from the Empire at an earlier point in time, before the Ston Rebellion and Interregnum, but I have no plans for the Empire to meddle in his story-line nor (for reasons readers of the first book should understand) for him to appear in any further stories set in the Empire.

GATES TO FAERIE is independent, although there are a couple of something I'll call "bleed throughs": constants of the situation even though the circumstances are different. For instance, Elves are mutated humans with some natural powers, twisted by some non-humans who enslaved them for a period.

IO: Why are your books so much devoted to warfare? Is there motivation for this?

DM: As I keep repeating, war and conflict is one of the easier ways to illuminate real character and stimulate characters to grow. It's a story-telling mechanism, largely in the background for Grace and her family, more up-front and personal for Joe and Asina, who spend about an Earth century helping the human slaves of a demon-held planet escape demonic domination.

IO: How have reviewers reacted to your books?

DM: Mostly positive. Some missed the point almost intentionally (there was one reviewer from England who claimed Grace wasn't a "true" Hispanic woman despite her own admission that she'd never met any; *The World's Only Perfect Woman* and my in-laws agree Grace and her Earth family are pretty much dead on to the culture). The rule seems to be the ones who approach my stories as a story enjoy it, the ones who approach with an agenda find an excuse not to.

IO: Do you have a background in the military? If so, what's in your military background?

DM: No, I do not. Beyond extensive reading and friends and family members who are or were in the military, I am ignorant. This was an unofficial background reason why the Imperial military does many things very differently than any Earth military. In the foreground, there's the detail that the Imperial military is many thousands of years older than anything Earth has produced. There's a good amount of convergent evolution because the essential mission is the same, but in some things the Empire has made different choices than any military on Earth that I'm aware of.

IO: What background do you have as a reader of science fiction and fantasy? How long have you been reading it, what started you reading it, what science fiction books have you read that you particularly liked?

DM: I have been reading science fiction and fantasy my whole life. The earliest book I can remember is a book of Arthurian tales my parents gave me—not kid versions either. I started buying science fiction and fantasy with my allowance and money I earned sometime around the time I was eight. That was over fifty years ago. Since then, I've read at least seven thousand novels and short story collections. Robert Heinlein stands out; everything he did as an author was thoughtful and rings true. *THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS* is probably my favorite single work of science fiction and several others of his are also regular re-reads. *LORD OF THE RINGS* remains my favorite fantasy fifty years after I first read it—I don't have the time to read it every year any more but I still love it. Poul Anderson. Roger Zelazny. Andre Norton. Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Jim Butcher, Robert Jordan, David Weber and many others. If I were to pick a couple of under-rated authors or authors the field has largely forgotten, I'd probably say Glen Cook for the former and H. Beam Piper for the latter.

IO: Do you have any connection with science fiction such as science fiction writers'

guilds, science fiction organizations, science fiction conclaves?

DM: I've been a member of S.T.A.R. San Diego (the area's oldest club) since the late seventies. Attended Comic-Con until it got Too Damned Big To Enjoy, have been to a few Westercons and Worldcons (and one Nasfic). I participate to the extent I have something useful to contribute in several Facebook and MeWe groups.

IO: What were your thoughts about what you were doing when you began writing science fiction?

DM: That was the late seventies and I'm not sure I remember. I used to swap manuscripts with Jeff Swycaffer for mutual feedback but was never satisfied with what I produced at that time. I think it was a case of imposter syndrome. Then I met The World's Only Perfect Woman and had kids and writing kind of got pushed to the side for about fifteen years before I decided to spend the effort to make it happen. I can tell you that the basic framework for the Empire of Humanity goes back to about 1978 and in some places even earlier; I've learned a lot about why and how since then, but I can still see the basic bones of the world-building from that time period.

IO: Do you concern yourself with warfare occurring in everyday reality? Here, I mean.

DM: Only in that I consider it an adult responsibility to be an informed citizen. I try to draw a line between my positions on current politics and my author's career. Some things that have enough general evidence may show through, such as economics, but if you want to talk about what I think on a given political subject as a citizen, we need to go back to basic facts and principles and work our way up from there in order to have a productive conversation, and this interview is about my work as an author. I'm happy to hold those conversations (as those who follow my personal facebook page or blog as opposed to my author page or blog are aware), but my author career is not the place for them. I wouldn't mind educating my readers a bit, but if I let it get in the way of entertainment, that's a problem. I'm not here to preach; I'm here to tell stories. I will tell you as an author I intentionally have characters saying things I do not personally agree with, or only agree with in part.

IO: Well, it's been a pleasure to have you here and I think you have done some reader educating in this interview. If you want to write to Ionisphere I'd be happy to hear from you again. I invite you to note that Jefferson Swycaffer is a member of the bureau that this publication represents, if you didn't already know that from maintaining some contact with him. Your writing does have a lot in common with his; I've read REVOLT AND REBIRTH. And I'll invite readers to send for at least one of your books; these are sure to be of interest.

Fanatiquette: The “New” Fan Etiquette by Heath Row



Better communications are a must for fandom.

In the December 2010 issue of **The National Fantasy Fan** (Vol. 10 #s3 & 4)—available at <https://tinyurl.com/TheFan122010> --members Sarah E. Harder, Jack Robins, and yours truly offered some tips and tricks navigating online fan spaces *via* social media and email. “[The online] world is...fraught with peril; miscommunication abounds, manners and courtesy are oft left behind, and common sense sometimes doesn’t make it from the brain to our fingers on the keypad”, Harder wrote. In the last twelve years, despite an increase in online communication—and during the pandemic, increased reliance on it—civility online doesn’t seem to have gotten much better.

Entire books have been written about the topic, including Andrea Weckerle’s *CIVILITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: HOW COMPANIES AND PEOPLE CAN TRIUMPH OVER HATERS, TROLLS, BULLIES AND OTHER JERKS* (Que, 2013), *A CRISIS OF CIVILITY? POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND ITS DISCONTENTS* (Routledge, 2019), and Anika Gupta’s *HOW TO HANDLE A CROWD: THE ART OF CREATING HEALTHY AND DYNAMIC ONLINE COMMUNITIES* (S&S, 2020). But few address it through the lens of fandom. Jessica Brawner’s *CHARISMA + 1: THE GUIDE TO CONVENTION ETIQUETTE FOR GAMERS, GEEKS AND THE SOCIALLY AWKWARD* (WordFire, 2014) might be the only example.

The last title captures the situation in which we find ourselves, I believe. If we think online conversations generally can be daunting and fraught with peril, especially with the growing political divide (see Jeffrey Redmond’s “Politics in Science Fiction” in *Ionisphere* #34 for just one example), that is even more true among fen. Why? As fen, stereotypes aside, we can occasionally be more socially isolated, at least in our fannish interests, and that can lead to gently antisocial or asocial behavior when gathering with other fen or in the broader mundane world. (I still remember stories of one apa participant who ate Vienna sausages out of a can with a knife while at a roleplaying game convention, during an adventure.) The pandemic and spending two years largely at home, communicating mostly online, has not helped. That can be exacerbated as we

age. We have less patience. We don't hear as well. We get grumpy. Our opinions are more entrenched. In one email discussion group I participate in, there are two members—longtime fen—who frequently argue with each other, at times expressing strong dislike for each other. Hatred. They've known each other as fellow fen for decades.

In addition, we are, by nature, enthusiasts. What we believe, we believe strongly. Science fiction is better than fantasy, for example. (Just kidding.) STAR TREK is better than STAR WARS. (Not kidding. At all.) Comic books were better before Frank Miller's THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS. Earlier episodes of GAME OF THRONES are better than later episodes. Heck, people still debate whether the Beatles or the Rolling Stones are the better band.

Finally, similar to sports fans, we pride ourselves on our knowledge. As fan John Hertz recently commented to me in an apazine, "Among the virtues of fandom, we care remarkably little whether you're old or young, conventionally pretty or not, rich or poor in material goods; more than in any other activity I know we love you for your mind." (**Vanamonde** #1493.) That can lead to acceptance and empathy; it can also lead to challenges. When communicating with other fen, we like to strut our *mind stuff* and show off what we know, what we've read, what we've seen, who we've met. So do other fen. That can occasionally lead to awkward exchanges if we try to one up each other. At a recent club meeting I mispronounced a comic book artist's name—Bill Sienkiewicz. Not only was I rightfully corrected, the person who corrected me was also corrected. It blew over, but I might not have. After all, who doesn't like to be *right*? (Clearly, I still carry the moment in my mind. I need to put it down.)

Last year, I published my first book, COMMUNICATING IDEAS: 11 STEPS TO SELLING INNOVATION (<https://amzn.to/3MQrX9>), and editor John Thiel asked me to contribute a piece on the topic of communication, on tact within fandom, perhaps through the lens of fan-pro relations—especially since more and more of fan communication moves beyond letter columns and conventions to social media and less active forms of participation.

Harder's original piece, "A Fan's Guide to Social Media", still offers advice worth heeding.

- "[Do] not...purposely hijack or take over someone's posts or threads..."
- "[Do] not...troll—or seek out discussions with topics or opinions you disagree with for the sole purpose of causing discord."
- "[P]roofread [your] emails."
- "[P]roofread (and content read) [y]our posts and comments."

- “If you can’t let go of a perceived offense, then I’d suggest messaging that person privately to let them know how their words affected you.” (Ruth R. Davidson)
- “When in doubt about someone’s intent, it’s appropriate to ask for clarification.” (Davidson)
- “[C]onsider who [y]our audience is...On...social networking sites...many of us have friends and family from various groups, associations, or times in our lives—and who have varying life situations, interests, beliefs, religions, and political views.”
- “[S]tep back, consider your words, and think about the ramifications.” (Davidson)
- “If you’re an aggressive debater, I’d recommend only debating with those with whom you have the type of relationship where you know it is OK and won’t cause any harm.”
- “When debates go sour, it might be best to walk away before it gets to the point of harming your relationship with the person.”
- “There might even be times to block a particular person from posts that you know will set that person off on an angry rant or endless debate.”
- “[F]eel free to ignore someone’s posts, block messages, or take a break from the forum.”
- “[D]evelop a tough skin, especially for those who are sensitive to certain things.”

More than a decade later, I’d add a few more pointers that I’ve learned over the years. I’ve been online since 1988 and active in online communities at least since then, dating back to dial-up bulletin board systems, online conferences including Echo and the Well, and online services such as America Online and CompuServe. I’m a more recent arrival to fandom, only attending cons since 2004 or so, joining the N3F in 2008-2009, and joining LASFS just a couple of years ago. None of that means I know anything—certainly not everything—just that I might have some ideas I want to communicate.

Here’s what I’d recommend in 2022:

Establish Group Norms

It can be helpful for participants in a given online space or fan community to set up guidelines for behavior and interaction. At cons, we can find examples in documents such as World Fandom’s “Rules and Code of Conduct for all World Fandom Events including AnimeFest and GameFest” (<https://gamefest.org/ConventionRules>). Comic Con International’s “Convention Policies” (<https://tinyurl.com/comicon-rules>), and the “Worldcon 76 Code of Conduct” (<https://tinurl.com/Worldcon-rules>). Online, we do much the same in the National Fantasy Fan Federation’s Facebook groups. The

Directorate recently developed and introduced rules we ask online participants to abide by. Even if someone doesn't explicitly agree to them, if someone hangs out with us online, the rules apply. If you're active in other fan spaces, consider establishing group names appropriate for that community. Doing so can make addressing disagreements or situations easier—because everyone knows what the shared norms and mores are. And ideally, they've agreed to them.

Give and Take

Fandom is what we make of it. One of the things that concerns me about more recent media—and sometimes mundane—fandom events is that people come expecting to be entertained, to have someone else do something for them. That is true online, as well as at cons. No one is here to entertain you. So be sure to put something into the system, as well as benefit from it. Going to a con is not like going to a movie, where you can just sit back. Participating in an online discussion is not like going to a speech. You'll get more out of fandom the more you put into it. Ours is an active culture, a participatory culture, some would even say a correspondence culture. Share what you know and like with other people, don't just rely on others to keep a conversation going.

There's Room for Everyone

Unlike Harry Harrison's 1966 novel *MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!*, there's plenty of space and time for everyone in fandom—regardless of who you are. Some longer-time fen occasionally grouse about newer fen or less serious fen. We can learn from anyone. Let others be. Let others breathe. Similar to roleplaying games or filk singing circles, let others share and take the spotlight sometimes. And accept all fen just the way they are, even with tinned meats. (If you can accept the idea of aliens, you can be kind to someone you don't agree with or resonate with fully.) Fandom is a safe space for all of us as long as we maintain that space for each other.

All Fandom is Good Fandom

We are, after all, fen—and enthusiasts. We should recognize, respect, and reward other people's enthusiasm. You might prefer hard sf. I might like cyberpunk. Both are grand. What common ground can we find? Maybe there's a hard sf novel with cyberpunk elements, or vice versa. If you play roleplaying games, you might prefer fifth edition *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*. Heck, you might like *PATHFINDER*. Or *TUNNELS & TROLLS*. It doesn't really matter, because we both like roleplaying games. That should be sufficient. That might be enough.

They Might Be Right

This is a tactic I apply in real life, too. If my asserting that what I know is correct will lead to an ongoing argument or disagreement, I let it go and sometimes say, "You might be right." Occasionally, little is gained by "winning" a war of opinion or knowledge. As Frank Herbert wrote in *GOD EMPEROR OF DUNE*, "Never attempt to reason with people who know they are right!" If I'm unable to persuade someone that they're wrong or incorrect easily, if I'm unable to successfully share my knowledge—and there's little gain to doing so—I let it go. They might be right. And it might not matter if I'm right, anyway.

You Want (Them) to Come Back

If we don't welcome new members or participants, if we don't respect and celebrate current members, if we stomp off in a huff when we don't get our way, what happens to our fan spaces and communities? They go away. Sometimes, we're drawn to a fandom because we don't fit in or feel at home in other groups more widely available in the mundane world. We join the N3F instead of the Kiwanis. We spend our weekends playing *MAGIC: THE GATHERING* at game stores or attending cons rather than going to baseball games or going bowling (Sometimes, we do it all!). We want our fan groups, clubs and apae to stick around so we can learn about and share our enthusiasm for the minutiae of pulp fiction magazines, old-time radio, comic books, or whatever it is we're into. And we want other people there too, to participate, so we can share experiences, favorites, and ideas with them—sharing our mutual interests and enthusiasms. If we leave, or if they leave, we're back where we started before we found fandom.

Finally, because this is **Ionisphere**, after all, I want to touch on fan-pro relations. While the discussion above also applies when interacting with professional writers, artists, and other creators, I'd offer a few additional points to keep in mind.

Pros are People Too

In science fiction, fantasy, and horror, pros are not some distant, unreachable, detached entities we need to approach with appeasement and care. Fen don't always walk on eggshells. And if a pro is at a con, a reading, or a club meeting, they are there, after all, to interact with other people. Many pros started out as fen first and might remain fellow fen. Approach them just like you would anyone else. Regardless, when interacting with pros, approach them like you would a celebrity or anyone active in public life. In the 2009 **Allure** piece "How to Talk to a Celebrity" (<https://tinurl.com/celebrity-talk>), Brooke le Poer Trench interviews screenwriter Gigi Levangle Grazer and offers the following tips:

1. Act normal
2. Know when to keep your distance

3. Watch the clock
4. Timing is everything

I'd add a fifth tip: Have something to say. Similar to my advice on "Give and Take" above, don't just gush at your favorite writer, fan artist, or actor—have something to say. Be open yourself, as a person. And, don't seek anything from them unless such seeking makes sense. If you're in line for an autograph at a con, obviously it's okay to ask for—or buy—an autograph. But if someone is hanging out at a con with their friends and family, don't approach them with a fan transaction as your goal. Even as a pro, they might not be "working" just then.

Pros Are Not Your Friends

Online, it's easy to develop what are called parasocial relationships. In the **Teen Vogue** article "On Parasocial Relationships and the Boundaries of Celebrity" (<https://tinyurl.com/parasocial-1>), journalist Stitch wrote, "[P]arasocial relationships are...everywhere across fandom spaces, and even other fans can be the subjects of this largely unequal relationship. A parasocial relationship is a long-term attachment to a media figure...based on what a person 'knows' or understands about that figure over time. We develop parasocial relationships based on repeated interactions with these figures on social media or on television that make them seem relatable and accessible rather than far away from us 'regular' people." (For a more in-depth consideration of the topic, explore Rachel O'Donovan's "To Boldly Go Where No Psychologist Has Gone Before: Effects of Participation in Fandom Activities on Parasocial Relationships". <https://tinyurl.com/parasocial-2>).

Be wary of presuming that you "know" someone because you know of them, or because you participate in the same mailing list, you've "liked" their posts, or you've otherwise interacted. Sure, they might be open to friendship, and you might become friends with them, but that is not where such relationships begin between fen and pros. They already have friends, they have families, and they're engaging with you as a pro and a fan. (For example, I sometimes message Stephen R. Bissette and Fred Hembeck on Facebook. Bissette might respond favorably to my movie recommendations. Hembeck might even wish me a happy birthday. But we're not necessarily friends. We're acquaintances, at best.)

They Don't Owe You Anything

Even if pros are open to engaging with fen—Warren Ellis was a good example of this during the Warren Ellis Forum days—they still have their professional activities and interests firmly in mind. In many ways, fen are consumers of what pros produce, and

their interactions with us, while friendly and enthusiastic, are in some ways marketing their products and services—with fen as their target audience. That doesn't mean their intent is commercial or crass necessarily, but when engaging with pros, remember that they are pros first. Know when to stop messaging someone. Take no offense if a convention peters out. Don't fall prey to the expectations of a parasocial relationship and expect more than they can give. (The same is largely true for fellow fen. Watch the clock and know when to keep your distance.)

I'd also like to put the question to you as a fellow fan. What have you learned about interacting with other fen—and pros—online and offline? What do you wish others would do or not do? What stories—good and bad—can you share from your experiences as a fan? What advice would you give newcomers to the N3F—or to fandom?

After all, fandom is what we make it. What norms and mores should we consider as fellow fen?

A fan attending a convention found the pros lined up waiting to get into the convention hall. He watched them from across the street. Somebody came over and asked him “What do you think of the view?” He answered, “It has a lot of pros and cons.”



Fan entering a convention hotel



Roy “Griff” Griffis: I was recently very thoughtfully interviewed by John Thiel for his newsletter **Ionisphere**. Naturally, I was interested in getting the issue in my hands. Once I did, I was happy to discover Mr. Thiel did an excellent job with the finished interview. My ego satisfied, I read through the rest of the publication.

I was surprised by the quality of the content of the newsletter. It was erudite, nay, even literary in tone. I’ve grown accustomed to a much more casual “hey, cool kids” kind of presentation, and the focused attention of your newsletter was refreshing. It certainly told me your team was serious about the field of SF/F (as it was once called).

Given all of that, I would be happy to return to the Ionisphere.

It’s very nice to hear back from one of our interviews, Roy. We like it if we can achieve closer contact with writers and ask questions about what they have written. The National Fantasy Fan Federation is very serious about the science fiction and fantasy field and our department thinks it needs interchange with authors. I hope you will continue to regard the NFFF as a serious organization and maintain an awareness of it, perhaps discuss it among the people you are associated with in the science fiction area. Where you are at seems far away to me as I don’t hear much the same things in my own science fiction reading material, but here we ARE hearing from you and reading what you have written will increase NFFF awareness of you. It will up the status of the bureau to have accomplished this interchange with you. So thanks for responding to the issue, and any time you feel like writing to us again, please do so.

Heath Row: Reading this issue of Ionisphere shortly after reading and commenting on Origin #48 was an interesting experience. I can pick up on a general sense of dissatisfaction and change in the air related to the bureaus in which you’re involved, and I hope you end up feeling pleasantly uncomfortable rather than overwhelmed and at the end of your rope.

I think the return to more active interviews will inject some new energy and inspiration into your work—and Ionisphere. I'll give some thought to interview subjects I'd recommend and perhaps even pitch you on some interview ideas I'm willing to pursue myself so I'm not merely passing the buck. I agree with your comments on seeking people who have something interesting to say regardless of whether they have a new or forthcoming book to promote. When I edited *The National Fantasy Fan*, we faced a similar challenge in "Re: The Review Section". Receiving review copies of new titles from publishers is nice, but there is so, so much good writing to read regardless of when it was published. There's absolutely nothing wrong with a new review of an old book—or an interview with someone interesting "just because".

Your remark, "Chain stores may not seem like science fiction to some, but they do to me—they affect us sociologically and maybe even anthropologically. Superhighways were seen by science fiction as being what they are now, a perpetual motion of humanity," reminded me of recently reading the Robert A. Heinlein story "The Roads Must Roll", because of something someone said in an apa. I'm certain there's a science fiction story lurking within the proliferation and predominance of national chains and franchise retail. Even the commercialization of space travel could inspire new stories. In the past, astronauts went into space. Heroes. Now CEOs and comedians do.

I'm also intrigued by the idea that "perhaps we have divisions of fandom—military fandom, political fandom, space fandom, media fandom, and our own fandom, which should be considered central fandom". With so many circles in the Venn diagram, it's no wonder we have trouble finding out where they all intersect! In *Origin*, you mentioned the ideals of the N3F. I wonder whether there were or still are common ideals within science fiction or fandom itself. What is it about this stuff that attracts us to it? Is it merely entertaining, or is there something...else?

The interview with Steve Griffiths was a nicely balanced approach to exploring the process of writing and publishing a book, and the ideas underpinning *KILL SEQUENCE*. I appreciated his positioning of the book among Lee Child, Harlan Coben, Michael Crichton, and Ian Fleming. And I'd welcome further exploration of the ideas addressed by authors' works in future interviews. I felt this interview gave his writing slightly short shrift, but I understand concentrating on the professional experiences of Griffiths as a writer.

Mr. Redmond, is the Foz Meadows article you mention the "Unempathic

Bipeds of Failure: The Relationship Between Stories and Politics” that ran in Amazing Stories and Blackgate in 2016 (<https://tinyuri.com/yrb4e4za> and <https://tinyuri.com/4464zhcb>)? I had missed that piece, as well as Glenn Harlan Reynolds’ 2014 **USA Today** column “Politics don’t belong in science fiction” (<https://tinyuri.com/2p9fuhu3>). I had been unaware of the late 1930s Committee for the Political Advancement of Science Fiction, or its “Science Fiction Internationale” and manifesto. I would love to see any surviving texts to determine whether they’re still relevant and useful. While I find the Sad Puppy slate an unfortunate event in recent history, my opinion is that they’re largely a knee-jerk reaction against the diversification of authors, readers, and writing.

It’s almost as though they think that people who aren’t straight white men shouldn’t write or read science fiction, fantasy or horror—and that the works that are worth recognizing and celebrating should continue to be written solely by straight white men. I find that idea laughable and wonder what the supporters of the movement are afraid of. Personally, I think there’s room for all writers, readers, and ideas, that everyone has the right to see themselves and people like them in various media and storytelling—and that people have the right to challenge points of view that seek to limit or lessen others. The challenge is that the people who represent and reflect the norms and mores of the oppressors historically now claim similar oppression when their ideas and positions are challenged—or when they don’t see themselves primarily portrayed in the media. We need to be able to challenge bad, harmful, or hurtful ideas, as well as welcome and support a wide range of ideas.

At the same time, I think we need to move beyond the Sad Puppy slate, which is less relevant as such every single day that passes. (Though it remains illustrative and informative, its importance and influence has waned.) There is a place for politics in science fiction, fantasy, and horror. But I think we need to consider the futures and worlds we’re speculating. Do they encourage the survival of individuals, families, groups, societies, and humankind in all its shapes, sizes, colors, and creeds? That leaves room for negative portrayals of mindsets that don’t further mankind generally, and such criticism should be seen as valid and of value.

I also enjoyed the interview with Roy M. Griffis. I particularly appreciated his openness and honesty about the challenges in his life and family, which affected his writing pretty seriously. His take on Lovecraftian writing and the Cthulhu Mythos sounds intriguing! And his Lonesome George Chronicles sound like a solid

example of the kind of political sf posited above. “There is no good thing that we humans can’t misuse”, Griffis says. He even offers advice to people who feel like they can’t make it past the gatekeepers of publishing. “Learn how to self-publish.” A wonderful, lengthy interview.

The interview makes Mr. Swycaffer’s commentary on the state of publishing even more poignant. “The Big Publishers have consolidated, and they are, for obvious reasons, more interested in big blockbusters and best-selling series, and far less interested—to the point of exclusion—in ‘midlist’ adventures, lesser triumphs, and standalone books of only modest sales numbers,” he wrote.

And the issue ends with another interview! Melanie Nilles’ perspective on self-publishing, establishing a fan base of readers, and interacting with them also proposes one possible path forward, regardless of a writer’s politics or point of view. Write, first, for yourself, promote your work, and engage with the readers who contact you.

There’s a lot to think about in this issue, and a lot of ideas for writers of all stripes to consider and implement.

I’m very pleased to get your letter of comment, Heath; it’s the best LoC Ionisphere has ever gotten. You are listed as being one of the staff members of this bureau, and thereby you’re LoCcing a publication you’re a part of, but don’t discontinue doing it! As I told you when I asked you to join the bureau, I had noticed you had a broad and fundamental basis in the NFFF and wanted to list you as support of the bureau, and I think that support has helped us out considerably. Now your letter of comment is a more visible support, and is so much to the point and purpose of the bureau that it stands as a column in IO or an article might.

Yes, both bureaus require building and development, and I hope to get them changed for the better. I want to get them formed to be exactly what such bureaus, existing within the N3F, should be like. It seems to me that NFFF Bureau members have always enjoyed their amateur status as organizational officials, and have liked trying to get things together without ever expecting perfection. Sometimes bureau building and development has taken the place of bureau functioning. But they do need to be developed and made generally intelligible in order to function. This bureau should evolve some means of coordinating with writers that would be significant and effect some results in the progress of science fiction. As we try to do this, we are being NFFF members and establishing intentions, keeping things moving, in other words. We want writers to be aware of the NFFF and what it does, and we want the NFFF members to be more aware of

the writers and the books they write. We also want inter-bureau activity, and I was glad to see your comparisons of this and the History and Research Bureau. So, we build and do what we can as we build, and try to resurrect things the NFFF has had in the past.

Books should be discussed in the NFFF. They used to be discussed in Tightbeam. Now they are reviewed, but practically not discussed at all. I might mention Facebook's Science Fiction Book Club to members as a place where books are discussed. I feel like annexing it to the NFFF so we would have book discussions, but of course I can't do that.

We could get another C.M. Kornbluth out of someone writing about modern society and the super-efficient way it exists. The things that go on nowadays are ridiculous enough to furnish writers with automatic satire. People walking around with face masks already sounds like science fiction of the past.

There's a big interest now in how writers are making out and how it's done. There ought to be information like this piled up in the Writers Bureau, but I don't think that bureau has gotten up as far as writers' conferences, though that's a potential future for it.

*Here's a challenge: **Kevin Trainor:** Loathe as I am to criticize a fellow Neffer and Director, I must nonetheless take issue with several points made by Jeffrey Redmond in the last Ionisphere.*

I am not sure whether Mr. Redmond's failure to do his due diligence on the origins of the Sad and Rabid Puppies is a simple failure to do the research, because he has accepted the narrative of the Puppy Kickers on the Sasquan concom and elsewhere*, or a deliberate attempt to further blacken the name of Larry Correia by associating him with Theodore Beale (aka Vox Day), thus using the ancient tactic of guilt by association. I do not know why Redmond would indulge in such calumny, but I'm not so much interested in the "why" as the "what".

If one bothers to read Larry's own words on the subject, posted in great abundance at his blog, Monster Hunter Nation, you can see that he was less than enthused at the notion of having Beale and his "Dread Ilk" on his side in the struggle. (There is a tag on Monster Hunter Nation devoted to the Sad Puppies, so it's not that hard to look up.) His attitude toward the Rabid Puppies was best summarized by one of fellow Utah-an Howard Taylor's Maxims of Maximally Effective Mercenaries: "The enemy of my enemy is the enemy of my enemy. No

more, no less". The humorous "formation" of the "Evil League of Evil" by John C. Wright, which included both the International Lord of Hate (Correia) and our Supreme Dark Lord (Beale) was just that, a joke. Anyone taking it seriously deserves to have their head examined by a doctor to see if there are any working parts.

The conflating of conservative SF writers (and, by extension, their fans) with "racists, sexists, and homophobes" is one that doesn't hold up under even minimal scrutiny. Correia, who rose from rural poverty to best-selling author, is Latino, as is fellow author Sarah Hoyt. Both have numerous strong female characters in their books, and the protagonist of Hoyt's novel *A FEW GOOD MEN* is a heroic gay man. One could search the Hugo nominees of the Sad and Rabid Puppies in vain for such people. (Theodore Beale, one should note in passing, is Native American**). However, the racist/sexist/homophobic accusation has long been popular on the left as a synonym for "people we don't like" regardless of its accuracy, much like its predecessor "Fascist", which rarely was used to describe adherents of Mussolini's socialist corporatist system. Leftist fans should be on notice that their shame words are increasingly ineffective from overuse, and find new abusive terms, if they can.

Meadows' criticism of Glenn Reynolds' "meagre" USA TODAY column on politics in SF is laughable. What are his credentials to criticize a tenured law professor at a major state university, who has quite obviously been reading SF most of his life and is very familiar with the field? Has Meadows been running a blog read by millions since 2001? More to the point, where, exactly, is Reynolds' observation that the mundane culture wars have come to science fiction wrong? Meadows, and Redmond, never get around to saying, instead deflecting to whining about complaints of "political correctness". Are they unaware that Hoyt grew up in ultra-leftist Portugal in the 1970s and knows damned well what "popular" suppression of wrongthink looks like? Are they unaware that there are quite a few other authors and fans like her, who know first-hand, or a one remove, what it's like? To whine because somebody is correctly naming what is going on is like the bully complaining that his fists hurt from beating his victim.

Yes, SF on both the fan and pro side has had its share of Communists, Technocrats, and other delusional sorts in the Golden Age, but many of them acquired wisdom with age (see, for example, Heinlein's evolution from an Upton Sinclair Socialist Democrat and advocate of the Social Credit movement to radical libertarian) or at least quietly abandoned their Stalinist sympathies after the

Hungarian Rebellion of 1956. Unfortunately, today's BNFs feel that they have the upper hand and can impose whatever silly-ass notions they see fit on fandom. The steady shrinkage in worldcon membership as opposed to, say, the San Diego Comic Con and Dragon***Con has taught them nothing.

Redmond then circles back to the Sad Puppies. The kindest thing I can say about this section is that he seems to have swallowed Meadows' BS hook, line and sinker. For one thing, as I have noted above, Beale and Correia did not work together on Sad Puppies. Correia had been doing the Sad Puppy thing for the two Worldcons before Sasquan, and handed it off to fellow author Brad Torgerson for that worldcon. (It should be noted that Torgerson was promptly assailed for being racist, sexist, etc. despite being married to a black woman and having a black daughter). Beale's creation of the Rabid Puppies was a separate effort with a different purpose—whereas Torgerson and the Sad Puppies believed that Worldcon and the Hugos had been corrupted but could be redeemed. Beale stated from the outset that he expected neither of the Puppy groups to win, that he expected Worldcon to cheat if necessary to prevent a Puppy win, and that his intention was to prove Worldcon utterly corrupt and deserving of destruction. Well, we all remember how that worked out, don't we? The Sad and Rabid Puppies swept the Hugo nominations in six categories—and suddenly 2,500 votes for "No Award" mysteriously appeared in five of those categories—something that had never occurred in the history of the Hugos. The only category not to be purged was Best Novel, which ironically was won by *THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM*, nominated by the Rabid Puppies.

The following year, Sarah Hoyt and a couple of other female authors tried again with Sad Puppies TV, but too many of us had already had our noses rubbed in the truth of Sasquan and were unwilling to give Worldcon any further time or money.

The rest of the article is on the same level of fact-free polemic, verging on libel. Leftist SF fans don't need to organize—they already control the "commanding heights" of fandom. If they are unwilling to tolerate people whose sole offense was to publicly support politicians and public figures abhorred by the New Left, they should not be surprised when those fans stop showing up to support their organizations they are running. Conservative fans are perfectly willing to organize organizations to bring them together. In the meantime, it amuses me greatly to see that years after the attempt to reform the Hugos failed, the Sad and Rabid Puppies are still living rent-free in some peoples' heads, spitefully making messes

on the carpet.

*His citing of Foz Meadows would seem to indicate that this is the case.

**Further, the pearl-clutching over Beale's comment on N.K. Jamison completely overlooks her remarks that provoked such a response. One should ask why such comments from Black women are acceptable, but a similar response from a red man is not.

***There is no truth to the rumor that I am investigating hotels in Carson City and Pahrump so that we can have our own conventions with blackjack and hookers. That's not the way legal prostitution in Nevada works, anyway.

You're not criticizing an editor when you say you don't like something he has printed.

I'm glad that the article has motivated you to comment; we do like to get feedback on what appears in Ionisphere. Redmond is an argumentative writer, and one is likely to get argument in the replies, but that, too, is discussion, and I think the matter of all this political activity in science fiction is something that should be discussed. The talk of people controlling fannish interests is highly relevant to what is going on and is something we might concern ourselves with instead of ignoring it. Mention of "wrongthink" refers to the Orwellian political mythos, it being a "newspeak" term, and indeed, I think we're living in an Orwellian chaos when we get into conflicts like these. I like these arguments to be on the surface, rather than being unknown feuding, and now have two sides of a controversy in Ionisphere, inviting any further commentary on the subject. Personally I think politics needs to be exorcised from Science Fiction Fandom.

