

CONVERSATION EASTERCON 2023



Souvenir Book

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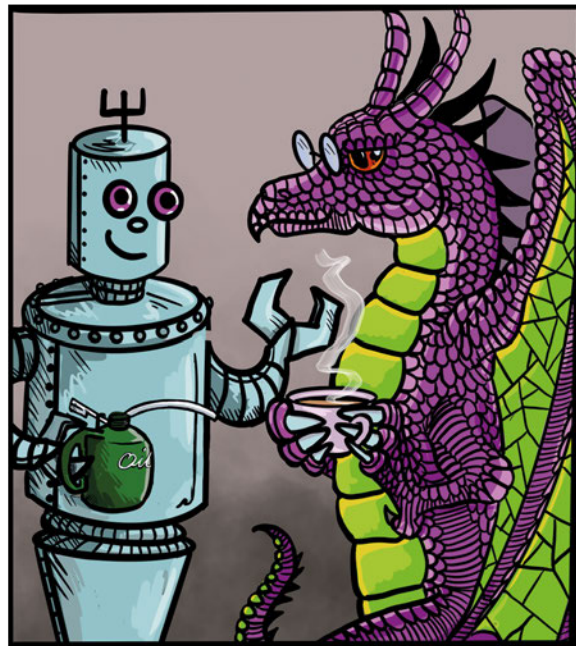
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CONVERSATION EASTERCON 2023

The UK National Science Fiction Convention
7-10 April 2023 · Hilton Metropole Birmingham



Guests of Honour

Zen Cho

Niall Harrison

Jennell Jaquays

Kari Sperring

Adrian Tchaikovsky

Ursula Vernon

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Conversation 2023 Souvenir Book

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Welcome to the Conversation Souvenir Book

by Caroline Mullan, Chair of Conversation 2023

Conversation 2023 was the 74th Eastercon, held at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole, familiar to members as the site for previous Eastercons: Innominate in 2017, Illustrious in 2011, and BECCON '87 over three decades earlier. I was on the con committee in 1987 and again in 2023; the hotel had not changed much except its name, and the Eastercon continues, but much else has changed about running conventions.

Changes in expectations and possibilities were developing, slowly, and we were adapting year by year, until 2020 brought the Covid pandemic and in March that year the first of its associated lockdowns. The team organising the 2020 Eastercon (Concentric), led by Vanessa May and John Dowd, found itself with only three weeks' notice engulfed by lockdown and unable to run, reduced to a bidding session held over Zoom. The meeting approved Vanessa's bid to hold the 2021 Eastercon at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole or online, as conditions would determine, with many of the same team as in 2020 but a new name reflecting the nature of the times: ConFusion. A year later ConFusion was held as an online convention, successfully involving remote participants and streaming its programme via the internet across the world. UK fandom owes much to Vanessa and her teams as they navigated through this enormously difficult period to maintain the continuity of seven decades.

Phil Dyson and his team took on the difficult challenge of running Reclamation in 2022, still in conditions of uncertainty. The con took place at the Radisson Blu at Heathrow, post lockdown but hampered by Covid restrictions. James Turner took charge of tech for the programme and streaming selected items from the onsite programme to the internet – and there was at least one speaker who streamed in from their home – but the focus of the convention was on getting together again in person. At the bidding session for 2023 Vanessa May bid again, but Conversation was awarded the convention. Subsequently Vanessa worked with us to enable us to run at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole:

Conversation would not have happened without this help, and we owe her particular thanks.

Our team worked through two difficult years to run Conversation as a fully hybrid convention, facilitating participation both in person and online. Brian Ameringen managed our money, Claire Brialey our committee and volunteers, John Dodd our site liaison and operations, Karen Fishwick our accessibility, Zi Graves our programme, Alison Scott our communications, and James Turner our tech both onsite and online. Steve Cooper joined us later to give us some needed resilience. You will find a list of our core staff elsewhere in this book, and during the Easter weekend nearly a hundred staff and volunteers worked alongside a host of programme participants onsite and online to help make the convention happen. We also owe thanks to our collaborators: the British Science Fiction Association, the Science Fiction Foundation, the British Fantasy Society, FANAC.org, the fan funds, and our dealers and artists (also listed elsewhere). Eastercons happen because the members of our community freely give their time and commitment. Together in 2023 we set a new standard for participation. Thank you, everyone.

This souvenir book is intended to further promote our superb Guests of Honour, to be a document of record to bring our story up to date, and to showcase our convention. We thank everyone who has contributed. We also owe special thanks to James Turner and Zi Graves for organising our participative programme; recordings of 153 programme items have been lodged with FANAC.org and the Science Fiction Foundation for the benefit of scholars of science fiction and fandom in the future.

Our Guest of Honour Jennell Jaquays sadly died on 10 January 2024. We were very much honoured by her presence, and offer our condolences to her family and the fans who valued her and her work.

Caroline

Zen Cho

by Kari Sperring

Zen Cho is an artist.

No, hear me out. She is, of course, a writer, but she works in technicolour, sensaround, high definition completeness. Her novels and shorter fiction are multi-layered, complex, delicious: to read the first page is to walk within a brand new world and to experience the everyday world from unexpected angles. In her hands, words become pigments, bringing light and shade and texture to every aspect. She has a gift for character: the inhabitants of her worlds are real people, engaging and flawed, speaking with voices you can hear. Her pacing is impeccable, leaving readers breathless and exhilarated as she pulls us along. Her plots are never predictable.

She's deeply political, examining colonialism and racism and homophobia and imperialism with her characteristic sharp insight, and yet she is never preachy. She's thought-provoking: I'm still mulling over all the varied aspects of her early novel *The Perilous Life of Jade Yeo* nearly a decade after I first read it, while the more recent *Black Water Sister* lives rent free in my mind. She's uncompromising, in her voice, her critiques of imperialism and institutional and cultural forms of oppression. She is not comforting nor is she comfortable: she writes from her own culture and perspective and expects the reader to keep up and, if necessary, to adapt and learn as they go. Her imagination is twisty and creative and unexpected; she can and does write brilliantly across multiple genres, from horror to fantasy to romance to satire to silver fork novels.

She's funny. Even in the darkest corners of her worlds, where her characters confront life and death stakes, her humour shines through. It's sometimes painful, speaking to the pretension and arrogance of orientalist attitudes in *Sorcerer to the Crown*, for instance, or addressing Malaysian cultural homophobia in *Black Water Sister*. Her characters are fascinating – competent, self-questioning, pioneering – yet

they are also sharp-tongued, spiky and brisk and able to laugh at themselves. Here is a writer who is capable of simultaneously confronting readers with their prejudices and making them laugh at those prejudices

and at themselves. Her books are funny across multiple levels, from the political and cultural to the straight up ridiculous. She is, frankly, a hugely gifted and original writer.

It's easy to compare writers – indeed, it's a requirement of marketing, in many cases. And yet as a practice, it's also diminishing, reducing writers to references. There are echoes and influences all through Zen Cho's work, yes. She has spoken of some of these, particularly historical novelist Patrick O'Brian. She speaks to genre, but not genre alone. I could list several writers of whom she reminds me, but none of them are Zen Cho herself, and she stands on her own without need of them. She is herself, unique and marvellous. It is a privilege to know her: in person, she is as intelligent and insightful and funny as she is on the page. Several of her talks and interviews, both in the UK and in Malaysia, are available online, and I urge you to watch them. Her occasional articles can be found on her website¹, and are well worth reading for her clear analysis and commentary across a range of subjects. She has a new book coming out in August 2024, which has been on my pre-order list since it was announced, because each of her books opens new doors.

An artist, yes, painting in words. But she's more than that. She changes the world, word on word. She's a magician.



¹ <https://zencho.org/zen-cho-articles/>

Courtesy for the monstrous: *Spirits Abroad* by Zen Cho

by Niall Harrison

Considering that Zen Cho's writing is often, and fairly, described as charming, delightful, and even comforting, it contains an impressive amount of darkness. In 'The Fish Bowl' (2013), for instance, Su Yin is a student whose situation we don't quite understand at first; gradually we realise that she has been falling behind in her studies. She used to enjoy the 'monkish world' of studying, the feeling 'of being capable of doing everything necessary', but lately she finds herself teetering on the brink of panic. She hides her report card; she spends nights designing dolls online. One day a koi offers to grant her a wish. After initially declining, she accepts the offer, wishing for a modest score on her upcoming history test. In exchange, the fish takes a bloody bite out of her arm. Of course things don't stop with a single wish. People notice; they think Su Yin is cutting. She begs the koi to hide her 'until it's over', and the koi obliges, consuming her entirely:

The koi's mouth was a dark place. Her body was being crushed, compacted, folded away. It hurt. But after this, Su Yin knew, there would be rest. After this, nothing.

Or look at the resolution of 'The Mystery of the Suet Swain' (2014), in which two students at Cambridge University have to deal with a stalker, who turns out to be an Orang Minyak, a creature from Malaysian folklore whose appearance is man-like, but vividly unpleasant:

His whole body was covered with a thin layer of grease. His skin glowed. A buttery film submerged his eyes [...] The flesh was slippery and horribly warm, the texture more like plastic than human skin.

These are two different types of darkness, and the stories have different kinds of ending – the horror in 'The Fish Bowl' is existential and comprehensive, whereas in 'The Mystery of the Suet Swain' it can be defeated, and the protagonists duly achieve cathartic victory over a monster. But they are similar in that both disturb the reader, and many of the stories collected in *Spirits Abroad* – which was first published in Malaysia in 2014, then in an expanded edition in the US in 2021, and in 2023

was finally brought to the UK – contain similar moments. Even a story like 'The House of Aunts' (2011) – one of the first of Cho's works to garner significant attention – which is both a school story and a romance and displays all the charm and delight those genres can imply, doesn't soft-pedal the undead nature of its protagonist, Ah Lee. When she finally reveals her true nature to the object of her affections, what he sees is:

a face incontrovertibly dead [...] When her mouth opened, a musty inorganic smell gusted out. The tongue was bright red, the colour of fresh arterial blood, and it was too long.'

Perhaps none of this is exactly surprising: 'The House of Aunts', for instance, may be in part an obvious response to *Twilight*, but there's also a fair bit of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in its DNA, a series that regularly and adroitly shifted tone between and within episodes; and to get a bit more canonical, across the stories in *Spirits Abroad* you might think of a writer like Diana Wynne Jones, equally capable of leaving a few spikes in a reader's brain. I found myself thinking about Italo Calvino, in part because I think he and Cho at times share a waspish perspicacity in their fiction, but in part because of one of the undelivered lectures collected in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988, trans. Patrick Creagh), which explores the quality of lightness as it applies to fiction. As in all of the memos, Calvino ranges widely, and without necessarily maintaining a strictly coherent argument, but several of his observations came back to me as I read *Spirits Abroad*.

In particular, I thought of Calvino's discussion of a scene from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Perseus prepares a bed of leaves for Medusa's severed head, so that it is not damaged when he places it on the ground. Calvino suggests:

Lightness could not be better represented than by this gesture of refreshing courtesy toward a being so monstrous and terrifying yet at the same time somehow fragile and perishable.'

This for me – if we can separate the image from its gendered connotations, which I think with a bit of work we can – is the most powerful kind of lightness to be found in Cho's work. A good example is '起獅, 行礼 (Rising Lion – The Lion Bows)' (2011), in which Jia Qi is the newest member of a lion dance troupe that has a sideline in ghost hunting. Arriving at a rather ordinary 1970s-build English hotel to perform at a Christmas party, their secret assignment is to deal with a ghost that is haunting a cabinet in one of the rooms; but when the ghost turns out to be that of a ten-year-old black boy, 'adopted' and brought to the UK centuries earlier by a British imperialist, the troupe exercise Calvino's refreshing courtesy, and take the cabinet with them rather than going through with an exorcism. The balance of monstrosity and vulnerability is different for this ghost than it is for, say, Ah Lee – which is to say that Ah Lee is in actuality monstrous (as well as being a teenage girl), whereas the ghost, although disruptive, is only seen as monstrous (and is more importantly a young boy) – but in both cases Cho's storytelling reminds me of Perseus's courtesy.

What is likely Cho's best-known story, the Hugo-winning 'If At First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again' (2018), also plays in this space. Byam is an imugi, which in this version of Korean mythology means it is a large, snakelike proto-dragon, who after one thousand years gains the right to attempt to ascend to heaven and be transformed into a true dragon. However, 'how you were seen mattered just as much as what you did', and Byam's attempts to ascend are repeatedly thwarted when humans see it and name it as an imugi, often with fear and loathing; in the most contemporary instance, the embarrassment is being tagged in an Instagram post. Here is an entity seen as monstrous but struggling to achieve flight, to achieve lightness. Calvino writes of seeking 'fresh methods of cognition and verification' when feeling bound in this way, so I think he might have enjoyed what happens next.

Byam tracks down the Instagrammer responsible for thwarting it (an astrophysicist called Leslie) and visits her in disguise; but, instead of eating her, it becomes fascinated by

Leslie's research, which it understands as an alternative route to enlightened transcendence. Leslie, too, is struggling with her path in life – she has recently been dumped by her boyfriend, and then is denied tenure – and the pair form a bond, fall in love, and live together for the remainder of Leslie's life. Only after Leslie passes away does Byam successfully ascend, witnessed this time by a child who names it as a dragon. The shifts between different speeds of narrative time – from thousand-year chunks into the first days and months of Leslie and Byam's relationship, then overshooting into the last decades of Leslie's life – are managed with a light touch, gracefully opening up our perspective on the events covered, particularly when Leslie reveals that she knows what manner of creature Byam is. It's a story about letting life take you where it will, about being open to the people and experiences that come your way, and about how those people and experiences can be terrifying and delicate all at the same time.

It is also, in an understated way, about not letting other people define your experiences. Leslie and Byam are not exactly a conventional couple, after all, and so Leslie introduces it only 'to those of her family who didn't object to the fact that Byam appeared to be a woman'; but it works for them. This sort of negotiation of identity and acceptance crops up again and again throughout *Spirits Abroad*, most often relating to the move between different cultures and expectations – as reflected by its organisation into 'Here' stories, which are primarily contemporary stories about Malaysians in Malaysia, 'There' stories, which are primarily contemporary stories about Malaysians in other places, and 'Elsewhere' stories, which are more extravagant fantasies.

The prototypical 'Here' story might be 'The First Witch of Damansara' (2012), which reads a little like a try-out for Cho's most recent (and for my money, best) novel *Black Water Sister* (2021). Vivian returns home to Malaysia, from a 'modern Western country', on the occasion of the funeral of her grandmother, who may have been a witch and who turns up in Vivian's dreams as something of a busybody. The flashpoint here is clothing, both the tank top

she wears on arrival (“Can see your bra,” whispered Ma, “it’s not so nice”) and then, more substantially, shopping for a wedding dress and deciding between Western white and a Cheongsam ‘as red as a blare of trumpets’ that really doesn’t suit her. In the end, reconciliation is achieved, and Vivian’s grandmother even provides her with details of a good seamstress.

On the ‘There’ side, in ‘The Perseverance of Angela’s Past Life’ (2021), the titular character, having studied in the UK, moves to Japan to teach English but is haunted by a version of her teenaged self. ‘What she liked about being an adult,’ we are told, ‘was being able to control her life’; but of course, like Byam and Leslie, she learns that we never are, and that without reconciling with the repressed queerness of her younger self, she won’t really be an adult, either. And in the ‘Elsewhere’ section we meet, for instance, Siew Tsin of ‘The Terra-cotta Bride’ (2011): a modern girl who has died, and is protected in hell by becoming the second wife of her long-dead Great Uncle. Into this simulacrum of family comes the titular simulacrum of a woman, a third wife, one who has never been alive to go alongside the two who once were. Ultimately, the situation cannot hold, and Siew Tsin leaves the ‘protection’ of marriage in favour of reincarnation. Like Angela, she has to learn acceptance, and not to try to control that which won’t be.

Courtesy to the monstrous; fresh methods of cognition; authentic cadences in story resolutions: there is one other notable source of lightness in Cho’s writing, for me, which is the wit contained in almost every sentence. None of the stories in the collection are written in the first person: the most common voice is a wryly observant third person, sometimes omniscient. Here, for instance, is the narrator’s take on contemporary Britain’s response to the arrival of a dragon:

In Britain, people were far too sophisticated to pray to their spirits. Instead they wrote articles about them.

Some examples are subsequently given, all of them on-point. Or here are two characters in love:

They smiled stupidly for a while, shedding radiance on the slide and sandbox, showering incidental romance on the speed-walking uncle and auntie.’

Just the right mix of saccharine and self-aware.

So: charming, delightful, and comforting, yes. *Spirits Abroad* is in the end all of those things, because its various lightnesses provide definition to an array of characters coming to know themselves, rarely alone (there are strong friendships in many of the stories, as well as romantic relationships) and always resourceful. But it’s the thought behind the lightness that stays with me afterwards. ‘Life and politics is equally important,’ insists one character; it’s almost the only moment of didacticism in the entire book, but the entire book is a demonstration of the statement’s truth.



Niall Harrison

by Abigail Nussbaum

My first contact with Niall Harrison was an email. It was the fall of 2005. I had been blogging for a few months, reviewing books, film, and television in the science fiction and fantasy genres. Niall emailed to ask whether I'd like to review for *Strange Horizons*, where he edited the reviews department. By that point, however, I already knew who he was. A few days earlier, my blog stats had shot up, driven by a post on Niall's LiveJournal. It was titled 'Your new favourite blog'.

I did end up reviewing for *Strange Horizons*, and later taking over as reviews editor when Niall moved up to become the magazine's editor-in-chief. Over a friendship that has spanned nearly two decades, I have had a front row seat to the development and growth of Niall's career as a reviewer and editor, a journey that has crossed blogging and social media platforms, publications, conventions, and awards committees. Through it all, that one original interaction still sums up so much about Niall to me, and why he is a unique and vital voice in SFF fandom. He is generous with his time and attention. He is willing – eager, even – to set himself aside and direct the spotlight towards others. He is always on the lookout for new voices, new perspectives, and new ideas. And if you stand still long enough, he will try to get you to write for him.

I was far from the only new critic recruited by Niall for the *Strange Horizons* reviews department, reflecting his determination to find new voices who would revitalise not only the department, but the mirror it held up to the field. His idea for the department was a wide range of voices, covering a wide range of works, offering in-depth, thoughtful discussions that situate those works in their historical and literary context. As editor of the magazine as a whole he remained committed to maintaining *Strange Horizons*'s role as a unique venue for thoughtful, groundbreaking fiction and non-fiction, which foregrounds under-represented voices.

In the years that I have known Niall, that desire to improve both the genre and the conversation about it has led him to step up and do work on behalf of fandom, usually without placing himself in the spotlight. As co-editor of *Vector*, the BSFA's

quarterly magazine (where he recruited me to write 'Progressive Scan', a column about SFF television). As maintainer of *Torque Control*, the *Vector* editorial blog – which became, for a time, one of the core venues of online SFF fandom, a site for lively conversation and the development of new ideas. As a judge for the Arthur C Clarke Award, and later a booster of the award's shortlists and of in-depth conversation about them. And as a member of the programme teams for various Worldcons and Eastercons. In all of this work, Niall has sought to push forward the level of discussion in the field, to promote work that expands our ideas of what science fiction can be. And, in typical Niall fashion, he has done this without snobbishness or condescension, out of a genuine love for the field and belief in its capacity to grow.

As both a writer and an editor, Niall occupies a unique position and offers a unique perspective. He cares deeply about the fields of science fiction and fantasy (though perhaps more the former than the latter), but he also expects a great deal from them. He's interested in the very core of the genre – in writers like Peter F Hamilton and Stephen Baxter – but also in its periphery, in writers not traditionally tagged with the science fiction label, and in works that slip across the boundaries between genres. He isn't overly reverent towards the genre's past – not for him the insistence that 'true' SF fans must read Asimov or Heinlein – but he's also always eager to understand it, to look backwards and learn where the ideas we take for granted first germinated (as seen in his



new *Strange Horizons* column, 'Depth of Field', which combines discussions of new and old work). He's the sort of reviewer who knows Margaret Atwood was talking nonsense when she dismissed science fiction as 'talking squids in outer space', but who also isn't interested in chauvinistic posturing over that statement. He'd much rather write, with insight and care, about Atwood's later science fiction works, such as the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy.

I might describe Niall as a reviewer's reviewer. By which I mean not only that those of us who love to write and read SFF criticism admire him and learn a great deal from his writing (and are overjoyed that he has returned to it after a hiatus of too many years), but that he believes deeply in the value of criticism, as literary work in its own right, and as a necessary mirror and spur to the field. This has meant not only championing the work of contemporary critics (for years he edited John Clute's *Strange Horizons* column, 'Scores'), but rooting himself in the work of critics who came before him – as those of us into whose hands he has pressed copies of review collections by Clute, Joanna Russ, and William Atheling Jr can attest. This belief has told in Niall's own writing, not only in how he takes on and synthesises the ideas of other critics, but in how he always seems to be searching for a system of science fiction, a history of what the genre was, is, and could be.

The result hasn't always been smooth sailing. A casual observation on Niall's LiveJournal about the absence of any female writers' names from the cover of an anthology of original short fiction resulted in hundreds of comments that were, if not quite acrimonious, certainly heated. A blog post on *Torque Control* pointing out the relative absence of women from the shortlists of the Clarke Award similarly spurred a lively comment thread. And yet I believe that both of those incidents helped shed light on a real problem in the field, and played a (small, but nonetheless real) part in changing the facts they were observing. Niall doesn't seek out controversy, but his love of the field means that he will call out problems in it when he sees them, and usually in a way that draws attention.

At the same time, Niall also knows when to stand back and let the conversation go on

without him, for example during the RaceFail conversation in 2009, recognising that his role should be amplifying the voices of others rather than making himself the centre of the discussion. Instead, he took on the lessons of that conversation, becoming more conscious of racial bias in the selection of works being reviewed and the identities of reviewers assigned to them. For years, he compiled the 'SF Count', a survey of SFF review venues observing the gender and race balance in both the works they chose to review and the reviewers they chose to platform. More recently, he has been a champion of SFF in translation, most especially in his writing about novels and short stories translated from Chinese.

All of these traits can be seen in Niall's own writing, exemplified in the excellent review collection *All These Worlds* (it should come as no surprise that, having expressed admiration for other writers' volumes of collected reviews, and belief in their utility to the field, he has sought to produce one of his own; we are all the better for its existence). He is a generous, thoughtful reviewer, always willing to meet a work where it's at rather than imposing his own priors on it. To read Niall's reviews is to be struck by his willingness to take every work on its terms, while still holding firmly to his own ideas, and remaining on the lookout for the wider context within which the work sits.

I was thrilled to learn that Conversation would be honouring Niall as a Guest of Honour – not only because this was a much-earned celebration of a dear friend, but because Niall represents, to me, so much of what fandom should aspire to. His generosity, his passion, his humility, his openness to new ideas, his drive to excellence and, most of all, his promotion of the work of others at the same time that he was developing his own voice, all come together into a profound contribution to SFF fandom. As he enters the next phase of his career, and returns to regular blogging and reviewing, I have once again seen him seeking out new voices, and encouraging young reviewers to participate in fandom. I look forward to many more years in which he will continue to be an inspiration, as a critic, a mentor, and a fan.

An explanatory introduction

by John Coxon

Niall Harrison, one of Conversation's Guests of Honour, published a book and held a launch party at the convention. The book in question was *All These Worlds: Reviews & Essays*, a magnificent overview of the field of science fiction from a very talented critic. Niall put a copy into the fan funds auction and accompanied it with an offer: the winner could commission him to write a review of anything. Andrew Hogg and I bid heavily on the item because we knew it was a one-of-a-kind opportunity. And we won.

Our first thought was to have Niall review *All These Worlds: Reviews & Essays* by Niall Harrison (since that would be very funny), but we eventually drifted towards Star Wars, as is often the case with us. Niall is familiar with parts of

the old Star Wars Expanded Universe, and has read the Heir to the Empire trilogy by Timothy Zahn, so obviously we couldn't ask him to review that. We thought about another trilogy (the Jedi Academy trilogy by Kevin J Anderson) or another series (the X-Wing series by Michael A Stackpole and Aaron Allston), and then it occurred to us we could combine the two.

As such, we made Niall read *I, Jedi* by Michael A Stackpole; a sequel to the first four X-Wing books which takes place during the events of the Jedi Academy trilogy, featuring Corran Horn: the galaxy's finest starfighter pilot, detective, Jedi, and lover. The result is proof (if any were needed) that Niall can write an excellent and intriguing essay about any subject matter under the sun. He really is a treasure.

I, Jedi by Michael A Stackpole – fan fund review

by Niall Harrison

I find this a distractingly odd sentence:

Mirax and I never would have gone there three years ago, but Wedge Antilles had recommended it, and someone in management had been convinced that our participation in the liberation of Coruscant made Mirax and me just the sort of *glam* couple to attract the notice of the New Republic's fashionable elite.

I'm not referring to the fact that the 25-year-old novel it's from is part of a continuity that no longer officially exists, the old Star Wars 'Expanded Universe' that thrived between the early '90s and the mid-2000s, in which the city-planet Coruscant did indeed require liberating in a way that it never has on screen; no, the combination of the current vogue for multiversal shenanigans and faded teenaged memories of the post-*Return of the Jedi* conflict in Timothy Zahn's Thrawn trilogy (1991-1993) make that adjustment relatively straightforward. What trips me up is the phrase 'someone in management', which strikes me as a maximally '90s sentiment that is deeply incongruous in the context of Star Wars. Star Wars is grand

adventure, broad-canvas politics, epic battles and sweeping emotion; it has no place, not even really in its most ground-level manifestations like *Andor* (2022-), for the kind of petty corporate *Dilbert*-esque frustration implied by 'someone in management'. There are certainly leaders and higher-ups and bosses, but surely not *management*.

The sentence does its job, mind you, in that it accurately captures the character of our narrator and hero, Corran Horn. He is a brilliant ex-detective and a brilliant current X-wing pilot, the sort of person who chafes against rules and structures, and if there is management in Star Wars, it absolutely is not a surprise that he's somewhat dismissive of it. As the novel opens, the one thing that intimidates him is the prospect of becoming a father, an event that he not-particularly-endearingly fears would be 'on the scale of Thrawn disruptive'. His attempts to convince Mirax that now is not the time have been rebuffed, perhaps because they also sound more like they hail from a mid-'90s sitcom than a galaxy far far away: it is 'an

unsettled time' (when is it not); there is the 'uncertainty of my job' (but apparently he has life insurance, which is another surprising addition to my understanding of Star Wars society, but which I admit does after all imply management). Just as Horn reconciles himself to his fate, however, the plot strikes: Mirax has disappeared, presumed kidnapped, and Horn must set off on a rescue mission.

At least, he must do that right after he spends a few months and half the novel training – in disguise – as a Jedi in Luke Skywalker's new academy. During this time he bumps into most of the characters you remember from the original films (Han is on his way to do a Kessel Run, because of course he is), as well as a number of characters you will recognise if you've read other Expanded Universe novels (hi, Mara Jade!), not least because this part of *I, Jedi* shadows Kevin J Anderson's Jedi Academy trilogy (1994). The justification for this set-up is rather flattering to Horn and a little hard to swallow for the reader. Luke compares Horn's situation to the events of *The Empire Strikes Back*, when he made 'the most serious mistake of [his] career' (note: not his life) in leaving Yoda before his training was complete, and I have to admit that the stakes of *I, Jedi* – being set, as it is, in a period of reconstruction, and being about, as it is, a character on the periphery of major events rather than central to them – did not strike me as being at quite the same level. The structure also means that certain resolutions necessarily take place off-screen, because they happened in Anderson's books and Horn wasn't there, and despite Stackpole's best efforts at turning this limitation into a *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*-style virtue, it does feel like a long time until we get back to the matter of Mirax's disappearance – particularly while Horn is giving Luke advice on how to be a better teacher, even though that advice is tragically necessary. At one point Horn abbreviates a scene by reporting that 'The conversations we all had were, in retrospect, very self-indulgent and, in the long run, rather trivial', which is equal parts savage burn of Kevin J Anderson and remarkable self-own by Stackpole.

However, things come into somewhat clearer focus in the novel's second half. If at this point

Stackpole is still shadowing other Expanded Universe novels they are not ones with which I am familiar, and he does a much better job of making his narrative feel like its own thing. There is much action, recapitulating Horn's previous careers: he makes use of his detective skills while visiting his grandfather on Corellia, and his pilot skills while infiltrating a post-Imperial pirate organisation led by ex-Moff Leonia Tavira. (Tavira's presence rapidly becomes the most depressing element of the novel's hardly-progressive sexual politics, and includes such queasy writing as the fact that her 'slender, petite physique' is 'easily classed as eye-candy', despite the fact that 'in form and age she almost seemed a child'. This is irredeemable stuff, although it is pettily satisfying that it ends with a line that, 25 years on, serves as an inadvertently cutting comment on Horn's mental capacity: the follow-on from 'almost seemed a child' is that her 'cool confidence [...] betrayed kilobytes of data about her mental age'. Kilobytes: now that's perceptiveness for you.) The infiltration also requires yet another disguise and, as foreshadowed by the novel's title, Horn has an identity crisis. 'I no longer know who I am,' he worries; isolated in his mission, with nobody around him who knows him as Corran Horn, he ricochets between detective and pilot and Jedi, not knowing which role to choose, or even how to choose, other than according to the needs of the immediate moment.

I have no idea whether *I, Jedi* was a pitch from Stackpole or an assignment to Stackpole, and therefore no idea whether he was attempting to draw coherence out of the whims of corporate imperative ('management') or whether he always intended to create a commentary on the nature of characters in tie-in fiction, but either way it seems to me that the latter is what he ended up with. I resist using this term as much as I can, but Horn is unavoidably a Mary Sue-ish character albeit, instead of appearing to be an authorial insert, he comes across as an insert on behalf of readers (particularly teenage male readers of a certain disposition), a Swiss army knife capable of learning any skill and therefore of being deployed into any Star Wars narrative as a

comfortable viewpoint. What stands out about the novel in 2023, however, is that it is a first-person past-tense viewpoint. The use of first-person was, I think, uncommon for Star Wars and perhaps other tie-in fiction at the time; the use of past-tense, meanwhile, was almost universal, whereas now it is the present tense, with its presumed sense of urgency, that is favoured. But first-person past-tense is well-suited to the type of reflection on individual experience that Stackpole is trying to provide,

and is I think why Horn's final self-integration feels at least a little triumphant. The climactic moment comes when he assembles his own lightsaber and realises, 'I was still a pilot [...] I was still CorSec [...] and I was *Jedi*'. We still don't necessarily know from this who Horn is beyond his roles, but we do know that he can rise to meet any role that is required: not 'or' but 'and'. Indeed, in the end, he can even be someone who grows up enough to become a father.

Jennell Jaquays

by Allen Stroud

In 1993 *Dragon Mountain*, a box set adventure for Dungeons & Dragons second edition, arrived in high street shops in the United Kingdom. The cover artwork for the box was a Jennell Jaquays picture of a dragon crouched on an outcrop of rock in front of a mountain.

I still have my copy of *Dragon Mountain*. I bought it because of the cover art. The proportions of the dragon are exquisite. The poise of the creature seems like it might be a photographic moment captured in time. Granted, there is an artwork quality to the image, belying any real confusion over whether it is a drawn work or a picture of a real dragon; but the inclusion of shadow on the rock, the curve of the tail, and the spread of the creature's wings can't but help an impressionable and imaginative young teenager like me to be transported and carried away into the image. Art like this balanced the dense fantasy text and detailed rules of the books. Art like this inspired young people like me. Without this art, I would not be the person I am today.

Jennell Jaquays had an amazing career as an artist and writer. Her portfolio of work extends far beyond illustration, covering the intricacies of writing roleplaying source books and interactive plotlines for computer games. This began with a variety of initiatives while she was a student, working in the early independent gaming scene in the 1970s and 1980s as well as crossing over and doing freelance work for the nascent 'big dogs', like TSR and Chaosium. To begin with she was brought into projects as an

artist, but then began to develop a profile as a writer as well.

Jaquays's *Dark Tower* was nominated for the 1979 H.G. Wells award for Best Roleplaying Adventure. At the time, these adventure supplements tended to be linear quests, with branching routes and choices as 'wrong turns'. Jaquays's design involved a more complex and intricate set of patterns with loops, and multiple entrances, ensuring massive replay value for gamers. (In contemporary game design, 'Jaquaysing the dungeon' means to create a scenario with a myriad of paths.)

In November 2004, as part of Dungeons & Dragons 30th anniversary celebration, *Dungeon* magazine produced a list of the 'thirty greatest D&D Adventures of All Time'. *Dark Tower* was the only entry on the list not published by TSR.

Jaquays was co-author and illustrator for Chaosium's *Griffin Mountain* RuneQuest scenario. Set in Glorantha, this highly praised scenario was also nominated for the H.G. Wells award in 1981. The reworked version, *Griffin Island*, was nominated again in 1986. As a level designer for TSR's *Castle Greyhawk* module, Jaquays shared the 1989 Gamer's Choice Award for Best Roleplaying Adventure.

From the perspective of a Generation X child growing up in the United Kingdom, Jaquays's work was part of the massive cultural export of Dungeons & Dragons and other roleplaying games that arrived on our shores. When I began roleplaying in the late 1980s, I had a sense that I had found my community and that the books

and art spoke to my soul, feeding the imaginative fire that would become integral to my career as a creative practitioner and academic. The imagery of that time has become the foundation for what came after.

One example of that, which clearly demonstrates the influence of Jaquays's art, is 'Last Descent', the cover of an issue of *Dungeon* magazine back in the early '90s. It's acrylic on illustration board mounted to light plywood and depicts a damaged nautaloid, the interplanar ships of the Illithids, as it falls out of the sky.

This image inspired the creators of 2023's computer game of the year, *Baldur's Gate 3* from Larian Studios. The entire opening sequence of the game is a running battle between a nautaloid and a flight of dragons ridden by Gythyanki warriors. When

you see that imagery in game and see the original Jaquays painting, the connection is immediately apparent. The visual iconography is right there, the link both reverent and obvious.

I had the very good fortune of working on *Baldur's Gate 3* for several weeks in 2020 and 2021. It was clear then that the designers, writers, artists and programmers were well aware of the legacy they had inherited – a legacy in which Jennell Jaquays played a huge part.

After establishing herself in roleplaying games Jaquays expanded her portfolio, moving into work on computer games as well. Her early work on Coleco's conversion of *Donkey Kong* in 1982 was a high profile start. Coleco's *Wargames*, for which Jaquays was co-designer of gameplay, won the 1984 Summer CES (Consumer Electronics Show) original software award. Later credits included Software's *Quake II* and *Quake III Arena* and Microsoft's *Age of Empires III*.

Jaquays's work covered different areas such as the interface (for *AoE*) and level design in *Quake*. Having an adaptive creative individual with such experience who was able to work in multiple mediums must have been a complete joy.

Reading an early interview with Jaquays whilst she was working on *Quake II* reveals a lot. Her appreciation for storytelling, alongside her engagement with visual design in the medium, shines through her responses to the questions. That connected quality is precious, and it helps

any development process when an individual can produce exceptional quality work in all of the different aspects of the final product. Her last game credit is as an artist and level designer for *Halo Wars* on the Xbox in 2009, again showing her engagement and



understanding of both areas of these projects.

In 2011, Jennell Jaquays came out as a transgender woman and has been incredibly supportive of initiatives in the gaming industry to increase diversity and representation. Jaquays became creative director for The Transgender Human Rights Institute in Seattle and was involved in the petition to create 'Leelah's Law', outlawing conversion therapy of LGBT youth. In response to this petition, in April 2015 President Barack Obama called for the banning of conversion therapy for minors. Jaquays was named as one of the 'Top 50 Transgender Americans You Should Know' by LGBTQ Nation and was a 'Trans 100' 2015 Honouree.

On 10 January 2024, Jennell Jaquays died in a hospital in Dallas; she was 67. Her wife, Rebecca Heineman, said the death was caused by complications of Guillain-Barré syndrome. She is survived also by two children from her first marriage.

Kari Sperring

by Juliet McKenna

It was a tremendous pleasure to chat with my friend, and talented writer, Kari Sperring at Conversation, under the guise of interviewing her as one of the convention's Guests of Honour. This was also a welcome opportunity to explore the many and varied influences which have shaped her critically acclaimed and widely admired writing.

Kari first discovered fantasy in the books her mother read to her as a small child, notably *Alice in Wonderland*. Once she was reading for herself, the local library offered her Andrew Lang's fairy books, and collections of myths and legends retold by authors such as Roger Lancelyn Green. *The Magician's Nephew* arrived as a fifth birthday present. Later library visits introduced her to Andre Norton's books, to Robert Heinlein's work, and many more. To this day, like her mother before her, if Kari thinks a book looks interesting, she reads it. If you're looking for something to read, this makes her an excellent source for recommendations, as many of us well know.

Like many British writers of her generation, Kari watched *Doctor Who* from its earliest days, as well as *Star Trek: The Original Series*, *Space 1999*, and similar shows. These days, she watches the wealth of SF and fantasy films and TV with an informed and critical eye. Even when she is dissecting some inadequacy in plotting or dialogue with clinical precision, however, she will find positives to highlight; Kari is kind and she is fair. Do not mistake this for softness. As many people can attest, Kari is no pushover.

Her enthusiasm for *Star Trek* introduced Kari to conventions by way of a fan club which she found advertised in a TV magazine. At a one-day *Star Trek* convention in Slough, 13-year-old Kari met friendly and welcoming fans, who recommended books she might like to read from a wide range of genre authors. She found the specialist booksellers who could supply these titles in the dealers' rooms and signed up for mailing lists in those pre-Internet days. As she read ever more widely, Kari began writing her own stories, and the *Star Trek* fan fiction community offered her encouraging, constructive feedback.

These experiences clearly had a lasting impact. Kari is invariably welcoming to fans who are at their own first convention. In her dealings with other writers, she understands the importance of assessing work honestly while being supportive at the same time. Many attendees at the Milford SF Writers' Workshops have benefited from her insights. Equally, she understands the contribution that fresh perspectives can offer her own work, always interested to see what readers have found.

From her late teens, she started to attend Eastercons and Fantasycons. She was soon spending time helping out in the Green Room and elsewhere. Kari always wants to be useful. Conrunners quickly recognised her talents, so she took on a wider range of responsibilities on various con committees through the 1990s, in the UK and in Dublin – where she was instrumental in establishing Octocon, now the national Irish SF convention. Kari believes strongly in co-operative and collaborative fandom. She puts this into practice whenever she is involved in an event.

As all experienced event organisers will tell you, a successful convention is one where the hard work and preparation beforehand, and behind the scenes at the time, goes unnoticed because everything runs so smoothly. Since 1963, the Doc Weir Award has been voted on and presented annually at Eastercon, to recognise a significant contribution to fandom that might otherwise go unnoticed for similar reasons. Kari was the recipient in 2009, to well-deserved acclaim. Not that she has rested on those laurels. She continues to help out whenever she can.

To return to Kari's writing, she has always been creative. Learning at primary school that the people who wrote the stories she loved were called authors, she decided she would be one of those one day. Over the years, she moved from inventing tales of revolution involving her dolls to *Star Trek* fanfic. She robustly defends the ways fan fiction offers young writers the freedom and space to explore different ways of expressing themselves, including 'Mary Sue' self-insertion narratives. That said, the less than welcoming

attitude she found at SF conventions towards would-be authors starting out meant she kept quiet about her fiction writing as her skills and her ambitions quietly grew.

Meanwhile, her professional life progressed through various academic posts as a historian specialising in the Celtic and Gaelic-speaking peoples. This included researching and writing non-fiction books on early medieval Ireland, on medieval Welsh royalty, and on her lifelong passion, *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas. Far from being dense, multi-footnoted, research tomes, these books are extremely readable, frequently enlivened with Kari's dry sense of humour. She carries these strengths through to her fiction, along with her historian's insistence that fantasy narratives and worldbuilding must be plausible – though she does not remotely favour gatekeeping, on the basis of academic degrees or anything else, when it comes to publication. As far as Kari is concerned, if someone wants to be a writer, all they need is something to write with.

Her first book, *Living with Ghosts*, was inspired in part by her passion for Dumas's novels, in particular the intense atmospheres he creates. Other influences include her tabletop gaming experience and her fascination with swordplay. The result is a complex, though never overly complicated, novel exploring the intersections of court politics, ambitions and magic with human needs and frailties. Published by DAW Books in March 2009, it was awarded the Sydney J Bounds Award for Best Newcomer 2010 by the British Fantasy Society, was short-listed for the IAFA William L Crawford Award 2010, and made the Honor List for the 2010 James Tiptree Jr Award.

Her next novel, *The Grass King's Concubine*, is strikingly different in style, tone and setting. Influences here include Kari's passion for kung fu movies, and the stories of community and continuity popular in Hong Kong cinema. A wealthy young woman's search for a legendary land and her unexpected, sometimes nightmarish, discoveries make for a compelling story, enriched with Kari's interests in labour rights, the impacts of industrialisation and the influences of elites. There are also ferret women. As I say, she has an engaging sense of humour.

Kari is not a natural series writer. While that may be a marketing department's nightmare, her work is enjoyably unpredictable. Few of her dedicated readers would have predicted that Kari would now be exploring the Arthurian mythos. She has so often said that writing mediaeval fantasy would feel too much like work. She has no interest in finding 'the real Arthur'. She has also encountered far too much frankly ridiculous wishful thinking woven around Celtic-inspired fantasy.

What does interest Kari about the King Arthur mythos is the magical medieval 'neverwhen' created by medieval minds in these wide-ranging story cycles. This tradition is infinitely flexible, and at the same time authors can rely on a reader's familiarity with the core stories and ideas. The lesser characters really interest her, especially when they do something unexpected. Gaheris, one of the princes of Orkney, has long been a favourite. He is a loyal, chivalrous knight, if occasionally sarcastic – who kills his mother because she is sleeping with Lamorak, hereditary enemy of the Orkney family. This tale intrigued Kari, and so she wrote a novella putting a very different twist on those events. The more she wrote about these characters, the more fascinating she found their tensions and relationships. Over many years, these stories evolved into her latest publication, *The Book of Gaheris*, available from NewCon Press.

Kari's writing is compassionate without being sentimental about human nature. She has a clear-eyed, deep understanding of the complexity of human nature, both good and bad. Her worldbuilding is detailed without being cluttered, while retaining the essential mystery of magic as it offers both dangers and opportunities. Raised in a left-wing Labour household, her social conscience invariably adds depth to her work, while never distracting or detracting from the story. Her work will prompt a reader to ask themselves questions about the underlying issues she explores, without being abrasive or confrontational.

I have no doubt that Kari remains honestly bemused to see herself now listed in perpetuity as an Eastercon Guest of Honour. Her many friends and fans, both long-standing and more recent, would expect this. Equally, we know full well that this recognition of her talents and merits is most thoroughly deserved.

Adrian Tchaikovsky

by John Coxon

Adrian Tchaikovsky is one of an elite few authors in our genre. By this I mean that, when I was doing my postdoc work, he was one of the writers of which two things were true:

1. I knew people who went to conventions who had read his books.
2. I knew people who did not go to conventions who had read his books.

This was a shockingly short list; as it happens, although *Children of Time* won the (very well-deserved) Arthur C Clarke Award in 2016, I actually first read it at the behest of one of my colleagues. ‘Go and read this excellent book,’ she instructed me, and so I did.

Boy, it’s a good book.

Sometimes, I read science fiction novels in which the ideas are so compelling, and so convincing, and feel so *right* that they influence how I view the world. *Children of Time* is undoubtedly one of those books; I’ll never look at a spider in the same way again, and Tchaikovsky’s work has had a huge impact on how I relate to the search for extra-terrestrial life. (I now think aliens will be much weirder than I previously thought they would be.) The truly astounding thing was that *Children of Ruin* managed to pull the same trick again. Twice. I could spend the entirety of this article harping on about the quality of those books, but they are (as I write this) finalists for the Hugo Award for Best Series; the final instalment, *Children of Memory*, was published in 2022. If you haven’t read them, you should fix that.

If you’ve not read any of Adrian Tchaikovsky’s work and you’re reading this, you would be forgiven for thinking that he might be a science fiction author. This is partly true, but it rather occludes the huge range of novels that he has written. He started in the genre by writing three fantasy novels back to back and pitching them as the start of a series. They were the first instalments in the ten-volume epic fantasy series, *Shadows of the Apt*, which was published between 2008–2014 (yes, ten books in seven years). I asked him about the move from fantasy saga to science fiction, and he responded by

saying, ‘As a bit of a punt, I wrote this book about spiders in outer space.’ I think that reveals a lot about him as a writer in two ways. Firstly, his passions are clear on the page and bleed into the stories he tells; secondly, he is a very self-effacing writer.

He says he’d wanted to write a take on *Casablanca* for years, and in 2022 he returned to fantasy with *The City of Last Chances*, a beautiful book with more perspectives than I have fingers; but it is told in such a strong voice, and with such a masterful thread woven through it, that it stands as one of the very best fantasy novels I have ever read. I asked him in our interview at the convention about whether he felt he’d been away from fantasy and he said he felt he had, partly because of the astonishing success of *Children of Time*; but the BSFA Award win that *City* garnered is surely proof that he has not lost his touch while he’s been away. The way he describes the book’s publication is that he ‘managed to get Head of Zeus into an arm lock’ (another rather humble turn of phrase). Presumably, further wrestling moves were deployed to secure the publication of *House of Open Wounds*, which came out from Head of Zeus in December 2023.

Tchaikovsky is a big gamer. *Shadows of the Apt* came from a roleplaying game he ran as an undergraduate, and more recently he has had turns on podcasts *Force Majeure* and *How We Roll* as a player and game master. He’s said in interviews that he generally plans books prior to writing them, but *City of Last Chances* marked a departure, with him writing it as he went (to use the technical vocabulary, he pantsed instead of plotted). I asked him whether he thought it had drawn inspiration from his gaming side and he pointed out that if it is a gaming narrative, it’s a very modern one, as it focuses on a single city (much like modern classics John Harper’s *Blades in the Dark* or Grant Howitt’s *Spire*). Nonetheless, I still think that the way Tchaikovsky blends the character perspectives in *City* has the touch of a master GM wrangling a table of unruly players.

The eagle-eyed amongst you will have noticed that Tchaikovsky had two novels published in 2022, and might be thinking, 'Gosh, he's prolific.' Well, let me tell you about the other works he had published in that year, just to drive the point home. Firstly, *Eyes of the Void*, the second volume of a thought-provoking space opera series with undertones of cosmic horror. I confess I have only read the first instalment of this series (*Shards of Earth*), but what strikes me about it is how different it is from the other series I've mentioned here. Secondly, *Day of Ascension*, a Warhammer 40,000 novel which (perhaps unsurprisingly, given Tchaikovsky's talent for writing the Other) will make you root for the Tyranids. And thirdly, in shorter fiction, his novella *Ogres* marked his second time as a Hugo Award finalist for Best Novella.

He describes himself as lazy; particularly, he says that the reason that he writes in secondary worlds is 'sheer laziness' because it saves him the effort of researching the primary one. (He wrote one book set in our own world, and researched it thoroughly.) He says he writes to explore worlds, and notes that this neatly skips any question of whether to explore an idea in a fantasy or a science fiction setting; the world will place itself on the spectrum of the genre, and then he writes to the world. (He does also note that he's not going to be stopping writing science fiction any time soon.)

The multiple nods as a Hugo Award finalist, combined with the BSFA Award win, make a point about his writing which is worth stating;

this is a man who can have four novels and a novella come out in a single year, and all of them can be noteworthy works of genre fiction. There are other authors who are high volume, and there are other authors who are high quality, but I cannot think of a single other author who manages to combine both adjectives in the way that Tchaikovsky does. It is testament to his skill and his imagination that this is the case.

It is also a testament to his transition from part-time to full-time writer, having given up his day job as a legal executive. He says that was always the dream, but that *Children of Time* winning the Clarke Award triggered a snowball effect which led to that book earning enough money to make it viable for him to make the jump. I asked him what was the coolest thing that he hadn't yet written about, and he spoke about the idea of fungi intermediating between different species, enabling things like communication between trees, which I'm sure I will be entranced by when it crops up in a future novel. I'm sure there will be future novels, as he told the audience at Eastercon he had seven manuscripts currently submitted to various publishers. (!)

So, we reach the end of the article, and I need a neat bow to tie everything up with. A pithy conclusion to complete your understanding of the man about whom I am writing. So the question becomes: How do I pigeonhole an author who can write all these stories at the level of the very best in the field? The answer is quite simple. I don't. I just invite you to enjoy the ride.



Ursula Vernon

by Tibs

I first came across Ursula Vernon in the mid-2000s, when I discovered *Digger*, her long running (2003-2011) webcomic about a rather lost but very sensible wombat; this resulted in several awards (including, eventually, her first Hugo) and a fascinated and devoted following. The entire thing is still available to read online¹, as well as for purchase via Sofa Wolf or, if you were very lucky, in the signed omnibus Kickstarter editions from 2013² (which I have), or 2022/3³.

Shortly after finding *Digger*, I discovered her blog, initially on LiveJournal, for a while on Dreamwidth, and now on Twitter – and, as that fails, Mastodon and maybe other places. It's important to mention here because Ursula shares the ups and downs of her life online (often in irreverent detail), in the process effectively saying, 'Well, if it happens to me, then it's a normal thing and not something to be ashamed of.' So we've heard about her mental illness and its treatment, the breakup with her first partner, life with her current partner, Kevin Sonney (and chickens!), about gardening, fast food, bird watching, the ups and downs of being an author and artist, D&D sessions, and lately the scariness of being diagnosed with breast cancer (the lump was called 'Bob').

But it's her fiction that I most love. Ursula's female protagonists are characterised by a *very sensible* approach, often with surprising results. There's something incredibly reassuring about reading her books (yes, even the horror) because of this.

She also has a long involvement as an artist with furry fandom, and according to her entry on wikifur⁴ has been a guest of honour at several furry conventions.

Her storytelling mainly falls into five themes, which I'll cover in turn.

Children's illustrated chapter books

If you aren't child-adjacent, then I should explain that chapter books are the stage after picture books. Illustrations are still important, but there's enough text to warrant (short) chapters.

Ursula's first chapter books were the eleven Dragonbreath books. The protagonist is Danny Dragonbreath, a young dragon, although none of the other kids at school believe in dragons. The books have a great time playing with all sorts of fantasy tropes.

The second series is the six Hamster Princess books. Harriet Hamsterbone has been cursed to prick her finger on a hamster wheel when she's 12, and fall into a deep sleep. Her take on that, typical of an Ursula protagonist, is to figure that she's invincible until she's 12, so she can have Adventures! The first book of the series came out with a wonderful pink sparkly cover.

Once Ursula started publishing books for children, she realised that it would be confusing if she continued to publish adult books under the same name, so she adopted the pseudonym T Kingfisher for books aimed at an adult audience (the T stands for 'The').



¹ <https://diggercomic.com/blog/2007/02/01/wombat1-gnorfl/>

² <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/sofawolf/digger-omnibus>

³ <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/grimoakpress/digger-unearthed-the-complete-10th-anniversary-collection>

⁴ https://en.wikifur.com/wiki/Ursula_Vernon

Books that are categorised as for children/young adult

Of particular note here are *Summer in Orcas* (a very interesting take on a portal fantasy) and the multiple award-winning *A Wizard's Guide to Defensive Baking*, in which the young protagonist shows why one should not underestimate magic just because it has to do with baked goods.

Fairy story retellings

When writing on LiveJournal and Dreamwidth, Ursula would every so often explain a fairy story, and boggle at the motivations of the characters. She's also written her own variants of a good few, including *The Seventh Bride*, *Bryony and Roses*, *The Raven and the Reindeer* and the collection *The Halcyon Fairy Book*.

I love the way *Bryony and Roses* makes gardening a central part of this retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, the not-magical-at-all hedgehog from *The Seventh Bride*, and the whole different view of Hans Christian Anderson's *Snow Queen* that is provided in *The Raven and the Reindeer*.

Slow burn romances in a fantasy setting

The novels in the Clocktaur sequence, *Swordheart*, and the Saint of Steel books are all set in the world of The Temple of the White Rat – a very pragmatic religious order. They're also all slow burn romances with (unsurprisingly) very sensible female characters.

I love these for the people involved, all of whom are trying to make the best of an often bad lot, and also for the badger-like gnoles, who will happily explain how stupid humans are (but excuse it as humans can't smell).

Horror novels

Latterly Ursula has started writing horror, which novels have also attracted various awards. As always, I'd find it hard to pick a favourite:

The Twisted Ones is inspired by Arthur Machen's short story 'The White People', and the imagery of the twisted creatures and their realm is very striking.

The Hollow Places is set in and through a 'museum of curiosities', some of which are even creepier than they seem. I appreciate the way that normal life puts constraints on the

characters, for which there's no magical solution provided. The image of replastering a wall to re-establish the barriers between dimensions sticks with me, as does the story from the found diary. There's inspiration taken from Algernon Blackwood's *The Willows*...

What Moves the Dead is as much an explanation as a retelling of 'The Fall of the House of Usher', with true moral angst as an underpinning of the story (I also love the third gender for soldiers).

A House with Good Bones is the one with vultures, and a haunted house of a different nature. There is a resolution, but I can't help feeling it's more a putting off the bad things into the future...

All have their genuinely creepy moments. Reviewers seem to feel that *Nettle and Bone* also belongs to the horror category, although I'm not so sure. It's definitely a dark fairy tale, and a fascinating exploration of what is or is not evil. It also has the cutest skeleton dog ever – because Ursula Vernon.

So where to start?

Honestly, it's hard to say, as I love everything she has written. But there is an excellent selection of online short fiction⁵, all of which are highly recommended including the award-winning 'Jackalope Wives' (Nebula), 'The Tomato Thief' (Hugo) and 'Metal Like Blood in the Dark' (Hugo); all three also won WSFA Small Press Awards.

Other references and resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_Vernon

Her own website:

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

Blogging and tweeting:

LiveJournal <https://ursulav.livejournal.com/> until April 2017 (Bark Like A Fish, Damn it!)

Dreamwidth <https://tkingfisher.dreamwidth.org/> until October 2020

Twitter/X <https://twitter.com/UrsulaV> (since December 2007, and as it lasts)

Mastodon <https://redwombat.social/@ursulav> since December 2017

Bluesky <https://staging.bsky.app/profile/tkingfisher.bsky.social>

⁵https://freesfonline.net/authors/Ursula_Vernon.html

Eastercon 2023: ‘And now the conversation has ended...’ (er, not quite just yet)

or Finding Heterotopia at the Fan/Academic Binary: a con report in the form of a
7,000 word academic paper

by Nick Hubble

*This piece originally appeared on Nick's blog
Prospective Cultures¹, and we're very grateful to
them for permission to reprint it here.*

Notes:

1. For anyone just interested in a particular panel, the titles are in bold so that you can just scroll through to that point if you like.
2. A note on names; I've used first names for people on panels and surnames for referring to people not on panels. There is no deeper intention behind that.
3. This is meant to be impressionistic rather than 100% accurate reportage.

So, I'm back home from Conversation 2023 after a dream-like interlude of four days and nights during which I didn't leave the hotel, and I'm now writing this to try to capture as much of that dream as possible before the memory fades and I forget who I am. When I say 'writing this', I also mean the discarded drafts, including an autobiography framed in terms of charting the relationship between minute shifts in my critical practice and difficult events and realisations in my life. On reflection, you'll be relieved to hear, I've cut this out because it's enough to say 'reasons', but I needed to take the trip. And it has been a Covid-fuelled trip, laptop in bed, playing Orbital, Mogwai and Hawkwind (for which I blame Ian McDonald for including an orgone accumulator in *Hopeland*), alternating between reading, feverishly typing and dozing.

It all fits together because my life has been a Covid-enforced rollercoaster since first having it in March 2020 and subsequently being diagnosed with post-viral fatigue syndrome in September of that year. Up and down, up and down, I've got over the anxiety and the drop in self-confidence but it's impossible to get away from the uncertainty of not knowing how

functional I'll be at any particular point in time, irrespective of relative 'success' at 'pacing'. I've lost count of how many times I have mentally felt I can't carry on with my job, which I have a passionate love-hate relationship with and which, as with many academics, is also deeply bound in with my sense of self and purpose. At the same time, I am continuously aware of how privileged and lucky I am to work in a post that it was possible for me to cut down to a part-time role and carry on in despite my condition.

Even so, this has been one of those years that really turns you inside out. In January I restarted my 400+ mile commute to work on a week-in-week-out basis for the first time since March 2020. I have either been completely off work, working from home, or on research leave since then, which was not a state of affairs that could continue indefinitely. At first, commuting went better than I expected, so that by the point I reached the February reading week I was feeling quite optimistic about the future and told my partner that maybe all this was really going to work and that my career would carry on. Literally two days later, I had a complete dizzy relapse into full-on post-exertional malaise and was off work for six weeks. Once capable of sustained reflection on the matter, perching in the garden in the late March sunshine, I mentally resigned myself once again to leaving academia. Then I walked inside, turned on my laptop to look at my email and found out that I had successfully got a grant which means I can work from home throughout the 2023-2024 year. So, meat was back on the menu... but that was two full 180 reversals before Eastercon, neither of which I had had time to emotionally 'process', a department in which I am glacially slow, and so I went in with bases loaded, so to speak.

¹ <https://prospectiveculture.wordpress.com/>

I had been helping a little with the programme team since the beginning of the year, especially on some of the items in Niall Harrison's GoH strand. As is the nature of things, finalising these took us rather close to the con and I developed some anxiety that these items would actually get populated and happen. Therefore, I made some efforts to approach and assign people to try and ensure that we did have 'Overshoots and Other Anthropocene Narratives', 'Thirty-four Years, and An Interim Survey' and 'Rethinking the History of SF', and put myself on the first and third of these because I knew I could talk to the topics. In walking myself into this sense of responsibility, I blithely ignored my own sense of insecurity about the academic/fan binary, which for me is also caught up with the gender binary and other faultlines.

This was the point where I was going to discourse at length about my personal and academic reading practices, which I have tended to keep separate, even as compartmentalised as possible, and which have often been out of sync. I was going to write about theory, which is something I very rarely do, and discuss the importance of queer theory to me around the turn of the century, during the key final years of my PhD (which was an interdisciplinary comparative study of George Orwell and the social research organisation Mass Observation). Earlier in the late '80s/early '90s, I read SF for private personal pleasure – Banks, feminist SF – and then again especially from 2002, after completing my PhD, since when SFF has been predominately my main personal reading. It is only looking back when writing this that I think it's a bit odd that I used the work of e.g. Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to think about George Orwell, who I was researching academically, but never in relation to e.g. *The Female Man*, which I was reading for pleasure. On the one hand, I kept my reading resistant to my own critical practice; on the other, I was able to corral my academic practice along slighter straighter, slightly more controlled grounds than my reading.

After some initial post-PhD attempts to write SF papers as an academic, I realised that what I was looking for from SF spaces was a way

to engage with my personal reading rather than my academic reading (for which I had outlets) and therefore I became invested as a fan in distinction to being an academic. So, not only do I not see my SF reviews as academic, I get upset if they are seen as somehow academic. Obviously, this is in many ways a problem of my own making, and in any case I've repeatedly failed to keep to that self-imposed boundary anyway; but this is the best way I can find to explain it easily. It's now a decade since I abandoned the gender binary, which over time has made me feel better subjectively. Writing this piece makes me think that maybe it's now time to go the whole hog and set my pronouns as they/fan/academic. What you see is what you get (which is never as straightforward a proposition as it first sounds).

Funnily enough, during one of the two-hour programme meetings preparing for the con, I was asked if I'd go on the 'Fans as SF Critics' panel, which was at that (late) point short on panellists; I replied that I would be happy to do it but there was also the fact that, while I feel I review as a fan, I am nonetheless an academic critic, which was what the panel description defined fan critic against (and I think there are people in the field who would label me more academic than fan). It was suggested that this might make an interesting contrast but, in the end, I wasn't allocated to it – partly I think because that panel ended up scheduled parallel to the History of SF one. But that parallel scheduling created a troubling either/or binary in my mind. The History of SF panel was in any case troublesome; it was the one that went through the most pre-con iterations and drafts, switching from one panel to two and back to one.

At the end of March, I went back to work (online) and that tired me out so much I had to take some days' rest (I was on annual leave by then). However, things turned a bit messy at that point because the emails concerning the History of SF panel went to an email address I hadn't used for the con; so I didn't pick them up until the Wednesday evening, whereupon I tried to address some points raised but also reiterate my conception of the panel, which was that the point was not to diversify the existing history of

SF, but to radically revise the framework for the history of SF (e.g. abandon the 'Golden Age' etc. and embrace looser periodisations) and create a new one which would in its nature be global and inclusive. Then the next time I checked into that account was late on the Thursday night at the hotel, by which time various developments had occurred and the debate had intensified. Without going into details, I got so upset that I couldn't sleep at all that night, but had to lie there stewing in misery, anguish and self-pity, with only a toy armadillo for emotional support. I couldn't even get up and put the light on because I was sharing with my son.

Fortunately, we did manage to resolve everything amicably on Friday morning (thanks to all those involved!) and after attending the **Luna Press Launch** (throughout which both the enormous, disembodied head of Val Nolan and the emotional punch of Anna Smith Spark's reading from *A Woman of the Sword* swam in and out of my consciousness) I did finally manage to sleep for the rest of the afternoon while Alex diligently revised for his upcoming GCSEs. I felt OK when I woke up (in time for the **NewCon Press Launch Party**) but, as so often in these acute moments of emotional turmoil, a lot of stuff went up in the air and then came back down in a different order. As a result, I ended up going some places I wasn't entirely expecting to go on the **Gig (Economies) in Space** panel at 9pm on the Friday evening.

I was on this with Stew Hotston, RB Kelly and Edmund Schluessel and I think we had a good discussion. My highlights were Rachael talking about how horrible it is to work in a hyacinth bulb factory (which features in the plot of their excellent novel *On the Brink*, the sequel

to the Clarke-shortlisted *Edge of Heaven*), Edmund mentioning that the first space strike actually happened on Skylab in the 1970s (although this is disputed²), and Stew explaining that the costs of getting into space are such that we are unlikely to get a stereotypical precariat dependent on the gig economy, but that we probably will get a kind of precarious gig-economy existence for highly qualified technical workers who find themselves forced to do what their corporations want because there is (literally) nowhere else to go once they are out on an installation in space. This led to further discussion as to whether corporations are really 'general artificial intelligences' and whether it is ever really possible to 'walkaway', in the style of Cory Doctorow's novel of that title, in space or otherwise. According to Edmund, walking away is just a petty bourgeois Heinleinian frontier dream of the small homestead (and implicitly colonial because dependent on removing the existing indigenous occupants of said land), but I would say that the impulse to keep on moving away from authority is fairly central to SF and can be found in many stories: the example I gave in the panel was Alan Moore and Ian Gibson's *The Ballad of Halo Jones*, where it is combined with gender politics to radical effect (and also in Vonda McIntyre's *The Exile Waiting*, where the outward urge allows SF to break free from the bourgeois novel's problem with closure³).

Towards the end of the panel, Elliot, the moderator, asked us to reply to one each of four linked questions to the panel⁴ concerning the asymmetry in bargaining power between employer and employees, the fourth of which was 'How effective is the state at supporting the

² See <https://universemagazine.com/en/cosmic-disobedience-did-the-skylab-crew-really-go-on-strike-on-orbit/> and NASA's denial: <https://www.nasa.gov/history/the-real-story-of-the-skylab-4-strike-in-space/>

³ <https://prospectiveculture.wordpress.com/2020/03/06/the-exile-waiting-1975-by-vonda-n-mcintyre/>

⁴ As posted in the convention's Discord forum for the panel: There are several factors affecting the asymmetry in bargaining power between employer and employee in place:

1. How difficult is it for an employee to gain a new job, with the skills, reputation and transport options they have available after leaving their current job?
2. How easy is it for an employer to find a replacement with the right skills for someone they have just fired?
3. How few hands have the jobs been concentrated under the control of, inside the volume of space within practical travel distance (is it easy for them to form cabals or otherwise collude)?
4. How effective is the state at supporting the right of individual workers to coordinate their response to bad employers?

Which of these factors, if any, will tend to be magnified in space (and why)?

right of individual workers to coordinate their response to bad employers?'. Whereupon I jumped in, in part because I had already forgotten the previous three, and said something along the lines of 'Not at all. There is nothing that the state is going to be able to do to protect employees in the long run. Therefore, we should abandon the state and form a different type of society. Please come along and hear us discuss this tomorrow on the "Anarchy or Bust!" panel.' At which point, Stew turned round to me and said, 'I wasn't expecting that answer!' Neither was I until I opened my mouth and discovered that I had transitioned from (academically?) discussing a political position to advocacy.

I should point out that Rachael did subsequently provide the more obvious (but nonetheless too radical for our governments) answer of universal basic income. Well, I wouldn't say no to that and, clearly, existing state protections of workers are central to many people's lives... but it is also the case that states do not treat all the people who live within their areas as citizens with legal rights. Historically, indigenous populations and 'illegal' migrants have often had to work in unregulated sections of the economy. As Stew pointed out, the whole point of the frenzied 'small boats' crisis is not to cut immigration to the UK but to create a workforce that has no rights. In this respect the state is not supporting workers' rights but actively undermining them. Memories of the post-war Welfare State (itself built off the profits of empire and dependent on migrant labour) shouldn't blind us as to how the state is increasingly being used in the interests of capital today.

So, I wasn't saying anything I don't believe but, even so, having said it out loud caused me some cognitive dissonance afterwards because I was expressing beliefs that I normally only express in SF book reviews (such as the one linked above of *The Exile Waiting*, which I wrote over three years ago). I've had this before; it's a type of *déjà vu* in which you come to a realisation that you immediately realise you have already come to three years before and even, sometimes, three years before that as well. Rather than a sign that I'm in the Matrix, this is

a sign that I'm not identical with myself, which on the whole is a good thing to be aware of because we are not, as human animals, only our conscious subjective identity. The self is not unitary and unified.

On one level this is unexceptional; most of us change behaviour and self-presentation to suit context and that operates as a safety valve (although it does encourage Jekyll-like behaviour; Jekyll being the jackal-like villain of that story). However, problems can arise when you trap yourself in having to maintain a pattern of behaviour you no longer want to. Or, in my case, in writing a certain way that I no longer want to. Therefore, I find myself writing different things from different personas, none of which quite dovetail with the one I'm living, but causing enough confusion to tie me up in contradictions that I can't always resolve immediately. These can manifest variously as indecision or becoming blocked on a topic I'm writing about. Therefore, every now and again there has to be a reset, such as the one taking place now at this Easter 2023 – which I'm hoping to harness in this piece of writing, thereby accelerating the processing process, and so bootstrapping myself out of the phase I've been stuck in since the beginning of the pandemic, OK?

As a consequence of trying to think through such mechanisms in recent years, I'm now very interested in self-reflexivity as a research topic (indeed, it is a component in the project for which I've just got a grant; you see, there is a method to the madness). Historically, however, one of the areas that I have found myself getting conflicted about is the divide between academic and fan/non-academic criticism. This came to mind on the next day, Saturday, at the **Book Launch for Niall Harrison – *All These Worlds: Reviews and Essays*** which consisted of the always wonderful Nina Allan holding an interview with Niall (and then us all queuing up to buy the book and get it signed). Like many others, I think Niall is a great critic, and holding the book and reading the contents brought immediate pleasure because in many cases I could remember reading the essays and reviews when they first appeared. There was a 'glowing period' (I nearly called this a golden age) in the second

half of the '00s when Niall was editing *Vector* and running three posts a week on *Torque Control*, the *Vector* editorial blog. The discussion between Nina and Niall on this was an absolute pleasure, for anyone such as me who felt themselves... not yet part of fandom – because even though I had joined both the BSFA and the Science Fiction Foundation and I'd been to the Glasgow Worldcon in 2005, I was really struggling to understand the unwritten rules. But here I felt welcome to include my slightly tangential, stream-of-consciousness responses to fiction (usually several days after everyone else).

Two of the posts I remember in particular (neither of which made the cut for *All These Worlds*) were both of works I ended up enjoying more than Niall because I love books which teeter out of control, skirting the edges of chaos: a review of Neal Stephenson's *Baroque Cycle*⁵ and a review of Gwyneth Jones's *Kairos*⁶, which remains not only one of my all-time favourite novels but in my opinion⁷ also one of the best. I should add for balance that a number of the reviews that are actually included in *All These Worlds* also inspired/compelled me to go out and read their subject texts, such as Kelly Link's *Magic for Beginners*, Kameron Hurley's *God's War*, and Jennifer Marie Brissett's *Elysium*. At Niall's encouraging suggestion, I wrote some pieces for him at the end of this period such as an article on *The Carhullan Army* for *Vector*, a review of Gary Wolfe's *Bearings*⁸ for *Strange Horizons*, and contributions to a round-robin discussion of Tricia Sullivan's *Lightborn*⁹ on *Torque Control*. I had previously written academic articles for *Foundation* and *Extrapolation*, but this was me really 'letting my hair down' as John Clute would put it (not that I had much even then). Niall did also suggest I write proper fiction reviews, but that would have obviously been going too far at that point because of, variously, lack of confidence, imposter syndrome re fandom, academic unease with a format based on opinion (even



critical opinion), and a reluctance to share all my intimate reading experiences. Nevertheless, the idea did take hold and, after taking several years to properly process it, I did finally bring myself to write a review of a work of fiction (so blame Niall).

Anyway, I feel I owe an enormous amount to Niall and that was one reason why I was hoping the con panels would work out. I mention Clute because there were inevitable audience questions at the launch concerning the influence of Clute on Niall, at least early on in his reviewing career. This tangentially reminded me that my first contact (I think) with Niall was actually emailing him in his then role of *Strange Horizons*' Reviews Editor to complain about Clute's review¹⁰ of Andrew M Butler's edited collection, *Christopher Priest: The Interaction*, which singled out my chapter for an especially close reading. (Just to note, John, if by any chance you read this, I have finally got over it now.) Reading the review today, I'm in stitches – and, on reflection, there is praise there which I should have accepted for what it was. At the time, though, I was absolutely livid and quite distraught because there didn't seem to be a way for me to write about SF if this approach (which was all I had) was not the right one. Therefore, I launched into a lengthy exchange in the comments – which is not a good idea – which fortunately no longer seem to be accessible.

Clute's review is worth reading just to indicate the way in which SF fandom has subsequently shifted a bit to tolerate the 'illiterate scientism of the humanities trade' and

⁵ <https://vector-bsfa.com/2008/04/25/baroque-cycle-quicksilver/>

⁶ <https://vector-bsfa.com/2008/10/03/kairos/>

⁷ <https://prospectiveculture.wordpress.com/2022/04/30/kairos-1988-1995-2021-by-gwyneth-jones/>

⁸ <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/reviews/bearings-by-gary-k-wolfe/>

⁹ <https://vector-bsfa.com/2010/12/09/lightborn/>

¹⁰ <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/reviews/christopher-priest-the-interaction-edited-by-andrew-m-butler/>

the ‘ineradicable odour of the factory’. Indeed, the relationship between Eng Lit academia and SF has changed considerably since then. I must admit, however, that some of the phrases in this review did burn their way into my psyche, with the consequence that I almost wanted to live up to them. When angered by something in British SF cycles, I’m always tempted to change my twitter bio to ‘spelunker’, a word I had to look up the meaning of, to indicate an outsider status. The idea that ‘the Orcs are about to take Helm’s Deep’, which wasn’t directed at me regrettably, has become one of my favourite cultural touchstones (in an approving sense, obviously). Perhaps the phrase that resonates with me most is the description of academic protocols as ‘shit-stupid’. Of course, Clute was not wrong to say this. However, while academic protocols are fucking shit-stupid protocols, it also needs to be remembered that they are entry-level protocols (with supporting structures), offering an education to people that gives them a chance of going on to develop their own style and judgement. Critics are not born; they have to get started somewhere. However, time passes and universities are no longer the same public service that I was proud of back in the ’oos, as they now charge huge fees. Even so, I’m very happy that both a former PhD student of mine and at least one former undergraduate student of ours at Brunel were at the con (not that either’s excellence is in any way due to me).

Having exorcised that particular ghost, I shall move on; but do buy Niall’s book because it is brilliant, and it is important to support his publishing venture (I’m sure I shall be referring to *All These Worlds* again in my blog over the months ahead). Furthermore, it is great to see him back from hiatus, reviewing again and writing a column, ‘Depth of Field’¹¹, for *Strange Horizons*.

Feeling particularly orcish, which in this context I have now established as one way of simultaneously being both academic and fan, I proceeded (via the Games room) to **Anarchy or Bust!**, with Juliet Kemp, Edmund Schluessel, and Stephen Oram (moderator). The longer

story of why I wanted to do this panel is that I have been (re)reading some political SFF following editing the SFF & Class special issue of *Vector* in 2021, with a view to expanding my Tribune article on ‘How Sci-fi Shaped Socialism’¹² into a book (a project which has now been slightly superseded and will require some reframing). This led me to sign up to a couple of online panels at Chicon 8¹³, ‘Systems of Governance’ and ‘Better Worlds are Necessary’; the panel description of the latter of these referenced Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Cory Doctorow’s *Walkaway*, Nisi Shawl’s *Everfair*, and Margaret Killjoy’s *A Country of Ghosts*. Reading this selection of largely anarchist or anarchist-adjacent novels, all of which are very good, made me think about how often it is precisely the qualities central to these particular books which I value in SF *per se* (as, for example, in the case of *The Exile Waiting* discussed above). Therefore, before the panel began, I found through reflection that I had the reasoning to support my somewhat surprising declaration of the evening before.

Thus – rather than stating ‘I’m writing a book’, which was going to be part of my self-introduction – I was able to say that: ‘...for me anarchy was primarily a destination rather than a specifically designed political practice. And by destination, I didn’t have a particular utopian structure in mind but rather a new form of subjectivity that wouldn’t be based on the old bourgeois liberal individualism of the unified subject, which maintains that unity precisely by separating itself from all “others”. It’s that old nineteenth century subjectivity which philosophically underpins the traditional hierarchies, the gender binary, heteronormativity, white supremacy etc. To move beyond these structures, we need newer consent-based, queerer, intersectional, more fluid subjectivities that reject the mind-body split.’ At least, that’s what my notes say. In practice, I think we merged the personal introduction with discussing an example of an

¹¹ <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/depth-of-field-i-remaking-history/>

¹² <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/12/how-sci-fi-shaped-socialism>

¹³ <https://prospectiveculture.wordpress.com/2022/09/11/notes-from-chicon8/>

anarchist SF text. In their succinct tweet-threading of the panel, D Franklin noted:

Nick also rates *Walkaway*, and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, for complex engagement with ethical values and temporality, and the idea of subjectivity.

I was talking about the end of *Woman on the Edge of Time* when Connie kills the doctors in order to save the utopia of the future: an act that, if judged by the ethical standards of her own society, is wrong and is only justified if we support the book-long existential struggle to support the right of the liberated, non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal society to exist in the future. In other words, the temporal logic of anarchy is not simply linear but more fluid in reflecting the reality that political choices and actions today have to both be oriented towards that post-patriarchal future and anticipate the subjectivity of that future. The only way this can be done is through speculative fiction, whether it is called SF or labelled some type of political philosophy. So, to frame this the other way round, 'anarchy as destination' is itself a form of speculative fiction, whose existence depends on us being able to think ourselves outside of the world we're in (or outside of Mark Fisher's concept of capitalist realism as Juliet framed it – see also their article, 'Breaking Out of Capitalist Realism'¹⁴). Central to thinking outside the system is having a space that is buffered against society and supports alternative subjectivities. I tend to think of such spaces as 'counter public spheres' – public in that they allow an exchange of ideas through written publications and in person; counter in that they are opposed to the values that drive the wider public sphere of media, press, liberal intellectuals. The SFF community with its cons, presses, magazines, fanzines etc. is still a counter public sphere, despite the Marvelisation of society, because the core of both written SF and fantasy is about escape from the restrictions of capitalism.

There was a question from Jude Roberts in the audience as to whether Eastercon might be considered a heterotopia¹⁵, a lovely irruption of full-on Foucauldian theoretical terminology into the heart of fandom. Yes, I think the

utopian outline of a heterogeneously other space does shimmer in and out of view at moments in Eastercon (I write having spent a week thinking about it; at the time, I said 'kinda'). It is a precarious structure, which is dependent on many people volunteering and doing a lot of work to keep it going. As Juliet pointed out, sometimes it is the dissonance between the heterotopian aspects and the non-heterotopian aspects that make Eastercons go wrong. However, I don't agree with Edmund that they are simply just contradictions of capital, a concept most commonly illustrated by the idea that capitalism permits books calling for its destruction to be sold. We don't say, though, that therefore no books are truly capable of pointing beyond capitalism. The argument here is not that Eastercon represents a direct threat to capitalism (!) but rather that it provides a needed open space within capitalism to think outside capitalism, and occasionally attains the fleeting status of magic.

The other main area we again had a difference of opinion about on the panel was the concept of 'walking away', with Edmund suggesting it was individualist rather than rooted in solidarity. I don't see it as individualist in Doctorow's *Walkaway*; it is walking away to form new types of social solidarity. The great question of the journey forwards for me is whether we're going to take everyone with us or whether we're going to have to fight absolutely entrenched counter-revolutionary resistance? To be honest, that is a rhetorical question; there is no magical universal transition. Therefore, walking away seems a more productive approach than fighting and losing (one way or another) a civil war. Obviously, it doesn't have to be literally walking away, but might mean building different kinds of networks, which is ultimately what *Walkaway* comes down to. In any case, the point about that novel is that the result of walking away is not utopian but the flawed, albeit interesting, society of *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*. Whatever route we take, we're not going to get to the destination of anarchy any time soon. In Iain M Banks's *The State of the Art*, which is the novel in which the

¹⁴ <https://www.uncannymagazine.com/article/breaking-out-of-capitalist-realism/>

¹⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heterotopia_\(space\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heterotopia_(space))



Culture visit Earth in 1977, the ship's mind predicts that we are still 10,000 years off attaining Culture status. But on the positive side, as I said in the panel, we're now nearly 50 years closer to the goal. My reading recommendation was Hope Mirrlees's *Lud-in-the-Mist* as, firstly, an example of how anarchist subjectivity is probably found more in fantasy than SF, but secondly, and more importantly, a good lesson in how the bourgeois protagonist learns to love fairy fruit. As always, there is much more to be written on all these topics.

Because of being on the Anarchy panel I missed the BSFA Awards Ceremony and found out the winners through Twitter afterwards. I wrote about *City of Last Chances* winning and my final analysis of the Best Novel award in a postscript¹⁶ to my round-up review of the shortlist.

Sunday morning began uncomfortably early with **Overshoots and Other Anthropocene Narratives** at 9am. It normally takes me a while to get going during the day, so I was worried that I would struggle to come out with anything coherent. However, in the event, sitting on the sofas and passing the mic between us turned out to be a rather congenial way of having a very productive discussion with Abigail Nussbaum, Anne Charnock, and Niall Harrison. The context for this panel was Niall's essay for *Strange Horizons*, 'In Search of Green Overshoots'¹⁷, and the panel proceeded by Niall defining the concept. The simplest explanation would be that a 'green overshoot' novel addresses climate

change through a linear structure which extends from the past through the present and into the future – although we immediately included temporally-braided novels that have a repetitive looping structure of past-present-future, past-present-future, and so on. Then the rest of the panel continued by talking about different examples. Mine (which doesn't really fit either of the above descriptions but is not a million miles off) was *Expect Me Tomorrow* by Christopher Priest, which I wrote about as an overshoot novel (or kind of)¹⁸ earlier this year – although while writing this 'paper' it has occurred to me that there is a good case for arguing that *A Dream of Wessex*, which is possibly my absolute favourite Priest novel, is a more conventional example of the form. Anne chose *The Coral Bones* by EJ Swift and Abigail picked *Appleseed* by Matt Bell.

Niall went on to talk about the following novels in particular: *Overshoot* by Mona Clee, *The Overstory* by Richard Powers, *The Deluge* by Stephen Markley, and *Hopeland* by Ian McDonald. Abigail talked about *Goliath* by Tochi Onyebuchi. I talked about Virginia Woolf's *The Years* being intended as a non-climate overshoot novel, with the intention of charting changes in social and cultural consciousness away from patriarchy towards a more liberated society in which women would be free (there's more about this in my online essay on 'The Woolfian Century'¹⁹). Other books mentioned included *Flight Behaviour* by Barbara Kingsolver, *Specimen Days* by Michael Cunningham, and *Sleeping Embers of an Ordinary Mind* by Anne Charnock.

Responding to Abigail's comments on Monica Byrne's *The Actual Star*, I was reminded of the Anarchy or Bust! panel and the discussion of Banks's *The State of the Art*, which is also a kind of overshoot novel in that the Culture itself represents a future that is 10,000 years further advanced than the near-past Earth setting of the story. Unlike *The State of the Art*, the nomadic, subsidiarist, anarchist and post-binary-gender future of *The Actual Star* is set only 1,000 years

¹⁶ <https://prospectiveculture.wordpress.com/2023/04/14/bsfa-awards-best-novel-shortlist-reviews-postscript/>

¹⁷ <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/in-search-of-green-overshoots/>

¹⁸ <https://prospectiveculture.wordpress.com/2023/02/04/christopher-priest-expect-me-tomorrow-2002-and-some-thoughts-on-temporal-structure-and-whether-it-is-an-overshoot-novel/>

¹⁹ <https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/hubble-woolfian-century>

hence. This is a utopian future, although there are enough issues and problems in the society that the novel is probably best considered a critical utopia in the manner of *The Dispossessed*. There is also a past set in a Mayan Kingdom 1,000 years ago, thus providing overshoot temporality but also complicating the spiritual dimension of the synthetic religion that underpins the future utopia. I think there is a very hard-edged attitude in the novel to our present global civilisation, which is shown to collapse over the next 200 years amid climate chaos, repeated pandemics and civil insurrection. Much as I'm here for the nonbinary anarchist future (and I would love to spend time living in this society), I don't think I could bring myself metaphorically to push a button to set the processes in motion that would clear the decks for it. I'm not suggesting that Byrne is asking us to do this – rather the future society comes from the descendants of those who 'walkaway' – but I feel there is an element of moral approval of the destruction of society within the novel's hard-edged attitude. Maybe I haven't managed to completely escape bourgeois liberal sentiments to the extent that I'd like to think I have, and it's my outlook that is deficient. However, while I wouldn't rule out either walking away or forming a synthetic religion as necessary to bringing about a future we can live in (and obviously we do need to break irrevocably from capitalism, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity), I still think any transition to a post-Anthropocene 'utopian' future will be messier (as for instance in the manner of Doctorow's *Walkaway* and *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*) rather than as morally virtuous as perhaps implied by Byrne. Although, as noted, *The Actual Star* is a critical utopia, meaning that it's more complex than my discussion here is implying and I'm still working out exactly what I think about it (more than eighteen months after it came out). Moreover, its hard-edged moral attitude might be precisely the quality which gives it enduring status over the long run, which I think it will achieve.

In considering non-overshoot climate change novels, Anne discussed *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson, which begins with a very near-future 'wet-bulb' heat wave causing millions of deaths in India and then speculates on a range of consequences, and resulting technological and social changes over the coming decades. We also discussed whether the Clarke Award actually picked climate novels ever. This shifted into a discussion of whether the 2021 winner, Laura Jean McKay's *The Animals in That Country*, is actually a climate change novel, which I would argue is the case because of the way it breaks down subject-object relations between humans and animals. (It does also have a temporal dimension – maybe enough time has elapsed that I could reread and write about it.) Anne specifically praised Australian SF as dealing with climate change (partly due to being on the front line) and there are temporal dimensions in particular to James Bradley's *Clade and Ghost Species*²⁰.

Niall also threatened he will make his thoughts publicly known if none of the eligible overshoot novels are shortlisted for the Clarke this year. Aside from those mentioned above, this list would also include the following recent overshoot novels he recommended in the convention Discord channel for the panel: *Mischief Acts* by Zoe Gilbert (discussed at the end of the Overshoot essay), *Venomous Lumpsucker* by Ned Beauman, and *The Moonday Letters* by Emmi Itäranta. (He also recommended an earlier novel, *Arcadia* by Lauren Groff.) I wonder if the Clarke is the best place to focus on in this respect. And I don't mean that we need another prize, but rather that there seems an opportunity to do something more adventurous and expansive with the ideas here.

Developing a train of thought from the panel, if this project was being conducted within academia we would make it the subject of a network grant bid, using the money to hold some symposia around the country and gather in scholars and researchers. Then we'd produce some publications, such as an edited or co-written collection divided into maybe three parts: the first defining the concept and

²⁰ See also <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/writing-fiction-in-the-age-of-climate-catastrophe-a-conversation-between-anne-charnock-and-james-bradley/>

discussing core examples, the second section focusing on more marginal and contested examples, and the third and final section exploring the wider ramifications. But when I wrote ‘adventurous and expansive’ I wasn’t thinking of the academic option (although there are useful elements to that kind of model, and academics would still be welcome to contribute), because academia also exerts almost irresistible coercion to force emergent ideas into existing hierarchical patterns of knowledge. So, once the collection was published it would get subsumed into a wider growing Anthropocene discourse that would have some influence in the academy but at the cost of eventually becoming just another power structure within the hierarchy.

Better just to let the ‘overshoot’ concept develop more organically within the less hierarchical counter public sphere of SF criticism and reviewing: let people use and misuse ‘overshoot’, try it out, appropriate it for their own ends, tie it to wider social and political trends etc. (Hence, I’ve tried to list most of the books discussed so that people – including me – can read them all and think about this further.) There is also a more committed version of this in which exploration of the idea would involve trying to think outside the limitations of standard linear time by e.g. writing different types of history or by bringing texts from different places and times together (which Niall has already begun doing with his ‘Depth of Field’ column). Furthermore, there is the activist version in which, as discussed above in relation to *Woman on the Edge of Time*, we consider ourselves as involved in a political struggle to hold open a different temporality to that of the present and (rather than ’70s style urban guerrilla tactics) engage in *Hopeland-* or *Actual Star-*style projects to that effect (maybe

even drawing on heterotopian fan spaces). Whether we want to go the full hog and define spiritualities and synthetic religions is a topic that can be discussed later (I have thoughts) but there are certainly ethical, consent-based protocols that might be drafted and tested both through practice at fan/activist spaces (I guess that is what codes of conduct are) and through writing criticism and, indeed, speculative fiction. Arguably, this all exists already but it still needs to be brought together – and that would need to be via non-hierarchical, intersectional networks.

Later that afternoon I was in the audience for **Thirty-four Years, and An Interim Survey**, with Niall Harrison asking Nina Allan, Anne Charnock, Stew Hotston, Juliet E McKenna and Neil Williamson questions such as ‘Why have you chosen to write science fiction or fantasy?’, ‘Do you consider there is anything distinctively British about your work, and if so, what is it?’, ‘What do you consider the major influences on your work?’ and ‘What do you think have been the most significant developments in British science fiction and fantasy over the last fifteen years?’ This was intended as an interim follow-up to the survey conducted by Niall in 2009, which was itself a follow-up to Paul Kincaid’s survey of 1989 – the results of which can be found in a book compiled and edited by the two of them, *British Science Fiction & Fantasy: Twenty Years, Two Surveys*²¹ (2010; I think this is still available somehow as a PDF). This was a panel that I set up at Niall’s request, so I was keen to see it go well, which it did. I was particularly interested in the question about what the most significant changes or drivers of change in British SF have been since 2009. The various answers to this question included: gaming (Stew), Marvelisation, and particularly its effect on the depiction of magic (Neil), climate change



²¹ <https://vector-bsfa.com/twenty-years-two-surveys/>

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is the UK equivalent to the Science Fiction Research Association. Formed in 1971, we are an independent charity (No. 1041052) committed to the development and communication of academic and scholarly research in science fiction studies. Our key principles are:

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- We publish the peer-reviewed journal, *Foundation*, three times a year
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(Anne), more diverse stories and the eruption of speculative elements into the mainstream (Nina), fantasy seeing a shift in perspective to the point of view of the oppressed and also to include LGBTQ+ narratives (Juliet). I think the effects of all these changes were evident across the con, as I've tried to capture just in writing about my thoughts and experience.

There were some other points that resonated with me because I live in Wales and politically identify as Welsh European rather than British, such as Neil's point that he considers his work more distinctively Scottish than British, which interestingly linked to Nina's discussion of the difficulty of trying to sell Scottish elements in her work to the US market and therefore not getting a US deal for *The Good Neighbours*. I was further intrigued by Nina's statement that she used to see herself as part of the post-New-Wave but since moving to Scotland has found herself questioning that British anti-novel tradition. So that is something I'm going to look into with interest while catching up on Nina's more recent work later in this year. The distinctiveness of the 'Scottish scene' (which was a famous book title of the 1930s, whose subtitle could perhaps now be reframed as 'the intelligent woman and nonbinary person's guide to the Scottish futures') was evident in the dealers' room, where it was represented by the magazine *Shoreline of Infinity* (founded 2015), Luna Press Publishing (also only set up in 2015, which now seems incredible given how established it is), and other independent Scottish presses. There was also a stall for Satellite 8, which would tempt me but for the fact the dates don't work (and I never made it to Satellite 7 either). Then, of course, there is Glasgow 2024, where I will be

going. One of my intentions going forward is to write about and review some examples from the Scottish scene in the run up to that Worldcon.

I was back on the next panel, **Who, Why and What do We Award** at 3pm on Sunday (9 April) with Cheryl Morgan, Nicholas Whyte, Niall Harrison, and Gareth Worthington moderating. I have written about some of the discussion on this panel in the postscript to my round-up review of the BSFA Award for Best Novel shortlist, as referenced above. One important point I didn't discuss there was Cheryl's brief presentation of some data concerning Hugo Award winners²². Her slides beautifully demonstrate the tectonic shift that happened in the Hugos from 2016, following the defeat of the 'puppies', when women suddenly started winning all the fiction categories and dominating the shortlist. This has been an epic process to witness, and I think it is a fantastic development and potentially a field-defining paradigm shift. However, Cheryl introduced a note of caution by saying we have to take into account that one of the factors that might be playing a role here is that men are no longer writing fiction. Is this the case? Well, the media discussion around this week's publication of Granta magazine's ten-yearly list of the 20 best British writers under 40²³ certainly sounded similar notes, with the *New Statesman* (which, admittedly, seems to be morphing into some sort of right-wing contrarian rag) lamenting 'The decline of the Literary Bloke'²⁴. I'm not sure too many tears will be shed over the lack of successors to Amis & co (which, I suspect is mostly due to the extremely unattractive role models they provided) but the wider

²² from her excellent keynote presentation to the 'When It Changed: Women in SF/F Since 1972' conference held online last December, hosted by the Science Fiction Foundation and Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic at the University of Glasgow – see conference recap at <https://fantasy.glasgow.ac.uk/index.php/2022/12/20/when-it-changed-women-in-sf-f-since-1972-recap/>

²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/apr/15/grantas-best-of-young-british-novelists-meet-the-class-of-23>

²⁴ <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2023/04/decline-literary-bloke>

implications are not yet fully obvious. I would say that people will always read fiction but it is not difficult to imagine attempts by right-wing populists to target 'woke' fiction (indeed, we've experienced them), or a more general process by which fiction gets less coverage due to somehow having become 'less mainstream'. All that can be said for certain at the moment is that the cultural terrain is shifting rapidly and that this is alarming many people in the UK's mainstream media, which is very resistant to change because of its ownership patterns.

I was slightly weaving in and out of consciousness at 6pm on Sunday during **The Final Frontier: What LGBTQ+ Stories Can Only SFF Tell?** but this was a very pleasant experience as the panel (E Saxey (moderator), Emily January, Aliette de Bodard, Troo, Trip Galey) discussed 'the ways in which SFF tells LGBTQ+ stories that are unique to the queer perspective and also can only be told through a fantastical lens. Where is the boundary between a hoped-for better future and fantastical fiction?' It was good to be reminded of many books that I have read over the last few years, such as Foz Meadows's *An Accident of Stars*, Arcady Martine's *A Memory Called Empire* and *A Desolation Called Peace* (both of which won the Hugo for Best Novel, and are therefore key parts of the paradigm shift mentioned above), Yoon Ha Lee's *Machineries of Empire* trilogy and *Phoenix Extravagant*, Simon Jiminez's *The Vanishing Birds*, Ada Palmer's *Terra Ignota* series, Tamsyn Muir's *Locked Tomb* series and Aliette de Bodard's own *The Red Scholar's Wake*. I'm not sure anyone mentioned Kameron Hurley's *The Light Brigade* – which, like *Woman on the Edge of Time* and some of Russ's work, also involves a fight across a fluid temporality for the existence of a future utopian society – but I would include that as well; and obviously the list could go on.

One thing to note is that it is not that long ago (at least from the perspective of someone in their 50s) since an hour-long panel discussion of LGBTQ+ stories in SFF would have ranged across the entire history of the field (as that history stands at the moment with 'Golden Age' still intact, rather than the rewritten version I haven't got to yet in this piece – see below). Or to put it another way, it is really significant that

the discussion wasn't about the Le Guin, Russ, Tiptree generation or even the British SF of the '80s, '90s, '00s including (randomly, the first that come to my mind) works by Mary Gentle (who was mentioned in the description of the non-binary panel, which I missed), Gwyneth Jones, Justina Robson, Ian McDonald, Geoff Ryman and Iain M Banks (there was a welcome reference in the Discord discussion to 'the events on board GSV Sleeper Service'). Again, it bears repeating that there are panels' worth of other writers and books we could discuss. In fact, simply discussing them all, thinking about them intersectionally, and putting them in dialogue with queer works from earlier periods and/or other cultures which might usefully be considered sfnal, would in itself give us a more open understanding of the genre's history.

In terms of this current golden harvest of LGBTQ+ fiction crossing the boundary to a hoped-for future, I think one of the contributions that these books make is by exploring new forms of subjectivity that are not only *not* hetero- or cis-normative but also not structured around the nineteenth-century model of the unified subject that is always separated from object. It is not coincidental that Martine's, Lee's and Muir's books all feature scenarios where protagonists share their minds and bodies with other consciousnesses. This is not new in SF – one of my favourite previous versions is Robson's *Keeping it Real* which I've read a few times, and there are other, earlier, less obviously queer versions – but I feel that the concentration of such exploration within the context of the ongoing paradigm shifts in the field opens up the new possibilities that we need to make further progress.

All of which brings me to my last panel, on Monday at 1.30pm, **Rethinking the History of SF**, with Kate Heffner, Edward James, Paul March-Russell, and Niall Harrison moderating. The much-revised panel description reads: 'Is it time to rethink the history of SF? Rather than tell the same old stories of the Golden Age and the New Wave, which focus largely on US/UK male writers, can we identify broader social-historical-technological labels that reflect the impact of world-historical conditions and events, such as the First World War? Will this

enable us to tell a more inclusive and diverse history of global SF that speaks to life in the 21st century? This panel will brainstorm some possible new labels, debate their utility, and more broadly consider how the writing of SF history has changed over time, and may continue to change in the future.' The initial context for this was a review²⁵ by Niall in the LARB of the MIT Press's Radium Age series²⁶. At one point there would have been two panels: one to discuss the Radium Age itself, which covers a period from 1905-1935 (in the event, we were able to fold a brief discussion on the Radium Age series into the panel addressed from the perspective of Paul, who is writing the introduction to one of the volumes) and the second to address the points Niall raised in the closing paragraph to the review:

Over the last couple of decades, critics such as John Rieder, John Clute, and Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay have advanced models for how we might think about global SF history differently, and some of their thinking dovetails with some of [series editor Joshua] Glenn's. The way I would frame the opportunity would go something like this: in place of the Golden Age and the New Wave, we could identify broader social-historical-technological labels that provide umbrellas to bring different traditions into dialogue, encouraging readers to trace the impact of world-historical conditions and events – such as the First World War – even across the work of authors who, at the time, were unaware of each other's existence. The Radium Age certainly gestures in this direction, not least because it boldly subsumes Hugo Gernsback's 1926 launch of *Amazing Stories* within itself, thus (correctly) reframing the most commonly recognised starting point for genre science fiction as specifically the start of genre science fiction in the United States. Unfortunately, from the selections so far, it risks being only a gesture.

In the pre-panel emails, I made a comparison between this call to go beyond the Golden Age and the New Wave and a notorious Christopher Priest diatribe, "It Came From Outer Space", first published in *Foundation* 21 (1981) – a piece that was ostensibly a review of Lester del Rey's *The World of Science Fiction: 1926-1976* (1979). The piece is prefaced with the

editorial comment, 'The following is a polemical piece rather than a book review, which is why we have chosen to publish it under the "Forum" heading.' Reading it now, however, you have to say he was absolutely on the money here regarding how del Rey's text was part of a process of institutionalising the

...familiar story [...] It is the one we all told, the one which most of us tell, the one which like folklore is passed from one generation to the next. It concerns, of course, the year 1926 and Hugo Gernsback; 1938 and John W Campbell; 1964 and Michael Moorcock. It treats of Golden Ages and New Waves, fandom and conventions, pulp magazines and digests, classic titles and sense of wonder. This sacred text, for so long passed by word of mouth, is now being written up so as to persuade outsiders of the good news of science fiction. Lester del Rey, like St Luke, is writing the gospel for non-Jews.

Despite the welcome fact (I was in the audience for Jeannette Ng's epic speech at the Dublin Hugo ceremony) that there is no longer an award named after Campbell, this history has become more entrenched in the way that Priest foresaw. When, in the run-up to the con, I asked Google's Bard AI chatbot for a history of world SF 1935-1955, it simply told me about the US Golden Age, even though I hadn't used that label. In comparison, Chat-GPT3.5 told me about the US, Europe and Japan. Neither account mentioned any women at all. A more detailed prompt would no doubt solicit a wider response, but in many ways you have to know what you are asking for in order to be sure that you are getting a fuller picture. This is an existing problem with Google anyway, which is only going to be exacerbated as search engines and AI language models are further combined. How peak Golden Age is it that the 'familiar story' will be told to us in the twenty-first century by robots?!

The panel began with Edward talking about histories of SF in general and some of the issues he faced in writing his own history, *Science Fiction in the 20th Century* (1994). In particular, his discussion of what frustrated him about Roger Luckhurst's *Science Fiction* (2005), which was

²⁵ <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/dancing-on-the-worlds-thin-crust-on-the-mit-press-radium-age-series/>

²⁶ <https://mitpress.mit.edu/series/radium-age/> and see also <https://mitpress.mit.edu/introducing-radium-age/> for more background on the series.

explicitly presented as a 'cultural history', was illuminating on the disciplinary academic differences between History and English Literature. In particular, Edward singled out Luckhurst's chapter on the 1960s and complained that as history it's ridiculous, because it focuses on the New Wave and yet the vast majority of SF readers and writers during the decade were not New Wave. In other words, the book is only focusing on a very small minority and not therefore providing a history, cultural or otherwise, of SF. I must admit to having some sympathies with Edward's position here because precisely this kind of confusion between a particular movement, which is often avant-garde and therefore necessarily an extreme minority pastime, with an entire period is a staple of English Literature's approach to literary history. For example, Modernism, a term that was barely even mentioned during the period in which its handful of leading practitioners were at their peak, has become synonymous with the early decades of the twentieth century, a conjunction which has created various problems within the field, which I've now become so sick of that I no longer wish to devote time to even trying to outline what they are.

In my opinion, English as a discipline would be better off rewriting our own literary history so that it doesn't focus on an avant-garde modernist minority during the period before and after the First World War, but instead looks at the broader cultural and literary developments of the period as they impacted on a majority of the reading public. In this they could learn from the example of the historian Christopher Hilliard's *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (2006). So, in this respect, I agree with Edward. On the other hand, while I'm not going to list them, I have also read plenty of very poor, superficial readings of literary texts in history books by historians. My advice to anyone interested in getting the fullest picture would be to read as freely as possible across all available disciplines concerning the period you are interested in. Furthermore, it is also necessary to tease out emergent trends in any period. Social change

does happen, and it starts with a minority and not by the majority all changing their minds at the same moment. To paraphrase Douglas Adams, if we had let opinion polling guide us throughout human history, we probably wouldn't have come down from the trees yet.

So, to get back to histories of SF, they need to capture emerging waves but not at the expense of what the wider body of readers and fans were doing. In this respect, Kate Heffner's research, as featured in her Peter Nicholls Prize-winning essay for *Foundation* 141, 'Femizine: A Study of Femme-Fans' Labour in Post-War Fan Cultures', is both absolutely fascinating and also illustrates that shifts in consciousness and subjectivity are not just the products of avant-garde cultural production but also originate in everyday collective practices.

We had a brief discussion about academic SF companions or 'handbooks', partly because I was clarifying my dissatisfaction with the one I co-edited for Bloomsbury in 2013. It's not that these books aren't useful, but they do have limitations to their use as frameworks for considering the history of SF. These limitations are well set out in Farah Mendlesohn's forensic analysis of the handbook genre in 'Curating Science Fiction in the "Rainbow Age": a discussion in several parts: ICFA 43 Guest Scholar Keynote' (*Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 33: 3, 2022). I will be referring to this analysis in more detail in a separate post²⁷ about handbooks and my own experiences of editing one.

Mendlesohn's article begins with a declaration that there is no single SF community and 'that we need to understand ourselves as an overlapping, intersecting and continually changing and flowering bouquet of interests, experiences, and identifications: what critic Kat Tanaka Okopnik has described as a prismatic community.' This is a useful place to begin thinking about what a history of SF might look like; how it would need to be equally overlapping and intersecting. But rather than enrolling new texts to this history, I was hoping the panel might first unfurl some new banners under which a wider range of texts could then be enrolled. This is what Niall was calling for in

²⁷ Later published at: <https://prospectiveculture.wordpress.com/2023/07/02/some-thoughts-on-sf-handbooks/>

the review cited above, with the suggestion that 'broader social-historical-technological labels' could replace the old familiar terms such as 'Golden Age' and 'New Wave'. The potential here is that any book (or other form of text) from anywhere in the world that responds to social and technological change could be enrolled under such a banner, so there would be no inbuilt limits, as at the moment, to what historical texts can be considered SF. One of my personal motivations for opening up the field in this way is that I think what a whole 'hidden' wave of feminist SFF from the interwar years could reveal would tell a very different story to the current US Gernsback-to-Golden-Age history. However, this is something I'm going to have to come back to in more detail at some point in the future, although I probably will say a bit more about it in the upcoming Handbook piece.

One of the issues we discussed in respect to sociological and technological change is that it doesn't happen in the straightforward linear progression that we sometimes expect from our history. For example, China has experienced, in a period of less than 50 years, the same processes of industrial development that took 200 in the UK. So which texts do we compare if trying to make a global historical comparison? Here, Niall's 'Depth of Field' approach discussed above might be useful. To be honest, we didn't get much further than scratching the surface of the topic in this panel. I think it might be a good area for a future panel or panels, that could perhaps be planned more carefully in scope and purpose to drill into some of the factors involved in more detail.

Niall did warn us beforehand that he would ask us what our 'ideal' history of SF would be like. I took him literally and said, 'A nonbinary, queer, anarchist, chaotic neutral, AI personal assistant that is not modelled on the Western, patriarchal, universal subject, which can access any existing defined form of SF (i.e. everything already accumulated under the heading of the History of SF) but also conduct its own assessments of whether any sort of text/media might meet the definition of science fictionality in the broadest sense'. Furthermore, the AI would be able to assume the personality of

character of any SF author, so you could talk to Robert Heinlein or Octavia Butler and ask about their motivations. And, of course, they (the AI having they/their pronouns) would support role-playing participation within text worlds; my examples were *The Female Man* and *Blake's 7*, which is possibly a niche combination, but I think the mode would be widely attractive to fans. Niall's response was that I obviously wanted my own personal Culture mind. Well, duh, yeah of course. But I don't think this is that far off. It would only require the right corpus of data to train an existing AI language model to do much of this in a textual form. If not already, then soon enough there'll be people doing something along these lines for the core Golden-Age, New-Wave 'familiar story', so we need to do something about that.

There was so much more I wanted to write but this is already a medium-sized novelette. Although that reminds me of one particular afterthought which was that if you had to have a one-volume history of SF, then perhaps the way to do it would be as a documentary novel mixing historical and fictional characters. In particular, it should be an overshoot novel with a speculative future, and there should also be a temporal struggle running throughout to hold the possibility of that future open. I think that would be a history that would still require a human to write it, as things currently stand at least.

Earlier on the Monday, Alex and I went to Fiona Moore's talk on *House of Dragons (Management Perspective)*, which inspired us to spend the first leg of the car journey home discussing both succession planning and EDI in the series and in life. I should say in passing how much I enjoyed reading Fiona's book, *Management Lessons from Game of Thrones*, which was both witty and wise, but also provided some references to anthropological business studies that I found very interesting from the perspective of my sociological academic interests.

I've never been to the **Closing ceremony** before but I'm glad I did as I found it gave a satisfying sense of closure to the con. I felt emotional in a good way when Caroline said, 'and now the conversation is ended...' and



passed on the baton to Farah. In some ways, of course, this closure was ignored by the Covid outbreak that continued claiming people afterwards (including me). However, I don't think it will be remembered chiefly for this, despite some debate on FB to this effect. Fwiw, I think some of the criticisms of the con's Covid policy in the immediate aftermath have been unfair. Possibly the policy could have been briefer and more concise. However, there is only so much you can do to mitigate the impact of areas shared with the general public. The main question is whether mask-wearing in programme items should be mandatory except for those on the panel or with exemptions. But I think people at the con did on the whole behave responsibly; it was noticeable that many, even a majority, of those in programme items were wearing a mask on the Monday, at which point it had become clear that there was a Covid outbreak. Indeed, I think it was a well-run con in general. It had a good programme. I liked the hotel (much more than the Heathrow Radisson). The hybrid provision seemed really, really good. The mixed online and in-person panels worked well. I haven't watched anything on catch-up yet because I wanted to capture and process my impressions of the con first, but it is great that this facility exists.

Obligatory past Eastercon anecdote: 2023 is only the second time I have been to a second consecutive in-person Eastercon. The previous time was in 2011, when Eastercon was also in Birmingham at the same hotel. I could only get there on the Sunday and my recollections are hazy beyond buying some books, seeing a panel with Ian Whates and Sophia McDougall on, and then (unrelatedly to the panel I think) feeling extremely unwell. My only really vivid memory

was stumbling into the lift with cold sweat pouring off my forehead, and staring glass-eyed at a guy wearing shorts who had shaved legs and black-painted toenails and must have thought I was horrified at the sight of him, but I was using every remaining fibre of conscious control in my body not to projectile vomit over him and everyone else in the lift. Fortunately, I made it to my room, vomited violently and copiously into the toilet, grabbed a glass of water and collapsed onto the bed. However, some bizarre reflex caused me to turn on the TV on the way past it to the bed. And so that is how I came to spend just about the worst hour and a half or so of my life unable to move, suffering an excruciating headache and waves of nausea, with a *Top Gear* special swimming in and out of my consciousness. Talk about aversion therapy! I didn't go to another Eastercon until Manchester in 2016. But, this time, I hope to be back again in 2024.

As for the fan/academic binary... somewhere along the line, I seem to have got over it. Normally when I hear the 'A' word I think of it as being negative, but at this con I actually heard it being used positively (shout out to Liz Batty discussing the Overshoot panel on the Octothorpe podcast – could there be such a thing as an Octothorpe Overshoot, I wonder). It's exhilarating to write about fiction in SF reviews rather than frame it as a means of explicating a particular theory (as often does happen in academic discourse), but it's also fun to switch between the codes as long as that may be done voluntarily. I end this wishing I could write more (novella-length is in reach, and I could have self-pubbed this on Kindle as speculative criticism). Indeed, there was going to be more about not only queer theory and performativity but also John Clute's *Pardon this Intrusion* – which, although I failed to review it, did come on the academic conference circuit with me as I took care to quote it in a succession of academic papers. Maybe there's still time to write all these unwritten projects and re-enchant the past. Because the simple truth is that there is no more a fan/academic binary than there is a gender binary. And the further you go down that path of realisation, the bigger it gets...

Organising an accessible convention

by Caroline Mullan

Eastercons – the UK national science fiction conventions – have been organised annually for over seven decades, attracting up to a thousand people each year to a selected site. Each year's convention is separately organised by a committee of volunteers assembled for that year only, who recruit additional volunteers to do the necessary work. Conversation 2023, the 74th Eastercon, was no different in that regard.

What was different in organising for 2023 was that committee and volunteers came together while the Covid pandemic was still running its course. We knew we would run an Eastercon. We did not know, when we started, what kind of convention we were going to be able to run. Recent history had been... interesting. The first UK lockdown was put in place just weeks before the 2020 Eastercon, and the con consisted only of an online bidding session to select a committee for 2021. The 2021 Eastercon eventually ran entirely online. The 2022 Eastercon, held just after the lifting of the UK's pandemic measures, was a traditional gathering in most ways although subject to various community Covid precautions; some of its programme was streamed via the internet to those not able to attend in person. With governments still changing rules and guidelines, and Covid variants and cases fluctuating, for a long time none of us had a clear idea what a 2023 Eastercon would ultimately look like.

Conversation was planned from the start as a hybrid convention to allow its members to participate onsite *or* online. We would be able to run fully online if countries locked down again, but if allowed we would be able to gather under whatever mix of restrictions and advice was in place at the time.

It was a good thing we did.

During the pandemic period, while people could not gather in person, fandom learned a lot about meeting online. Right from the start, in early 2020, we found that we were well-placed



to maintain our communities. We were already in touch socially via Facebook and Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr, Dreamwidth and Discord. Fans had professional skills in tools for video conferencing such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, and for other forms of online collaboration such as Slack, Discord and Trello. Cutting a long story of trial and experimentation short, we learned which tools worked best for us, about the barriers that prevent people from using them, and how to support our friends and collaborators to participate in new ways. We learned how to use these tools collectively – and which ones not to use – to get together and run conventions. Different conventions tried different things, so by the time much of the world opened to larger gatherings again in 2022 we had a good deal of collective experience of different models of organisation for online and hybrid conventions.

The Conversation committee found that Zoom and Discord worked well for organising an Eastercon. For face-to-face video Zoom was free or very cheap, relatively easy to learn to use, and tolerant of poor quality domestic internet connections. For text chat Discord was free or cheap, ran on a wide range of platforms, and was already well-known to many fans (particularly gamers) as a collaborative tool; it allows for a good deal of flexibility in setting up and managing online text conversations for people who are not all available at the same time, which makes it attractive to organisers.

From coming together as a committee in late 2020 until the convention itself in 2023, we never met in person all together at the same

time. We adopted these tools: meeting via Zoom, chatting in real time and maintaining persistent threads of conversation via Discord, and with email and shared documents backing up our interactions. With some in-person contact, we met online, we communicated with our members online, and we recruited and briefed our volunteers online. And ultimately, for the same reasons, we used the same tools during the convention itself, with the addition of YouTube for streaming and recording our programme and providing captioning, and Vimeo for more securely catching up on those recordings.

The changing restrictions on gatherings and these choices for dealing with them had many consequences for our Eastercon. First, with the increased range of tools used we had committee and staff roles for managing our online presence and communications that went well beyond anything an Eastercon committee needed before the pandemic. People need specific skills to set up and maintain dynamic websites, Discord servers, and email and shared document facilities, and these are now needed throughout the life of the convention to support committee, volunteers and members to engage through these mechanisms.

Second, we needed collectively to manage simultaneous channels for communications among the committee and with members. We had Discord threads linking to emails, web pages and stored documents. When we needed to tell our members something the message went out via social media, by email, and on printed pieces of paper in the post, each with links to relevant resources and each requiring its own mix of skills, tasks and schedules. A separate team handled direct communication with members of the convention. None of this work was new to Eastercons, but again the circumstances increased the amount of work required and our demands on our volunteers' time.

Third, the plan for the convention itself had to integrate our online activities with our onsite programme. Our tech lead, James Turner, had the vision and commitment to design and implement a seamless process for hybrid programme participation. Remote participants

could see and share in what was happening in the room, onsite participants could see and hear the remote participants, and both onsite and online audiences could see and hear all of this. Separately, we ran Discord forums for each item, which gave participants and audiences access to support and engagement, and allowed questions to be asked and answered. Throughout the planning period and all through the convention the programme and technical teams had to work closely together to understand the facilities to be used, which items would make use of them, and the support needed for participants onsite and online. This increased the amount and time of collaboration needed among committee and volunteers.

Finally, with all this complexity behind the scenes we had to plan in conditions of uncertainty. Would we be able to gather somewhere in person and if so where? We weren't sure about that until quite late in 2022. What facilities would we have available to support our online convention? That depended to some extent on the site, and the state and costs of its technical capabilities, as well as on the numbers involved onsite and online. In what numbers would we gather, and in what way and at what cost? We remained uncertain until the very last minute.

On the day, all our planning and communication worked well. The convention was able to gather in person, with online participation also an option. Nearly 900 people joined the convention, about 60 specifically as supporting/online members. Nearly 800 members arrived at our hotel for some part of the weekend, and nearly 500 registered to use our Discord server. The onsite and online tech, communications, programme and green room teams worked hard to turn our ideas for a hybrid convention into reality, providing a seamless experience for programme participants and audiences joining and participating online – and backed up as usual by volunteers in all the other roles needed to support the convention onsite. Four of our Guests of Honour joined us in person, and two online. Collectively we provided one of the best experiences for our members of any hybrid convention anywhere in the world up to that

point, and it was done through the creativity, commitment, and goodwill of volunteers.

The art show showcased and sold work both onsite and online. Regardless of location, members chatted on Discord – using it as a help desk, collaboration tool and social platform – running up to, during and after the convention. Our online Guests of Honour joined us via Zoom from North Carolina and Washington State, other programme participants from Australia, California, Nigeria and a range of other locations across the world; we also had some volunteers based outside the UK, giving us better coverage across time zones. Over 150 programme items were streamed to our members in real time and made available as recordings from the following day. And when it turned out that there was a strain of Covid running through the UK, infecting some people intending to come or actually present in our hotel, and requiring them to isolate or return home, those members were able to join their programme items online from their hotel rooms

or their own homes – and many did so. Ultimately over half of our programme items involved at least one Zoom participant. We could have run entirely online. We could have run entirely onsite. We chose to be hybrid.

Online options for participating in our gatherings allow us to bring speakers and participants from across the world. They support people in circumstances that restrict mobility and social engagement in person, whether these restrictions relate to health, family, finances or geography. In return, we benefit from the voices of those who would otherwise be absent to enrich our conventions and our ongoing conversations, and build capability to support our future communities and future selves. Hybrid conventions are hard work for the organisers, but that work is necessary, and important, and we should not shy away from it. Conversation 2023 showed that it can be done. We should get on with organising more.





The British Fantasy Society is
a community for people who
love all things Fantasy and
Horror.



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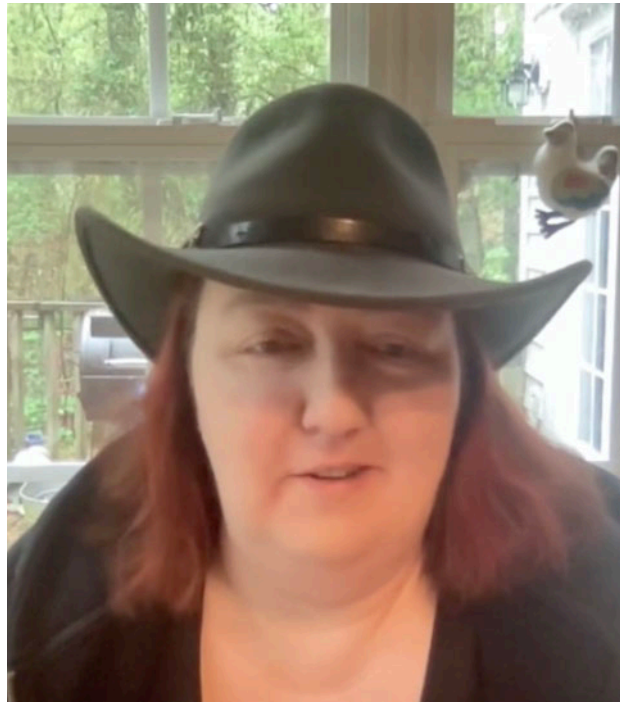
Pull-out photo supplement

photos (mostly) by Simon Bubb









For the record

The Conversation programme

This listing is a record of the final information provided in our at-con programme guides, although in some cases there were still some later changes, reflecting availability. Our programme featured all our Guests of Honour and many other creators and fans, both on site and online. Programme items are arranged here by date and time, in alphabetical order of item title in each timeslot. Each entry includes a brief description and the type of item, as well as the planned participants (listed alphabetically by the name each preferred to use); where relevant, moderators are marked as '(m)'. Conversation 2023 is grateful to everyone who took part in the programme, including of course those very late substitutes who are not listed here.

Thursday 6 April

4.30pm

So... you're here early!

It's Thursday, and here you are! You've arrived early for the con: whether you're a regular or brand new, here's what you can expect (and how you can help). Join us in the main bar or hop on Discord to see what's up!

Friday 7 April

Noon

BSFA presents: Journals, anthologies, and more! (talk/lecture – Wellington-Salisbury)

A look at the BSFA's many publications, and some of the BSFA's favourite external magazines.

Stew Hotston (m), Allen Stroud

Eastercon kids' meet: Friday (craft lounge; for children)

For children and younger teens, and their grown-ups, a family meet-up in the craft room to talk about all things Eastercon!

Hey, you! Pay me! (panel – Balmoral)

Even the most experienced authors sometimes find invoices unpaid. Our panel talk about the art of valuing your work, and getting what

you deserve – and some of the barriers to that.

Wendy Bradley (m), Mike Brooks, John Jarrold, Juliet E McKenna

Luna Press launch (Sandringham; parental discretion; mask optional)

Kick off Eastercon with a launch party from Luna Press – an aperitif to whet your appetite for the whole weekend ahead! Led by Luna's Francesca T Barbini, our fantastic creators will be launching: Anna Smith Spark with her new novel, *A Woman of the Sword*; Tiffani Angus and Val Nolan with their non-fiction, *Spec Fic for Newbies: A Beginners' Guide to Writing Subgenres of Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror*; Francesco Verso at last launching his SF novel, *Bloodbusters*, after the original 2020 launch was cancelled.

Readings: Adults miscellaneous (Queens; parental discretion)

No sex, some violence, and some dark, disturbing themes.

Garth Nix, Gillian Polack, Edmund Schluessel, Anna Stephens

SF in antiquity (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

The strange and wonderful SFnal origins of the genre from bronze men in Greek myth to telescope viewings of men on the moon.

The Fossil (m), Clare Goodall, Cheryl Morgan, Marcus Rowland

1.30pm

D&D One, or five point five? (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Is this really the new – and last – edition of the infamous RPG?

Ed Fortune, Omar Kooheji (m),

Esther MacCallum-Stewart, Martin

Fibrecraft for the fidgety (craft lounge)

An informal crafting meeting to trade fibrecraft secrets, learn new skills, and share knowledge about all things fibrecraft.

CL Gamble, Lola Third Vault Yarnie

How to write in public (round table – Gladstone-Churchill)

A round table and quasi-workshop to help current and aspiring authors develop useful

skills in capturing an audience with your live reading, knowing when to disengage online, and the art of being criticised.

*Trip Galey, SJ (Sarah) Groenewegen,
M V Melcer (Mel), David Wake (m)*

Illustration for narrative (panel – Queens)
Matching pictures with words.

*Dawn Abigail, Jackie Burns, Jennell Jaquays,
Ursula Vernon, Gareth Worthington (m)*

Read the subtitles! Beyond English language in genre TV and film (panel – Balmoral)

What are you missing if you don't get beyond the one-inch barrier of subtitles? What new worlds might you open up? And what might the problems be? Also, the pros and cons of dubbed versions.

*Ruth EJ Booth, Zen Cho, Anne-Louise Fortune,
Gillian Polack, Anna Raftery (m)*

Readings from Elsewhen (Pavilion; parental discretion; mask optional)

A quartet of Elsewhen Press authors read from their works. Enjoy excerpts by Andy McKell, Juliet Kemp, Judith Mortimore and Penny Hill, accompanied by refreshments.

Where does history end and fantasy begin?
(panel – Sandringham)

Can fantasy be historically accurate? Can history ever escape the fantastical? A look at the ways that history is impacted by myth and popular imagination, and how fantasy in turn creates its own idea of history.

*David Green, Kate Heartfield, Kari Sperring,
David Stokes (m), Sandra Unerman*

3pm

(All panels were due to start around 15 minutes after the advertised start time to minimise clash with the opening ceremony.)

The adaptable Gaiman (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Neverwhere, Sandman, Good Omens, American Gods – what an adaptable author! Our panel discuss what exactly makes Neil Gaiman such a well-regarded author and share some of their favourite aspects of his storytelling style.
*Randee Dawn, Trip Galey, Alexander Glass,
Kate Towner (m)*

The last five years: new SFF (panel – Balmoral)

Reviewing recent works: those we expect to have staying power, works which have gone tragically

overlooked, and newly emerging talent.

*David Green, Stew Hotston (m), Abigail Nussbaum,
Gareth Worthington*

Opening ceremony (event – Queens)

Welcome to Eastercon! We've snuck a few preview sessions before our official opening ceremony so you've had a little time to see our convention... now, let's welcome you in and get this started!

*Zen Cho, Niall Harrison, Jennell Jaquays,
Caroline Mullan (m), Kari Sperring,
Adrian Tchaikovsky, Ursula Vernon*

Queer pirates (panel – Sandringham)

A discussion including fandom and canon of *Our Flag Means Death* and other series such as *Black Sails*.

*Johannes T. Evans, Ryann Fletcher,
Kate Heartfield (m), Juliet Kemp, F. D. Lee*

Rockets matter: listen to me (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Should space travel be owned by private firms? Should rockets be recycled? And what about the people and ecology of the Earth-side launch zones?

Jackie Burns, E.M. Faulds, Bill Ray (m), Allen Stroud

4.30pm

Adventuring as an older protagonist (panel – Sandringham)

Who says the Chosen One has to be under 30? Our panel have a chat about their favourite characters who enter the narrative with a few more years under their belt. From Stede Bonnet to Esme Weatherwax, who are your favourite older protagonists?

*Kate, Catherine Sharp (m), Sandra Unerman,
Virginia, Susie Williamson*

Beyond human intelligence (panel – Balmoral)

Animal sapience, collective intelligence, alien minds and uplifted futures.

*TJ Berg (m), Stew Hotston, V Anne Smith,
Danna Staaf, Adrian Tchaikovsky*

Climate fiction: a very current subgenre (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

The drivers behind climate fiction and whether it can help us save the planet. What's happening in climate fiction: is it all doom and gloom or are there some positives? Does activism make

for good fiction? Where has the genre been done well?

Vincent Docherty, E.M. Faulds (m), Ian Green, Hildur Knútsdóttir, Ian McDonald

Desert Island Books (interview – Queens)

Join Guest of Honour Niall Harrison as he tells us all about his foundational reads.

Niall Harrison, Dan Hartland, Roz Kaveney, Graham Sleight, Adrian Tchaikovsky

Eclectic Dreams launch party (Pavilion; parental discretion; mask optional)

Eclectic Dreams, the new anthology from Grimbold Press, is launching here at Eastercon! Chat to editors about this array of works by Milford creators. This collection is published to support the Milford Bursary Scheme which provides funding for writers of colour.

Tiffani Angus, Jacey Bedford, multijimbo, Pete W Sutton

Life drawing class (craft lounge)

A guided class for drawing a clothed figure.

Eira (m)

No simple binaries (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Characters and settings who've just said 'no' to gender binaries. From Martha Wells's *Murderbot* to Ursula Le Guin's *Gethenians* and Mary Gentle's *Ortheans*: a look at the history and future of non-binary characters (and where the human non-binary characters are).

Sandra Bond, Mike Brooks, Juliet Kemp, Cheryl Morgan (m), Edmund Schluessel

Tarot (workshop – Sussex; parental discretion)

Jan Siegel presents this workshop on Tarot skills, including discussion of her new book in collaboration with Pat Cadigan.

Your first Eastercon? (discussion group – tea lounge)

Is this your first time at Eastercon? If so, welcome! We're so pleased you've chosen to join us, and we understand that this convention might look and feel a little different to other sci-fi events you've attended. Come to this session to gain valuable insight into how Eastercons work, what you can expect from the event, and to ask any questions that you have.

Fiona Moore (m)

6pm

The magical city of Birmingham (round table – Wellington-Salisbury)

We didn't just pick this place because it has a nice train station! Birmingham has a tremendous degree of history and potential, but is often overshadowed by megacities like London and New York in fiction. We argue to redress that balance!

Dawn Abigail (m), Farah, David Wake

Meet the artists (Monarch – art show)

Come and meet the artists in the art show and see the amazing art!

Jackie Duckworth (m)

NewCon Press launch party (Queens; parental discretion; mask optional)

Come and join the wonderful authors of NewCon Press, including our very own Guest of Honour Kari Sperring, as they launch this year's magnificent new offerings.

Kari Sperring, Ian Whates

Putting yourself on the page (round table – Gladstone-Churchill)

Marginalised people have long headcanoned / fanoned their favourite franchises that otherwise left them out. Is this still necessary in an era of increasingly diverse publication?

Tim Knight, Jess Meats, Angeli Primlani (m), Marcus Rowland, Heather Valentine

So bad it's great (panel – Sandringham)

What's so bad it's good, what's so bad it's bad, and what could have been great if only something hadn't gone wrong? Why we love the sincerely hamfisted in sci-fi film and TV sometimes more than the soullessly immaculate.

Fran Dowd, Elliot, Dave McCarty, Fiona Moore (m), Tlanti

Tea! Beyond the brew (panel – tea lounge)

Tea is much, much more than a refreshing drink. It has medicinal purposes and can be used as a cooking ingredient, as a cultural touchstone, and even as a currency! Join us for a chat.

A.Y. Chao, Aliette de Bodard, Anne-Louise Fortune, Omar Kooheji (m)

Writing about game universes (panel – Balmoral)

What are the joys, drawbacks or challenges of writing within a specified universe for games? And how should it be achieved? From TTRPGs to computer games, our panellists discuss playing by someone else's rules to create new and meaningful art.

Sarah Cole, SJ (Sarah) Groenewegen, Kate Heartfield (m), Jennell Jaquays, Adrian Tchaikovsky

6.30pm

The Dark Room (event – Pavilion)

Join in the world's only live action interactive video game!

7.30pm

A brief history of feminist SFF imprints (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

The Women's Press in the 1980s and 1990s published SFF, old and new. In 2020, GoldSF launched as a new intersectional feminist SFF imprint. The panellists will give a short history and talk about why such an imprint is needed now.

SJ (Sarah) Groenewegen, Kate Heffner, Paul March-Russell, Lucy A. McLaren (m), Susie Williamson

Conlangs and you (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)
Our panel look at a history of deliberately constructed languages in both fiction and real life, and how, when, or if you should use them in your fiction.

Mike Brooks, Jude Roberts, Catriona Silvey (m), Anna Smith Spark, David Stokes

Readings: Adult orientated and the fantastical (Balmoral; parental discretion)

Reading slot for writers: adult orientated and fantastical/mythological.

Sandra Bond, F. D. Lee, Juliet E McKenna, Wole Talabi

Storytelling in maps: dungeon design (panel – Queens)

Designing dungeons for engaging gaming: what is it about maps that makes the game world more real? And what are some of our favourites?

Michael Cule, Penny Hill, Jennell Jaquays, Omar Kooheji (m), Martin

Why should you join a Society? (panel – Sandringham)

The BSFA is a key part of Eastercon: why should you join it, or groups like it?

Ali Baker (m), Emily Inkpen, Shona Kinsella, Allen Stroud

8pm

Glasgow 2024 presents: Gin24 tasting

(workshop – Pavilion; children not allowed, mask optional)

Taste the delicious custom Glasgow 2024 gin with the Glasgow Worldcon team!

Lizzzz, Meg MacDonald (m)

9pm

Adaptation-a-go-go (panel – Sandringham)

Sandman, She-Hulk, Good Omens II, Rings of Power... A chat about adaptations, tie-ins, unlikely sequels, and all the big IPs dominating our screens.

Jon Evans, Anne-Louise Fortune (m), David Green, F. D. Lee, Catherine Sharp

The dark heart of childhood (panel – Balmoral)

SFF children's books often contain a kernel of horror or revolve around tragedy. Why is that, and what do children get from it?

Fran Dowd, Hildur Knútsdóttir, Lucy A. McLaren, Judith Mortimore (m), Garth Nix, Ursula Vernon

Fanzines in perspective: art, archive or ephemera? (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

The growth of fan archives like FANAC.org have demonstrated the value of fanzines as the history of our community, but what does that mean for fanzine producers today? Who are they writing for, is it art, and do they want to be in an archive?

Tommy Ferguson, David Hodson, Jerry Kaufman, Clarrie Maguire, Geri Sullivan (m)

Fearlessly spineless: invertebrates in SFFH (panel – Queens)

Depictions of invertebrates in fiction through the ages. Be it giant squid, sentient spiders, or baby xenomorphs, fiction has a long history with spineless creatures. Authors and experts discuss their fears and favourites of this boneless bunch.

TJ Berg (m), Dr Bob, Marcus Rowland, Danna Staaf, Adrian Tchaikovsky

Gig (economies) in space (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

The gig economy with all its precarity remains a fact of life in this century; how does SFF see gig working, or does it engage at all?

Elliot (m), Stew Hotston, Nick Hubble, RB Kelly, Edmund Schluessel

SF now: South America (panel – Pavilion)

State of the genre: South America. What we are missing? A look at the current gems in South American SF publishing that aren't making it to the UK/US/Australian market.

Gustavo Bondoni, Fabio Fernandes, David Stokes (m)

Saturday 8 April

Before 9am

parkrun (Babbs Mill course; mask optional)
Come along to Babbs Mill parkrun! Eastercons have been organising trips to parkrun for a number of years. They are fun, inclusive events for anyone who wishes to improve their fitness. All abilities welcome. Run to start at 9am; meet at 8am in the hotel foyer to travel together, departing at 8.15.

Christina Lake (m), James Shields

9am

Hard to pin down: why we love weird fiction (panel – Queens)

Slippery to categorise, a joy to read: let's talk about fiction that is hard to define! What elements can go into a weird story? Why do we love it? Who is writing it well? And how do you know if you want to be a weird fiction writer?

Gustavo Bondoni, Meggie, Tim Mendees, E. Saxey (m), Pete W Sutton

Pros and cons of writing groups (panel – Sandringham)

Thinking of writing but finding it tough going it alone? Find out more about writing groups in their different forms. Critiquing skills, being held to account, and more.

Charlotte Ashley (m), Kat Kourbeti, Brian (Munchkin) Milton, Kari Sperring, Rebecca Zahabi

SF, ethics and science (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Debating ethical issues in science through SF.

TJ Berg, Alexander Glass, Stew Hotston, Stephen Oram (m), Jude Roberts

When I am old I shall wear purple (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Discussion about how fans can remain personally happy and socially valuable after retirement.

Wendy Bradley, Fran Dowd, Penny Hill (m), Geoff Ryman

Why did you build it that way? (panel – Balmoral)

Questionable engineering choices in fiction: do you really need spinning death blades leading to the engine room? Dodgy engineering as both a dramatic choice and a design horror.

Aliette de Bodard, Elliot, Jess Meats, Tim Rowe, Richard Stephenson (m)

Writing collaboratively: how to write all alone together (panel – Pavilion)

How do you approach another writer with the idea of working on a project together? How do you set up rules/guidelines? What are the benefits and drawbacks, and what happens when things go pear-shaped?

Tiffani Angus, Trip Gale, Becky James, Hildur Knútsdóttir, Gareth Worthington (m)

10am

Qi Gong exercise class (fan lounge; mask optional)

Gentle exercise to start your day out right. The Qi Gong class is a specially adapted version suitable for over 60s and disabled people, and allows you to remain seated during the entire class.

Allison Ewing

10.30 am

Contract skills (workshop – Sussex; children not allowed)

Francesca Barbini of Luna Press hosts this informative workshop to help you develop essential skills in reading, understanding, and negotiating your publishing contracts.

FANAC fanzine scanning station 1 (craft lounge)

Drop in and find out more about the FANAC fanzine scanning project, and bring along old fanzines to scan (permission from editors required).

Joe Siclari, Edie Stern

Feedback (discussion group – Pavilion)
Queries, questions, concerns or compliments about the convention? Come and voice them in the feedback session to let the con committee know.

Independent treasures: small press (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Independent publishing: small press, unusual imprints, and even DIY.

Sandra Bond, David Stokes, Pete W Sutton (m), David Wake

Readings: Fantasy works (Balmoral)

Reading slot for writers: fantasy with a historical bent.

Trip Galey, Ian Green, David Wake, J.L. Worrall

SF Now: Africa (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

State of the genre: Africa. What we are missing?

A look at the current gems in African SF publishing that aren't making it to the UK/US/Australian market.

Oghenechovwe Ekpeki, Geoff Ryman (m), Wole Talabi

Wanted undead or alive (panel – Sandringham; parental discretion)

Necromancers, ghosts and the undead through the ages, and how speculative fiction handles the impermanency of death.

Zen Cho, Stephen Deas, Meg MacDonald (m),

David Thomas Moore, Garth Nix

Noon

AI and SFF creativity: can AI create original art anyway? (panel – Sandringham)

Machine-generated art (in its widest definition) is grabbing the headlines. Publishers have been under fire for AI cover art that used work from human artists without specific permission. An onslaught of AI-developed material has led to the closure of open submissions to SFF magazines. Our panel of experts discuss what 'AI' is, and isn't, and its impact on SFF.

Lilian Edwards, Alexander Glass, Clark Seanor (m), Ursula Vernon, David Wake

Books On The Hill launch (tea lounge; mask optional)

Join Books On The Hill for the launch of James Bennett's latest title in their dyslexia-friendly line! Have a cup of tea and find out all about this amazing line of books.

Alistair Sims (m)

Disinformation: how to spot it and help stop its spread (talk/lecture – Balmoral)

Disinformation is rife and threatening democracies. This presentation looks at practical methods everyone can use to identify it and help to curb its spread.

SJ (Sarah) Groenewegen

GoH interview: Kari Sperring (Queens)

Guest of Honour Kari Sperring is interviewed by Juliet McKenna.

Isolation horror: small town shivers (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Folk horror frenzy in a tiny, isolated village in Cornwall? Weird goings-on in a mid-western town in the USA? Why are small settlements a favourite setting for Stranger Things to happen? *Hildur Knútsdóttir, E. Saxey (m), Anna Smith Spark, Neil Williamson*

Originals on screen (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

In the age of the tie-in, what hope is there for original sci-fi and fantasy on the big and small screens?

Ed Fortune, Emily January (m), M V Melcer (Mel), Abigail Nussbaum, Gareth Worthington

Reading aloud for public performance

(workshop – Pavilion)

Writers often have to read their work aloud in front of people. But how do you deal with lights and mics and still make your work captivating? Sign up for tips and tricks and a chance to practice a reading! You will be provided with some short readings (around 100 words), or bring your own.

T.H. Dray, E.M. Faulds (m)

SFF presents: Critical skills masterclass 1

(workshop – Sussex)

The Science Fiction Foundation is pleased to present this masterclass in SFF criticism, led by Paul March-Russell and facilitated by Tony Keen.

1.30pm

Andor: Star Wars for adults? (panel – Sandringham)

Is *Andor* the future of the Star Wars franchise? Is it as good as everyone says?

Stephen Aryan, Mike Brooks, F. D. Lee (m),

Fiona Moore, Ryann Fletcher, Russell A Smith

Book launch: Niall Harrison (Queens; mask optional)

A launch event for the book from one of our Guests of Honour, *All These Worlds: Reviews & Essays*. Opening with a short interview about the book led by Nina Allan, enjoy a Q&A session and refreshments to follow.

Do genres have boundaries? (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

How do you define a genre? Where are the boundaries where one ends and another begins? Let's talk about borders of genre, the difficult work of defining them (if it's even possible), and the joy of infinite subgenres.

David Green, Roz Kaveney, Chris McCartney (m), Jude Roberts, Rebecca Zahabi

Eastercon kids' meet: Saturday (craft lounge; for children)

For children and younger teens, and their grown-ups, a family meet-up in the craft room to talk about all things Eastercon!

My first contract (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)
What to watch out for in your first publishing contract.

Tiffani Angus (m), Francesca T Barbini, Randee Dawn, Garth Nix, David Wake

Recycled jewellery (craft workshop – Sussex)
Join CL Gamble to learn ways that you can rescue, reuse and remake all sorts of things into jewellery in this DIY workshop.

Roamers: a solarpunk launch party (Pavilion; mask optional)

Come and join the party with Flame Tree Press as we celebrate the launch of *Roamers*, the exciting new Solarpunk novel from Francesco Verso!

The Lady and the Octopus (talk/lecture – Balmoral)

A talk from Danna Staaf on the subject of her new book: Jeanne Villepreux-Power, a revolutionary 18th century woman who invented the modern aquarium and forever changed our understanding of marine evolution.

3pm

Alternatives to currency (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

What else is there? Envisioning societies that don't rely on card, hard cash (or SFnal credits):

what are the alternatives, and what can these societies look like?

Stew Hotston, Juliet Kemp (m), Fiona Moore, Gillian Polack, Jesper Stage

Book launch: *The Devil's Finger* (dealers' room; mask optional)

Author, fan, 2023 TAFF candidate and general force of nature Sandra Bond launches *The Devil's Finger* – her horrifyingly humorous, or humorously horrifying, second novel – at her table in the dealers' room. There is likely to be fudge...

Eerie River joint launch party (tea lounge; parental discretion; mask optional)

Rachael Boucker will be reading from her new book, *Shades of Night*, along with fellow label author David Green with his latest novel, *Path of War*. Join them both in the tea lounge to celebrate the launch of these fantastic works!

Film analysis skills (talk/lecture – Balmoral)
Zoe Burgess-Foreman presents a talk on the critical analytic skills that allow us to understand and interpret the subtleties, nuances, and really obvious things of cinema.

Gateway to fantasy: YA writing (panel – Sandringham)

Authors and the worlds that have been a gateway to fantasy for a whole generation: Tamora Pierce, Seanan McGuire, Patrick Ness, and more!

Becky James (m), Hildur Knútsdóttir, Lucy A. McLaren, Susie Williamson

Hay Lecture (Queens)

The hitchhiker's guide to healthcare: what science tells us sickness and dying will look like on a dangerously hot planet. The Hay Lecture is presented by the Science Fiction Foundation, and this year will be given by Dr Colin Carlson of Georgetown University with an introduction by Graham Sleight of the SFF.

John Brunner (talk/lecture – Wellington-Salisbury)

Ian Millsted gives an interim report on his research on Hugo Award-winning SF author John Brunner, and some of the research challenges he faces. Introduced by Ian Watson.

Living dystopia: is the real world worse? (panel – Pavilion)

Dystopias are a long-time mainstay of SFF. Many reflect aspects of the real world in which they were produced and were created as dire warnings. This panel seeks to understand the nature of the real dystopias that more and more of us are living in.

Fran Dowd (m), Oghenechovwe Ekpeki, RB Kelly, Nige, Stephen Oram

Table talk with Adrian Tchaikovsky (Sussex; mask optional)

Join our Guest of Honour, Adrian Tchaikovsky, for an hour of cosy and casual conversation! Fully hybrid item with limited places.

4.30pm

Archiving fandom (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Preserving lost websites, zines from the '50s, and long out of print film is something that often falls to us rather than any official body. How does fandom archive its history and genre history as a whole, and what are some of the benefits and drawbacks?

Sandra Bond, Kate Heffner, Dave McCarty, Ian Millsted (m), Joe Siclari

The art of the edit (panel – Queens)

Editing can make or break a work; like cutting a gem from rock, it helps to refine the raw material into the beautiful final piece. And like gems, we rarely see the rough version before the cuts to know what's changed. Our panel discuss the sometimes unseen art of editing.

Ruth EJ Booth, Anne Charnock (m), Oghenechovwe Ekpeki, Hildur Knútsdóttir, Pete W Sutton

BFS pub meet (bar; mask optional)

Come and join the British Fantasy Society for a social chat in the hotel bar!

Book launch: Rhapsody of Blood volume 5 (Pavilion; mask optional)

Roz Kaveney's extraordinary Rhapsody of Blood series reaches volume five, released this month. Join us to celebrate the launch.

Designing the future (panel – Sandringham)

How design in our lives can be influenced by the fantastical to make reality from fiction – and how it can feed back.

Andrew Armstrong, Oliver Langmead, Clark Seanor (m), Smuzz

Imagining reproductive futures (talk/lecture – Balmoral; parental discretion)

As long-duration spaceflight becomes a reality, it becomes urgent to address the health risks faced by astronauts sent on long missions and the issue of human reproduction in space. Is it ethical to have babies in space when we don't know the risks for them or the parents? What if people become infertile in space? How can technology be used to help humans reproduce in adverse conditions? In this talk, we showcase how science fiction and scientific data can be combined to model relationships about reproduction in space, develop predictive models for novel scenarios, and respond to some of the pressing questions we have about our future far from Earth.

Emily Finer, Lara Jost (m), Nick Simonetti, V Anne Smith

Metal clay (workshop – craft lounge; parental discretion)

Create metal clay silver jewellery in this hands-on workshop led by Helen Foster Turner of London Metal Clay.

Readings: PG/12A rated SF (Gladstone-Churchill; parental discretion)

Reading slot for writers.

Gustavo Bondoni, John Dodd, Russell A Smith, Gareth Worthington

Table talk with Kari Sperring (Sussex; mask optional)

Join our Guest of Honour, Kari Sperring, for an hour of cosy and casual conversation! Fully hybrid item with limited places.

6pm

Anarchy or bust! (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* offers one of the best known anarchist societies in SFF, but are there others? How do we imagine societies without bosses?

Nick Hubble, Juliet Kemp, Stephen Oram (m), Edmund Schluessel

Approaches to sustainability (panel – Balmoral; parental discretion)

What does a sustainable future look like, and what does sustainability mean? Our panel discuss personal lifestyle changes like solar panels and insulation, affordability, what can be lobbied for to make changes at national and

international levels, what we can expect to see if we don't make these changes...

Christianne, Elliot, Becky James (m), Jonny Nexus, Warren Philips

Badly written disease (panel – Pavilion)

Panelists discuss examples of where writers have given terrible descriptions of medical conditions.

TJ Berg, D.A Lascelles (m), Pepper, V Anne Smith

BSFA Awards ceremony (event – Queens)

Allen Stroud (m)

Radical imaginings: LGBTQ+ liberation beyond representation in SFF (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Everyone loves to see themselves represented in the stories they love, but how can literature fuel liberation beyond the inclusion of diverse characters? How can we model ideal societies free of oppression in our fiction? What lessons from real world liberation can we use to create moving, aspirational narratives for audiences?

SJ (Sarah) Groenewegen (m), Roz Kaveney, Chris McCartney, Susie Williamson

Saturday filk! (round table – Sussex; mask optional)

Filking is where people sing songs about sci-fi, fantasy, and related topics – often as parodies or pastiches of existing songs, but also original tunes. Come along and sing, or just listen to others. Until late.

The Dark is Rising (panel – Sandringham)

Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* series: why is it still so compelling?

Janet Ellicott, Trip Galey, E. Saxey, Kari Sperring, Kate Towner (m)

7pm

We look amazing! (event; mask optional)

It's right after the BSFA awards ceremony, you're dressed in your very best... now it's time to show off! Meet up in the main bar with your fanciest or favourite clothing and accessories – capes, costumes, loud shirts, anything that makes you feel fabulous.

7.30pm

Anti-aging: is it possible? (talk/lecture – Balmoral)

Is Lazarus Long possible? Will we ever have a Boosterspice or a Antigone? Is becoming a corpse the best strategy? And why *has* Jean-Luc Picard lost his hair?

William Bains

BSFA presents: Reaching Orbit (panel – Queens)

BSFA Orbiter groups have been around a long time, helping new writers get started.

Mark Bilsborough, Susan Oke (m), Allen Stroud

Complaints through history (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

From Babylonian copper to Birmingham hotel carpet, a panel of historians and fans discuss their favourite complaints throughout all of human history, and compare legendary complaints from conventions.

Brian, Phil Dyson (m), Farah, Kate, Soph Williams

Cricket Chronicles launch and wrap party (tea lounge; mask optional)

Join author Ryann Fletcher for an informal party to celebrate *Era's End*, the final book in the Cricket Chronicles! Perfect for all you fans of sapphic sci-fi and found family space shenanigans.

Glasgow 2024 presents: Ceilidh! (event – Pavilion; mask optional)

Join the Glasgow 2024 team for a night of traditional Scottish culture with a ceilidh dance. Featuring two sets from a live band, and conveniently near the bar for refreshments in between, the dancing will start from 8pm.

The influence of Evangeline Walton (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Join our Guest of Honour, Kari Sperring, for this discussion panel on the thoughtful and eloquent fantasy works of 20th century writer Evangeline Walton and her unique relationship with mythology.

Kevin McVeigh, Catherine Sharp (m), Jan Siegel, Kari Sperring, Freda Warrington

Interspecies romance: aliens, vampires and more (panel – Sandringham)

How does romance (and sex) work if your

partner isn't the same species as you?
*Zoe Burgess-Foreman, David Cartwright,
Alette de Bodard, Anna Raftery (m), Ursula Vernon*

9pm

BFS Presents: Short story submissions (panel – Queens)

The British Fantasy Society present a panel on short story publishing: how to submit, how works are chosen, and all the behind-the-scenes on short fiction.

*T.H. Dray, E.M. Faulds (m), Shona Kinsella,
Pete W Sutton, Neil Williamson*

Down the virtual pub: fan groups in the time of Covid-19 and beyond (panel – Sandringham)

Which groups have thrived? What are the challenges? Is it worth going back to the pub? What else has moved online (book groups, convention programmes, readings, games)?

*John Coxon, Fran Dowd, Marcin Alqua Klak,
Tim Mendeas (m)*

The how and when of intimate scenes (panel – Gladstone-Churchill; children not allowed)

How and when to use sex scenes if you're not writing erotica.

*Angeli Primlani, Edmund Schluessel (m), Anna
Smith Spark, Anna Stephens, J.L. Worrall*

Monster movie night (Balmoral; parental discretion)

Featuring: *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). One of the most iconic monster movies in history, the Gillman has been tremendously influential on creature design throughout the decades since. Celebrate nearly 70 years of this classic, and join us for a chat afterwards about how it's been re-interpreted with works like Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water*.

Tony Keen (m)

Multiverse magic (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Apart from the MCU, films like *Everything Everywhere All at Once* are exploiting the possibilities of many worlds. And many writers have also leaned into the implications and made multiple timelines work, despite the difficulties. We discuss our favourites.

*Stew Hotston, Emily January, Judith Mortimore (m),
Catriona Silvey*

Sunday 9 April

9am

Carbon arc lamps (talk/lecture – Wellington-Salisbury)

Before incandescent bulbs and LEDs, carbon arc lamps were the first practical source of electric light. But what went into making one? How common were they? Where were they used?

John Holden

Devouring history (panel – Sandringham)

From ancient Egyptian bread to millennia-old honey, humans will eat just about anything – or try to recreate it if they can't. Our panel look at the foods they wish they could have tried, and discuss ways to recreate the taste of ages past.

Gillian Polack, Sidsel (m), Shana Worthen

Future of Eastercon (panel – Balmoral)

Fandom has survived the Plague Years, but in what state? A panel discuss the future of Eastercons, and what changes may yet come.

John Coxon (m), Phil Dyson, Farah, James Shields

Morning stroll (outside; mask optional)

A walk around the lovely pondside scenery near the hotel, guided by Bridget Wilkinson.

Overshoots and other anthropocene narratives (panel – Queens)

Critics such as Adam Trexler, Erin James and Amitav Ghosh have variously argued that the form of the novel must evolve to adequately represent the world in the anthropocene. In an essay in *Strange Horizons*, Niall Harrison discussed one type of narrative structure that might meet this brief, which he christened an overshoot: a story that starts in the past, continues to the present and, by depicting ongoing changes in the world as well as in the human characters' lives, creates a sense of necessity for a future to be shown in order to fully resolve the narrative. This panel road-tests this new label by discussing examples of overshoots, and considers what other narrative structures might be particularly suited to depicting life in the anthropocene.

*Anne Charnock, Niall Harrison, Nick Hubble,
Abigail Nussbaum (m)*

Poetry in SFF (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

A panel on our favourite uses of poems in science fiction or fantasy.

Roz Kaveney, Oliver Langmead, Chris McCartney, Anna Smith Spark, Richard Stephenson (m)

Sunday morning worship (event – Pavilion)

An Easter Sunday Christian service of worship. Suitable for anyone of any denomination.

Douglas Spencer (m)

9.30am

Cryptofiasco (talk/lecture – Wellington-Salisbury)

From the author of 'Attack of the 50 Foot Blockchain', a delve into the undignified collapse of cryptocurrencies.

Nigel Heffernan

10.30am

Be gay, do crime: the 'Magneto was right' panel (Wellington-Salisbury)

Many real-world minorities find their very existences are illegal in many ways, in many places. Does this make it easier for LGBTQ+ individuals to sympathise with villains – especially one that are queer-coded or have very real, justifiable motivations for their actions? How does our experience with fiction square with the impulses for and against both assimilation and subversion in real life?

Zoe Burgess-Foreman, Aliette de Bodard,

Roz Kaveney, Chris McCartney (m), Troo

The colonial conversations of *Predator* (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Predator has had some interesting conversations about colonial attitudes, either by aliens or humans.

E.M. Faulds (m), Stew Hotston, Gavin G Smith,

Russell A Smith

FANAC fanzine scanning station 2

(craft lounge)

Drop in and find out more about the FANAC fanzine scanning project, and bring along old fanzines to scan (permission from editors required).

Joe Siclari, Edie Stern

Feedback (discussion group – Sandringham)

Queries, questions, concerns or compliments about the convention? Come and voice them in

the feedback session to let the con committee know.

GoH interview: Adrian Tchaikovsky (Queens)

Guest of Honour Adrian Tchaikovsky is interviewed by John Coxon.

Jumping off the page: writing believable characters (panel – Balmoral)

Getting characters from a sketch to a fully fleshed-out individual is an art in itself. But how is it done? Our panellists discuss techniques for making your favourite characters so lifelike you can almost smell them.

David Green, Anne Lyle, Lucy A. McLaren,

Anna Smith Spark, Anna Stephens (m)

Quaker session (event – Pavilion)

A session for Quakers, and others who wish to join them in a meeting of friends.

Noon

Does it have to be spaceships? (panel – Pavilion)

Artists discuss their SFFnal themes and what they pick for Eastercon.

Jackie Burns, Jackie Duckworth, Eira (m),

Helen Foster-Turner, CL Gamble

Eastercon bid session and business meeting (event – Queens)

A chance to hear from the team for Levitation 2024 about how their planning is going. Then the committee for Belfast 2025 will present their bid, along with any other bids for that year.

Farah, Tommy Ferguson, James

Epilogues and afterwords: finishing your work (panel – Sandringham; parental discretion)

Wrapping up your story can really make or break the whole thing; how do you know when to finish, when to keep going, and how to end your story in a way that's going to satisfy both you and your audience? Our panel discuss the art of closure, from short stories to whole series.

James Bennett, Anne Charnock, Roz Kaveney,

Anna Smith Spark, Sandra Unerman (m)

The fantastical cat (discussion group – Sussex)

Cats are awesome: discuss. (Perhaps with reference to our favourite depictions of cats in SFFH as a thinly veiled excuse.) Please do not leave open containers of liquid on any flat surfaces.

Hildur Knútsdóttir, Susie Williamson

Non-European Middle Ages (panel – Balmoral)
Eurocentric lore has been a goldmine for fantasy and historical fiction writers. But what was the rest of the world doing?

Oghenechovwe Ekpéki, Stew Hotston (m), Cheryl Morgan, Gillian Polack, David Stokes

From Doctor Who to Doc Weir: what is British fandom all about? (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Fans discuss the history and culture of British fandom. What, if anything, makes it different from other fandoms? What aspects of British fandom do not translate well, or seem bizarre, strange or baffling to those outside Britain?
Sandra Bond (m), Fia Karlsson, Clarrie Maguire, Fiona Moore, James Shields

What's not D&D? (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Alternative TTRPGs for your dice-rolling cravings.

Charlotte Ashley, Brian, Michael Cule (m), Elliot, Adrian Tchaikovsky

1.30pm

Alien ecology (panel – Balmoral)

What would life on an alien planet look like? What could it look like? Where have you seen it imagined well?

TJ Berg (m), Janet Ellicott, V Anne Smith, Smuzz, Adrian Tchaikovsky

Debut spotlight (readings – Pavilion; parental discretion)

A trio of new authors read from their debut works: join A.Y. Chao with *Shanghai Immortal*, M V Melcer with *Refractions*, and Lucy A. McLaren with *Awakening* as they give us a tantalising glimpse of these brand new tales!

Fantasy Book Swap live podcast (event – Wellington-Salisbury)

Ali Baker and her guest, Kari Sperring, discuss children's fantasy fiction, based on a favourite book chosen by Kari and a complementary contemporary book chosen by Ali. Kari's choice is *The Silver Brumby* by Elyne Mitchell; Ali's choice is *Abyssinia* by Ursula Dubosarsky.

Mascot making! (craft lounge)

If you haven't had a chance yet, drop by the craft lounge to have a go at assembling and customising your very own Conversation mascots! Do you want to create a robot, a

dragon, or both? Children will receive an award ribbon for creating their mascots and putting them on display. And, while this item is in-person, the papercraft models will be available for online members to print and make their own at home and share on Discord, too!

Sci-Horror! (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Two great genres that taste great together: science fiction and horror. Why do they go so well together, and what are our favourite examples?

Zoe Burgess-Foreman, David Cartwright (m), The Fossil, Roz Kaveney, Hildur Knútsdóttir

Table talk with Zen Cho (Sussex; mask optional)

Join our Guest of Honour, Zen Cho, for an hour of cosy and casual conversation! Fully hybrid item with limited places.

Thirty-four years, and an interim survey (panel – Sandringham)

In 1989, Paul Kincaid surveyed working UK-based science fiction and fantasy writers, and wrote up the results for *Mexicon*. In 2009, Niall Harrison repeated the questionnaire, and wrote up the results for the BSFA, considering the changes in the SF field during those twenty years. We're not quite due another iteration, but this panel will ask some current writers to answer some of the questionnaire: why have you chosen to write science fiction or fantasy? Do you consider there is anything distinctively British about your work, and if so, what is it? What do you consider the major influences on your work? And what do you think have been the most significant developments in British science fiction and fantasy over the last fifteen years?

Nina Allan, Anne Charnock, Niall Harrison (m), Stew Hotston, Juliet E McKenna, Neil Williamson

TWP meet-up (tea lounge)

Informal gathering for members of TWP (*The Women's Periodical*), past, present and future. TWP was set up in the early 1980s to encourage women to write, create art, and share the common experiences of being women in SF fandom, and 285 mailings later it is still going strong. All women welcome.

Christina Lake (m)

3pm

Adaptable Arthur (panel – Queens)

As a canon written by many authors down the ages, Arthuriana is uniquely flexible in letting you choose which version of the canon you want, and how you want to adapt it.

James Bennett, Gillian Polack, Juliet E McKenna, Russell A Smith (m), Kari Sperring

Get recycling! (fabric workshop – Sussex)

Join CL Gamble to learn some great ways to recycle your old fabric into useful and reusable every day items like make-up removing wipes, sanitary pads, and more!

Glasgow craft meet (meet-up – craft lounge)

Join the Glasgow 24 team for this friendly drop-in crafting session.

Has fanfiction won? (panel – Sandringham)

Once strictly forbidden, fanfic is now being publicly embraced. From 'filing off the barcode' and turning fanfic into original work, through reimaginings that would once have gotten the imaginers sued, all the way to writers and actors admitting to their favourite saucy fics – has fanfiction won the war?

Zen Cho, Anne-Louise Fortune, Emily January, F. D. Lee, Kate Towner (m)

Hiking with hobbits: best fantastic walks (panel – Pavilion)

Sam and Frodo, or *The Left Hand of Darkness's* glacier trudge? Many SFF protagonists end up on long walks, so do we enjoy their travelogue or wish we could see the woods for the trees? And how can our own hiking experience influence the worlds we build and the journeys our characters undertake?

David Green, Ian Green, Anna Smith Spark (m), Ursula Vernon

Poetry read-around (reading –tea lounge)

Poetry reading session, with con members participating by bringing their own poetry.
Dawn Abigail, Pauline E Dungate, Chris Morgan, Richard Stephenson

Readings: SF, dystopias and the near future (Balmoral)

Reading slot for writers: sci-fi, dystopia, and near future.

Aliette de Bodard, Oghenechovwe Ekpeki, RB Kelly, Stephen Oram

SFF presents: Maureen Kincaid Speller

retrospective (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

The Science Fiction Foundation presents this panel discussing the life and works of the legendary SF critic and editor, Maureen Kincaid Speller.

Nina Allan, Tanya Brown, Dan Hartland, Paul March-Russell (m), Samira Nadkarni

Who, why and what do we award? (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

The role of awards in the fandom ecology and SFF economy.

Niall Harrison, Nick Hubble, Cheryl Morgan, Nicholas Whyte, Gareth Worthington (m)

4.30pm

The case for cosy (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Comfort fiction: why fluffy, feel-good material, like a warm hug for the soul, is worth more to us now than ever. Previously put down as slight, or 'girly nonsense', maybe our perspectives have changed post-pandemic? We discuss our favourites and the growth of the genre. From *Legends and Lattes* to Becky Chambers, all cosy or low-stakes SFF is embraced!

Anne-Louise Fortune (m), David Green, Kate, Bella Pagan

Do the genre mash (panel – Sandringham)

Mashing up genres (like sci-fi westerns, horror romcoms, or fantasy detective mysteries) is a popular method of drawing out new heroes and settings. Our panellists discuss their favourite joining of the different streams of fiction, and how to write it without going too far off the rails.

A.Y. Chao, Trip Galey, Ian Green, Tim Mendeas, Virginia (m)

Exploring future(s) with the public using SF

(talk/lecture – Pavilion; parental discretion)

Speculative fiction influences scientists in what they research and technologists in what they invent. It can also enable the general public to consider the ethical issues around how science and technology might be used to shape their future(s).

Stephen Oram

Fountain pen meet-up (craft lounge)

Join hosts Aliette de Bodard and Juliet Kemp to compare and chat about the most beautiful pens

and exquisite inks around! Bring your own favourites to show off.

SFF presents: Sci-fi in education (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Why should learning be staid and dull? Our panel look at the ways that the exciting world of science fiction can be used to engage learners.

Ali Baker, Paul March-Russell (m), Meggie, Jude Roberts

Table talk with Niall Harrison (Sussex; mask optional)

Join our Guest of Honour, Niall Harrison, for an hour of cosy and casual conversation! Fully hybrid item with limited places.

What is Milford, and why you should attend (panel – Queens)

Regular attendees talk about the Milford Writer's Workshop and the value of honest, constructive critique for developing as a writer.

Fiona Moore, multijimbo, Susan Oke, Russell A Smith, Kari Sperring

6pm

BSFA Lecture: Classical references in *Dracula* (Queens; parental discretion)

The annual BSFA Humanities Lecture. In writing *Dracula*, Bram Stoker drew on his own classical education and an established tradition of classical references in vampire stories. He could expect his audience to recognise his allusions. Far from functioning as 'Easter eggs', accessible only to a privileged few, they would have resonated with readers steeped in classically-themed fin-de-siècle plays, paintings, poetry and fiction. As such, Stoker could deploy them to help root his title character in a remote and fantastical past and to advance three major themes: tyranny and imperialism; the monstrous and the supernatural; and sexual predation. Content note: the final part of this paper engages with classical rape stories and vampiric predation as a metaphor for rape; listener discretion is advised.

Penny Goodman, Shana Worthen (m)

Conrunning history and future (panel – Balmoral)

We have records of some of the earliest fan-run conventions. What's changed, what's stayed the

same, and what does the future look like?

Marcin Alqua Kłak (m), Dave McCarty, Tlanti, Suzanne 'Suzle' Tompkins

The final frontier: what LGBTQ+ stories can only SFF tell? (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

LGBTQ+ stories are not new to myth, literature, or other modes of fiction. Many of these, however, are bound up in the material realities of life as we experience it now, or in the recent past. What ways can SFF tell LGBTQ+ stories that are unique to the queer perspective and also can only be told through a fantastical lens? Where is the boundary between a hoped-for better future and fantastical fiction?

Aliette de Bodard, Trip Galey, Emily January, E. Saxey (m), Troo

Ian Watson's birthday launch (Pavilion; mask optional)

Join Ian Watson and NewCon Press for a double party as Ian celebrates both his 80th birthday and the launch of a brand new collection of his works!

The pros and cons of self-publishing (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Why do people self-publish? Is it cool? How does it work? Disruptive technology has worked well for podcasts and music, but possibly less well for fiction.

David Cartwright, F. D. Lee, Lizzzzz, Jonny Nexus, Gareth Worthington (m)

Table talk with Ursula Vernon (Sussex; mask optional)

Join our Guest of Honour, Ursula Vernon, for an hour of cosy and casual conversation! Fully hybrid item with limited places.

Whose law is it anyway? (panel – Sandringham)
A critical look at legal systems in SFF. Would it be more accurate to refer to Judge Dredd as Magistrate Dredd? Could a Faustian bargain be deemed Unconscionable? And just what is 'Quintesson justice', anyway?

Alexander Glass, Ida Keogh, Misha (m), Chris McCartney, Judith Mortimore

7.30pm

Comedy in SFFH (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Is it time for more than just Pratchett and Adams to grace the science fiction and fantasy humour section of our bookshops? And what about comedy horror books? We delve into new

modern works that look on the lighter side of SFFH, and discuss why humour in these genres can be so hard to find in book format when TV and film frequently go there.

*Ali Baker, Gustavo Bondoni, Tim Mendeas (m),
Catriona Silvey*

Learning from romance (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Romance is the biggest selling of all fiction genres, with devoted fans and some very strict writing expectations; what can SFF learn from the behemoth that is romance?

*Anne-Louise Fortune, Judith Mortimore (m),
Anna Raftery, Kate Towner, Ursula Vernon*

Members versus attendees: new ways of participating in fandom (panel – Sandringham)

Has fandom gone from being a hobby to becoming a professional development opportunity? Are we still creating communities? Has fandom lost its core/become too fragmented, or is this the best era ever for anyone interested in SF to find out more about the genre?

*Brian (m), Marcin Alqua Kłak, Sidsel,
Marguerite Smith*

Online pub meet (online spaces; parental discretion)

Couldn't make it to the hotel bar? Have a pint with friends from the comfort of your own home instead!

Readings: Fantasy and SF (Queens)

Reading panel for writers: fantasy and SF.

*Zen Cho, Kate Heartfield, Andrew Knighton,
Adrian Tchaikovsky*

Readings: PG/12A rated fantasy (Balmoral; parental discretion)

Reading slot for writers: 12A fantasy.

*Randee Dawn, Jess Meats, Kari Sperring,
Susie Williamson*

Sunday filk session (round table – Sussex; mask optional)

Filking is where people sing songs about sci-fi, fantasy, and related topics – often as parodies or pastiches of existing songs, but also original tunes. Come along and sing, or just listen to others. Until late.

We can hear space (talk/lecture – Pavilion)

From the corpses of dead giants to fingerprints of the Big Bang, to the monsters that lurk at the

heart of the galaxy, radio astronomy has made amazing discoveries. Verity Allan walks us through the vast computers and building the world's largest radio telescope, and highlights women's contributions to the field.

9pm

Fanfic open mic! (event – Gladstone-Churchill; children not allowed)

Relax on the last night of Eastercon with this 18+ fanfic open mic night! Sign up and bring your best 5-10 minute readings to share aloud, or just come along to listen.

Heather Valentine (m)

Fan funds auction (event – Sandringham)

The chance to acquire some quality merchandise (and some other things) and support the fan funds in an in-person and virtual auction. Fan funds exist to send delegates to conventions in other places and foster connections between fans around the world; when they come back, they raise money to enable future trips. Lots include items to read, watch, make, wear, eat, display or donate to a future fan funds auction.

Prison Biscuit (event – Pavilion)

Donna Scott is bringing her comedy double act 'Prison Biscuit' to Conversation. Read more about it on her website: <https://donna-scott.co.uk/>

Readings: Adults-only horror (Balmoral; children not allowed)

Reading slot for writers: horror for adult attendees.

*Arthur Chappell, Hildur Knútsdóttir, Tim Mendeas,
E. Saxey*

Monday 10 April

9am

Cults and conspiracy theories (panel – Balmoral)

Why they happen, how to counter them, and why they are so influential.

*Arthur Chappell, Phil Dyson, Nicholas Jackson (m),
Pepper, Allen Stroud*

Fictional comfort and junk food (panel – Sandringham)

Second breakfast. Deep-fried deliciousness.

Floating fruit. A cup of klah. What makes a fictional world a cosy, welcoming place? How do

you know fictional characters are home sweet home, based on what they're eating? This panel will look at what food tells you about fantastic and world-building fiction, especially with respect to making a world a home.

Fran Dowd (m), Emily Inkpen, Gillian Polack

Music's symbiosis with art (panel – Pavilion)

Illustration, writing, painting, sculpting – visual and written artists often want music in the background. Our panel talk about what music means to their creative process.

Charlotte Ashley, Jackie Burns, Lucy A. McLaren, Catriona Silvey (m)

The past and future of *Vector* magazine (panel – Queens)

Looking at the past and future of one of Britain's leading sci-fi publications, the BSFA's critical journal, *Vector*.

Niall Harrison, Edward James, Stephen Oram, Shana Worthen (m)

The Female Man (talk/lecture – Wellington-Salisbury)

First published in 1976, *The Female Man* remains a rulebreaking, groundbreaking book. Through modern eyes sometimes problematic, the book is discussed and analysed by Farah Mendlesohn. An in-depth discussion of gender, storytelling, anger, and complex narratology.

10.30am

Feedback (discussion group – Pavilion)

Queries, questions, concerns or compliments about the convention? Come and voice them in the feedback session – not least for the benefit of the teams putting on the next two Eastercons.

Forbidden hues: sumptuary law in history and fiction (panel – Sandringham)

Sumptuary law in history and fiction: this panel discusses the laws governing clothing and presentation in real history, and how and when to use them in building your fictional world.

Farah (m), Nicholas Jackson, Gillian Polack, Angeli Primlani

My favourite Trek (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

What's your favourite iteration of Star Trek?

Christianne, Dave McCarty, Edmund Schluessel (m), Catriona Silvey, Troo

SFF presents: Critical skills masterclass 2

(workshop – Sussex)

The Science Fiction Foundation is pleased to present this masterclass in SFF criticism, led by Tony Keen – round two!

Third Row Fandom, twenty years on

(panel – Queens)

How was the term 'Third Row Fandom' coined, who was involved, and how have they changed the science fiction scene – or themselves – in the years since then?

John Coxon, Niall Harrison, Emily January, Meg MacDonald (m), Abigail Nussbaum

Writing music for your setting (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

Whether you need star-sailing shanties or folk horror ballads, our panel has you covered!

Alexander Glass, Kate, Kat Kourbeti, Allen Stroud (m), Neil Williamson

Noon

The future of transport (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

A deep dive into developments in rail, electric cars, renewable options, changes we expect in our lifetimes, and more!

Elliot, Jonny Nexus (m), Warren Philips, Richard Stephenson, Allen Stroud

GoH Interview: Zen Cho (Queens)

Guest of Honour Zen Cho is interviewed by Virginia.

***House of Dragons*: management perspective** (talk/lecture – Pavilion)

Have you ever wondered if you could sharpen your business acumen by studying George RR Martin's *House of Dragons*? If you did, you will get some great tips from Fiona Moore on how to cut your way through the competition.

Make your own fanzine (craft lounge)

A get-together to make your own fanzine!

Christina Lake (m)

Travelling fans (panel – Sandringham)

Fans travel a long way to go to conventions, especially Worldcons. International exchanges help build fan communities, but how important are they in the virtual modern world – and how environmentally sustainable?

Marcin Alqua Kłak, Carolina Gómez Lagerlöf (m), Cheryl Morgan, Angeli Primlani, Suzanne 'Suzle' Tompkins

Where did you get that potato? (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

Glorious anachronisms, real history, and aluminium Christmas trees.

Michael Cule, Kate Heartfield, Andrew Knighton, Gillian Polack, Sandra Unerman (m)

Zombies run – but do we? (panel – Balmoral)

How do fans keep fit – if we even do – and why does it matter?

Allison Ewing, Jean Thompson, Tlanti, Bridget Wilkinson (m)

12.30pm

Life on Venus (talk/lecture – Pavilion)

Among the clouds of Venus, amidst the fogs of sulphuric acid... could there be a glimmer of life?

William Bains

1.30pm

Doctor Who at 60 (panel – Wellington-Salisbury)

It's the good doctor's sixtieth anniversary; we look at the series' long history and ponder what's coming next.

Janet Ellicott, SJ (Sarah) Groenewegen (m), Brian (Munchkin) Milton, Russell A Smith

Fans as SF critics (panel – Sandringham)

What do fans bring to SF criticism? Do fanzines offer something academic criticism cannot? And should audiences have more or less say in the development and reception of speculative works?

Farah, Tony Keen, Abigail Nussbaum (m), Clark Seanor

Living with the algorithm (panel – Gladstone-Churchill)

How do we live with algorithmically determined everything? The algorithm affects search terms,

job applications, every aspect of life.

Naveed Khan, Omar Kooheji (m), V Anne Smith, Smuzz, Wole Talabi

Octothorpe podcast live! (event – Pavilion)

Survived the convention so far? Unwind and enjoy a live recording of the hilarious Octothorpe podcast from right here at Conversation!

John Coxon (m), Alison Scott, and Liz Batty

Rethinking the history of SF (panel – Balmoral)

Is it time to rethink the history of SF? Rather than tell the same old stories of the Golden Age and the New Wave, which focus largely on US/UK male writers, can we identify broader social-historical-technological labels that reflect the impact of world-historical conditions and events, such as the First World War? Will this enable us to tell a more inclusive and diverse history of global SF that speaks to life in the 21st century? This panel will brainstorm some possible new labels, debate their utility, and more broadly consider how the writing of SF history has changed over time, and may continue to change in the future.

Niall Harrison(m), Kate Heffner, Nick Hubble, Edward James, Paul March-Russell

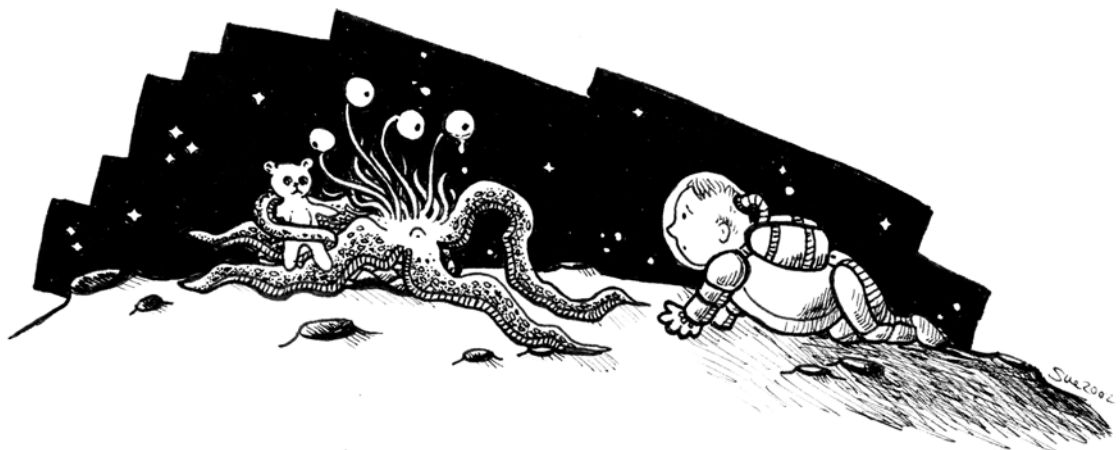
Ursula Vernon's garden (talk/lecture – Queens)

Ursula Vernon leads us on a guided tour of her beautiful garden – or would have, had the weather not turned inclement. Virginia will be interviewing her, instead, as they share a cosy hour-long chat with all of you in the audience.

3pm

Closing ceremony (event – Queens)

Zen Cho, Michael Cule, Niall Harrison, Jennell Jaquays, Caroline Mullan (m), Kari Sperring, Adrian Tchaikovsky, Ursula Vernon





Established:1958

BSFA

The British Science Fiction Association

<http://www.bsfa.co.uk>



BSFA Awards for 2022

The awards are named for the year in which the eligible works were published, and then voted on and announced the following year. Thus the 2023 awards will be presented in 2024. The awards are voted on by members of BSFA and members of the Eastercon.

The shortlists for the 2022 awards (with the winners in bold, as announced at Conversation) were:

Novel

- *The Red Scholar's Wake* – Aliette de Bodard (Gollancz)
- *Stars and Bones* – Gareth Powell (Titan)
- *The This* – Adam Roberts (Gollancz)
- *The Coral Bones* – E.J. Swift (Unsung Stories)
- ***City of Last Chances*** – Adrian Tchaikovsky (Head of Zeus)

Short Fiction

(under 40,000 words)

- ***Of Charms, Ghosts and Grievances*** – Aliette de Bodard (JABberwocky Literary Agency)
- 'Seller's Remorse' – Rick Danforth (*Hexagon* 11)
- *Luca* – Or Luca (Luna)
- *Ogres* – Adrian Tchaikovsky (Solaris)
- 'A Moment of Zugzwang' – Neil Williamson (*ParSec* 4)

Artwork

- Chris Baker – cover for *Shoreline of Infinity* 32
- Miguel Co – cover for *Song of the Mango and Other New Myths* by Vida Cruz-Borja (Ateneo De Manila University Press)
- Manzi Jackson – cover for *Africa Risen: A New Era of Speculative Fiction*, edited by Sheree Renée Thomas, Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki and Zelda Knight (Tor)
- Jay Johnstone – cover for *The Way the Light Bends* by Lorraine Wilson (Luna)
- Vincent Sammy – cover for *Parsec* 4
- ***Alyssa Winans*** – cover for *The Red Scholar's Wake* by Aliette de Bodard (Gollancz)

Non-Fiction

- 'Too Dystopian for Whom? A Continental Nigerian Writer's Perspective' – Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki (*Uncanny*)
- *Management Lessons from Game of Thrones: Organization Theory and Strategy in Westeros* – Fiona Moore (Edward Elgar)
- 'The Critic and the Clue: Tracking Alan Garner's *Treacle Walker*' – Maureen Kincaid Speller (*Strange Horizons*)
- 'Preliminary Observations from an Incomplete History of African SFF' – Wole Talabi (SFWA.org)
- ***Terry Pratchett: A Life with Footnotes*** – Rob Wilkins (Doubleday)

Book for Young Readers

- *Violet Made of Thorns* – Gina Chen (Hodder and Stoughton)
- *Her Majesty's Royal Coven* – Juno Dawson (Harper Voyager)
- *Mindwalker* – Kate Dylan (Hodder and Stoughton)
- ***Unraveller*** – Frances Hardinge (Macmillan Children's)
- *Illuminations* – T Kingfisher (Argyll)
- *Only a Monster* – Vanessa Len (Hodder and Stoughton)
- *Zachary Ying and the Dragon Emperor* – Xiran Jay Zhao (Margaret K. McElderry)

Atom Abroad

BEST TRIP. E

THE HARP
STATESIDE

HAVE BAG,
WILL TRAVEL

FAN FUNDS

The Fan Funds have enabled SF fans to travel across oceans to meet fans in other countries for over 70 years. This year, we have three races ongoing.

The TransAtlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) will bring a fan from North America to Glasgow 2024: a Worldcon for our Futures.

The Get Up-and-over Fan Fund (GUFF) will bring a fan from Oceania (Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia) to Glasgow 2024.

The European Fan Fund (EFF) will send a fan from Europe to Erasmuscon, the Eurocon in Rotterdam.

Fans around the world can vote in all of these contests and can read the reports of previous trips, which are often fascinating insights into the history and broad scope of fandom.

report

H. Ken Bulmer

Anna Ratcliffe
2016 TAFF Trip

World
James' Jumi
Children

Gillian's
GUFF 2010

GU
James Shields Goes Un

Funds in 2010

Fan funds at Conversation

by Claire Brialey

Fan funds – which in Europe tends to cover TAFF (the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund), GUFF (the Going Under Fan Fund), EFF (the European Fan Fund), and other fannish good causes – have had a presence at Eastercons for many years. It's an opportunity to raise awareness of what the fan funds are about, raise money to support future trips, encourage people to vote in any races that are under way, and generally try to contribute some extra fun to the convention.

At Conversation there were two fan fund races nearing their deadlines: a TAFF race, to send a delegate to North America (including the 2023 NASFiC, Pemmi-Con, in Winnipeg) and an EFF race to send a delegate from within Europe to the Eurocon (which last year was Konflikt, in Uppsala).

The fan funds collectively held an auction on Sunday night and took a fan table in the dealers' room which included our Amazeballs tombola, sales of recent trip reports (including the newly available report of Sue Mason's TAFF trip from 2000!), and voting in the two live races. The auction raised over £1,700, and activities at the table plus general donations brought in over £360 more during the weekend – all in addition to the voting fees contributed in the EFF and TAFF races at the convention and direct through online and postal voting.

Fia Karlsson, then the European TAFF administrator, took charge of the table at the con, Geri Sullivan produced a magnificent auction catalogue – for the second weekend in a row, following Corflu in Belfast – and John Coxon, Douglas Spencer and Alison Scott (the European GUFF administrator) all took major roles in the auction with help from Mary Burns,

Meike, and Murray Moore as runners and Mark Plummer on set-up. Many thanks to all of them, and to Suzle and Jerry Kaufman and the other volunteers who helped on the table – and to everyone who contributed to the funds through votes, donations, and bids.

Marcin 'Alqua' Klak, the EFF administrator, had been at Corflu to take votes for the first race for that fund; as a virtual member of Conversation, he was one of those who participated over Zoom in bidding at the auction, where the mighty brains and engines of tech were deployed to their fullest extent to enable everyone present in the room and online to see the catalogue and bid in real time.

Matylda Naczyńska won the first EFF race (beating James Shields); she subsequently attended Konflikt and a year later, with Marcin, is administering the race for her successor to attend Erasmuscon, the Eurocon in Rotterdam, in August 2024. Sandra Bond won TAFF (beating Mikołaj Kowalewski); she attended Pemmi-Con and is now – with her North American counterpart, Michael 'Orange Mike' Lowrey – administering the race to bring a North American delegate to Glasgow 2024: a Worldcon for Our Futures, which will be held a week before the Eurocon. And Alison Scott finally got to make her GUFF trip to Australia and New Zealand (delayed from 2020) in September and October 2023, and is currently – with her New Zealand counterpart, Simon Litten – administering the race to bring a delegate from Oceania to the Glasgow Worldcon as well. Such is the eventual fate of fan fund delegates.



Dealers at Conversation

Books on the Hill

Books

<https://www.booksonthehill.co.uk>

Boswell Art

Brangle art, hand crafted jewellery

Cathaven Press publications

Occult detective magazine, and other books.

Jilly Paddock's books.

<http://greydogtales.com/blog/occult-detective-magazine/>

C L Gamble

Upcycled jewellery, zines, postcards, small gifts

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

David Wake/Watledge Books/New Street Authors

Books

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

<https://www.newstreetauthors.co.uk>

Diana's Stellar WireWorks

'I make original design wire-wrap jewellery with large crystals, charms and multi-coloured wire.

My work is perfect for fantasy cosplay, steampunkers and anyone looking for something offbeat. Commissions welcome.'

<https://www.facebook.com/dstellarww/>

Eerie River Publishing

Fantasy novels from David Green and Rachael Boucker, and horror novels from Tim Mendeas

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

F. D. Lee Books

<http://www.fdlee.co.uk>

Flame Tree Press

Novels and themed short story anthologies

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

Future Fiction

Future Fiction publishes science fiction books and comics (often in translation from many different languages) by the best SF authors from Europe and the world.

Genki Gear Ltd

Original and quirky designed T-shirts and gifts. All ethically produced and completely unique.

<https://genkigear.com/>

Guardbridge Books

New books from small press, hand-made jewellery

<http://www.guardbridgebooks.co.uk/books.html>

Jackie Duckworth Art

Hand-made puzzles and gifts, greetings cards, T-shirts

<https://www.jackieduckworthart.co.uk>

James A Odell

Novels

<https://alexandraauthor.blogspot.com>

Lancaster University English and CW courses

Leaflets, some staff books and banner stand

<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/english-literature-and-creative-writing/>

Let Zoe Spoil You

Novel, short stories and zines

<https://linktr.ee/letzoespoilyou>

London Metal Clay

Silver jewellery

<https://londonmetalclay.com>

Luna Press Publishing

Books

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

Mini Print Factory

3D printing miniatures for role play and tabletop wargaming. Licensed sellers of Highland Miniatures, Epic Miniatures, Crippled God Foundry and Lost Kingdom

<https://www.ebay.co.uk/str/miniprintfactory>

MY Press & TTA Press

Magazines, books

<http://ttapress.com> and <https://interzone.press>

New Street Authors

Fiction, poetry and art cards from Birmingham based authors

<http://www.newstreetauthors.com>

NewCon Press

Publishers of science fiction, fantasy, and occasional horror; titles available as both paperbacks and signed limited edition hardbacks.

<http://www.newconpress.co.uk/info/books.asp>

PM Press

Radical and stimulating fiction and non-fiction, including the Outspoken Author series of novellas and interviews.

<https://pmpress.org.uk>

Ryann Fletcher books/A Nebulous Purpose art
Books and merch, art in the way of pins, prints, cards, and stationery
<http://RyannFletcher.com>

Sandra Bond (writer) and Fudjit
Fudge and fiction
<https://www.sandra-bond.com/>

Shoreline of Infinity
Magazines, books, mugs
<http://www.shorelineofinfinity.com>

Space Cat Press
'We are a small indie press publishing literature where imagination and space exploration collide. Includes anthologies of fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction.'
<https://spacecatpress.co.uk>

Stairwell Books
Stairwell Books: the best in Yorkshire writing! Based in York, tales from all over. Sci-fi, fantasy, story and poetry collections, children and YA: a book for everyone.
<https://www.stairwellbooks.co.uk/product-category/genres/sci-fi/>

Third Vault Yarns
Yarn, knitting patterns, project bags
<http://thirdvaultyarns.com/>

Wyldblood Press
Books and magazines
www.wyldblood.com

Zarduth
Books (my SF/fantasy fiction)
www.Zarduth.com

Fan tables

Also in the dealers' room at the convention:

1/2r Cruttenden
Used books

Belfast Eastercon bid
Bid to host Eastercon in Belfast in 2025

British Fantasy Society
Society celebrating fantasy, horror and speculative fiction
www.britishfantasysociety.org

British Science Fiction Association (BSFA)
Society supporting and promoting science fiction in all its forms
<https://www.bsfa.co.uk/>

Eurocon 2023
<https://eurocon2023.se>

Fan funds
Support to send European delegates to meet SF fans in other countries, and welcome overseas fans to European conventions. Specifically the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, the Going Under Fan Fund, and the European Fan Fund
<https://taff.org.uk/> and <https://taff.org.uk/guff> and <https://fandomrover.com/category/eff/>

Funcon 1
A fun convention in which space leopards probably won't eat your face
<https://funcon.lol>

Glasgow 2024 – A Worldcon For Our Futures
82nd World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) that will take place at the Scottish Events Campus (SEC) in Glasgow, Scotland from 8-12 August 2024.
<https://glasgow2024.org>

HSFCon / Erasmuscon
Organising Dutch Eurocon in 2024
<https://www.erasmuscon.nl>

The Lally Wall
Information about forthcoming conventions

Levitation – Eastercon 2024
eastercon2024.co.uk

Octocon
www.octocon.com

Pemmi-con (2023 NASFiC)
A convention promotions table. Hope to sell memberships!

The Royal Manticoran Navy | TRMN
Pens, pencils, stickers, ribbons, badges, lanyards, new member packs
<https://trmn.org>

Satellite 8
Convention sign-up
<https://eight.satellitex.org.uk>

Artists at Conversation

We were delighted that there were more than twenty-five artists exhibiting at Eastercon including:

Leslie Arrowsmith

'I make paper art pictures, not quite decoupage.'

Chris Baker (Fangorn)

Clare Boothby (online only)

Clare is a craft magpie.

Paul 'Mutartis' Boswell

Paul Boswell is a West Country-based illustrator and screen printer. Paul's background and influences in art are varied and range from graffiti art to sci-fi, folk horror and beyond. Paul enjoys creating mysterious and moody atmospheric artwork which has been used on many book covers and album sleeves: see his work at <https://www.instagram.com/mutartis/>

Jackie Burns

Jackie Burns is a Fellow of the International Association for Astronomical Artists (IAAA), a science communicator, UK and European Lead for STEAM (on behalf of the IAAA), and a multi-discipline artist. Her media include, but are not exclusive to, acrylic on canvas, watercolour, pencil, digital, fibre, glass, metal, clay, and creative writing.

Jim Burns

Judith Clute (online only)

See Judith's work at <https://judithclute.com/>

domin-IKA

Her paintings vary from abstract to the surreal and reflect her interest in animism and animalism. Works with ink, acrylic and watercolour. See her work at <https://www.instagram.com/dominika.hakutaku/>

Jackie Duckworth

Jackie is a printmaker and illustrator inspired by history and mythology, birds and beasts.

Sabine Furlong

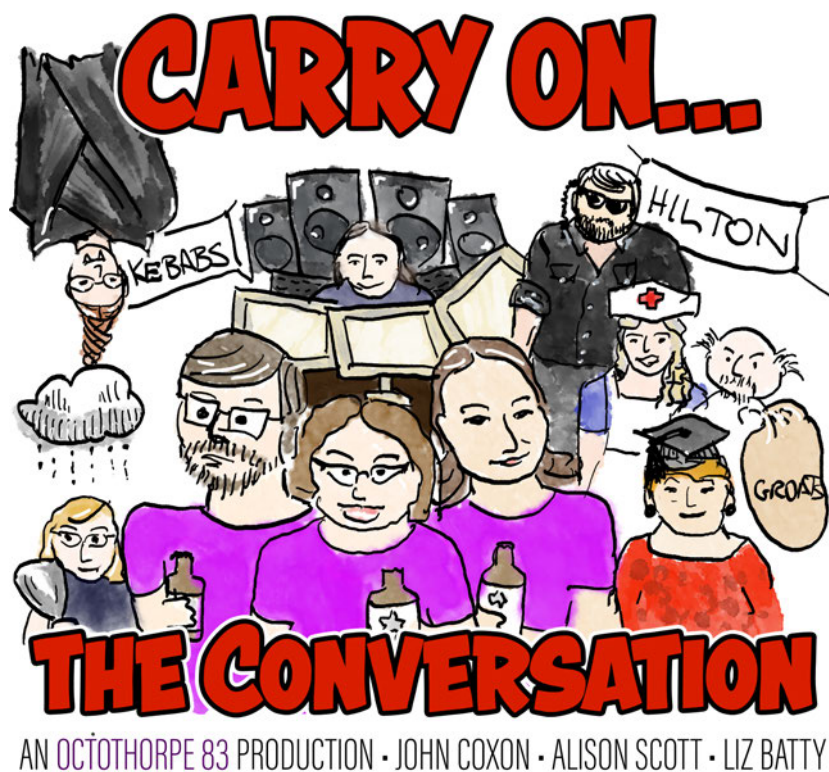
'I like to experiment with photography, light and viewpoints to create light-hearted moments of fun and beauty.'

Sarah Haddock

'I am a mixed media artist and use traditional textiles, such as fabrics, yarn, paint and clay, to create interesting and beautiful creature art. Some can be used as receptacles such as my creatures which eat and poop their contents; others just want to hug you or make you happy.'

Sue Jones

tortoiseloft.com



Phoenix

Phoenix is a neurodivergent firebird who creates art from data sets inspired by space, science and science fiction. All her works are sold to support charities – for more info see phoenixdataart.com or @phoenixdataart on social media.

Lisa Konrad

art.kunstmatrix.com/en/artist/lisa-konrad

David Lascelles

D A Lascelles, creator of fantasy images and digital art.

purpleport.com/portfolio/areteus

facebook.com/DavidLascellesPhotography

Esther MacCallum-Stewart**Cristina Macia**

'I use mainly polymer clay and micas to create steampunk and lovecraftian boxes and pendants, witch-rooms-in-a-box, etc. You can see these at instagram.com/cristinamacia'

Julie McMurray

snowdragonsart.wordpress.com

Fionnuala Murphy

Works in watercolour. 'My current series is looking at planets moving through spaces.'

Eira Short

'Hi, I'm Eira. I've been going to cons for over thirty-five years and enjoyed exhibiting my quirky artwork at many of them. I like traditional painting, dealing with pen and ink, gouache or oils. I'm currently painting a 12m mural in the school hall where I work. I also do Trapeze.'

Jasper Smithers

@smithersjasper

Smuzz

Smuzz is killing more publishing companies just by drawing/writing for them. It's a gift.

Outdated: smuzz.org.uk

Patchy: facebook.com/SmuzzArtistSMS

Anne Sudworth

annesudworth.co.uk

Adrian Tchaikovsky**Margaret Walty**

'The magic of imaginary worlds and the magic of the everyday world intermingle in my work – dragons in the skies and in the garden, dryads in the woods, tree cities and sea cities, and portals into elsewhere and elsewhere.'

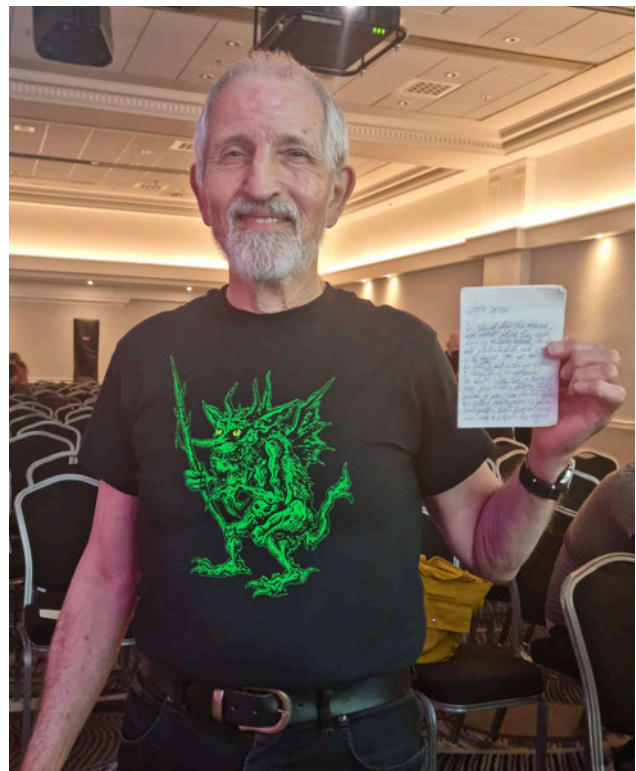
Green Demon

by Chris Morgan

9-11 April 2023

In the Eastercon art show this weekend, more macabre pictures than usual, many by Mutartis Boswell, who also sells prints & tee shirts, cards and mugs in the dealers' room next door. His first con, he said; we told him of others. I wanted to buy one of his spectacular tee shirts, chose this, a fluorescent green demon on black, with a spear suitable for poking those who don't applaud. He's getting ready to perform his poems, demon painted in bright dayglo limes, demon ready to perform his deadly rhymes.

Chris was the thirteenth Birmingham Poet Laureate and resolved to write some poems with thirteen lines.



The Doc Weir Award

by Mark Plummer

'The Dr Arthur R Weir Memorial Fund was discussed and it was agreed that the money collected during the past year, some fourteen pounds, should be devoted to a Fan Recognition Award in Doc's name.'

Skyrack #42, 27 April 1962, ed. Ron Bennett

...and that's how the Doc Weir Award came into being. That £14 funded a handsome silver cup on a black base, and a wooden presentation box. It was first presented in 1963 at the Eastercon in Peterborough; the winner, in absentia, was Peter Mabey.

Since then the Dr Arthur R Weir Memorial Award – the Doc Weir Award as it quickly became known – has been presented almost annually. Winners' names were initially added to the base but that's long since been filled and so now they flow onto the box itself.

Ron described it as a 'Fan Recognition Award' and over the years there's been some evolution in exactly what that means. The award to Peter in 1963 was for his work with the BSFA lending library, and if you look down the list of 57 previous winners you'll see the names of authors, booksellers and of course fans: fanzine editors and writers, convention runners, club organisers and people who just do stuff.

The Award is voted on by members attending the Eastercon (now including online members) and will be presented at some point during the convention. Voting was moved online by (inevitably) Alison Scott in 2022, which better reflects a hybrid attendance. You write down the name of the person you think deserves the Award, and your own name, taking care not to get the two muddled up. Lobbying isn't discouraged, although it's probably as well to keep it a secret from the subject of your lobbying.

The suggestion is that you vote for somebody who has made a significant contribution to fandom which has largely gone unrecognised, one of the unsung heroes if you like. I often say that the perfect Doc Weir candidate is somebody you don't think of until somebody else mentions their name, at which point it suddenly becomes blindingly obvious and you can't understand how you didn't think of it yourself. It's not necessarily an award for conrunning in general or Eastercon-running in particular, although it often is. The Award had never gone to somebody who lived outside the UK – until 2003, when it did. The Award had never been won jointly – until 2017, when it was. There's nothing to actually say you can't vote for somebody who's won it before, although arguably past winners are now at least a little bit sung. Most past winners were born before the Award was first presented, but there are plenty of people who were born after 1963 – often considerably so – who have nevertheless made a huge contribution. Have a look at the list on the next page and see who you think should be added to it the next time you get to vote.



Winners of the Doc Weir Award 1963-2023

1963: Peter Mabey	1994: Tim Broadribb
1964: Archie Mercer (d)	1995: Bernie Evans (d)
1965: Terry Jeeves (d)	1996: Mark Plummer
1966: Ken F Slater (d)	1997: John Harold
1967: Doreen Parker (Rogers) (d)	1998: Andy Croft
1968: Mary Reed	1999: ½r Cruttenden
1969: Beryl Mercer (d)	2000: Tim Illingworth
1970: J Michael Rosenblum (d)	2001: Noel Collyer
1971: Phil Rogers (d)	2002: Dave Tompkins (d)
1972: Jill Adams (d)	2003: Bill Burns
1973: Ethel Lindsay (d)	2004: Robert 'Nojay' Sneddon
1974: Malcolm Edwards	2005: Dave Lally
1975: Peter Weston (d)	2006: Steve Lawson
1976: Ina Shorrocks (d)	2007: Sue Edwards
1977: Keith H Freeman	2008: Eddie Cochrane
1978: Gregory Pickersgill	2009: Kari Sperring
1979: Rog Peyton	2010: Alice Lawson
1980: Bob Shaw (d)	2011: Mark Young
1981: John Brunner (d)	2012: Pete 'Smudge' Smith (d)
1982: no award	2013: Jan van't Ent
1983: no award	2014: Mark Meenan
1984: Joyce Slater (d)	2015: Martin Hoare (d)
1985: James White (d)	2016: Kathy Westhead
1986: no award	2017: Serena Culfeather and John Wilson
1987: Brian Burgess (d)	2018: Flick
1988: no award	2019: Jamie Scott
1989: Vincent Clarke (d)	2020: no award
1990: Roger Perkins (d)	2021: Alison Scott
1991: Pat Brown (Silver) (d)	2022: James Shields
1992: Roger Robinson	2023: Claire Brialey
1993: Bridget Wilkinson	

Past Eastercon summary accounts

In the past it was traditional for Eastercon souvenir books to publish the summary accounts of their predecessors. There hadn't been an opportunity for this to be done since Follycon in 2018 – when again it hadn't been done for a while and so the accounts were published from LX (2009), Odyssey (2010), Illustrious (2011), Olympus (2012), EightSquaredCon (2013), Satellite (2014) and Mancunicon (2016) – so we're going to pick up the slack here. Those accounts from previous Eastercons were made available online at the time, and in future they, and these more recent summaries, will be hosted at FANAC.org. Our thanks to all the past conventions who provided information.

The item headings are as supplied by each convention treasurer and so they're not necessarily consistent from one to the next. The accounts are published as supplied, with only minor edits to provide consistent spellings of e.g. 'Art show'.

Note also that the financial detail for Dysprosium (2015) and Ytterbium (2019) was provided for the final calendar year of operation, i.e. the one in which each convention took place; a breakdown of the income balance carried into that year or the dispersal of the balance carried forward in each case has not been made available.



Dysprosium (2015) – supplied by Wendrie Heywood

Income in 2015		Expenditure in 2015	
Bank balance at 1 January 2015	£48,634.34	Hotel expenses	£17,779.00
Memberships	£33,151.53	General publications	£438.75
Dealers' room	£290.76	Logistics	£3,705.00
Miscellaneous	£12,704.07	Access, H&S	£900.00
		Registration	£2,980.68
		Stationery	£2,614.24
		Passalong	£10,000.00
		Miscellaneous expenses	£26,461.24
		Tech ops	£9,493.68
		Marketing/ads	£3,770.19
		Art sales	£814.39
		Bank balance at 31 December 2015	£15,823.53
Total income	£94,780.70	Total expenses	£94,780.70

Innominate (2017) – supplied by John Dowd

Income		Expenditure	
Memberships	£42,155.00	Credit card charges	£1,132.50
Passalong	£12,991.30	Insurance	£500.00
Dealers' room	£1,505.00	Room hire	£8,805.00
Art show	£241.00	Registration	£1,232.50
		Childcare (crèche)	£3,325.00
		Transport	£300.00
		Con operations	£500.00
		Programme	£6,750.00
		Green room	£2,320.00
		Tech	£3,098.20
		Guests	£5,510.00
		Groats (volunteers)	£3,829.00
		Art show expenses	£1,000.00
		Dealers expenses	£500.00
		Printing	£1,880.00
		Passalong	£10,000.00
		Bank balance at 4 December 2017	£6,210.10
Total income	£56,892.30	Total expenses	£56,892.30

John Dowd, Innominate treasurer, adds: Some files were lost during an upgrade of the computer several years ago. This balance sheet has been created from the last pre-con budget sheet and the bank statements covering the convention.

The closing bank balance was used as start-up money for Concentric (see below).

Items that would appear in both income and expenditure columns, such as deposits, are not shown. Only the net commission for the art show is shown.

It is interesting to note that, like many conventions, Innominate covered its actual expenses from memberships. The passalong was used to meet early expenses such as the hotel deposit, and passalong from Innominate to later conventions was greater than the amount received.

Follycon (2018) – supplied by Phil Nanson

Income		Expenditure	
Memberships	£63,390.00	UK Guests	£2,984.98
Passalong	£10,500.00	US Guests	£6,511.17
BSFA sponsorship	£200.00	Tech	£14,375.00
T-shirt sales	£210.50	Logistics	£461.75
Adverts	£445.00	Wheelchair lifts	£1,128.00
Dealers' room, art show etc.	£2,590.00	Room hire and golf carts	£1,260.00
		Dealers and art show	£1,064.14
		Crèche	£4,476.00
		Real ale and beer tasting	£121.00
		Flyers, poster, factsheets	£496.26
		Read Me, badges etc.	£2,117.99
		Newsletter	£1,021.60
		Publications	£2,986.78
		Groats (volunteer hours @ £2)	£3,404.00
		Volunteer reward T-shirts	£773.40
		Ops	£942.72
		Volunteer food and drink	£1,254.89
		Programme drinks (green room)	£1,813.30
		Extravaganzas, prizes etc.	£7,262.48
		Enamel pins for members	£501.00
		Insurance	£1,339.28
		Eastercon.org	£200.00
		Grenadine (programme software)	£157.64
		Bank charges	£1,099.12
		Con-or-Bust bursaries to Follycon	£1,000.00
		Gratuities for hotel staff	£240.00
		Sundries	£143.00
		<i>Dispersal of surplus:</i>	
		New art show equipment	£2,000.00
		Milford SF Writers bursary	£650.00
		Diana Wynne Jones event bursaries	£250.00
		BRS/Unicon	£600.00
		SFF Masterclass	£500.00
		Con-or-Bust future bursaries	£550.00
		English PEN	£550.00
		National Literacy Trust	£550.00
		Amnesty	£550.00
		Passalong	£12,000.00
Total income	£77,335.50	Total expenses	£77,335.50

Ytterbium (2019) – supplied by Wendrie Heywood

Income in 2019

Bank balance at 1 January 2019	£53,434.27
Memberships	£22,108.11
Dealers' room	£100.00
Miscellaneous	£959.20
Launches	£183.00
Other income	£294.75
Art show commission	£12,076.00

Expenditure in 2019

Programme	£3,684.69
Guests	£3,842.59
Finance expenses	£5,020.81
Insurance	£1,512.00
General publications	£300.00
Website	£261.14
Logistics	£957.49
Access, H&S	£2,500.05
Registration	£855.00
Stationery	£2,943.14
Passalong	£8,516.39
Bursaries	£2,396.66
Miscellaneous expenses	£1,609.36
Volunteer costs	£759.29
Tech ops	£19,436.53
Guest of Honour costs	£1,854.02
Green room	£862.05
Bank charges	£30.96
Travel	£577.35
Marketing/ads	£394.00
Crèche	£2,275.00
Art sales	£11,346.30
Bank balance at 31 December 2019	£17,220.51

Total income

£89,155.33

Total expenses

£89,155.33



Concentric (2020) – supplied by John Dowd

Income		Expenditure	
Event deposit refund	£2,000.00	Events	£3,700.00
Hotel deposit refund	£3,600.00	Miscellaneous: promotions, publications and printing	£839.68
Memberships (includes dealers)	£54,304.23	Insurance	£1,041.60
Passalong (includes Innominate surplus, as above)	£15,088.20	Hotel deposit	£3,600.00
		Finance	£333.50
		Membership refunds	£25,956.96
		Passalong	£11,924.00
		Programme software (Grenadine)	£442.88
		Tech (including website and Zoom for bid session)	£652.03
		Bank balance at 26 March 2023	£26,501.78
Total income	£74,992.43	Total expenses	£74,992.43

John Dowd, Concentric treasurer, adds: Concentric was cancelled because of Covid-19. Once the hotel cancelled the booking we were able to reclaim the deposit and so we were able to see that members could be refunded. The insurance was no help as the kind of pandemic we faced was specifically excluded by the small print.

Members were keen to donate their memberships to help, despite efforts to persuade them to reclaim a refund; offers have therefore been made to following conventions to help with unbudgeted costs relating to Covid and virtual/hybrid issues.

ConFusion (2021) – supplied by John Dowd

Income		Expenditure	
Membership (net)	£16,115.38	Website	£860.78
Passalong	£9,000.00	Finance expenses	£488.58
Art show commission	£269.00	Video conference and streaming (RedBee)	£5,521.73
		Gathertown	£3,427.74
		Messaging	£206.09
		Programme	£35.28
		Art expenses (virtual display)	£215.99
		International charges	£300.13
		Events	£500.00
		Passalong	£10,000.00
		Volunteer T-shirts and pins	£886.00
		Tech (including prep for hybrid con)	£707.99
		Promotions	£9.50
		Bank and PayPal charges	£65.00
		Surplus at bank 21 January 2023	£2,159.57
Total income	£25,384.38	Total expenses	£25,384.38

John Dowd, ConFusion treasurer, adds: ConFusion was an unusual Eastercon. It was originally planned as a hybrid convention but partway through the process it became necessary to cancel the face-to-face part and go fully virtual.

This balance sheet shows net receipts and payments, e.g. the hotel deposit was returned in full so does not appear; partial refunds were made on face-to-face portions of memberships, so the net membership income is shown.

Reclamation (2022) provisional accounts – supplied by Phil Nanson

Income		Expenditure	
Passalong	£10,000.00	Guests	£5,675.71
Membership	£47,212.00	Tech	£14,613.62
Adverts	£668.00	Cophers	£2,823.20
Dealers	£950.00	Access	£348.00
Art show	£566.70	Site	£2,988.28
		Dealers' room and art show	£630.62
		Crèche	£2,743.00
		Publicity	£177.56
		Membership pack	£2,413.50
		Newsletter	£253.55
		<i>T-shirts – provisional</i>	£1,500.00
		Ops	£1,034.71
		Green room	£1,449.95
		Programme	£1,702.26
		Insurance	£1,283.00
		Web expenses	£331.71
		Covid precautions	£150.60
		Bank charges	£1,009.37
		Damages	£592.00
		Bursary contribution	£10.62
		Passalong	£10,000.00
		<i>To disburse – provisional</i>	£7,665.44
Total income	£59,396.70	Total expenses	£59,396.70
Bursary contributions received	£3,494.38	Bursaries funded	£3,505.00

The Eastercon: past, present and future

with notes by Mark Plummer

Year	Location	Name	Guest(s) of Honour
1	1948 London	Whitcon	Bertram Chandler
2	1949 London	Loncon	William F Temple
3	1952 London	London Science Fiction Convention	
4	1953 London	Coroncon	
5	1954 Manchester	Supermancon	John Russell Fearn
6	1955 Kettering	Cytricon	
7	1956 Kettering	Cytricon II	
8	1957 Kettering	Cytricon III	
9	1958 Kettering	Cytricon IV	
10	1959 Birmingham	Brumcon	Ken Slater
11	1960 London	London	EJ 'Ted' Carnell, Don Ford
12	1961 Gloucester	LXIcon	Kingsley Amis
13	1962 Harrogate	Ronvention	Tom Boardman
14	1963 Peterborough	Bullcon	Edmund Crispin
15	1964 Peterborough	RePetercon	Ted Tubb
16	1965 Birmingham	Brumcon II	Harry Harrison
17	1966 Yarmouth	Yarcon	Ron Whiting
18	1967 Bristol	Briscon	John Brunner
19	1968 Buxton	Thirdmancon	Kenneth Bulmer
20	1969 Oxford	Galactic Fair	Judith Merril
21	1970 London	SCI-CON 70	James Blish
22	1971 Worcester	Eastercon 22	Ethel Lindsay, Anne McCaffrey
23	1972 Chester	Chessmancon	Larry Niven
24	1973 Bristol	OMPAcon '73	Samuel R Delany
25	1974 Newcastle	Tynecon	Bob Shaw, Peter Weston
26	1975 Coventry	Seacon	Harry Harrison
27	1976 Manchester	Mancon 5	Peter Roberts, Robert Silverberg
28	1977 Coventry	Eastercon '77	John Bush
29	1978 Heathrow	Skycon	Roy Kettle, Robert Sheckley
30	1979 Leeds	Yorcon	Graham Charnock, Pat Charnock, Richard Cowper
31	1980 Glasgow	Albacon	Jim Barker, Colin Kapp
32	1981 Leeds	Yorcon II	Tom Disch, Dave Langford, Ian Watson
33	1982 Brighton	Channelcon	Angela Carter, John Sladek
34	1983 Glasgow	Albacon II	Marion Zimmer Bradley, Avedon Carol, James White
35	1984 Brighton	Seacon '84	Pierre Barbet, Waldemar Kumming, Josef Nesvadba, Christopher Priest, Roger Zelazny
36	1985 Leeds	Yorcon III	Gregory Benford, Linda Pickersgill
37	1986 Glasgow	Albacon III	Joe Haldeman, John Jarrold
38	1987 Birmingham	BECCON '87	Chris Atkinson, Jane Gaskell, Keith Roberts
39	1988 Liverpool	Follycon	Gordon Dickson, Gwyneth Jones, Greg Pickersgill, Len Wein
40	1989 Jersey	Contrivance	Avedon Carol, Rob Hansen, M John Harrison, Don Lawrence, Anne McCaffrey
41	1990 Liverpool	Eastcon	Iain Banks, Anne Page, SMS
42	1991 Glasgow	Speculation	Robert Holdstock
43	1992 Blackpool	Illumination	Paul J McAuley, Geoff Ryman, Pam Wells

Year	Location	Name	Guest(s) of Honour
44	1993 Jersey	Helicon	John Brunner, George R R Martin, Karel Thole, Larry van der Putte
45	1994 Liverpool	Sou'Wester	Diane Duane, Neil Gaiman, Barbara Hambly, Peter Morwood
46	1995 London	Confabulation	Lois McMaster Bujold, Roger Robinson, Bob Shaw
47	1996 Heathrow	Evolution	Jack Cohen, Colin Greenland, Paul Kincaid, Maureen Kincaid Speller, Bryan Talbot, Vernor Vinge
48	1997 Liverpool	Intervention	Brian Aldiss, Jon Bing, Octavia Butler, David Langford
49	1998 Manchester	Intuition	Ian McDonald, Martin Tudor, Connie Willis
50	1999 Liverpool	Reconvene	Peter S Beagle, John Clute, Jeff Noon
51	2000 Glasgow	2Kon	Guy Gavriel Kay, Katherine Kurtz, Deborah Turner-Harris
52	2001 Hinckley	Paragon	Stephen Baxter, Claire Brialey, Lisanne Norman, Mark Plummer, Michael Scott Rohan
53	2002 Jersey	Helicon 2	Brian Stableford, Harry Turtledove, Peter Weston
54	2003 Hinckley	Seacon '03	Chris Baker (Fangorn), Christopher Evans, Mary Gentle
55	2004 Blackpool	Concourse	Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Danny Flynn, Sue Mason, Christopher Priest, Philip Pullman
56	2005 Hinckley	Paragon 2	Eve Harvey, John Harvey, Ben Jeapes, Ken MacLeod, Richard Morgan, Robert Rankin
57	2006 Glasgow	Concussion	Brian Froud, Elizabeth Hand, M John Harrison, Justina Robson, Ian Sorensen
58	2007 Chester	Contemplation	
59	2008 Heathrow	Orbital 2008	Neil Gaiman, Tanith Lee, China Miéville, Rog Peyton, Charles Stross
60	2009 Bradford	Eastercon LX	Bill Burns, Mary Burns, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, David Lloyd, Dirk Maggs, Tim Powers
61	2010 Heathrow	Odyssey 2010	Iain M Banks, Mike Carey, Fran Dowd, John Dowd, Carlos Ezquerra, Alastair Reynolds, Liz Williams
62	2011 Birmingham	Illustrious	Vince Docherty, Peter F Hamilton, David A Hardy, Roz Kaveney, David Weber
63	2012 Heathrow	Olympus 2012	Margaret Austin, Paul Cornell, Cory Doctorow, Martin Easterbrook, George R R Martin, Steph Swainston,
64	2013 Bradford	EightSquaredCon	Edward James, Anne Sudworth, Freda Warrington, Walter Jon Williams
65	2014 Glasgow	Satellite 4	Jim Burns, Alice Lawson, Steve Lawson, Juliet McKenna, John Meaney; Special Guest: Terry Pratchett
66	2015 Heathrow	Dysprosium	Jim Butcher, Herr Döktor, Seanan McGuire, Caroline Mullan
67	2016 Manchester	Mancunicon	Aliette de Bodard, Dave Clements, Ian McDonald, Sarah Pinborough
68	2017 Birmingham	Eastercon 2017 / Innominate	Pat Cadigan, Judith Clute, Colin Harris
69	2018 Harrogate	Follycon	Kieron Gillen, Christina Lake, Nnedi Okorafor, Kim Stanley Robinson
70	2019 Heathrow	Ytterbium	DC, Frances Hardinge, Sydney Padua, John Scalzi
71	2020 [cancelled: Covid-19]	Concentric	Rhianna Pratchett, Adam Roberts, Alison Scott, Tade Thompson
72	2021 online	ConFusion	Dan Abnett, Dave Lally, Nik Vincent
73	2022 Heathrow	Reclamation	Mary Robinette Kowal, Philip Reeve, Tasha Suri, Nicholas Whyte
74	2023 Birmingham	Conversation 2023	Zen Cho, Niall Harrison, Jennell Jaquays (virtual), Kari Sperring, Adrian Tchaikovsky, Ursula Vernon (virtual)
75	2024 Telford	Levitation	Jackie Burns, Genevieve Cogman, Michelle Sagara, Elsa Sjunneson (virtual), Dr Srinarahari (virtual), Tade Thompson
76	2025 Belfast	Reconnect	Lauren Beukes, Derek Landy, Ian McDonald, Jeanette Ng, Rebecca Roanhorse, Will Simpson

The list of Eastercons was first compiled in 1971 by Peter Weston, working with Ken Bulmer and Pete Roberts. For some reason they decided to start the sequence with 1948, ignoring several earlier gatherings between 1937 and 1944. They concluded that there had been 21 prior conventions and hence the 1971 convention was called Eastercon 22.

However, Rob Hansen later discovered that they'd omitted the 1957 Kettering convention. This was added in to the sequence in 1989, and Eastercon 22 was saved from numerological embarrassment by declassifying the previously included 1951 Festiventon, on grounds that it was by design an international convention.

In 1948 and from 1952 to 1954 conventions were held at Whitsun (now overtaken by the late May bank holiday). In 1949 and from 1955 onwards they were at Easter.

Between 1959 and 1966 the conventions were run under the auspices of the BSFA and were styled officially 'British Science Fiction Association Convention' or similar. The 1960 convention doesn't seem to have had any other name.

1971 was the first convention to formally use the name 'Eastercon', although it had been used informally before. Indeed, the 1944 convention was called Eastercon, but for some reason that doesn't count.

Mancon 5 makes sense if you know that it was preceded by Mancon in 1952 (which wasn't an Eastercon), Supermancon, Thirdmancon and Chessmancon. For some values of 'sense'. Satellite 4 was preceded by three non-Eastercon Satellites.

At least two of these conventions (2007 and 2017) were replacements for earlier selected conventions which had to fold. Take care if you're thinking about bidding for 2027.

Eastercon LX was the *sixtieth* Eastercon, whereas LXICON was held 48 years earlier *in* 1961.

For various reasons Mary Gentle (2003), Sharyn November (2007), Dirk Maggs (2009), Carlos Ezquerro (2010) and Steph Swainston (2012) were unable to attend the conventions at which they were guests. In 2020 the Eastercon was unable to take place – apart from an online bidding session – due to Covid-19 restrictions and so Rhianna Pratchett, Adam Roberts, Alison Scott and Tade Thompson were unable to attend as guests.

This latest iteration of the list draws on Rob Hansen's *Then*, available via ae.ansible.uk

In Memoriam year till April 2023

Erik Arthur

Andrew Barton (Ambrosius, Mad Logician)

Anne Bodell

Ruth Coleman-Taylor

Roger Earnshaw

Roy Evans

Chris Fowler

AJ Hall (legionseagle)

Eve Harvey

Alun Tegai Hughes

Leonid Kourits

Michael Luckman

Joe McNally

Charles Partington

Pat Silver

Maureen Kincaid Speller

Dave Tompkins

Clint Wastling

'No one is finally dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away – until the clock he wound up winds down, until the wine she made has finished its ferment, until the crop they planted is harvested. The span of someone's life is only the core of their actual existence.'

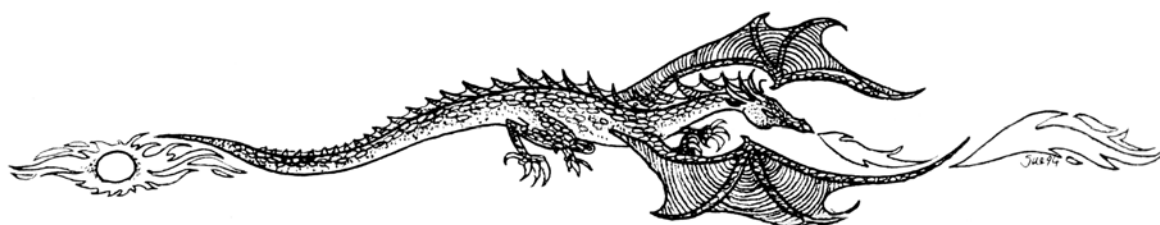
– Terry Pratchett, *Reaper Man*

Membership summary

Member type		Summary by day	
		Days	Number of members
Adult attending	661	All days	920
Adult low income	156	Friday	4
Teen attending	18	Saturday	6
Child attending	15	Sunday	6
Adult online/ supporting	87	Monday	2
Teen online/ supporting	1		
Total	938	Total	938

Members by country

Argentina	1	Jersey	1
Australia	5	Luxembourg	1
Belgium	4	Malaysia	1
Brazil	1	Netherlands	11
Canada	7	New Zealand	2
Denmark	1	Nigeria	1
Finland	2	Norway	10
France	2	Poland	1
Germany	7	Russia	1
Iceland	1	Spain	3
India	1	Sweden	21
Ireland	16	Switzerland	3
Isle of Man	1	Thailand	1
Israel	4	United Kingdom	782
Italy	2	United States	44
		Grand Total	938



Conversation end credits

Your committee were...



Caroline Mullan – Chair

Caroline has been attending Eastercons since 1980 and running them, on and off, since 1985, with excursions into Worldcons and other conventions on the side. She must have been doing something right along the way as she was Guest of Honour at Dysprosium, the 2015 Eastercon. Maybe it was being a founding and continuing member of TWP, the British women's APA, or twenty years as a Trustee of the Science Fiction Foundation, or articles in award-winning fanzines such as *Banana Wings*, or hanging out with Brian Ameringen at Porcupine Books. Anyway, she hasn't rested on her laurels and carries on conrunning: most recently before Conversation she coordinated the programme for Follycon, the 2018 Eastercon in Harrogate, and helped to create the Hugo packet for DisCon III. She looked forward to continuing the Eastercon conversation in 2023 and beyond by all possible means.



Brian Ameringen – Finance

Brian was born at a very early age of the world. He discovered science fiction around 1965 and SF fandom in 1971, and always dared to look forward. He's been attending conventions since then, and helping to run them since 1979. He's the founder, cook, bottle-washer and Lord High Everything Else of Porcupine Books, selling SF and fantasy at conventions from 1989 to 2017. He then volunteered to oversee finance for Conversation.



Claire Brialey – Co-ordinator

Claire has been enjoying science fiction for over forty years, running conventions for more than thirty, and publishing fanzines for at least twenty-five; those numbers keep on rising. She's done her time as a judge for the Arthur C Clarke Award and the Rotsler Award and administrator of the British Science Fiction Association awards and FAAn awards, and has won a plethora of fanzine awards too. She undertakes determined admin for a range of other fannish projects, including fan funds, and is unable to function without coffee and books.



Steve Cooper – Deputy Chair

Steve has been volunteering and helping to run fan conventions for over twenty-five years, including chairing the 2017 Eastercon (Innominate – the previous Eastercon held at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole) and co-chairing the 2014 Worldcon (Loncon 3, in London). He has also co-run a number of conrunning conventions in the UK, which he aims to get back to after he has finished acting as Treasurer for the 2024 Worldcon in Glasgow.



John Dodd – Site

John works conventions: that's what he does; that's all he does. He was Co-Area Head for MIMO for the 2019 Worldcon, Committee at Eastercons since 2020, Director of Dragonmeet, Front of House at UK Games Expo, RPG manager at Airecon and UK Games Expo and Director of Longcon. He enjoys building events where everyone can have a great time; and even now, in times when everything is not as it once was, he still looks for ways for others to have a good time. He's a Swordsman, a Devotee of the Iron Church, a preacher of handwriting, and a writer of games; he published his own RPG, *Quest*, in 2018. He's been line developer of SLA Industries and has written for several different games companies, including Cubicle 7 and Modiphius Entertainment. He also wrote a million words in 2014 and has never stopped since then; writing is what keeps him sane, and his SF novel *Ocean of Stars* was published in 2022. You can find him on Facebook or by typing 'Millionwordman' into any search engine in the world.



Karen Fishwick – Access

Karen has a professional background in volunteer management and community projects, having worked in this area for over fifteen years. She holds an NVQ level 4 in volunteer management. She has been running the logistics side of events for a number of years, including UK Fantasycon and an annual computer games convention, and has also volunteered for World Fantasy Convention. She loves to read genre books and writes an occasional review. She is also the secretary of the British Fantasy Society. Karen is a disabled woman who is passionate about access and supporting marginalised voices.



Zi Graves – Programme

Zi was relatively new to the convention-running side of things, but had earned a few volunteer T-shirts doing everything from running errands at Nine Worlds to running games at Worldcon to helping run programme at a prior Eastercon. This was their first time as programme head, and they were hoping to offer something for everyone with Conversation 2023's hybrid approach.



Alison Scott – Communications

Alison discovered science fiction fandom in her university SF society longer ago than she cares to remember, and has never looked back. Her projects and plots include the Hugo- and Nova-winning fanzine *Plokta*, and conrunning on Eastercons, Worldcons and, most recently, the online convention Punctuation. She has won the Rotsler Award for lifetime fan art achievement, and is the current GUFF (Going Under Fan Fund) delegate; at the time of Conversation she was waiting anxiously for the moment when it was safe to travel to Australia and New Zealand as a representative of European fandom. She won the 2021 Doc Weir Award. All this makes her the first woman ever to win all four major UK fan awards, according to Conversation Co-ordinator Claire Brialey. Alison can be heard every fortnight pontificating about the state of science fiction and fandom on the podcast Octothorpe.



James Turner – Tech

James has worked in a technical capacity for conferences, theatre and broadcast throughout most of the last twenty-five years. Much of his input is generally unremarkable although he was the lighting designer for a couple of seasons of *The Now Show* (Radio 4) while the radio theatre was being refurbished. His first convention was Interaction, the 2005 Glasgow Worldcon. Since then he has attended most Eastercons, with a couple more Worldcons thrown in for good measure, and often ends up helping in some technical capacity. An avid reader and lapsed gamer, he met his wife while rearranging the F/SF section of the school library; a conversation started then about what to read next which is still ongoing today. Outside tech James has a number of interests including teaching a small group of eager learners how to ring church bells.

Honour roll

Many thanks to all the teams of volunteers, and their leaders:

Sue Dawson (social media)

Jackie Duckworth (virtual art show and artist)

Tim Duckworth (art show)

Sue Edwards (green room)

Flick (newsletter)

Andrew January (website)

Emily January (Discord)

Pat Maher (ops hub)

Sue Mason (artist)

Farah Mendlesohn (dealers' room)

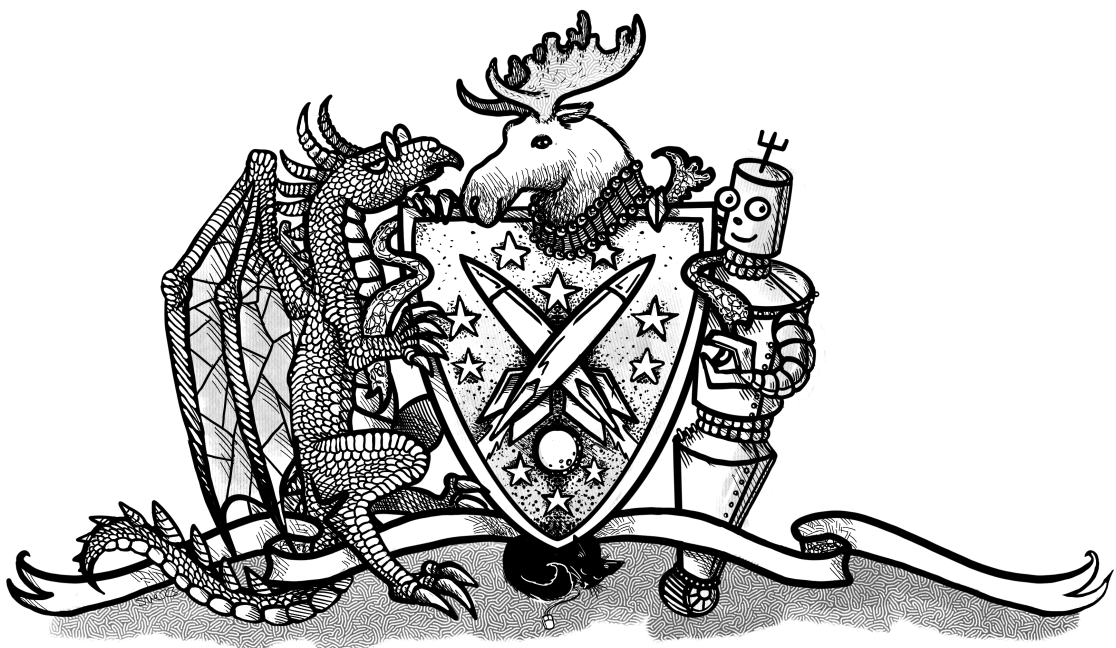
Judith Mortimore (membership)

James Shields (database)

Martin Smart (registration)

Shana Worthen (guest liaison)

And many thanks again to everyone who participated in the convention. It's down to the volunteers who contributed their time, effort and enthusiasm – onsite and online, before, during, and even after the con – that Conversation 2023 was everything it was.

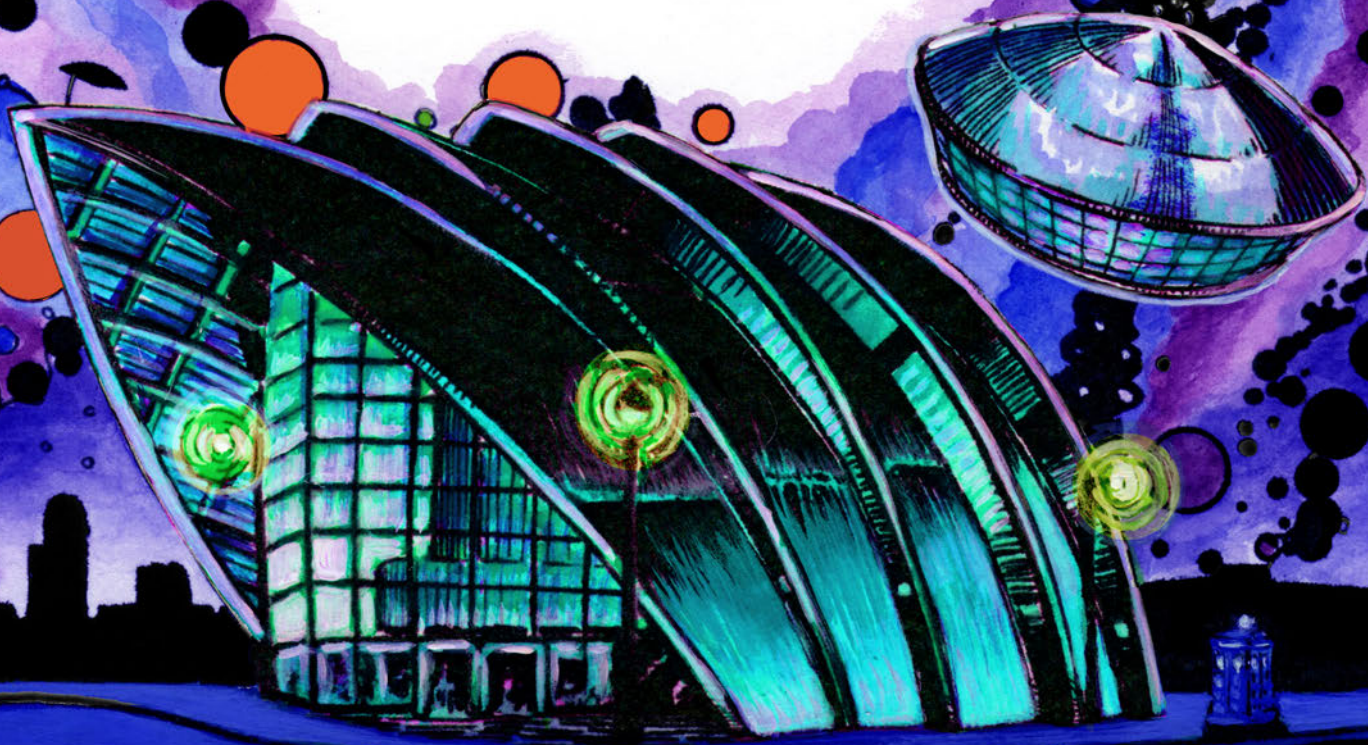


Glasgow 2024

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