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No AI/LLM was used in the creation of this zine.

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Editorial

This issue is all about events and event
planning, featuring some of the folks whose
hard work makes our entertainment and fun
get togethers possible. Planning events and
cons can be difficult and thankless work and
often goes unacknowledged. But events are a
great way to connect with other readers and
authors and are an important part of SFF.
Thank you to all event planners and con
coordinators!

This issue features interviews with Loscon –
now in its 51st year, Club Chicxulub – host
of in-person events in the Bay Area, Story
Hour – an online speculative reading series,

and an essay about getting involved with cons
by Wendy Van Camp.

I've been asked several times why this zine is
called Ionisphere rather than Ionosphere.
Frankly, I don't know. Perhaps Mr. Thiel can
chime in with an answer?

I am running free ads for books by N3F
members, so send those in if you have them.
¼ page is ideal for the ads. Likewise, if
members have new books coming out, please
get in touch about a possible interview. I also
encourage all amateur writers in the club to
submit to the N3F short story contest. You've
got nothing to lose!

As always, letters of comment welcome. I'd
love to hear what you think of the zine.

Jean-Paul L. Garnier

Joshua Tree, CA

August 2025

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TR-3B: Rising from the Depths by Jose Sanchez

**Interview with Loscon 51 Vice-Chair
Christian B McGuire**



JPG - Please introduce yourself and tell us a bit about your role in the organization of Loscon?

Christian B McGuire: Hello, I am Christian B McGuire and am Loscon 51 (2025) vice chair. My role is to support Loscon 51's chair.

JPG - Please tell us about the inception of Loscon, and how it has changed over half a century?

CBM: Loscon started with LA 2000, celebrating the LASFS's 2,000th meeting. It was so well received that the club ran another one, Loscon 2 (there was no Loscon 1). It's been held every year since, excluding 2020 due to COVID. As a volunteer run event it calls up the best fans can offer of their skills and knowledge. It has evolved from a relaxing event to a regional convention people travel to from all over. Within the growing landscape of fandom it has expanded its inclusion as the S.F. field has expanded to include all voices.

JPG - What is the connection between The Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society and Loscon?

CBM: As mentioned above it was the 2000th meeting of the LASFS that started it all. Loscon is sponsored and run through the LASFS. Most of the legacy volunteers for the convention originated as members of the club, but now more people are involved who've come from other fandoms, such as Dr. Who, the SCA, and anime fandom.

JPG - What are some of the upcoming highlights for Loscon 51?



CBM: All this year's Guests of Honor represent different views on the theme "Tell me a Story." Our Fan Guest, Tadao Tomomatsu has acted and presented on pretty much any media you can think of and is a consummate storyteller. Our Music Guest Lynn Gold has composed and performed for fannish crowds for 40 years. As a legendary party thrower Lynn has told stories through the themes of her parties. Artist Guest Benton Jew has been deeply involved in telling stories through storyboards, comics, and pre-visualization since starting work at ILM at the end of the last millennium. Ursula Vernon/T Kingfisher tells stories from two very different ways of presenting them. One for adults, and the other for Y.A. which calls

on the same writing skills, but with a tone to draw in and hold the attention of the young.

JPG - What are some of the greatest rewards, and challenges of organizing a science fiction convention?

CBM: Nothing beats seeing the convention members enjoy themselves during the weekend. Meeting old friends, and gathering new friends. Enjoying the wide variety of activities available at all times during the convention run; guest panels, the art show, gaming; both electronic and tabletop, the dealers room, the maker's space, music programming, and more. The biggest long term challenge is the push/pull between continuity and renewal. As Science Fiction won and is now mainstream fewer folks need to seek out a space such as the LASFS or a weekend gathering like Loscon.

Fewer fresh faces means fewer fans develop into volunteers for the long-term.

JPG - What are some of the things someone wanting to get into Con administration should know in advance?



CBM: Loscon is an all volunteer event. It relies on the skills gathered and shared among the committee. Everyone should start by volunteering at a basic level and learn from there. Volunteers are needed from truck loading before the convention to unloading and set-up at the site for Loscon (this year at the LAX Hilton). There are many other opportunities for fans to share their time and energy.

JPG - How does one go about becoming a volunteer for Loscon?

CBM: People don't need more than a willingness to ask if they can help out to become involved. They can email via the website, leave a message via FB, or even walk up after they get their Loscon badges and ask what needs to be done at that moment.

JPG - Any parting thoughts?

CBM: Every Loscon is unique. Each year new guests, a theme, and programming designed to reflect that theme abound. There's also outside folks who show up with an anniversary for a favorite show or author's

work, or who are promoting new projects that can fit in Loscon's areas of interest.

<https://loscon.org/>

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So You Want to Be on a Panel? Let's Talk About How to Get There.

Essay by Wendy Van Camp

<https://wendyvancamp.com/>



Stepping onto your first science fiction or fantasy convention panel can be a wild mix of nerves and excitement. I remember my first time. I had sweaty palms, rapidly beating heart, and all. Fast forward a decade, and I've now spoken at more conventions than I can count. Big ones, small ones, everything in between. I've also helped dozens of new writers and poets find their way to the mic. If you've ever sat in the audience and thought, "Could I be up there someday?" The short answer is: absolutely. And I'll walk you through how to do it.

First off, you don't need to be famous. You don't even need a long list of published books. What you do need is a genuine love for the genre, a willingness to share what you know, and a voice that is you. That's what conventions are looking for. People with genuine passion and something to say.

In this guide, I'll go over the same advice I give my mentees: how to figure out where you fit, how to apply, and what to do once you're in. Whether you write speculative poetry or genre fiction—or both—there's a seat at the table with your name on it. So pull up a chair.

Step One: Know What You're Getting Into

Before you apply to speak, do a little homework. Every convention has its own vibe. Some are great for deep-dive conversations about poetry and writing craft. Others are more focused on cosplay and celebrity guests. That's not a bad thing. It just means you'll want to aim where your work will be heard and appreciated.

Here's what I do: I check out last year's schedule. Usually, it's online. Are there panels about small presses, writing process, or poetry? If yes, Cool Beans! This could be a fit. If the list is all about screenwriting or gaming, then I look elsewhere.

And don't just read the schedule, look at who attends. If it's mostly comic book artists and actors, your quiet poetry reading might get lost in the shuffle. But if the guest list includes other genre writers and poets? That's a green light.

Step Two: Walk the Show Before You Apply

This one's key. Show up first as an attendee. "Walk the show." Feel it out. I do this for any new con I'm thinking about applying to. I sit in on panels and take notes. Who's speaking? Do they seem prepared? Are they respectful of each other's time, or are they rambling? Are newer voices getting a shot, or is it the same ten people at every mic?

When you scope a convention, you're not just scouting, you're also learning. It'll help you decide if your work belongs there. And trust me, it's easier to make a connection in person before ever submitting a panelist application.

Step Three: Get Your Bio in Shape

Now comes the paperwork part, but don't panic. A solid bio is your foot in the door. Keep it short; Under 100 words is great. Focus on what you've actually done. Are you a published poet? Have you taught a workshop, led a reading, hosted a podcast? Mention two or three things that show what you bring to the table.

Skip the list of appearances. You're not writing a resume. You're introducing yourself.

Also, get a good headshot. Please don't crop your face out of a group photo from brunch. A clean, friendly, professional-looking image can make a big difference. I keep mine, along with my bio, in a folder on my computer and on my website's "About" page. That way, I'm always ready, whether they want a file or a link.

Step Four: Pitch Some Topics

Most conventions will ask what panels you'd like to be on. This is your shot to stand out.

Think about your strengths. What lights you up? Perhaps it's world-building through verse. It could be writing disabled characters in fantasy worlds. Maybe it's balancing composing poetry with a full-time job. Try to pitch three ideas that speak to your experience and match the tone of the event.

And here's the thing: be flexible. You might end up on a panel you didn't suggest. That's normal. Con organizers are juggling a thousand moving parts. If they ask you to jump in last-minute, say yes if you can. This openness gets remembered, and often leads to more invites down the road.

Step Five: Be the Kind of Speaker People Want Back

Once you're accepted, show up like you mean it. Go to the opening ceremony. Support your fellow panelists. Be present. Not just at your own events, but at others, too. Folks notice that.

Behind the table, speak clearly, but don't hog the spotlight. A great panel is a group conversation, not a one-person monologue. If you see someone struggling to jump in, open the space. I've seen quiet generosity lead to future invites, because a speaker made room for others.

And don't forget to thank the staff. Seriously. Volunteers and organizers are the glue that holds these things together, and a little gratitude goes a long way. Post about the event if you're comfortable. Tag the con, share photos, say what you loved. That kind

of engagement builds relationships that last beyond the weekend.

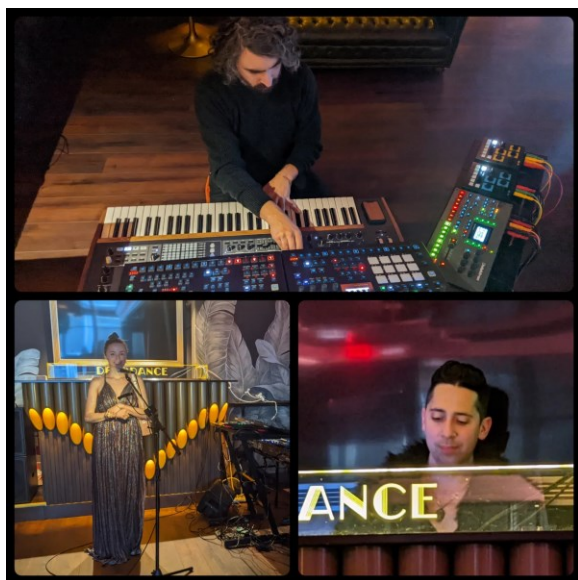
Last Thought

Starting out can feel like standing at the edge of a very large room, unsure where to go. Remember that every panelist you admire started there, too. They asked the same questions. Wondered if their work mattered. Took their first leap.

So this is your moment. Do your research. Get your materials ready. Say yes when you can. And most of all, trust in your voice. If you care deeply about your writing and about this weird, beautiful, speculative world we all build together? Let's get you up there.

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Interview with Matt Scott Carney, Lauren C. Johnson, & Dev Bhat of Club Chicxulub



JPG - What were the motivations behind starting the Club Chicxulub reading performance series, and tell us about your choice of the name?

Matt Scott Carney: I'd say one main motivation for starting the series was honestly the shock and horror of the 2020s. The week we came up with getting a literary show together was the week now referred to in San Francisco lore as the "[Orange Skies Day](#)." This was sometime in the fall of 2020, early COVID-19 pandemic era and during an unprecedented California wildfire season, which was especially bad in the Bay Area. A specific combination of smoke and fog and atmosphere led to this truly shocking nuclear-winter sort of dark orange sky—truly I had never seen anything like it in my life, even as someone who grew up in California and witnessed terrible fire seasons. It was so bizarrely cold and dark that the street lamps stayed on all day long. This happened after San Francisco had a few weeks of lockdowns earlier that year, plus a hideous election was looming, George Floyd had been murdered—all of the cultural moment absolutely felt like slipping off the precipice of doomsday. And it still does! I'm not sure we've ever left the doomsday paradigm in most respects. So many things have become even more threatening, obviously. Club Chicxulub encapsulates all of that.

I had bonded with Dev Bhat in grad school as a fellow artist of the night, and knew him both as a writer and a musician. Once I reached out to him to pitch this idea with Lauren, it easily coalesced.

Lauren C. Johnson: To piggyback on what Matt said about the "Orange Skies Day," we named the series after [the Chicxulub Impactor](#)—the asteroid that wiped out the non-avian dinosaurs and ended the

Cretaceous period. We landed on that name because it really did look like an asteroid had struck the Bay Area, and people were posting on social media about how the sky must have looked like this when the dinosaurs died.

The name also fit the feeling we wanted to capture in our literary series. We chose Chicxulub because climate change threatens more mass extinctions and because late-stage capitalism and the political climate of this era are nothing short of harrowing. The "Club" part is somewhat cheeky, but we wanted to make a nod to the fact that we're in this together and by creating and sharing art, we can spread some hope.

As for the motivations behind starting a reading series, I'll add that we wanted to create a home for emerging speculative authors. We were attending many Zoom-based readings during the pandemic and realized that there were plenty of outlets for literary fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, but not as many spaces dedicated to the growing speculative fiction community. We also wanted to create a welcoming environment for new and emerging writers who were just starting out and maybe didn't have much experience with readings and publications.

JPG - How do you go about curating the authors who read at the events, are they all local to the Bay Area, or do you also have traveling authors?

LCJ: We primarily solicit anonymous submissions for the shows, just like we do for the journal. We review them as anonymous

entries to ensure we're being fair and giving each piece a chance based on its own merit. I think sometimes with readings, there's a temptation to curate from the same set of experienced authors because you already know they're excellent performers who will draw a crowd. Unfortunately, that can mean newer voices get overlooked.

When we're reading the submissions, we look out for common themes and threads. How the pieces complement each other is another criterion that comes to mind when we're curating. We also look for pieces that offer speculative exploration from diverse communities because it's important to us to create an inclusive reading series and journal. Beyond our submission process, we also attend a lot of other readings in the Bay Area, and if we hear an author share a brilliant speculative piece at another reading and are blown away (which happens often), we'll follow up with them and invite them to join the show or the journal.

Most of our authors have been local but we've occasionally gotten traveling authors, like Kiana Shaley and Heidi Kasa, who were both visiting from LA and Austin, respectively. Hosting traveling authors can be challenging since we can't compensate performers aside from collecting tips from the audience. So hosting out-of-town folks is more about if the timing is right and the author was already planning to visit the Bay Area.

JPG - What made you decide to take the step of creating the Club Chicxulub Journal to accompany the reading series, and are there plans to create a print version of the journal?

MSC: I think there were three motivations for starting the journal. The first is that we saw the shows were well-received in the Bay, but also we recognized that not everybody could come see an event on a Tuesday or Wednesday or whatever night. The show is free, so especially in the beginning we were at really cool venues but on their worst weeknight. The journal was a way to extend the reach of the contributors to an asynchronous medium where readers can engage with the text and embedded audio seamlessly. Plus, it allowed us to collaborate with creators internationally, and also to include visual artists—the fabulist, surrealist, pop-surrealist, modern fantasy and speculative response to ‘clean as a bone’ realism is coming back into vogue equally across the mediums. Visual art, music, and literature are all part of this movement. Club Chicxulub as a journal is the only form capable of celebrating this maximalist aesthetic movement across all genres at once. The second thing is that a web offering allows us to work on the soundtracks in a ‘studio’ setting rather than under the pressure of a live show. Being a dedicated ‘sound guy’ alongside hosting has helped us avoid common stuff that can bungle events which would otherwise be rad—the bar was too loud to hear anything, there was feedback, the mic stand was garbage—this has happened to all of us. We’ve been able to make high quality live recordings and to ensure everyone can hear. But still, a live show is performing a piece that’s incredibly personal—and in the case of a Club Chicxulub piece, probably daring or weird and long-ish—under time pressure. So the journal has brought us to awesome

collaborations without pressure, without the noisy pub and the drunk barfly and your literary rival in the audience. The authors can record their performances in their personal creative space, and Dev and I can likewise work on the music solely with the author’s voice in our headphones.

We’ve also been able to produce some wild, stage-play sort of recordings. [Jasmine Sawers’ trans revenge play “The Rivening”](#) was one of my favorites, where we did voice acting, foley, effects—the whole nine yards. For another one, I got to make synthesizer patches and drum machine samples out of soda cans on [Kristin Eade’s story “Leech.”](#) That kind of stuff is all way harder to pull off live.

The third thing. Four live-scored readings per year with five or six authors apiece was honestly getting really tough to sustain. Now we produce two shows and two journal issues per year. The Bay Area writing scene is robust, but it’s not gigantic, so I guess another consideration was that only doing two live shows per year allowed us to avoid accidentally spamming the same writers—as much as we love them all!

Now, a print journal? I really want that to be a thing. It’s honestly just so cost-prohibitive at the moment. We are in the weird space of being too small for non-profit kind of funding, but big enough to get significant submissions. Maybe like my dad always said... we’ll see.

JPG - Tell us a bit about the audio accompaniments in the journal, and what

made you decide to bring these stories to life in more ways than one?

Dev Bhat: When Matt and Lauren approached me about contributing to the musical aspect of Club Chicxulub, I was actually in a creative slump. I was between bands, and I had an itch that my solo project, [Shipwreck Detective](#), wasn't quite scratching. I was struggling to reconnect with my own imagination. It was depressing and I was unconsciously seeking a new outlet. So when Matt and Lauren sat me down to discuss the ethos of the project, it felt like being seen. I adore film and video game scores to the point where that is often the music I'm bumping when walking or driving around. Traversing San Francisco, and the Bay Area at large, feels like passing through scenes in a movie. The drama of the Bay Bridge at night is a vibe that deserves music. The nightscape of the MUNI and Bart train lines and all the different stations have a musical atmosphere to them that I can hear. The countless hidden steps around San Francisco connect neighborhoods like an interlocking game map. The kind you might explore in a From Soft or Nintendo game. I look at nearly everything through this lens, and that extends into the things I read. Written and performed stories have a feel and cadence. When presented with the idea of a science fiction reading series that includes live, atmospheric electronic music, my first thought was "Was this really not a thing yet?" My goal is to create an audio landscape wholly unique to each story that is read at our shows. I read the stories closely a good handful of times and pay close attention to the headspace it puts me in. I focus less on the

moment to moment pieces of the story, and more so on the overall feeling, and go from there in terms of noting areas where the music can have shifts in tone. I want it to match the vibe of the story, but I also want it to fit the style in which the reader recites their piece. Our first step is we have the readers record a rough demo of themselves reading their story, usually on their phone or computer. Every reader has a cadence, and the degree to which they lean into that cadence varies. It often varies from recording to actual live performance. This absolutely informs the vibe of the music I create to accompany their reading.



Once I have a sense of all these things, I move on to the tools. I primarily score on an Arturia PolyBrute—a six voice keyed analog synthesizer. I also use an Elektron Analog 4 (a desktop synth made primarily for sequencing) and Analog Rytm (a powerful analog drum machine). I make all sounds from scratch to fit the texture of a given story, and let experimentation guide which of these instruments I lean on most for the story. If a story is more dream-like and flowing, it's nice to be able to play free-hand on a keyed synth. This gives a more organic and loose feel. If there is a coldness or mechanical feeling to the story (or how it's read), I might opt for the rigidity of a sequencer. All of it is

in service of bringing that story a little more to life, and putting the audience in the world of that story while it is being told.

Matt is an extremely talented musician who often approaches composing from a very different angle. I think meshing two distinct styles tends to produce the most interesting sorts of collaborations. As such, some stories in the journal have felt more suited to Matt's style of composition, while others actually felt best when including both of our styles. This series keeps me on my toes more than any other musical project I'm involved with. That's what I love about it.

MSC: Also I'd add that scored literary readings seemed like a niche not fully explored, especially five years ago when we'd hardly seen any readings with synthesizers, drum machines or sequencers. There are awesome series that bring musical collaborators and other cool accompaniments. But the thing that stood out to me was generally those felt more improvised and mostly guitar-focused. So we were like, what if this was *Blade Runner* or *War of The Worlds* or something like that? What if this was Vangelis or Wendy Carlos with big rich palettes of synthesizers that could sound radically different depending on the piece? And what if the music was designed ahead of time around the author's voice as the main instrument?



Our process is similar with both the journal and the show. Authors record their performance and send it to us along with their piece. Then Dev and I have about a month to create the music around their readings. Dev has performed all the live shows so far as Shipwreck Detective, and we share the composition on the journal issues—I've been working on a ton of my own music lately with my [art rock electro project N!](#), so probably I will also contribute to the next wave of live Club Chicxulub shows. And echoing Dev, I truly love our Shipwreck Detective versus N! co-authored pieces and the synergy of our different approaches. More of those in the future, for sure!

JPG - What have been the most challenging, and most rewarding, aspects of running the performance series and journal?

LCJ: I think the most challenging part has been budgeting the time to do this right. Running a literary journal and reading series is a surprising time commitment if you want to do it well. You have to set aside enough time to give each submission the attention it deserves—I hate feeling rushed when I'm reading because I want to make sure I'm honoring each piece by giving it a fair and thorough read. Then there's the logistics of coordinating events and connecting with new and exciting voices in the speculative world. We also try to create social media posts that are thoughtful and don't sound like soundbites we churned out with AI. Finding artists, managing all the logistics—it all takes time. That's not even mentioning the music element, which Dev and Matt handle, or updating the website, which is all Matt. This

is a lot to juggle alongside making your own art, not to mention holding down day jobs.

The most rewarding part is easy, though. I often say that hosting and attending readings is like getting a mini craft lesson. I learn something new about writing and speculative world-building from each author who has participated in the show and journal. Hearing all these stories has helped me hone in on my own artistic voice and aesthetic—for example, I recently realized I love stories set in claustrophobic settings! I think I'm a more sure-footed writer now, thanks to Club Chicxulub.

MSC: I love getting to know a piece and the author the way you'd learn your favorite song. It's so cool to hear someone's story in their own voice and create music around it. You build a relationship with the art and the artist. That feeling never gets old. I have also really loved making so many new friends, and especially being able to connect with visual artists.

Something else that's important to me with this project: I feel proud that we are creating a record of this era in art that feels permanent. I love literary events and have performed many times over the years, but a thing that makes me sad is that most of those performances only live on as fading memories or as a handful of blurry photos. I accept that sooner rather than later, I will only remember them because I wrote down that I was there. A lesson I learned from [Evan Karp and Quiet Lightning](#) is to value the record of a moment as much as the present of a moment. I feel recordings of performances are super undervalued, for now, but will

ultimately become essential—especially if we fully swan dive into a phase of society where we are in danger to perform this kind of material publicly.

I want to curate something of fidelity that can be revisited in 15 years or 30 years that is faithful to what happened, but also faithful to the feeling—as we age and move on, and the art scene and the world ages and moves on, recordings like these will crystalize our era, our aesthetics, and remain as milestones for who we were.

JPG - What have been some highlights of the performance series?



DB: It's hard to pick a single highlight. It might sound like a cop-out, but for me personally each show has had something unique to offer. My overall highlight is when all the elements of a show—the crowd, the reader, myself, the sound of the room—lock in. It's hard to describe, but sometimes the mix of spinning plates hits a rhythm and you can see people in the crowd start to lean in. Some of the venues we've done the show at have had a degree of ambient noise to them like bar sounds and the din of muttering and side conversations. There have been some moments, however, when all of that falls away and the reader and I really hit the vibe together. Those are my favorite moments.

MSC: Dev is modest, but I will out him as a total powerhouse with this story. One of the craziest things that happened was at [our LitCrawl show for San Francisco's LitQuake in 2022](#). We had Lauren Parker, Kate Folk, LeeAnn Perry, Yohanca Delgado reading. It was at a theater and it was going to be packed—this turned out by far to be the biggest crowd we've still ever had. People were standing in the hallway and around the stage! But the day before, Dev came down raging with COVID. We argued quite a lot—cancel the show? The show must go on, even without the distinguishing feature that makes it Club Chicxulub?

In the end, it didn't matter. Dev recorded his entire set of music literally the morning of the show despite being intensely sick and sent me the WAV files. The whole thing went off flawlessly! That was absolutely bonkers!



LCJ: [Our inaugural show on November 17, 2021](#) was nothing short of exhilarating. We featured Syr Beker, Paul Corman Roberts, Mike Iafolla, Ploi Pirapokin, and Noah Sanders, and I

was so nervous and so excited at the same time to emcee the event along with Matt. I co-host another literary series called [Babylon Salon](#), but this felt different because we were launching something entirely new. I had all these thoughts going on in the back of my mind like what if I just start babbling over the microphone or say something incoherent? But the night went without a hitch and so

many people showed up. Our venue, DecoDance Bar in the Tenderloin, was packed. I'll never forget how excited and humbled I felt to see the local literary community had really come through and supported us.

JPG - Your team is made up of writers and musicians, what have you done differently in running your event series and journal based on your experiences as creatives?

LCJ: I think being on the other side of this and having submitted my own fiction to publications (and gotten my fair share of rejections) has informed how I read submissions. I read them with care and am willing to give promising ideas a chance. I think I'm generous with feedback too—if a piece is almost working but not quite a match for our aesthetic, I like to share those impressions with the author. The author can take it or leave it, but I feel like receiving personalized feedback in rejections has helped me grow as a writer.

Club Chicxulub is just getting started and I suspect we're only going to keep growing. In the future, Matt and I will have to bring on more editors to help us read through all the submissions, but that thoroughness will remain part of our process. I want the authors who submit to our journal to know that we respect and honor their work, whether or not it's the right fit for us.

We also value being communicative with the artists and authors in the journal and show. We don't want to leave them in the dark wondering when the journal is coming out or

what to expect on the day of a performance. We try to give them all the information they need to feel prepared and supported.

JPG - What are you currently working on, and what's coming up next for you?

LCJ: My debut novel, [The West Façade](#), is forthcoming from Santa Fe Writers Project on March 3, 2026. I spent over 10 years writing and revising this novel, so it's a dream come true to know it'll be in the world soon.

The West Façade takes place in Paris, at the dawn of the Bubonic Plague, and the protagonist is the statue of Sainte Geneviève that guards the Notre Dame Cathedral. Geneviève's quiet existence changes irrevocably when a grieving woman places a citrus fruit in her hands as an offering—an offering Geneviève can't resist eating. Eating sets off a whole chain of events for Geneviève as she awakens to her desires: To climb down the wall, to explore Paris, to understand her human makers, and to love. Geneviève gets what she wants, but then she must choose between remaining human and accepting mortality or returning to the cathedral, where she will become a statue again and spend eternity watching others live.

Aside from reading the proofs for typos, there's a lot of work that goes into launching a book and I'm trying to sort out all the pieces of the puzzle. That's looking like trying to land reviews and interviews in respected lit journals and magazines and booking events for readings.

DB: I'm currently deep into production of an EP for my band, [Grimoires](#). That utilizes an entirely different part of my brain. It's a mix of metal and 90s shoegaze sounds. Aside

from that, I've been doing more solo performances as Shipwreck Detective. Each solo set I do is composed entirely from scratch for that performance—no repeat tracks or “songs.” It's a sort of creative challenge to myself. Doing that feels like exercising my brain and keeps me fresh for projects like Club Chicxulub. All of it—be it producing heavy music or constructing semi-improvised ambient sets—is practice. They all inform themselves. It's all related.

MSC: I have always been moderately slow at producing new fiction, and I am now extra slow. But nonetheless, I am wrapping up the final story of my short story collection which has been cooking for quite a while—the oldest surviving story in the batch is from 2008 which appeared in the amazing and long-gone journal A Cappella Zoo. The collection is called *Handshake With The Void*. I'd pitch it as chronologically linked fabulist short stories with a dash of satire and heaping spoonfuls of dark wonder that explore trauma, addiction and cosmology. Meanwhile, I will have a new N! album this year. I had actually not intended to write new music, but took a class with Brian Eno earlier in the spring and accidentally left with 5 new songs—tons of political rage, weird experiments, chord progressions and lyrics generated from dice rolls—it's in some ways the most seething music I've recorded and for sure the abrasive sibling to my last release [Soma Pop](#). But are we not slogging through abrasive times?

<https://clubchicxulub.com/>

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Interview with Daniel Marcus and Laura Blackwell of Story Hour



JPG - What were your motivations for starting Story Hour, and how has the program changed over the years?

DM: I started Story Hour in the early weeks of the pandemic. I just wanted a place where my writer friends and I could get together and share our work. It seemed like a good time to be thinking about community. Shortly after I kicked it off, I asked Laura to join me as co-host. Changes over the years have been significant, but mostly in scope. We have not deviated from the basic format: two authors reading their own work, complete stories (no portions or poetry), about thirty minutes each. The fact that Story Hour has hosted hundreds of authors is mindblowing.

LB: I'd say the main change is just the breadth of stories we're fortunate enough to host. Now that Story Hour has been around for five years, we know more writers and more writers know us, so we're not calling on

the same friends multiple times a year like we did in the beginning.

JPG - What have been some of the highlights of running a speculative fiction reading series?

DM: We are fortunate to have hosted some truly amazing writers. Sometimes after a program, Laura or I will text the other: "Holy crap." Or words to that effect. It's been a real privilege.

Exposure to writing and writers that I would not otherwise have known has been great. Getting to know the authors a bit has also been really nice.

Of course, getting the seasoned pros to read is really cool, but I especially like hosting the new writers who have just sold their first few stories. Sometimes, Story Hour is the first place they've read their work in public! Breaking in can be really difficult and isolating. We love supporting new writers – we were all new writers once.

Another highlight of the Story Hour project for me has been the collaboration with Laura. Our respective strengths complement the other and we continually learn from one another.

LB: Daniel hit the nail on the head—several nails. I'm learning something new all the time, and Story Hour makes me feel more connected to the speculative fiction community as a whole.

JPG - How do you go about finding and selecting authors to read on the program?

DM: We rely heavily on social media to get the word out. Laura has a much broader

social media presence that I do, and probably better social skills, so her efforts have been critical for outreach. When we started out, I basically just recruited my friends, so without that we would have run out of runway a long time ago.



LB: Daniel set up a form on the Story Hour website, so some authors approach us, which is wonderful. When it's up to us, we reach out to writers whose work we've enjoyed. We have very few specific

rules, but they're firm: Complete stories, speculative fiction, prose only. Sometimes we haven't been able to host writers whose work we love because they don't want to be recorded, or just haven't written anything short enough.

JPG - What have been the challenges of curating a weekly reading series, and what do you wish that you had known in the beginning?

LB: It's a lot more work than just sitting down and listening to stories! The weekly nature basically means weekly deadlines for all kinds of things: checking in with writers, promoting Story Hour before it streams, editing the videos, promoting the edited videos, and so on. We get some help now—Jean-Paul Garnier makes graphics, and we've had a number of guest hosts—and if we'd known in the beginning how much work it would be, I think we'd have started asking for help sooner.

DM: It's a challenge to balance life demands and a weekly program. We have to adjust the distribution of work so that neither of us is inequitably burdened. This is an imperfect process, requiring patience, empathy, and good communications. We're friends, so we do this pretty well, and we have become better at it over the years. Gotta echo Laura about help at the beginning. We have built a small go-to roster of guest hosts, but having that wired at the start would have been great.

JPG - What types of technical challenges have you faced and how have you overcome them?

LB: The biggest challenge presented itself when the *Atlantic* article about LibGen came out and showed the extent of Facebook's theft in pursuit of gen AI. We had already been talking about moving to another platform, but that made it clear that we had to move away from Facebook, which was not only boosting career-killing AI but doing it with work stolen from many Story Hour guests, plus Daniel and me. We started the move to YouTube then, and migrating five years' worth of videos is time-consuming.

DM: Yes, all of the above. The streaming technology itself is not tricky but managing program metadata (authors, backgrounds, story provenance, etc.) can be challenging. Facebook was an adequate platform for a while, but their AI policies are profoundly disappointing and made the platform untenable for us.

JPG - What advice do you have for events planners that want to host online events?

DM: Consider beforehand what you want to accomplish, your audience size, the desired lifetime of your recordings, your budget, whether the event will be recurring, your publicity requirements. Then, decide on your toolchain. Then, schedule your launch. Plan first, then act. Not that we actually did that.

LB: Decide what matters to you. The weekly nature of Story Hour is very important to me; it's easy to forget about monthly events. The quality of the stories is paramount.

JPG - Tell us about your own work as writers?

LB: Most of my short fiction goes into horror publications, and I've been told that I write "upmarket." Telling the stories I want to tell often means blending genres. For instance, I wanted to write a Gothic horror with the most isolated setting possible, so I ended up writing a novel my agent calls "Shirley Jackson in space."

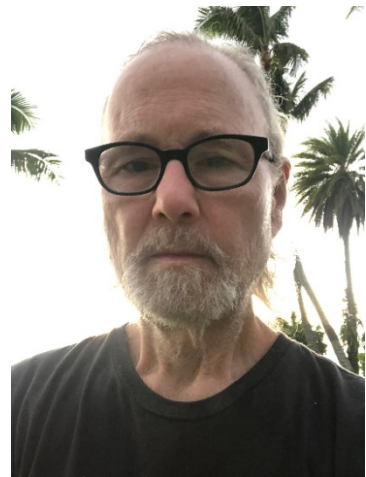
DM: Salon.com described my first short story collection as a "cross between Raymond Carver and William Gibson." I would not presume to compare myself with either of those writers, but as aspiration, the quote is spot-on. I also tend to mix or straddle genres to get at the core of a story or character.

JPG - What are your hopes for the future of Story Hour, and are there plans for in-person events or possibly an anthology?

DM: I haven't considered in-person events. There are a lot of good ones out there – KGB in New York, SF in SF in San Francisco, to name a couple. Keeping Story Hour online keeps financial and logistics overhead manageable and keeps us in line with our

original mission as an online reading series. We've talked about

podcasting the shows but haven't done anything about that. We may have briefly kicked around the idea of an anthology, but I



have mixed feelings. Sure, it would be awesome — we have had some amazing writers. But the whole point of Story Hour is the experience and power of the spoken word. Maybe a "best of" playlist published as a standalone audio, but we haven't talked about that. It's more than enough just to make sure this thing flies every week.

LB: It would be great to do more, but I'm also leery of biting off more than I can chew. My personal rule has been to keep things at a level we can maintain, so I don't want to take on anything that might take away from the weekly series.

JPG - What's coming up next for you, and what are you currently working on?

LB: I spend part of my workday copyediting for clients inside and outside speculative fiction, which keeps me reading interesting stuff. Two friends and I have been working on a found footage horror collaboration, which is great fun. I'm also trying to pull together a short story collection, but it's going to require some more stories to make one with a proper thematic throughline and not just a tossed salad of stories I happened to write.

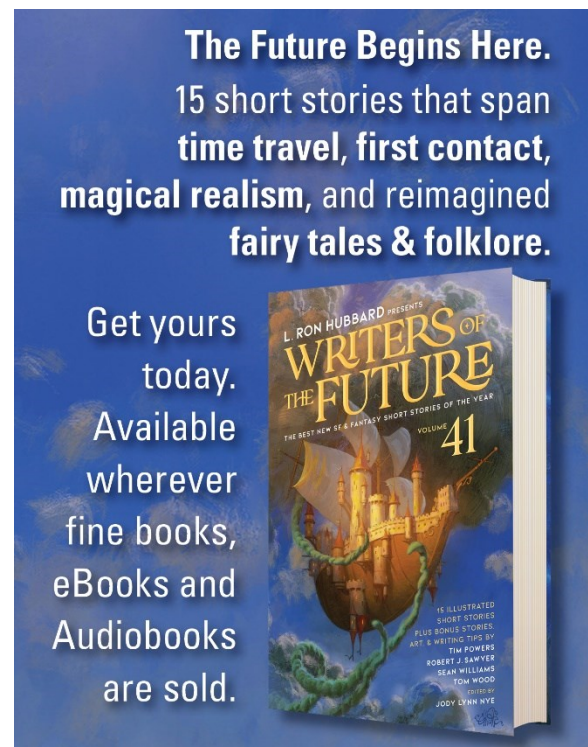
DM: Mmm ... salad. I recently retired from my technology day job, so I'm working on restructuring work, play, and family life without "punching a clock." I'm about 50,000 words into a new novel, have a few stories in various stages of completion, have started a newsletter where I can mumble to myself without attracting too much negative attention, have perfected my chili recipe, and am doing community service work.

<https://www.storyhour2020.com/>

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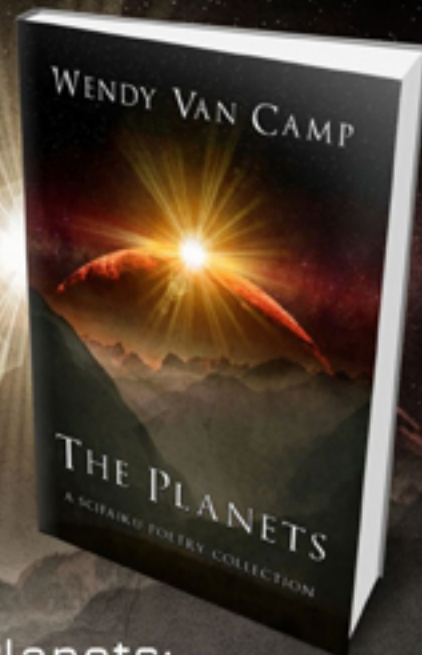
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1. This contest is open to all amateur writers in the field, regardless of whether they're members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. For the purposes of this contest, we define an amateur as someone who has sold no more than two (2) stories to professional science fiction or fantasy publications.
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3. Email attachments of Word documents are acceptable for submission. Manuscripts on paper should be typed, single sided on 8 1/2"-by- 11" white paper, double spaced, with pages numbered. The name of the author should not appear anywhere on the manuscript to ensure impartial judging. Photocopies are acceptable, if they are of good quality. Computer printouts must be legible.
4. Contestants can enter up to three stories. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) if you would like your story returned at the end of the contest. Stories will not be returned without an SASE. Do not send your only copy in case of accidental loss. We are not responsible for lost manuscripts.
5. Email entries will be accepted. Send to Jefferson P. Swycaffer at abontides@gmail.com. No guarantee can be made of email receipt. Privacy and property rights will be absolutely respected. No one other than the Short Story Judge will ever see the submission.
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9. The Short Story Judge is a published science fiction professional, and also a loving fan of the sf and fantasy genres. All comments and critiques are solely the Short Story Judge's opinion, but he promises to be constructive and polite.
10. Stories will also be reviewed by the Editor of the N3F Fiction zine *Eldritch Science*; authors of suitable tales will be invited to submit their tales for publication in our zine. This review and invitation will only occur after contest winners have been announced, so it can have no effect on the contest outcome.
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