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The Great Gray Mossy

By Harry Turtledove

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The Best of Beneath Ceaseless Skies

Online Magazine, Year Seven

Stories by:
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Kon
Maureen E. Mc
Michael Moor
Robert Silvers
Michael Swan

ALL-STAR ISSUE!

STRANGE HORIZONS

Samples of 2021 Fan Writings

By Jason Sanford

Contents

[Introduction](#)

Essays and Special Reports

[Baen Books Forum Being Used to Advocate for Political Violence](#)

[No One Creates Alone](#)

[Genre Grapevine Special Report: A Truly Global SF/F Genre Must Recognize the Financial Barriers Faced by Many International Authors and Creatives](#)

[Genre Grapevine Primer On the Latest Worldcon and Hugo Award Explosion](#)

[Genre Grapevine on SF/F Abuse and Harassment Campaigns](#)

[Voting issues with 2021 Dragon Awards](#)

Samples of Genre Grapevine columns

[Genre Grapevine for 2/9/2021](#)

[Genre Grapevine for 4/30/2021](#)

[Genre Grapevine for 5/29/2021](#)

[Genre Grapevine for 9/26/2021](#)

[Genre Grapevine for 10/31/2021](#)

Introduction

I'm honored to be a finalist for the 2022 Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer. This document contains examples of my 2021 fan writings, including samples of my regular Genre Grapevine column reporting on the science fiction and fantasy genres. I wrote 14 editions of my regular Genre Grapevine during 2021, [which I self-published on my Patreon](#).

I also wrote a number of essays and special reports, with my highest profile report being how the Baen Books forum Baen's Bar was being used to advocate for political violence after the 2020 United States elections. In response to my report, Baen publisher Toni Weiskopf took down the forum to investigate the issue. Nearly two months later the forums returned, with a new company completely separate from Baen Books running the Bar. While Weiskopf and Baen Books tried to act like there was nothing wrong with what had been previously posted in their forums, the fact that Baen Books removed the forum from their own url and now have a separate company running the forums is proof to me that what I covered in my report was extremely valid.

Other essays and special reports from 2021 include:

- "No One Creates Alone," an essay exploring creativity that I'm particularly proud of;
- A special report on the financial barriers faced by many international authors and creatives;
- Coverage of the 2021 Worldcon;
- A special report on abuse and harassment campaigns in the SF/F genre;
- and much more.

All of the columns, essays and special reports in this document can also [be accessed by the general public through my website](#).

Thank you for reading my fan writings.

Sincerely,

Jason Sanford
www.jasonsanford.com

Baen Books Forum Being Used to Advocate for Political Violence

(published February 15, 2021)

This is an investigative report about how [Baen's Bar](#), the private forum run by the science fiction and fantasy publishing company [Baen Books](#), is being used to advocate for extremist political violence. Evidence will be presented. Comments by a number of the forum's users will be shared.[See Note 1 below]

I believe it's vitally important for the SF/F genre to know what is going on in Baen's Bar. As the world has discovered in recent years, disinformation and online threats of violence do not remain in one place and this applies equally to the SF/F genre. When online threats of violence are ignored and encouraged, there can be unintended and possibly deadly consequences to everyone.

Baen Books is a historically important genre publisher. I don't believe the company supports the advocacy of political violence on their forum, but they are also doing little to stop their forum from being used for this purpose. They have the ability to deal with this issue but simply choose not to.

As I will show, this attitude toward their forum desperately needs to change.

History of Baen's Bar

If you're not familiar with Baen's Bar, it is a large private forum run by Baen Books. From the company's start in 1983, Baen Books pushed the technological boundaries for what a publisher could do to reach their audience, an attitude instilled in them by founding publisher and editor Jim Baen. For example, Baen was one of the first publishers to set up a website to reach the public.

Jerry Pournelle was once one of Baen Books' most well-known authors. After the company set up its website in the 1990s, Pournelle urged Jim Baen to add a chat feature to the site so book readers could speak directly to the publisher. This was the beginning of the company's forum, which started as a [bulletin board system](#) and eventually grew into Baen's Bar.

As of February 9, 2021, the Bar had 64,280 registered users, although there appear to be only a few thousand active members.[See Note 2] In addition to discussions and debates the forum also publishes "[snippets](#)" of yet-to-be published Baen books along with handling submissions for both the publishing company along with Eric Flint's 1632 anthologies and the [associated Grantville Gazette](#). [See Note 3]

Baen and the company's current publisher, Toni Weiskopf, market many of their books toward a specific subset of readers, what John Scalzi has called the "[Orthodox Church of Heinlein](#)." [See Note 4] As a result of this editorial bent, the press frequently publishes books by outspokenly conservative SF authors such as Tom Kratman, Larry Correia, John Ringo, and Sarah A. Hoyt.

However, it'd be a mistake to think Baen only publishes socially conservative writers. Bestselling Baen author Eric Flint, for example, was a long-time progressive political activist and member of the Socialist Workers Party. Other authors published by Baen include Joanna Russ, Lois McMaster Bujold, and Harry Turtledove, none of whom fit into the conservative author narrative.

However, while the publishing company may publish authors with a range of political views, the Baen's Bar forum definitely has a conservative tilt. This can be easily seen in many of the Bar's most contentious subforums, such as those dealing with politics and other controversial issues.

For all of the forum's existence Baen Books has essentially adopted and encouraged an "anything goes" rule for posts. And the forum is also known for an attitude of "if you can't handle the heat, stay out of the kitchen," a saying frequently quoted on the forum. Remember that saying, because it'll be used by a forum participant later in this report as a way of implying that advocating violence against others is no big deal.

Baen's Bar has also become [well-known in the genre community as a place where racism, sexism, homophobia and general fascism](#) continually pop up. For example, a Baen's Bar user from India was [nicknamed "The Swarthy Menace" on the forum by author Tom Kratman](#). People on the forum thought that was the height of clever humor.

Racist comments and innuendos frequently appear in many forum discussions. In a thread last year titled "Soft Civil War & Trump's Army," user Captrandy wrote that political conflicts in the USA could be solved if "[all the angry and non angry white males should stop going to work for a month or so](#)." In another political thread, user Pugmak wrote "[Simple competence has been declared white supremacy. Knowing how to do your job and expecting others to do likewise is now white supremacy and workplace oppression](#)."

All of which may lead you to believe Baen's Bar isn't moderated. Which is false. The forum has a number of active moderators and in the past has even banned a handful of topics from discussion, as will be covered later. But these days it appears few if any comments are removed. It also appears only one user has ever been banned from the forum, in this case for ironically pushing liberal political views in an argument with author John Ringo.[See Note 5]

Forum Comments Advocating Violence

Since the November 3rd elections, Baen's Bar has seen a surge of new registrants.[See Note 6] While most of these new members have not yet posted anything, some of these users appeared to join the forum because other platforms they used, such as Parler and now-banned Reddits, had been shut down.

For example, a user named Turk joined on January 11, 2021, writing "I heard about this site on a few other forums. Conservative but not rabidly or idiotically."

So what did Turk believe qualified as "not" being rabidly or idiotically conservative? When someone on the forum praised the police officer who led the rioters away from the Senate floor during the Capitol siege, Turk said, "[He should have let them invade the senate floor. Time those POS's faced a little reality](#)." The rest of that thread then discussed how the riot wasn't that bad because not many cops were really hurt (fact check: over 100 were injured, a number of them seriously) and "only" 5 people were killed, which to forum users meant the siege wasn't that serious.

This view was shared by others on the Bar, with user Arun.tblp describing the Capitol siege as a "peaceful protest."

However, what's most worrying about Baen's Bar is that since the 2020 Presidential election, the forum has seen a large number of posts urging violence against political opponents.

For example, [as reported earlier by File770](#), author Tom Kratman has used the forum to urge Trump to "start his own well-armed militia." Kratman added that Trump should say "I can start the civil war with a stamp of my foot. I've refrained, so far, but you cannot count on that restraint under all circumstances."

Kratman also explained what he thought the militia is for:

"The militia – again, a well_armed_militia – is necessary to present a threat in being to the powers that be such that, should they use extra-, pseudo-, and quasi-legal means to try to suppress the party, the price presented will be far too high."

Kratman [finished the post by saying the militia should](#) "recruit working class blacks, Hispanics, and Asians" because "they can engage in violence at need" while the media won't "condemn people of color for anything they do."

It's worth noting a number of Baen's Bar users posted comments agreeing with Kratman's words in that thread.

There are tons of discussions on the forum about the pending second American Civil War (frequently shortened to ACW2). For example, user Winterset wrote a thread titled "It may start sooner than I thought" on January 9, 2021, only a few days after the Capitol siege. This user wrote: "With the

idiocy of Pelosi and company on this truly obscene impeachment fiasco, and what the social media types are doing now, ACW2 is marginally closer. At this rate by summer the gunpowder will be burning everywhere.”

Winterset also wrote a thread titled “Musings on the future” on November 8, 2020, saying:

“Trump losing is a good thing. IF he had won things would be better for a while but the Dims would keep up the garbage. Now they will do the stupid power mad grab that will set off what NEEDS to happen. Which is ACW2. Those that claim its already happening as usual cannot understand reality. A real civil war is killing in job lots and all that goes with it.”

No one in this thread disputed what Winterset said, with some of the people responding by pointing out possible targets for the ACW2. A moderator with the username Theoryman wrote, “[As I’ve already pointed out, rendering ANY large city is uninhabitable is quite easy... And the Left lives in cities. The question is just how many of its inhabitants will survive...](#)” Theoryman later in the thread suggested shooting transformers in cities with high-power rifles to make the cities “uninhabitable until restored,” adding in another post that “[The point is to kill enough of them that they can not arise for another 50 years... or more.](#)”

User Br’er Tiger also wrote in that thread, saying “[The problem isn’t that you killed too many, but that you killed too few.](#)”

Other users in the thread pointed out that it may be harder to destroy American cities than people think, saying that, for example, the water aqueduct for New York City is buried too deep to easily target.

Note these users weren’t saying the entire discussion was wrong – they were quibbling over what to target. And also remember the user named [Theoryman quoted above is a moderator for Baen’s Bar](#) (note that in the linked image I deleted info possibly identifying Theoryman because I refuse to dox people). Yet instead of moderating this thread, Theoryman said to kill enough people so they don’t rise again.

In a thread titled “Who killed Ashli Babbitt?” users discussed the Capitol police officer who shot Babbitt as she broke into the Capitol. User James/G [wrote in that thread on February 5, 2021, that:](#)

“Since the week of the event, There has been very little said, compared to the sort of coverage you see for someone like George Floyd or Jacob Blake. Look at some ugly facts; She was White. She was not a large woman. She was unarmed. The only thing that would have got this swept under the rug faster, was if the shooter had been black.”

When a user in the thread pointed out a recent news article saying the officer was unlikely to be charged, Theoryman responded by saying “[Which is why the guy needs doxed... After that, the problem will take care of itself.](#)”

Let’s be very blunt about what Theoryman is saying: He is urging people to kill a police officer who defended the U.S. Capitol once they learn the officer’s name. And yet again, this user is a moderator for Baen’s Bar, meaning the publishing company selected this user to monitor and manage discussions on their forum.

And this isn’t the only example of violence being urged on the forums. On January 29, 2021, the user Turk, who again joined the forum after the Capitol siege, responded in a thread about surviving the Biden presidency by writing that he’d recommend “[Cleaning our weapons and waiting until you and yours make the final fatal mistake.](#)”

It’s worth saying not everyone on Baen’s Bar is advocating stuff like this. In what appears to be a response to the above comment, a user started a thread titled “[Time to Delete this Topic](#)” and said that the entire Politics section of the Bar should be nuked. When someone asked why, this user wrote “[I understand polite civil discourse. But advocating the murder of individuals due to political reasons should not be ignored, and absolutely not encouraged.](#)”

In response, user Br’er Tiger wrote “So ... who was he planning to murder?” and “btw: cleaning weapons can be a very zen-like process for some people ... calms the mind.” User James/G wrote “we’re just talking about causing violence, but in the manner of ‘This is a warning, do not proceed further’ type of manner. As several have stated, if the Moderate/Conservative finally do resort to violence, it will actually be something that will have Despots in Foreign countries going pale, and saying, ‘Nope, not gonna piss those people off.’”

And elsewhere in that thread about deleting posts encouraging violence, a user wrote that "...folks who can NOT handle the heat be kept out of the kitchen."

Returning to discussions on the pending second American Civil War, which appears to a favorite topic on the Bar, user Peke wrote on January 8, 2021, that "[I can see a smallish force with good skills at explosive handling, bringing a large city to its knees just through a few well-placed booms at some of the points I mentioned.](#)"

Fortunately, that topic caught the attention of moderators. That's sarcasm on my part because a few posts after Peke's comment a moderator named [James S Cochrane responded to the pending civil war thread by saying](#) "You aren't seeing a lot of public commentary because all communications are insecure. But most of the former SpecOps people I know have gone quiet. People who trained for twenty years to lead insurgencies or put rounds on target at a mile plus. The Left has also driven off a lot of cops who couldn't stomach their behavior, most major cities are seriously understaffed at this point."

Good moderation there.

Update: After publishing my report I saw these screenshots of a Baen's Bar moderator named Ben-David also calling for violence, including for the streets to "[flow with blood.](#)" This moderator also wrote about there being "[some genetic markers that predispose a person to being liberal](#)" and [enslaving leftists after they lose the war.](#) Again, this is a forum moderator saying this.

There are also a number of threads on the forum discussing how to equip militia members. During one of these threads, a user asked "The crux of the matter is what does a militia unit do these days? Are they static defenders? Are they light infantry? Are they recon? What exactly, is their role?"

User APPilot, who claims to be a pilot out of Missouri, started a thread on January 10, 2021, titled "[Behind Enemy Lines](#)" by saying:

"Is it real enough yet? Are we going to sit by and watch as we did during the late 30's and let the pogroms play out? Are we gonna let the Katyn Forest repeat? Wait until there is proof the bodies are stacking up? The lack of immediacy on the right is disgusting."

I could go on, but I think you should be getting an idea of the types of comments on the Bar encouraging political violence.

Why Won't Baen Address This Issue?

As I said at the beginning of this report, Baen Books sets the boundaries of what is and is not allowed on their private forum. They obviously have control over their forums and even have assigned a number of moderators to manage the Bar.

And Baen Books has in the past banned some topics from being discussed on their forum. In July 2008, a moderator named Silverdrake wrote a post titled "Newbie FAQ 2: The LaBrea Tar Pits, aka Banned Topics." In this post Silverdrake explained that a number of topics were banned from the forum because "Some topics have mired in muck, choked to death, and sunk out of sight several times over."

These banned topics included discussions on the 2000 United States Presidential election, the US Civil War, gender rights, questions related to "why Mr. Ringo completely dismisses Canada and any contribution Canada could make to a defense of North America," women in combat, abortion, and a few random topics such as Mercedes Lackey.[See Note 7]

And one of these banned topics, "Genetic engineering to select for a genetic defect in a child," so enraged Jim Baen that "he didn't want to have any part in propounding it anywhere on his site, even something as small as the infinitesimal amount to which he would be footing the bill."

So obviously Baen Books has banned certain topics from their forum in the past. Despite this, comments advocating political violence are currently not only allowed, they are encouraged by many forum users including moderators.

Brianna Wu [wrote an excellent thread last year about how many people, including journalists, didn't initially take Gamergate seriously.](#) However, Gamergate quickly turned into a vector for online radicalization which infected other aspects of society, including global politics.

This isn't to say Gamergate started all the troubles in our world, or to imply that Baen's Bar is the next Gamergate. But as I said at the start of this report, when online radicalization and threats of violence are ignored there are frequently unintended and even deadly consequences. For example, a recent survey from the American Enterprise Institute found that [nearly three in 10 Americans now believe political violence is acceptable](#).

Let me say this loudly and strongly: It is not free speech to threaten violence against someone you politically disagree with. Someone saying "I will kill you!" is not engaging in a debate or discussion. They are making a threat.

And Baen Books is allowing users to make threats on their forum.

Baen publisher Toni Weiskopf [is the editor Guest of Honor at DisCon III, the 2021 Worldcon](#). Each year Worldcon hosts in-depth interviews with each Guest of Honor. During this year's interview I'd really like Weiskopf to be asked about her company's private forum being used to advocate for political violence. Does she find this acceptable? Does she condone these types of statements? Why did Baen Books previously ban some topics from their forum but doesn't currently ban advocacy of political violence?

I doubt Weiskopf supports violent comments like those found on her forum, and I also doubt Baen Books as a company does.

But if that's true, why are they providing a platform for such comments?

Again, Baen Books has ultimate power over their forum. They could easily ban any user advocating political violence and delete posts calling for the same. They have chosen not to do this.

They need to immediately stop allowing their forums to be used for this purpose.

* * *

End Notes

[Note 1] While I don't link to the specific posts on Baen's Bar cited in this report, which can only be accessed after logging into the private forum, I did take screenshots of everything referenced. Update: I went back in and added links to many of the screenshots.

[Note 2] According to member info for Baen's Bar, which is publicly available on the forum, just under 1,100 users have made more than 100 comments on the Bar since December 2011 (which is as far back as the publicly available member info goes for the forum's current version). And only 8,000 users have made a single comment since December 2011, with 2,000 of this number making a single comment then not posting a second time.

[Note 3] Baen Books is one of the few large book publishers to accept novel submissions from unagented writers. And when Jim Baen was publisher he connected through the forum with science fiction writers whose books he later published. For example, John Ringo has mentioned how his first book with Baen was initially rejected, [but given a second chance by Jim Baen because Ringo argued with him on Baen's Bar about the Aquatic Ape Theory](#).

[Note 4] [As John Scalzi has written](#), "Anecdotally speaking, Baen's folk really do appear to have a high level of identification with the house, and much (but to be clear, not all) of Baen's stock-in-trade is a specific type of science fiction, which structurally resembles 'golden age' science fiction and whose readership/authorship correlates with social/political conservatism." In addition, the quote in the main report at this note had an attribution mistake, which has now been corrected.

[**Note 5**] Bob Nelson has described being banned from the forum “[for not agreeing with Mr Ringo’s vision of the universe.](#)“ Nelson later [wrote a more detailed post on what happened, describing how he argued against the sad puppies and other issues on the forum prior to being banned.](#)

[**Note 6**] In the 10 months prior to the November 3, 2020 election, just over 400 new users joined Baen’s Bar. In the three months after the election, nearly 360 new users joined.

[**Note 7**] According to the explanation in the list of banned Baen’s Bar topics, Mercedes Lackey posted a long rant on the forum about her distaste for Baen Books and Jim Baen personally, along with mentioning how she had been persecuted for being of a particular political bent. While it appears Lackey left the forum after that, Jim Baen “asked that the incident be stricken from discussion.”

***Update:** Mercedes Lackey reached out to me to say that the information shared on Baen's Bar about why she left was simply not true. She says she left the forum after 9/11 when forum users were posting freely about murdering all Muslims. Lackey strongly attacked these posts in a long post on Baen's Bar, but her post was heavily criticized by Tom Kratman and specifically John Ringo and Ringo's followers. However, Lackey's post and reasons for leaving said nothing about Jim Baen nor about Baen Books. She also says the note posted on the forum banning discussions around her leaving was written after Jim Baen passed, so he would have been unable to contradict it.*

No One Creates Alone

(published August 13, 2021)

Spoiler alert: In this essay I discuss the new manga [Look Back by Tatsuki Fujimoto](#). Story spoilers are given along with a discussion of the themes raised by the manga and what inspired its creation.

Two years ago the [Kyoto Animation arson attack](#) shocked the world. A man who wrongly believed the anime company stole one of his ideas walked into their studio with 11 gallons of gasoline and ignited a devastating fire, killing 36 animators and staff and injuring 33 more.

I've been thinking about this tragedy ever since reading the one-shot manga [Look Back by Tatsuki Fujimoto](#), released to honor the victims on the tragedy's second anniversary. Fujimoto is the creator of Chainsaw Man, one of the best mangas of recent years. Chainsaw Man has been highly praised for its off-beat mix of gory horror, dark fantasy and comedy in an action-filled story that explores deep issues such as debt bondage, abuse, poverty, and violence, all wrapped around an emotional heart that hits the reader hard.

But even people like myself who already loved Fujimoto's work were blown away by Look Back. Published by Shonen Jump in mid-July and made available online in multiple languages, millions of people have already read the heartbreaking and emotionally touching story, [which Comic Book Resources calls](#) "a love letter to the manga industry" and a "sorrowful elegy to those who were lost in the massacre."

All of that is true. But the manga is also one of the best tributes to creativity I've read, both in the ways our lives are influenced by our creativity and the connections our creations make between people.

Reading the manga and looking back at the Kyoto Animation tragedy have made me think deeply about creativity and our connections to other people, and the intricate ways these aspects of life come together to ensure that no one ever creates alone.

What Does It Mean to be Creative?

We all dream. We all have the ability to imagine new ways of seeing the world. We all craft new forms of expression. We all change our own lives and the lives of those around us in ways no one else can.

We are all, at our core, creative.

Creativity is frequently associated with artistic pursuits but to me, creativity occurs in every aspect of human existence. An engineer can be just as creative as a visual artist. A bricklayer may craft new ways of building with bricks just as a sculptor may craft innovative ways of sculpting the human form. Look at any aspect of human experience and there you can find creativity.

This is [much debate about the origins of what we today call creativity](#). For thousands of years cultures around the world believed that what we now call creativity was actually more of an act of "discovery," with divine inspiration or revelation being seen as the hallmarks of creation. People found inspiration through the [Muses](#), [Saraswati](#), and other gods and divine creatures. Alternately, people saw creativity as being "in dialogue with the great personalities of the past by whom one's own work could be meaningfully judged and properly appreciated," [which was one way of viewing creativity in ancient China](#). Creativity was also seen as being tied into an exploration of self and the greater world, or connected with understanding one's place in the universe.

In the western world these ideas on creativity began to change during the Renaissance as humanism took hold. Suddenly the artist as sole creator supposedly stood alone on center stage, a view still very much with us today. Or perhaps it's more correct to say this self-focused view of creativity has simply been more loudly expressed over the last few centuries. But the other views of creativity are still around and still provide paths for people to explore the creative process. And I haven't come close to summing up all the ways creativity is seen by different cultures and societies and people around the world.

In short, there are as many ways to understand creativity as there are ways to be creative.

I personally don't buy into the western view of the single heroic artist bravely bringing something into existence by themselves. This view of creativity is incredibly limiting because no one creates alone. We all exist within the larger world within which we live and create.

For example, I'm a fiction writer. I was raised within specific cultural and societal contexts and learned to express myself through certain languages, all of which are vital to my creativity as a writer. I've also read and experienced many stories that influenced my creativity. And I interact with other writers and readers, all of whom influence my own stories.

Even though I write my fiction by myself, I'm not writing alone. All those influences constantly whisper in my ear. There have been a number of times in my writing career where I thought I'd written a story on a totally new theme or idea only to discover other writers had already independently created similar stories.

The reason this happened is because none of us create alone.

Ideas Are Easy, Creating Is Hard

Ages ago I wrote a silly children's short story called "Rumpelstiltskin, Private Eye" and submitted it to the anthology series Newfangled Fairy Tales. Looking back on the story, it's not very good. But I was young at the time and worked really hard on it.

The story was accepted and I was asked to work as an assistant editor and read submissions for possible future volumes in the series. So imagine my horror when a story titled "Rumpelstiltskin, Private Eye" was submitted while the anthology containing mine was still at the printers.

My first thought was people would say I plagiarized the story. Yes, the stories were very different, especially in writing style, but certain aspects were the same. Mainly that Rumpelstiltskin worked as a private investigator and that he was investigating a case involving straw spun into gold.

But what happened here was that two authors who didn't know each other had created similar stories because of the similar trends in the children's publishing industry. At the time there was a small boom in children's fiction for newfangled versions of fairy tales — hence the anthology's name — inspired by the success of [The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs picture book by Jon Scieszka](#). When the anthology's submission call for reworked fairy tales was released, both myself and another author independently created similar stories with the same title.

While the stories we wrote weren't the same, it was still unnerving for me as a writer. If social media had existed then, I wonder if I'd have been called out for stealing someone's idea even though that is absolutely not what happened.

This episode taught me that creativity is far more than simply being inspired with an idea. Hell, ideas are cheap and plentiful. Every human in the world has more ideas than they can ever possibly use. Instead, creativity is about taking an idea and crafting something new with it.

But even then you may find that what you're creating isn't as original as you thought.

Sadly, that's what happened to the man who killed all those people at Kyoto Animation. He believed the studio stole his ideas because one of their animes featured a short scene where the [main characters buy discounted meat at a grocery store in an attempt to save money](#). As many others have pointed out, that scene was based on something countless people have done in their own lives. No one stole this idea. Instead, it's based on shared existence.

This doesn't mean plagiarism and theft of ideas don't happen. Of course they do. But perhaps we also focus too much on the belief that ideas by themselves are precious and original when the true heart of creation is what we do after the inspiration. What we create after having a new idea.

Creativity is such a strange thing. Since humanity appeared on Earth, approximately 100 billion people have lived and died. No two of those people lived the exact same life. Each person created things from their own unique outlook and experience.

But those 100 billion people were also shaped by shared cultures, beliefs, values, and languages. These patterns washed in and out of their lives and influenced what they created. So even as each person created something only they could create, they were also connected to larger forces in life which also help shape those creations.

For example, [humans created Acheulean stone hand tools](#) with relatively few changes for well over a million years. It's almost impossible to imagine that time span in our current cultural context, where we believe a city like London is old because it's existed for over 2,000 years. Yet it would take 500 times the history of London to equal how long humans crafted Acheulean stone tools. A million years of humans teaching each other to craft these tools, passing on their knowledge of this act of creation, being inspired to use different types of stones to create the tools, and modifying the tools as needed.

Each of these tools resulted from an act of individual creation. Each of them were similar yet also different.

Sometimes creativity brings forth something surprisingly new. Other times it results in something similar to what has already been created.

Creativity Means Connecting With Others

There have been many artistic depictions of creativity over the centuries. But *Look Back* by Tatsuki Fujimoto resonated with me because it showed so clearly how the connections between people not only influence their own individual creativity but also result in something greater than they'd ever create by themselves.

The manga opens with Fujino, a 4th grade student who draws art for her school newsletter. She enjoys the praise of her classmates but doesn't spend much time or effort creating her drawings. But that changes when Kyomoto, a truant and shut-in who never comes to school, also wants to publish her drawings in the newsletter.

Fujino is initially dismissive of Kyomoto, figuring that anyone afraid to come to school must naturally be bad at art. But Kyomoto turns out to be a great artist. Refusing to allow anyone else in the school to be a better artist than she is, Fujino begins to take her art seriously, continually studying and practicing her drawings. The two artists push each other to new heights without ever meeting, their art running side-by-side in the school newsletter for the next few years.

Fujino's art quickly improves. Despite that, she becomes dejected, believing she'll never be better than Kyomoto even though she's worked so hard to improve. Eventually Fujino decides to quit drawing.

However, a chance encounter with Kyomoto reveals that Kyomoto is a big fan of Fujino's art. The two become friends and begin drawing mangas together, winning a number of awards. Their friendship not only returns Fujino to drawing but helps bring Kyomoto back into the outside world.

When they grow older the friends have a falling out and experience a tragedy with echoes of the Kyoto Animation arson attack. Fujino blames herself for what happens to her friend. In one of the manga's most devastating lines, she tells herself "Drawing is completely useless."

But *Look Back* doesn't stop there. Instead, the manga shows how drawing — and by extension, creativity itself — is never useless because it has created connections binding Fujino and Kyomoto together even after death. Despite all the pain they both experienced, their lives are better for the days spent together and for their shared creativity. And their creativity has rippled through them in ways neither could have foreseen.

I cried at the end of *Look Back*, partly because of the story's beauty and the tragedy of what happens to the characters. But also because the story spoke so personally to me.

Everyone who creates asks at one time or another why they're doing this. They want to know if they're wasting their time. They encounter failure after failure, rejection after rejection, and wonder if they should simply stop.

They ask themselves, is what I'm creating ultimately useless?

Why am I doing this?

What good will come of this?

It's natural to doubt your creativity. Every person doubts their creativity at one time or another. After all, creativity can be scary, especially when you're exposing a personal part of yourself to the larger world. And sometimes other people are frightened by your creativity. Perhaps they don't want the way they view the world to change. Perhaps they're jealous. Perhaps they want to hurt others. And sometimes there's simply no understanding this hostility because people often do petty, vicious things without a good reason.

Even though creativity is at the core of what it means to be human, our world has sadly created many, many ways to destroy and damage the creativity in others.

It is so easy to let the world destroy your creativity. But instead of doubting yourself, understand that again, what you create in your life — be it art, stories, crafts, computer code, joining with others to build a new community center, protesting to right an injustice in society, or any other means of being creative — only you could have made this exact creation.

And also understand that what results from your creativity doesn't end once something is created.

When I write a story, it may seem as if that is a single act of creation. But nothing could be further from the truth. Because once I finish writing a story, there is still creativity as people publish my story, share my story, and read my story.

And that same creativity takes place when you view a work of art, or play a video game, or watch a film, or experience anything your fellow humans have created. Our minds take what others created and turn it into something new through what we experience. And once we're done experiencing a creation we aren't the same person we were before.

As Ursula K. Le Guin once said, "As you read a book word by word and page by page, you participate in its creation, just as a cellist playing a Bach suite participates, note by note, in the creation, the coming-to-be, the existence, of the music. And, as you read and re-read, the book of course participates in the creation of you, your thoughts and feelings, the size and temper of your soul."

Creating a painting is an act of creation, but so is viewing that painting.

Programming a video game is creation, but so is playing the game.

Designing a new home is creation, as is living in that home.

Humanity's creativity is built through countless connections such as these. Every time we create something, we split reality into two paths. There's the world as it exists without our creation, and the world with our creation in it. And there are forever evolving paths as people experience these creations and share it among themselves.

We're all going to die. We're all going to experience pain and sorrow and suffer. But our lives can also have moments of beauty. Of love and peace and happiness and perfect, all-embracing creativity.

As *Look Back* shows so wonderfully, our creativity connects us with the larger world. And you never know when or how your creations may inspire others and lead them to create their own works.

From now on when I despair that my stories will never be what I dream — when self-doubt gets to me and I think I should stop writing — I'll remember what I read in *Look Back*.

Because no one truly creates alone.

You are not alone. I am not alone.

We're all bound together in this life, and held together by the creativity that connects us all.

Genre Grapevine Special Report: A Truly Global SF/F Genre Must Recognize the Financial Barriers Faced by Many International Authors and Creatives

(published October 22, 2021)

Last year Nigerian author Innocent Chizaram Ilo won one of the [Commonwealth Short Story Prizes](#). However, receiving the prize money soon demonstrated to Ilo how excluded he was from banking in his country. He wrote a [must-read column in the Guardian](#) about the issues he faced in receiving the prize money and how red tape and other barriers exclude many people from accessing vital financial services.

Since then the situation for many authors, artists and other creatives around the world has not gotten better. While recent years have seen a significant jump in the number of international authors, artists, and creatives being published by science fiction and fantasy publishers and studios in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe, payment issues remain a pressing problem.

Among these payment issues are:

1. Familiar payment processing apps like Paypal, Xoom, Venmo, and Zelle can be restricted or not work in many countries, while financial red tape also prevents authors and creatives in some countries from easily receiving payments;
2. Extremely high processing fees can hit payments, which may not be evident to or considered by the publishers, studios and clients sending the money.
3. A fear that many people in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe don't understand the financial barriers faced by those in other countries and that the hassles of arranging payments could cause some international authors and creatives to not have their works considered for publication in the first place.

That last point is a critical one to emerge from my interviews with more than a dozen authors, artists and creative people in countries such as Colombia, Australia, India, Nigeria, Brazil, South Korea, and Mexico, all of whom have experienced issues with receiving payments.

None of the people I spoke with knew of a single technical solution to the problems they've encountered with receiving payments. Instead, they spoke of worries about how the editors, publishers, and clients they've worked with in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe perceive these difficulties in receiving payments. It's likely even their fellow authors and creatives in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe don't generally understand these concerns.

In fact, most of the people I interviewed asked to remain anonymous because they feared harm to their career if they spoke publicly about the issue.

Financial apps like Paypal, Xoom, Venmo, and Zelle have given the illusion that money can be easily transferred anywhere in the world in the blink of an eye. But while these apps may be reliable and available to many people in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe, the reliability and availability throughout the rest of the world isn't uniform. And even apps like Payoneer and Flutterwave, which focus on enabling money transfers in parts of the world where other financial apps are less reliable, can encounter problems.

In many ways the science fiction and fantasy genres are experiencing boom years, with the SF/F film, TV, streaming, publishing, and video game industries among the most popular creative industries in the world. Many international authors, artists, programmers and other creatives are not only breaking into the SF/F genres, they are bringing news voices and viewpoints to genres that until recently had a very American and Euro-centric focus.

Because of that, the financial barriers faced by many international authors, artists and creatives are not only barriers to being paid — they are also barriers to participating and being seen as equals within the SF/F genre as a whole.

App Restrictions and Financial Red Tape

In recent months Nigerian author and editor Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki, who won this year's Otherwise and British Fantasy Awards and has been a finalist for other honors including the Nebula Award for Best Novella, [has been documenting in public his issues in being paid](#).

For example, Ekpeki has been unable to use Smashwords as a platform for his writing because, as he was informed by Smashwords, he "[resides in a country that cannot receive PayPal payments](#)."

Smashwords sent Ekpeki a message saying since he couldn't be paid by Paypal, he must agree to one of the following options: 1) Make his books available for free; 2) Make special arrangements to be paid via Payoneer, where there's a \$500 minimum payment threshold before payments are made; or 3) Close his account and surrender any payments owed to him by Smashwords.

In the end Ekpeki decided to pull back from Smashwords due to their inflexibility. But as he said in an interview with me, that hurts his sales because “not everybody wants to buy from Amazon and I am limited to that platform which I also had to jump through hoops to use.”

Transferring money internationally has never been easy. Nearly every country has their own foreign currency and banking rules and laws. And added into that are various geo-political issues that may arise, such as when then-President Trump imposed new sanctions on Cuba, [causing Western Union to no longer process remittance payments to that country](#).

Pull all that together and it's easy to understand how complex international money transfers can be.

Some of the issues faced by Nigerian writers appear to result from restrictions instituted by financial apps because of fraud issues in that country. Other restrictions result from the type of red tape Innocent Chizaram Ilo described in his Guardian column.

But most frustratingly, many of the restrictions and issues appear to be totally random, as if instituted simply to make it more difficult to transfer money from one person to another.

As Innocent Chizaram Ilo said to me in an emailed conversation, “PayPal's restriction doesn't even make sense because I can make payments via my PayPal account to the US but can't receive payments with my PayPal account.”

Ekpeki has seen similar issues, with systems like Flutterwave saying in public they can be used in his country while actually getting paid through them can be extremely difficult.

Colombian translator and writer Arturo Serrano has also encountered random problems with financial apps that people in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe take for granted.

“Frequently, my clients have preferred to switch from one transfer method to another because of unnecessary obstacles,” Serrano said. “The client who now pays me with PayPal used to do it with WeTransfer, but WeTransfer doesn't seem to interact well with Colombian banks.”

The issues raised by Ekpeki, Ilo and Serrano were echoed by authors, artists and creatives in other countries. Many of the people I interviewed said they spent hours trying to figure out why a payment through different apps failed to go through, only to hit a stone wall. One author said she tried using four different apps to receive a single payment for a story, with the payment only going through on the final try.

“I was so embarrassed I haven't submitted another story (to that publication),” this author told me. “The editor's emails as payments were rejected were increasingly irritated, as if it was my fault the payment wouldn't process.”

Large Fees

Another issue faced by authors, artists and creatives outside the U.S.A. and Europe are the large fees associated with receiving payments.

[Dream Foundry](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping new professionals in the speculative genres, recently encountered this issue while paying an author in Lebanon.

“The economic situation there is such that even with ways to put money in the author's bank account available to us, paying them that way was useless; they needed cash,” said Jessica Eanes, the president of the Dream Foundry board.

Dream Foundry ended up using Western Union to transfer the money, which charged them a 25% processing fee. Dream Foundry paid the fee to help the author.

The authors and creatives I spoke with universally said that Western Union is the most reliable way to transfer money outside the U.S.A. and Europe (although Ekpeki noted Western Union had also been down for more than a week at the time of our interview).

However, everyone also agreed that Western Union charges extremely high processing fees, which can severely cut into what an author or creative receives.

Large fees also can pop up when using other systems, such as direct wire transfers between bank accounts. But even financial apps have fee issues. For example, Arturo Serrano noted that PayPal charges a bigger fee when money moves from a PayPal account associated with an American customer to his PayPal account, which is associated with a Colombian credit card.

Workarounds for Payments

Because of the reliability issues with payment apps and large fees associated with money transfers, a number of the authors, artists and creatives I spoke with said they've had to do work-arounds to receive payments.

For example, one author who couldn't receive money through Paypal had the payment sent to a friend, who had a working account. Another author I spoke with had a payment sent to a family member in the U.S.A., who then gave them the money when they travelled home.

When Arturo Serrano ran into a limit on how much he could receive by international bank transfer from a client, he had the client break up the payment.

“It was embarrassing to explain to my client that they needed to divide their payment over two separate months,” Serrano said.

And one translator I spoke with said that “Before I commit to translating Cubans, I now ask them if they have family in Florida who can receive money on their behalf. Last time I translated a new Cuban writer, I asked him if he had relatives in the US before I decided to work with him. If he had said no, I might not have translated him.”

In his work as an editor, Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki has also had to go through similar workarounds to pay authors. “Recently to pay a Nigerian writer I had to use my own networks abroad to receive the money via PayPal and have them send it via other services,” Ekpeki said, “after which I converted and gave the writers here local or foreign currency as they wished. A three way thing that cost me in time, energy and effort but which was necessary cuz not every writer had persons abroad who can do that for them.”

To Be Truly Global, the SF/F Genre Must Understand These Financial Barriers

There is no simple technology fix to all these issues. But the perception of these financial barriers in the science fiction and fantasy genre needs to change.

Many of the international authors, artists and creatives I spoke with said they were certain the difficulty in paying them directly affects consideration of their works by publishers, studios and clients in the U.S.A., Canada, and Europe. And even when these financial barriers don't stop them from having their work accepted, these issues can still result in them being treated differently.

One author told me that when they received payment for a story, the processing fees took more than a quarter of their money. When they mentioned this to their editor, the editor said it wasn't a big deal because the author lived in India.

“This editor told me since I live in India money will go further even with the fee,” this author said. “But that was still money I earned and lost.”

And related to these issues with payments is that many of the popular funding platforms used by SF/F creatives in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe, such as Patreon and Kickstarter, aren’t supported in many countries. This further limits the ways international authors, artists and creatives can support themselves and increases the importance of receiving payment for their work.

Another issue I heard from authors and creatives is how tired they are of essentially being tech-splained on this issue by publishers, editors, and fellow creatives in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe, who are certain that one payment app or another actually works to send money.

“No one solves the problem because everyone pretends the problem isn’t there,” Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki said. “The thing I really want to get across is people need to stop downplaying the problem by putting forward solutions that don’t really work. Everybody has a solution that they have not tried or actually used. People want to be progressive, but they don’t want to make the effort.”

And another common theme among the authors and creatives I interviewed was a fear that these issues make an author look unprofessional or suspect in the eyes of a publisher or editor.

“When a publisher has to make a special effort to pay, imagine how pissed off they are. How does that hit an author next time?” Ekpeki asked.

If publishers, studios and clients wish to attract submissions from more authors and creatives outside the U.S.A and Europe, here are some suggested steps to follow:

1. Be transparent and open about the different ways payments are made to authors, artists and creatives around the world.
2. If possible, separate the editorial and payment sides of the business so difficulties in payments don’t influence future editorial decisions.
3. State publicly that the publisher, studio, or client pays all financial transaction fees.

Fortunately, there are people in the SF/F genre willing to make these efforts. For example, Marguerite Kenner, publisher of [Escape Artists](#), said their podcasts “always pays all transaction fees that we can, including converting into different currencies where we have the option.” And the Escape Artists accounting and contracting are kept separate from their editorial teams.

And Kenner added that markets can also “use the communication tools at their disposal to help make it clear that not only are they seeking submissions from around the globe, but that they’ve done the work to put solutions in place for the problems those creatives face, like payment.”

It’s critical for the SF/F genre to understand and deal with the financial exclusion and payment issues faced by many authors, artists and creatives around the world. To do otherwise is to allow financial barriers to become massive walls limiting who can take part in the larger SF/F genre.

Genre Grapevine Primer On the Latest Worldcon and Hugo Award Explosion

(published June 24, 2021)

Unfortunately, this post's title is evergreen because every year we have an explosion related to Worldcon and the Hugo Awards. And every year people in the science fiction and fantasy genre ask, "WTF just happened with the Hugos?"

But this time's a little different because we've now had two explosions in six months, with all the Hugo administrators [resigning en masse in January](#) followed by a totally new group of award administrators resigning a few days ago.

The January resignations happened because [DisCon III](#), this year's Worldcon, said they'd limit the number of names on the Hugo final ballots and award plaques to four. While this wouldn't be an issue in the fiction categories, finalists in categories with multiple creators such as semiprozines and fancasts would have to decide which people to leave off the final ballot and award plaques.

The Hugo admins, upset at being forced to limit the number of finalist names, resigned. After a short controversy, DisCon apologized and said they wouldn't limit the names on the ballot or plaques. A new group of Hugo administrators then volunteered to run the awards, [resulting in this year's finalists being announced in April](#).

Then on June 22, these new Hugo administrators also resigned, [saying in a public statement that](#) "It is clear we have taken the process as far as we can, and that our input is no longer needed by the convention leadership."

These new resignations were prompted [by Worldcon again limiting Hugo finalists, saying that](#) "Due to space limitations, larger Finalists groups will be limited to a maximum of four persons with one guest each for the in-person pre-Hugo Award reception and in the reserved Finalist seating area for the Hugo Award ceremony."

After yet another outcry and the new resignations, Worldcon changed their mind. Gadi Evron, the head of events for DisCon and the person in charge of the Hugo Awards reception and ceremony, sent an email late Wednesday to all the Hugo Award finalists. (Note: I received this email b/c I'm a finalist for Best Fan Writer.)

The email read in part:

"Last week we sent a communication to you regarding Ceremony and Reception issues. Instead of coming to you, we made a decision on our own. We should have asked for your input as we said we would. This was a mistake, and we apologize. We know this isn't the first time, but we sincerely hope it will be the last. As you may be aware there are serious space constraints this year, but we have decided to prioritize the attendance of the Finalists and will make space for all Finalists and their plus ones who wish to attend. There will be no four person limit."

The email also said the DisCon ConCom will be meeting this weekend to discuss these issues, and that communication issues with Hugo finalists is on the agenda. The ConCom also asked for Hugo finalists to tell them of any other concerns, which would also be discussed.

It's important to remember that all of this is taking place in the backdrop of the [fall-out from last year's Hugo Awards ceremony](#), where toastmaster George R.R. Martin not only ran the ceremony way too long but mispronounced the names of many finalists and appeared to focus more on honoring John W. Campbell and Hugo winners from 50 years ago than the current and diverse group of finalists. And people still remember other issues with the Hugos over the last decade, including the [entire puppy ordeal](#).

Sadly, some parts of fandom are blaming the victims here, saying that it's the fault of Hugo finalists such as [Strange Horizons](#) for listing too many names (even though it should be noted [Strange Horizons didn't complain](#) about being limited to only four names). Yes, Strange Horizons listed the names of 87 staff members who helped the magazine become a Hugo finalist in the Best Semiprozine category. But

why is it a bad idea to celebrate and honor all the people who helped your magazine become a finalist for a major award, especially when these people are all volunteers?

As Maureen K. Speller, [the senior reviews editor at Strange Horizons](#), said, “I really thought we were going to get past this kind of shit after Fiyahcon proved the world didn't end if, dog forbid, you acknowledged all the creators, but Discon really has seemed quite determined to drag us back to the bad old days as fast as they can.”

Arguments have been put forward on different sites that Worldcon doesn't have the budget to invite all those people to the reception, or the stage can't handle that many people, along with other excuses. And it appears these types of complaints were on the mind of DisCon's overall leadership and lead to the most recent resignation of the Hugo admin staff.

If you think this type of attitude doesn't hurt the genre, [consider what Vajra Chandrasekera, the senior fiction editor for Strange Horizons](#), said: “This kind of shit, coupled with the Worldcon practice of either mangling or skipping non-white names at the ceremony, is why my name is not included in the very long list of SH staff in the Hugo nominees list this year—I asked not to be listed any more for these things lol.”

Since DisCon has now backtracked and apologized, it's likely that all this may be resolved when their ConCom meets this weekend.

But that doesn't change the fact that Worldcon has had three major issues with the Hugos in less than a year, if you include last year's award ceremony. So now questions are being raised in the genre about how the Hugos are run under Worldcon.

[Alasdair Stuart recently said that](#) "The Hugo's are getting too big for Worldcon. They've been heading that way for a while and until they're separated off or until the way the two groups interact changes, finalists will be stuck in the middle and fan finalists doubly so."

And a few days ago Christopher J. Garcia, the Hugo-winning editor of the fanzine The Drink Tank, [wrote in a public Facebook post that](#) “Yep, it's time to pull the Hugos from the WorldCon. Spin 'em off and figure things out.” Garcia added in a follow-up comment that “My initial thought is having a separate entity administering the Hugos entirely, while still most likely presenting at the WorldCon. Basically take the whole thing off the plate of the world con.”

In response, more than 300 comments were shared on Garcia's Facebook post.

Part of the problem is how Worldcon is structured, with each year's Worldcon having to run the Hugo Awards and, essentially, reinvent the wheel. There is no overall administrator or group of people who manage the awards from year to year, which can result in a lack of institutional knowledge and recurring unforced errors.

It's unlikely Worldcon will divorce itself from the Hugo Awards or not present the awards at a ceremony they host. But perhaps Worldcon should consider having permanent staff for the awards instead of relying on each year's Worldcon to run it.

And the fact that two sets of Hugo admins have resigned in six months also suggests that Worldcon needs to remove the ability of convention leadership to interfere with and overrule the people actually running the awards. The fact that two groups of Hugo admins saw their only option being to resign points to serious conflicts with Worldcon leadership about the awards.

I'm glad the DisCon ConCom staff will discuss solutions to this year's problems and, based on their openness to resolving the issues, there will likely be good news in the coming days. But that doesn't change the fact that the genre keeps having controversies related to the Hugos.

Perhaps 2021 will be the year where we finally explore ways to stop having regular Hugo explosions.

Update: After this column was published, [DisCon III announced that Bill Lawhorn resigned from his position as Convention Chairperson.](#)

Genre Grapevine on SF/F Abuse and Harassment Campaigns

(published on December 31, 2021)

December 2021 has seen multiple mass harassments carried out against people in the science fiction and fantasy community. It started when the small press Neon Hemlock released a Kickstarter for their anthology [Luminescent Machinations: Queer Tales of Monumental Invention](#). The planned anthology included stories by a number of authors including Neon Yang, a queer and non-binary author based in Singapore.

But Yang's involvement resulted in abuse and harassment of both the author and Neon Hemlock for publishing one of their stories. These attackers wrongly claimed Yang led and organized the harassment against Isabel Fall, who wrote the controversial "Helicopter Story" that was a Hugo Award finalist this year.

What happened to Fall, a trans woman whose story was published in early 2020, [is documented in this powerful and heartbreaking Vox story](#) by Emily VanDerWerff. Yang was one of the few people willing to be quoted on the record in VanDerWerff's story.

It appears that because Yang was quoted in the Vox story some people in the SF/F community convinced themselves that Yang was the ringleader of what happened to Fall. But the truth was that Yang was barely involved and only commented a few times on the controversy well after it had started.

Despite this, [as Foz Meadows said there were still](#) "people insisting that Neon must pay, that they deserve blacklisting & death threats." And this resulted in mass abuse and harassment when Neon Hemlock announced their new anthology.

Of those involved in the attacks on Yang, the person with the greatest reach and biggest name was author Gretchen Felker-Martin, [who requested more info on all the bad things Yang supposedly did](#) before insisting that Yang's apology related to Fall is "[pretty strong evidence](#)" of them doing wrong and that while Yang's "[original tweets are gone, but I saw them. They participated.](#)" Felker-Martin also wrongly claimed "[Yang flipped out and claimed \(Fall\) was a cis man and a nazi](#)" (also [see this image for more](#)) and that Yang helped "[ram a trans woman back into the closet and then ate and puked up her fucking ideas.](#)"

However, Yang was also subjected to [harassment from countless others](#), along with death threats. And the other authors in the anthology were also harassed for daring to share a table of contents with Yang, with [one author eventually pulling her story due to such harassment](#).

Eventually the truth came out. In a [powerful, evidence-filled and must-read thread](#), Suzanne F. Boswell showed how Yang "did not start or spearhead a harassment campaign against Isabel Fall." And Doris V. Sutherland [also showed that Yang didn't lead the attacks on Fall](#).

As [Boswell wrote in a summary of her thread](#):

There is no material evidence that Yang led a harassment campaign against Fall

Fall herself *does not name* Yang as a crucial actor (or at all).

What's happening to Yang is basically targeted harassment.

There are still people who believe Yang deserved what happened to them. Sadly, it appears no amount of evidence will change these minds.

While the attacks and harassment against Yang have dropped off, the personal effects on Yang remain. As does what was taken away by other people witnessing this abuse and harassment.

For example, in response to the attacks on Yang [author Ekaterine Xia said](#), "What I, a no-name queer Chinese writer, is getting out of this is that no one is safe. As in no 'ally', based on culture, skin color, queerness, or even good intentions is trustworthy. No marginalized person is safe from an unreasoning mob."

Attacks on Hugo Finalists

Barely had the attacks on Yang died off when a new round of abuse and harassment started against some of this year's Hugo Award finalists. These attacks began when it was discovered during the Hugo Award ceremony that this year's Worldcon, DisCon III, had selected military contractor Raytheon as a sponsor.

Many people rightly criticized DisCon for this decision, and [DisCon later apologized](#). But before that apology, attacks were directed at individual Hugo finalists who had no part in the Raytheon decision, had no power to change it, may not have even noticed it during the ceremony, and were also upset to have their names attached to something they didn't support.

Despite all this, Hugo finalists were personally harassed and attacked. And as with the attacks surrounding Neon Yang, the Hugo finalists who were harassed were largely marginalized and/or people of color.

Lindsay Ellis

People have raised legitimate criticisms around the few comments Neon Yang made about Isabel Fall's story, and valid critiques can also be made over DisCon's decision to have a defense contractor sponsor Worldcon and the Hugo Awards.

But there's a massive difference between criticism and mass harassment against individuals.

We've seen another example of this with the announcement four days ago by Lindsay Ellis – an influential YouTuber, critic and SF author who was a finalist for this year's Astounding Award for Best New Writer – that she will no longer create video content because of harassment.

In a Patreon post titled "[Walking away from Omelas](#)" – the post is [also mirrored on Reddit](#) in case you can't access the Patreon – Ellis explained why 2021 was so horrible for her. She also referenced the harassment experienced by Isabel Fall and Neon Yang.

Ellis's problems started in March when she [tweeted that Disney's Raya And The Last Dragon was a "redux" of Avatar: The Last Airbender](#). While the [tweet was later deleted](#), Ellis was criticized for implying "[that a great amount of Asian-inspired YA fiction bore great resemblance](#)" to Avatar. And from that point on people began criticizing previous statements and comments she had made.

As suggested by the reference to the [famous Ursula K. Le Guin story](#) in Ellis's post, she likely believes she is escaping an unfair system. I hope it goes well for her.

But it should also be noted that Ellis, by virtue of her bestselling debut novel and having a YouTube platform with 1.2 million subscribers, is currently one of the most powerful authors and content creators in the SF/F genre. When I read her statement, I was troubled by Ellis seeming to equate her situation with what happened to Isabel Fall and Neon Yang. Yes, all of them experienced unacceptable abuse and harassment. But Fall and Yang didn't have anywhere near the power and resources Ellis had to fight back against what happened to them.

And being against abuse and harassment online is not the same as being against any criticism of powerful figures in the SF/F genre. By virtue of her power, Ellis was [subjected to legitimate criticism for things she said](#). Because her voice was amplified by 1.2 million subscribers, people would naturally speak out when Ellis said things they disagreed with or which were wrong.

But again, there is a stark difference between criticism and critiques and the mass abuse and harassment campaigns the SF/F genre is now witnessing.

As [Cheryl Lynn Eaton said](#), "Ellis received a legitimate critique of her stance from POC. And then was dogpiled by professional pundits, paid antagonists, and attention seekers."

Or perhaps [Princess Weekes said it best in response to Ellis's announcement of leaving YouTube](#): "Wanting to humble someone publicly is not the same as good faith criticism."

What Comes Next?

What's the answer to all this? I don't know.

I've been on the receiving end of these mass harassment and abuse campaigns. When you're subjected to harassment and abuse your world compresses to a single, painful point, like a black hole that traps you against your will. Nothing you say or do makes a difference. People can tell you the harassment and abuse is unjustified and that you did nothing wrong. But none of that matters.

Because in the end you are merely a convenient target for people who are deliberately refusing to see you as human.

And what we've seen this month is not the end of the harassment and abuse campaigns in the SF/F genre. Sadly, it appears new campaigns are being run against YouTuber and Hugo finalist [Jenny Nicholson](#) along with harassment of [Kat Blaque](#) and [Princess Weekes](#).

And yes, I will repeat the obvious fact that these campaigns continually target people of color and marginalized writers and creators. Not always, of course. But the overall pattern is damn near impossible to miss.

Again, I don't know how to stop all this. What I can offer are the best words and thoughts I've read on all this in recent months.

Please take a few moments to read the following threads and essays. I think the starting point to ending the genre's harassment and abuse can be found in the thoughts already shared by these excellent people.

- [Thread from Alexandra Erin](#): "It's like... do you want to have a conversation about how harassment pile-ons happen or do you want to have a fight about whose opinions are wrong?"
- [Thread from Sunny Moraine](#): "The problem isn't one of who's right and who isn't, the problem is that PEOPLE ARE BEING FUCKING ABUSIVE."
- [Fonda Lee on why Twitter is the worst reader](#): "Women, minorities, and members of other marginalized groups in media, from Zoe Quinn to Kelly Marie-Tran, are already the preferred targets of bigots. But when marginalized creators misstep or are simply not savvy enough in a given random moment to clear the arbitrary tests of progressivism leveled by their followers, they are often taken down by the very same loud online voices that shallowly purport to be on their side."
- [Thread by Emma Mieko Candon](#): "Why are People Such Dicks Online?: a dissertation on call out culture and why queers seem so keen on repeatedly shooting ourselves in the collective foot."
- [Porpentine's Hot Allostatic Load](#): "This is in defense of the hyper-marginalized among the marginalized, the Omelas kids, the marked for death, those who came looking for safety and found something worse than anything they'd experienced before."
- [Mikki Kendall on Harassment Culture: You're Soaking in It](#): "Our conduct codes might need to revert to the ones used in kindergartens all over the world. Keep your hands to yourself. Put your listening ears on. Treat others the way you want to be treated. 'I want' is not a license for bad behavior."
- [Jim C. Hines on Don't Look Away: Fighting Sexual Harassment in the Scifi/Fantasy Community](#): "For far too long, our community has looked the other way, as if ignoring these problems meant they didn't exist."

Voting issues with 2021 Dragon Awards

(published September 8, 2021)

The 2021 winners of the [Dragon Awards](#) were announced at Dragon Con this past weekend. However, an issue with the award balloting system appears to have kept a number of first time voters from participating.

There's no indication this voting issue invalidated any of the winners or introduced any bias into who won. However, it does again raise questions about how Dragon Con manages the voting for their five-year-old genre awards.

The Dragon Awards were launched in 2016 and are seen as a "people's choice" style award, with both Dragon Con convention attendees and the general public being urged to vote. [As explained in this Dragon Awards FAQ](#), it's okay for authors and other finalists to encourage their fans to vote for their works at both the nomination stage and if they become an award finalist.

The [2021 Dragon Awards final ballot](#) was revealed on August 11 and voting ran from then through September 4, with the winners announced the following day. People who'd registered and voted in the Dragon Awards in past years appear to have received their final ballot and been able to vote without any major issues.

However, this wasn't the case with new voters, who had to [register, confirm their email, then receive their voting ballot](#), with the deadline to register being Friday, September 3. This is where the problem came in. New people were able to register in the final weeks before the voting deadline and able to confirm their email. But they then didn't immediately receive their ballot.

Instead they [received the following message titled Dragon Con Awards Confirmation](#):

"Congratulations you have confirmed your voting email address. Ballots are issued very early on Thursdays and Mondays during the month of August. You will not receive a ballot right away."

Despite what that message said, I have verified a number of new registrants in the final weeks of voting did not receive their ballots on those indicated days. Instead, these people waited weeks after registration before their ballot finally arrived on Saturday, September 4, the very last day of voting. Some of the new registrants saw their ballot in time to vote. A number of others did not and missed out.

I have confirmed this happened with 14 new Dragon Award registrants, and have also heard from Dragon Award finalists who said it happened to their fans who registered to vote for the first time. One new voter who asked not to be named registered on August 28. This person immediately received the emailed confirmation message above and confirmed their email address. However, their ballot didn't arrive the following Monday or Thursday, only appearing on the last day of voting. By the time this person saw the emailed link to the ballot the voting deadline had expired.

One of this year's Dragon Award finalists shared the following with me about these voting issues. This person requested to not be named.

"As a writer, I was disappointed when fans told me they never received their ballot. They were excited to support my book but then were frustrated when they couldn't. As a truly fan-voted award, they really wanted to participate, and from my point of view, if I ever get a second nomination, they may not respond when I ask for their support again."

While the Dragon Awards have been involved in several political-related controversies, [as detailed by Cora Buhkert in her recent write-up about the 2021 awards](#), I doubt this voting issue resulted in any political or other bias with regards to who won since all finalists were likely equally affected.

The Dragon Awards have previously been criticized for a "lack of transparency" with how they handle the award's final voting. [As Camestros Felapton has said](#), "there is a mismatch between the marketing of the award as a popular vote and the actual rules which give the organisers the capacity to determine the winner how they wish. If people think their vote doesn't matter then they won't vote."

I tried contacting the Dragon Awards for comment, but their "[contact us](#)" form on the award website wasn't working, with the required reCAPTCHA showing a site owner error for "invalid domain for site key." I also emailed the main address for the Dragon Awards for comment but didn't hear back.

Genre Grapevine for 2/9/2021

(Note: All links in this column worked at publication, but some may have since changed.)

Humanity's Original Stories Were Fanfic

I've been thinking about the fanfiction storm kicked up last month by R.S. Benedict with [a single tweet](#): "It's incredibly bleak how many contemporary aspiring writers cut their teeth on fanfiction, a form that actively teaches you to write worse."

I'm not going to rehash all that went down after those words – [the Mary Sue has a good overview](#) – but in general few agreed with Benedict's view. [I also agree with SL Huang that](#) "fanfiction has an extremely important place in queer culture and the history of queer writing. Fanfiction also has a long history of providing places for queer/BIPOC/other marginalized people to remake media."

And that "remake media" is key, especially when you consider that fanfic – or the remaking and reimagining of earlier stories – is essentially the default condition for storytelling across human history.

For example, the Epic of Gilgamesh was created and revised over hundreds if not thousands of years and only given a more fixed form sometime between 1300 and 1000 BCE by a scholar named [Sin-lēqi-unninni](#). It's also quite likely the Iliad and the Odyssey were crafted through a similar storytelling tradition, with generations of bards actually creating Homer's works. And even a classic like the Ramayana, which is generally [attributed to a single writer, was reworked countless times across the centuries and by different cultures](#).

And what is Shakespeare if not a lover of fanfic? [Over half of his plays reworked earlier works](#). This includes Romeo and Juliet, [which was based on a number of earlier poems and stories](#).

It's only since the advent of copyright laws that many authors have focused more on original stories instead of those they can rework and reimagine. And even then the acceptance of fanfic varies across cultures. [As Andrei Pechalin points out](#), "Russian spec fic periodically translates fanfic into 'shared universes,' e.g. Glukhovsky's Metro trilogy has generated over 90 published spin-offs."

And even getting past all this history, all stories live within a larger literary and storytelling tradition. No author creates stories without having first been influenced by other stories.

This means on one level every story ever written is a type of fanfiction. So please, stop looking down at fanfic. Because when you do you're looking down at a storytelling tradition as old as humanity itself.

Most 2021 Genre Conventions Will Likely Be Virtual

Many of these year's genre conventions are considering pulling the plug on in-person events, with [StokerCon in late May being the latest to announce it will go virtual](#). In their announcement about StokerCon, the Horror Writers Association said "the ongoing pandemic, the emergence of viral variants, and the broad range of travel obstacles around the world" all played a role in forcing this decision.

So far the 2021 Worldcon still aims for an in-person convention. However in their recent ["Update on Convention Dates and Hotels"](#), DisCon III revealed that one of the two Worldcon hotels filed for bankruptcy and closed. The update also said they are "committing to having a robust, virtual experience for DisCon III. As of now, this means having at least three streaming programming items per convention hour." And they added that they will create a separate virtual membership type for those who cannot attend DisCon in person.

Reading between the lines of that update, it's obvious DisCon III is preparing for the strong possibility of a mostly virtual convention.

As [Seanan McGuire wrote the other day](#), 2021 conventions are contacting her "to cancel or go virtual, one after the other..." Other authors are also being contacted and the assumption is most of this

year's genre conventions will eventually go largely virtual even if the COVID vaccines are successfully rolled out. However, some conventions may still have small in-person events to ensure they don't break their contracts with hotels.

Interzone Pulled from PS Publishing

In my last column I covered how [PS Publishing would be taking over the British magazine Interzone, which is currently published by Andy Cox and TTA Press](#).

[However, as Andy Cox wrote](#) the other day:

Unfortunately we had to withdraw Interzone from its potential new publisher, so the magazine remains with us. Admittedly this does throw a spanner into the TTA works. We'd already made plans for Black Static and other things – including my own “retirement” – based on Interzone being given to a new publisher. So I'd like to ask for some time to get things back into place, and to make any changes that have to be made in order to fulfil our commitments to you. We will do everything we can to fill subscriptions, but stuff like format and schedule may have to change. We might even have to stop taking new subscriptions and follow the winding-down Black Static route. Meanwhile we will continue to try to find a new publisher for Interzone.

While there's no official word on what happened, [an earlier version of Cox's message](#) said “The deal we had was a very simple one and they had to commit to just one thing, but as soon as it became obvious they weren't going to honour it we had no choice but to withdraw the magazine.”

Now the following is pure speculation, but I wonder if the “one thing” which PS Publishing had to agree to was keeping Interzone in print. Before the deal fell through, PS announced they wanted to move Interzone to a purely digital magazine instead of releasing both digital and print editions, as TTA Press does.

Andy Cox has long been devoted to making and designing print magazines and books. He told me once that if he had to switch to a digital only magazine he wouldn't do what he does. He loves print that much. And the magazines are beautiful.

I hope Andy finds someone else to take over Interzone, which remains one of the best SF magazines in the world.

Other News and Info

- The Hugo Awards [are now open to nominations through March 19](#). And the Nebula Awards are also open to nominations through February 28. SFWA members can both nominate stories and see which works have been recommended to the Nebula Reading List [by logging in here](#).
- Large number of authors, librarians and readers are criticizing School Library Journal for its February cover and lead story “[Why White Children Need Diverse Books](#).” The [cover art](#) featured a white child with part of her face covered by a book showing a Black child's face, [which as Justina Ireland said](#) “not only centers whiteness (diverse books are important because they are beneficial to white readers! Screw kids of color) but it does so during Black history month.” Author and librarian Alex Brown also critiqued the cover and story, saying they posit “[diverse books as abnormal, as something that white people must be convinced to indulge in. It strips us of our stories and centers whiteness](#).” The editor Kathy Ishizuka posted two notes on the cover and story, [apologizing in the second one](#). Brown didn't believe either response was sufficient and [withdrew from working with SLJ and cancelled her school's subscription](#). Other good threads on all this came from [Angie Manfredi](#) and [Karen Strong](#).
- More evidence that 2020 was a record year for book publishing, [this time with a report that BookScan sales numbers hit an all-time high](#). But as previously reported, these sales are not being distributed equally to all authors or to all booksellers, with many independent book stores still struggling.

- Last November Bertelsmann announced plans to acquire Simon & Schuster, “which would take the number of Big Five publishers down to four.” Now more organizations are coming out in opposition to this purchase, with the Authors Guild, Open Markets Institute, Horror Writers Association, National Writers Union, Novelists Inc., Romance Writers Association, Sisters in Crime, and Western Writers of America [sending a letter to the Department of Justice asking that the merger be turned down](#).
- [According to this NYTimes article](#), "Top editors at Hachette have told employees that they've learned the lessons of the Capitol siege of Jan. 6: no hate speech, no incitement to violence, no false narratives." They've also terminated some positions.
- J. Michael Straczynski is completing Last Dangerous Visions to "square up Harlan's legacy" and [will open the anthology for submissions for 24 hours on March 31 for stories up to 3,500 words](#). Submit if you want. But with regards to this anthology, remember that nothing can square the harm Ellison did. [As I wrote last year in this essay](#), Harlan Ellison hurt more than 100 of his fellow writers with a half century of lies and delays around Last Dangerous Visions. When the anthology is released, there will be an attempt to whitewash all of this. Don't let that happen.
- The phrase “harsh writing advice” trended after author and self-proclaimed “[as seen on the BBC](#)” personality [A.M. Hounshell tweeted](#) "HARSH WRITING ADVICE: Your writer friends are also your competition. Sorry." The tweet was later deleted but many authors gave excellent takes on that "advice," with [Jessica Ellis perhaps best summing it up](#): “HARSH WRITING ADVICE: Thinking of your friends as competition isn't going to make you a better writer, because no matter what imaginary horse race you invent, you can only write what you write. So write it.” Other excellent responses came from [C. Robert Cargill](#), [Zig Zag Claybourne](#), [Heidi N. Moore](#), [Omar Mouallem](#), and [Harry Turtledove](#).
- The Fiction Fandom and Friendship Twitter account, created by members of the former official fan discord for the Be The Serpent podcast, [wrote a thread and essay about concerns with the podcast's hosts Alexandra Rowland, Freya Marske, and Jennifer Mace](#). In particular, the fans felt episode #71 of the podcast, which featured Naomi Novik discussing her book A Deadly Education, [didn't address the the racism and other problems in that novel](#). The thread resulted in a good discussion on the issues and the [podcast hosts apologized and agreed to fix the issues](#).
- Judges for the 2021 World Fantasy Awards have been announced and they are considering works published in 2020. Judges must receive eligible materials by June 1. But earlier is always better. [Details>>](#)
- The 2020 Locus Recommended Reading List [has been released and is open for voting](#).
- The [Bram Stoker Awards preliminary ballot has been announced](#).
- Cartoonist Adam Ellis [said the makers of the short film Keratin plagiarized him](#) in a "[shot-for-shot remake](#)" of one of his comics. The short film by Andrew Butler and James Wilson was winning awards at different film festivals but has now been pulled. According to Ellis, [he didn't become aware of the plagiarism until the directors contacted him to help promote the film](#). Pro tip: If you're going to steal a work probably best not to contact the creator asking for promotional assistance.
- And that's not even the worst case of plagiarism in recent weeks. Matt Lodder, an art history lecturer at the University of Essex, [discovered a student "adopted his identity, copied his tattoos and submitted his unpublished professional research as his own."](#) As a fellow academic stated, "Plagiarism is normally a sin of laziness, not something people normally put a lot of effort into. But the sheer multi layers of this were kind of astonishing."
- [Excellent interview with author Tamsyn Muir which covers a number of topics](#) including how to write a good second-person point of view. And with regards to the audience Muir wrote the Locked Tomb trilogy for: "So I hope that every girl who got told off for being angry, and who, like me, in their secret heart of hearts, just kind of pretends that she has a huge broadsword or ax and hits people, it's for them. It's for you. Go nuts."

- [As pointed out by Brandon Taylor](#), Penguin UK's [visual promotions](#) for their rerelease of Danish poet Tove Ditlevsen's books and branding of her as the "Billie Holliday of poetry" is definitely an "Uhm."
- Is the [Reddit/GameStop stock frenzy the French Revolution of finance?](#)
- Think you know our home planet? [Then check out this animated model of the movement of Earth's tectonic plates over the last billion years](#). Fascinating.
- If you aren't following [YA Whispers](#), you're missing some amazing insight into what the whisper network is saying about certain literary agents and people.
- Sheree Reneé Thomas [has updated the fiction submission guidelines for F&SF](#). One change is preferring the speculative element be discernable in the first or second page of a story.
- The British Science Fiction Association is [launching a new fiction publication called Fission, which is open to submissions](#). However, [the magazine is a non-paying market](#). Since BSFA is a professional organization to promote SF, there are a number of grumblings from authors about the association publishing a non-paying fiction magazine.
- The book [Baker and the Geek was released by "Chelsea Millen"](#) just in time for Black History Month. [But it caused a stir because while the book appeared to be #ownvoices](#), it was actually written by a white woman. It then came out that the book was evidently written by Isabella Starling under a pseudonym. And [Starling's response kept digging that hole even deeper](#). More on all this [from Courtney Milan](#).
- SFWA released an alert [explaining what the CASE Act on copyright small claims means for writers](#).
- Karintha Parker [discusses how the pandemic has exposed problems around the publishing industry being centered in New York City](#).
- Wonderful imagery from [NASA's Deep Space Climate Observatory of the moon orbiting Earth](#).
- As a kaiju fan, I watched the [new Godzilla Vs. Kong trailer several times](#). And as John Wiswell shares, there are big laughs at the film characters saying ["We don't know why Godzilla is attacking us.' If only there were thirty other movies to clue y'all in!"](#)
- Rolling Stone [wants "thought leaders" to pay \\$2,000 to write for their magazine](#). Which is proof that Rolling Stone long ago sold out and are unclear on the subjects of morality and ethics, because money should always flow to the writer, not from the writer (even if you call yourself a "thought leader"). And as Stuart Turnbull says, [imagine Hunter S. Thompson's response if Rolling Stone had asked him to pay to publish his work](#).
- [Amanda Gorman is America's youngest inauguration poet](#), with people falling in love with her poem "The Hill We Climb."
- In addition to all his other work since being sworn in, President Joe Biden [put a moon rock in the Oval Office](#).
- I loved the [Museum of Modern Art's enhanced 1902 video of the Wuppertal Schwebebahn suspension railway](#). But I missed until now the [side-by-side video from 1902 with the modern day as the train moves through town](#).
- Someone has been [stealing short stories and releasing them as anthologies on Amazon](#) using different names (two names used were [Abbas Khan](#) and [Marcus Pugh](#)). Amazon eventually took these books down and [it's possible this person is stealing stories through Reedsy](#). Titles used for these anthologies of stolen stories included Collection of Crime Stories, Horror Short Stories, and Best Thriller, Crime, Suspense and Mystery Short Stories.
- Those people who wondered what the film The Shape Of Water would look like if it magically transformed into a pair of high-heel shoes [should check out this image](#).
- Writer and Tolkien biographer [John Garth claims to have discovered a secret in Ursula Le Guin's world, Earthsea](#). According to him, in the Old Speech of Earthsea the word for earth is called talk and the sea is called inien. Put them together, elide the middle syllable, and you get Tolkien. Of

course, Garth says this can't be proved but adds Le Guin was a huge admirer of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.

- Paul Weimer is one of SF/F genre's nicest people but he recently discovered he'd been permanently banned from Twitter after years of harassment from right-wing trolls. [He's now unbanned and describes what happened](#). And unfortunately, [this happens all the time on Twitter, especially to women and people of color](#).
- Excellent thread from Cherie Priest on how “[Once a year or so there's a piece by someone who got a book deal, tanked, and now blames...everyone in their immediate vicinity](#). It's always clear that they went in with wild expectations, absolutely no understanding of the industry, and a hearty sense of entitlement.”
- Japan's Media Do [has purchased NetGalley](#).
- Victoria Strauss [warns about the new literary agency Pique Literary](#).
- Sarah Gailey published a [great essay by Matt Wallace on found families and professional wrestling](#).
- The Japanese government has [proposed changing copyright law to require professional cosplayers to pay creators for the use of characters](#).
- The Wisconsin pharmacist charged with trying to destroy COVID-19 vaccines not only believed the vaccine would harm people, [but that the Earth is flat and the sky is a government shield to prevent people from seeing God](#).
- I missed this until now, but interesting how each copy of [Subcutaneous by Aaron A. Reed](#) is unique, with the story changing with each edition a reader buys. And note this isn't an old-style Choose Your Own Adventure or even interactive fiction. [As the Verge writes](#), "Some differences from copy to copy will be big, others small, even as the overall story stays largely the same."
- Colleen Oefelein was [fired as an agent at Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency after the discovery she had accounts on right wing-associated social media sites Parler and Gab](#).
- With the fifth season of The Expanse wrapped up, Andrew Liptak [shares a deep-dive into how the series went from game concept to blockbuster TV show](#).
- And Charlie Jane Anders writes in Esquire about [how space operas were dying because of continuing themes related to imperialism and colonialism until The Expanse transformed the genre](#).
- If you're a fan of Edward Scissorhands and don't mind your childhood films selling out to promote Cadillacs, [check out their Super Bowl commercial](#).
- Which [type of writer are you with regards to your manuscript?](#)

Opportunities

- Through June the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America is waiving fees for membership for Black writers. [Details>>](#)
- Registration for the Octavia E. Butler conference in March is open. And in celebration of International Women's Day, the conference registration fees have been waived. [Details>>](#)
- Rivers Solomon is looking for people interest in putting together a quarterly or semi-annual journal of anarchist fiction and poetry. Get in touch with them for more info. [Details>>](#)
- The Denver Horror Collective is seeking submissions for The Jewish Book of Horror. Deadline April 30. [Details>>](#)
- Lit Reactor is seeking submissions for The Mercy Seat: Stories From Death Row. Deadline Sept. 30. [Details>>](#)
- Nightfire Books will be open to unagented submissions for one week starting June 15. [Details>>](#)
- The deadline to apply for the Odyssey Writing Workshop is April 1. The annual six-week residential workshop will be held June 7 – July 16, 2021 on the campus of Saint Anselm College

in New Hampshire. “If social distancing is still necessary but travel is possible, the workshop will be held in person with COVID precautions. If travel for many is not possible, the workshop will be held online, as it was in 2020.” [Details>>](#)

Genre Grapevine for 4/30/2021

(Note: All links in this column worked at publication, but some may have since changed.)

Thank you

I want to take a moment to thank my readers and Patreon supporters. I am a finalist for this year's Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer for my Genre Grapevine column. In addition, my story "[The Eight-Thousanders](#)" is a finalist for this year's Nebula Award for Best Short Story.

None of that would have happened without the support people like you have shown my fiction and nonfiction. Thank you!

Last Dangerous Visions Envisions a Last Dangerous Submission Release

J. Michael Straczynski, executor of Harlan Ellison's estate, [opens an extremely limited 24-hour submission window today for the forever-delayed anthology Last Dangerous Visions](#).

But to submit you have to sign a questionable "submission agreement."

I understand part of why Straczynski is requiring the submission agreement because Hollywood is extremely litigious (with [Ellison being solid proof of that](#)). But the agreement is still extremely troubling and I suggest authors be wary of signing it.

The agreement says an author can't sue Straczynski for anything he's currently working on which is similar to what you submit. That's fair.

However, then there's this clause. Note the word "material" refers to your submission.

"You may use, without any obligation whatsoever to me and without payment whatsoever to me, the Material, or any part thereof or ideas therein, to the extent that such Material, part, or idea (a) is not unique, novel, original, and concrete so as to be entitled to intellectual property protection under the law; or (b) has been made public by anyone at the time of my submission or otherwise is in the public domain; or (c) would be freely usable by a third person if it had not been accepted as a submission or the subject of any agreement; or (d) is not protected by copyright law."

Essentially, that clause allows Straczynski to use any part of your story that isn't covered by copyright. Doesn't mean he would do that, but the agreement allows it. So if you write a story with a killer central idea or concept, well, bad news, [killer ideas and concepts aren't protected by copyright](#).

But to my mind, that's not even the worst part of the contract. Later on it reads:

"I understand and acknowledge that you and your employees have access to, may create, or have created, stories, books, film or television material and/or other ideas which may be substantially similar or identical to the Material in theme, idea, plot, format or other respects. I agree that I will not be entitled to any compensation because of the use of any such substantially similar or identical material that may have been independently created by you or any of your employees ..."

That means the agreement forces you to legally state that Straczynski might create stories, books, film or TV material substantially similar or identical to your story. But if they do you agree you wouldn't be entitled to any compensation.

If you want to see the agreement, [you can download it as a PDF](#).

It should be pointed out that contract terms like these are familiar to many people in Hollywood. However, such a submission contract absolutely goes against the norms and practices of the publishing industry. In addition, I've had Hollywood agencies ask to see my stories before and I've never had to sign anything for them to consider these stories, so we shouldn't pretend this is something everyone in Hollywood does.

Most importantly, authors should not be required to sign a contract or give up so many rights merely to submit a story!

The agreement obviously doesn't mean Straczynski would do any of this or is trying to steal authors' stories or ideas. And I'm also glad Straczynski will release Ellison's anthology, although it is weird to be adding new stories to this book instead of simply presenting it as a historical artifact.

[As I've written before](#), never forget Harlan Ellison hurt many writers with his 50 years of lies and delays around *Last Dangerous Visions*. This agreement strikes me as yet another head-desk moment in this anthology's long, sordid history.

Hugo Awards News and Info

The [Hugo Awards finalists were announced by DisCon III](#) two weeks ago. DisCon also announced that this year's [Worldcon will be held at a new hotel in Washington, D.C., from December 15 to 19](#). Because of this people will have until November 19 to vote for this year's Hugo winners.

Most of the genre reacted extremely positively to the Hugo finalists, with *Comic Years* calling the finalists an example of "[another banner year for genre entertainment](#)." Cora Buhkert's [breakdown of the finalists is also well worth a read](#), praising both the works themselves and noting the ballot's diversity.

However, the Hugo announcement did generate some controversy. First off, the renamed "[Helicopter Story](#)" by Isabel Fall made the Hugo ballot in the novelette category. [According to Clarkesworld editor Neil Clarke](#), who originally published the story, the author requested this title change. And the story is still not available to read since [Clarke took it down last year and posted these comments](#).

In addition, the Best Related Work finalist "[George R.R. Martin Can Fuck Off Into the Sun](#)" by Natalie Luhrs generated a ton of comments from people in the genre because of the title. You can [read some of these comments in this article on File770](#), where people ask if the essay's title violates the code of conduct of this year's Worldcon.

I don't agree with this take. First, the essay is legitimate criticism of GRRM's horrible MCing during last year's Hugo ceremony. Very strongly worded criticism, yes, but sometimes that is needed.

As a reminder, during last year's Hugo ceremony GRRM didn't focus on the amazing authors nominated for the awards. Instead he focused on John W. Campbell, whose racist and fascist beliefs (not hyperbole, look it up) caused his name to be removed from the Astounding Award.

GRRM also didn't bother to learn to pronounce the names of the finalists and winners. And when "honoring" the current Hugo winners, he kept going on about past winners like Heinlein and Silverberg, as if to imply the current winners would never measure up to the past.

So Natalie Luhrs responded, as did many others. Her essay is raw and pointed and yes, that title sticks with you. And now some people are complaining the essay, by being a Hugo finalist, constitutes harassment of GRRM and violates the Worldcon code of conduct. Seriously?

The Worldcon code of conduct should not be used to shut down a legitimate critique of a genre issue. [As Courtney Milan says](#), "I am trying to understand the argument that a blog post written outside a convention violates the code of conduct for a convention and...failing."

GRRM is one of the most famous, powerful, and highest paid authors in the SF/F genre. Luhrs rightly critiqued his words and actions in a powerful essay.

Is it possible GRRM's feelings are hurt by the title. Possibly, although only he can say. But I'm certain far more people were hurt by GRRM's words at last year's Hugo ceremony. Thank you to Natalie Luhrs for writing this essay. And congrats on being a Hugo finalist!

Chicon Won't Run Retro Hugos

Next year's Worldcon, Chicon 8, [released their first progress report](#). Among the notable news is that in response to complaints about the [Retro Hugo Awards](#), Chicon "has decided that we will not administer the Retro Hugos for 1947. We will, however, be doing a retrospective of the works and fandom of 1946, headed up by Cora Buhkert, 2020 Hugo Award Finalist for Best Fan Writer."

As the report states,

"Several factors went into this decision. First, the public feedback made on social media and sent to us in email after the last two Retro Hugos largely were not supportive of Retro Hugos at Chicon 8. Second, it has been increasingly difficult to get representatives from estates involved in the awards, leading us to question who we were actually honoring when the creators are deceased and the estates, for the most part, are uninterested. Third, there is a financial cost factor — rockets and bases, tech for putting on a ceremony, etc. Fourth, the labor costs of administering the awards, the director and crew for a ceremony, hosts and acceptors, etc. Fifth, there tends to be much less interest in the Retro Hugos, based on lower nominations, lower voting, and lower attendance at Retro Hugos ceremonies."

I think Cora Buhlert is the perfect person to run the 1946 retrospective. This also strikes me as a good compromise between those who want to permanently get rid of the Retro Hugos and those who want to raise awareness of historic genre writers and works.

Baen Books Forum Update

On April 9 the Baen Books forum Baen's Bar returned after nearly two months of being shut down. The publisher shut down the Bar after my report about the [forum being used by some participants to advocate for political violence](#).

According to this [message from Baen publisher Toni Weisskopf](#), none of the allegations raised about the forum were justified. Weisskopf points out that there were many posts she disagreed with, but adds "I did not see illegal speech even in the most heated discussions."

Despite that, she then announces a number of changes to Baen's Bar. For example, a new company, SFF Forums, will be administering the Bar. The Bar will no longer be open to the public (you must purchase a Baen book to access it). And it sure sounds like they will be enforcing the forum's rules and moderating it again, which was what I asked for in my original report.

Weisskopf even says "if you are seeking to plan imminent violence, from whatever political direction or none at all, that won't fly."

Obviously I disagree with Weisskopf saying the allegations were not justified. [In my report I shared the evidence](#) of what was being discussed on the Bar. But Baen can decide what speech they allow on their forum and they appear to have made their decision.

But I again return to Weisskopf's statement, which sure sounds like Baen will return to moderating their forum. She even references the forum rules "decreed by the God Emperor Himself, Jim Baen of Sainted Memory" and says they will be enforced.

That said, one of the moderators I mentioned in my report as appearing to advocate for political violence, Theoryman, looks to be an admin for the new forum. The day before Weisskopf's statement was posted, [Theoryman posted a public and detailed post on the forum about free speech](#).

But again, I return to the fact that Baen Books had a new entity take over the forum while Weisskopf's statement talks about moderating the forum and following forum rules And [even Theoryman posted the Bar's rules](#) and talks about forum moderation.

My take on all this is it sounds like Baen didn't want to admit there was a problem. But they'll now be enforcing the rules going forward, bringing in new administrators and moderators, and those "seeking to plan imminent violence" won't be allowed to do so.

People can draw their own conclusions. But Baen Books making all these changes plus Weisskopf saying in her statement that if "the level of discourse descends too low, we'll lose the Bar" is very illuminating to me.

Black Static's New Format

As I've previously covered, [TTA Press publisher Andy Cox tried to find a new publisher for the British magazine Interzone earlier this year](#). However, [that deal fell through](#) even though Cox said he'd wanted to retire.

[TTA Press](#) is continuing to publish Interzone and Black Static, but is no longer accepting subscriptions. However, all current subscriptions are still being honored.

TTA Press recently released the latest issue of Black Static in a new double issue version, which also appears to be the new format for Interzone. The magazines are now a 6 x 9 inch perfect bound book with 190 pages, looking like a high-class literary journal. There are no illustrations or nonfiction inside. But the stories are still very good and the interior layout is very readable.

I loved the old design of Black Static and Interzone, especially for the magazine's innovative use of interior art. But I can see why TTA Press switched to this format because it's likely way easier and less time intensive to design, layout, and print the magazine.

As a reader, it's still a nice format. As a writer, I would still love to be published in Black Static. For now it appears TTA Press will continue publishing both magazines and [sell them in this book/literary journal format](#).

And yes, Black Static and Interzone are still open to submissions.

Other News and Info

- If you're a SFWA member, don't forget today is the [last day to vote for the Nebula Awards](#).
- Many other awards announced their shortlists and winners in recent days including [the 2021 Ignyte Awards](#) (which IMHO is one of the most exciting new genre awards around), the [Xingyun Awards for Chinese science fiction](#), and the [Sir Julius Vogel Award finalists](#) for genre works by people from New Zealand.
- Author Philip Roth was famously misogynistic and vengeful against anyone he believed wronged him. Before he passed away in 2018, Roth selected Blake Bailey to write his biography, [evidently hoping the biography would settle scores and convince the world that Roth was actually a great guy](#). Well, that massively backfired after sexual assault allegations were raised against Bailey, [who was quickly dropped by his literary agency while the publisher of the Roth biography pulled it from print](#).
- Related to Roth, [Monica Hesse has a very good thread](#) about the myth of writers needing their spouse to never interrupt their writing or put any demands on them. "If you are married to a writer and they tell you their creative process means they cannot contribute to your household, it might not be that they're a genius. It might be that they're a jerk." A number of authors responded to that thread with their own accounts of writing despite not having uninterrupted time, including [Aliette de Bodard](#) and [Tiffany Pitts](#). And Samantha Mills [shared an excellent anecdote about Toni Morrison writing her first novel](#) only for her kid to spit up on the manuscript. So Morrison simply wrote around the vomit.
- From now on when someone complains about the so-called cancel culture, [I'm going to quote LeVar Burton](#): "In terms of cancel culture, I think it's misnamed. I think we have a consequence culture and consequences are finally encompassing everybody."
- [According to Alan Dean Foster](#), his royalty issues with Disney have been resolved. As a reminder, after Disney acquired the copyright licenses for the Alien and Star Wars tie-in books Foster wrote, the company continued to publish the books but not pay royalties. However, that doesn't end the larger dispute. SFWA (which originally brought this issue to the public's attention) says Disney is still not paying about a dozen additional authors. SFWA has provided Disney with the names of these authors but, according to an email SFWA sent to members, "Disney is being reactive, rather than proactively working with us to address the significant issue we have brought to their attention." [In response SFWA has formed a task force](#) with the Author's Guild, Horror Writers Association, National Writers Union, Novelists, Inc., Romance Writers of America, and Sisters in Crime to help authors who might be owed money. For more info or to report if you're owed royalties, [check out the #DisneyMustPay website](#).

- While Disney makes billions off Marvel Comics and their other intellectual properties, the authors and creators of those properties rarely see any of that money. For example, Ed Brubaker, the creator of the Winter Soldier, [says he received more money from a cameo in the Winter Soldier show than he did from actually creating the world-famous character.](#)
- Devi Pillai is the new president and publisher of Tom Doherty Associates and will be in overall charge of associated imprints including Tor, Tordotcom Publishing, and Forge Books.
- The magazine Amazing Stories is on hiatus. [According to a post on their website](#), this is because a "major licensing agreement using the Amazing Stories name has been terminated owing to non-payment."
- ["Fiction sales in 2020 soared by more than £100m for UK publishers](#), as readers locked down at home made their escape into books, with audiobook sales also climbing by more than a third."
- "On the flip side, [about 98 percent of the books that publishers released in 2020](#) sold fewer than 5,000 copies." As [Silvia Moreno-Garcia says](#), "That sounds average. Even before the pandemic average sales seemed to hover in the low thousands."
- In-person conventions are slowly returning with DisCon III hosting an in-person event from December 15 to 19, which will be the latest in the year Worldcon has ever been held. New York Comic Con also [aims to return for a smaller than normal in-person event in October](#) while Blerdcon will host a ["vaccine mandated event \(even if you HAD covid and recovered\)"](#) from July 16-18 in Washington, D.C.
- But despite some conventions returning to in-person events, [book publishers and booksellers believe it is still too early to predict when in-person author readings and tours can safely restart.](#)
- SFWA has elected new officers, [including Jeffe Kennedy as their new president.](#)
- Bethany Baptiste has [written a powerful thread about publishers and agents reaching out to Black writers when the Black Lives Matters protests started.](#) Despite that, Baptiste writes that "An agent ridiculed my writing for 2hr then informed me they wanted to go on sub immediately because they knew editors were feeling white guilt and would buy my story in a heartbeat."
- [As Rebecca Makkai notes](#), Jonathan Franzen's flap copy claims he is "the leading novelist of his generation." I totally agree with Makkai that the word "the" is "doing a whole, whole, whole lot of work there..." Many others piled onto Franzen including hilarious comments from [Joseph Fink](#) and [Zig Zag Claybourne.](#)
- With Hollywood and Broadway producer [Scott Rudin being called out for his horrible treatment of nearly everyone across his career](#), author [Michael Chabon offered a deep apology](#) for enabling and overlooking the harm Rudin did for twenty years.
- I totally agree with Shawn Taylor at Nerds of Color: [Elfquest is one of the greatest comic books of all time](#) and revolutionary in how it impacted many writers and readers, myself included.
- Alyssa Collins, an assistant professor of English Language and Literature and African American Studies at the University of South Carolina, [has been awarded the year-long Octavia E. Butler Fellowship.](#)
- So it turns out the GOP has created a bulk book-buying operation and is [using this to boost Republican political authors onto the bestseller lists.](#)
- [As J.D. Boehninger says](#), "I wish I had a passion for anything in life that matched (Cory) Doctorow's hatred for printers." To read Doctorow's newest printer-rant thread, [go here.](#) Be warned the thread starts out with the words "pirate" and "lawless cur" before convincingly showcasing the horrors that result when printer companies get their way and how this could be a taste of things to come in our interconnected world.
- [As the NYTimes explains](#), self-help author Rachel Hollis "built a blockbuster business sharing her 'authentic' self. Then things got a little too real" when she kept referring to her housekeeper as the person who merely "cleans the toilets." When called on that, Hollis pushed back by saying she was living her best life, just like Harriet Tubman. [Hollis ended up apologizing twice in the same week](#) but that doesn't appear to have self-helped her authentic standing.

- Ever see a subtweet about a literary controversy but have no idea what it's referencing? Then check out the [new Twitter account Explaining Book Subtweets](#) to understand more book subtweets than you ever knew existed.
- While you may believe [the saga of this independent alt-rock radio station trying to stay on the air](#) has little to do with the SF/F genre, their story is actually a cautionary tale of what happens when corporate consolidation hits an industry. If we're not careful, [this could be the future of the book industry](#).
- Excellent article about how author [Martha Wells thought her writing career was over before her hit Murderbot Diaries series was released](#). Any writer who has ever despaired over their career should read this. Andrew Liptak also has a [very good interview with Wells about her writing process and the creation of Murderbot](#). And for those who can't get enough of Murderbot, the newest novel in the series, Fugitive Telemetry, was just released while [Tor.com published a new stand-alone short story in the universe](#). Finally, [Tordotcom announced a six-figure acquisition](#), its largest purchase to date, for six more novels by Wells, of which three will be in the Murderbot series.
- Aimee Ogden should be a horror writer because [this tweet about a centipede is the scariest thing I've read in weeks](#). Shudder.
- Jack Black [getting his vaccine is the superhero we all need these days](#).
- [So much truth in this Tweet:](#)
 Doctor: I'm going to drop you off in 2022.
 Companion: But Doctor, I come from 2019.
 Doctor: I'm going to drop you off in 2022.

Opportunities

- The 2021 Future Worlds Prize for Fantasy and Science Fiction Writers of Colour is open for submissions. Winner will receive a prize of £4,000 while runner-up receives £2,000. All those shortlisted will receive mentoring from the prize's publishing partners. Deadline June 25. [Details>>](#)
- The Horror Writers Association is accepting submissions for their upcoming poetry showcase. Deadline June 1. [Details>>](#)
- [Hilary B. Bisenieks and Annalee Flower Horne](#) are editing a special issue of Quaker SFFH for Friends Journal. Seeking Quaker-based stories of the fantastic up to 2,000 words. [Details>>](#)
- Blood Knife is seeking contributors with "good takes on sci-fi, cyberpunk, fantasy, the future, and/or (preferably and!) radical politics." [Details>>](#)

Genre Grapevine for 5/29/2021

(Note: All links in this column worked at publication, but some may have since changed.)

Goodreads Still Won't Implement Standard Security Features; Criminals Now Using Site to Extort Authors

Nearly a year and a half ago [I reported on trolls spoofing the identities of numerous authors](#) on Goodreads in a massive coordinated attack against author Patrick S. Tomlinson. Eventually Goodreads [began dealing somewhat with this issue](#), especially when the attacks spread to other authors.

However, Goodreads still hasn't implemented basic online security measures for their site, such as requiring email or phone verification for new accounts or allowing people to easily report fake accounts. As a result, the site continues to see attacks against authors.

And now, [as Victoria Strauss at Writer Beware details](#), criminals have begun using the site to extort authors by threatening to post a blizzard of one-star reviews and ratings if authors don't hand over money to "[buy our paid review offers](#)."

Writers and readers need to understand that Goodreads is allowing this to happen with their weak security measures. Goodreads isn't the victim here. Goodreads is enabling these problems.

Last week Tomlinson was again attacked on Goodreads, with trolls once more creating dozens of fake accounts to harass him. Many of the accounts spoofed Tomlinson's name while others used horrific racial epitaphs in their account names. Here's a [screenshot of one of these usernames and their comments](#) (strong TR for use of racial epitaph and racism). These accounts then posted numerous fake reviews of Tomlinson's book *In the Black*, using the reviews to slander and attack him.

Worse, while Goodreads allows users to flag fake reviews, you still can't easily do the same with obviously fake accounts. Instead, Goodreads asks authors to email support@goodreads.com to report fake accounts, a time-consuming process which is more rooted in web practices of the 1990s than 2021.

Alternately, users have to figure out that if they [click on a profile picture there is a small grey flag at the bottom of the enlarged photo for reporting the user](#). This is not intuitive at all and seems to be simply to make it difficult to report fake accounts. And when you do this you still can't report the account as fake, merely as "Inappropriate."

Every major social media platform these days allows people to directly flag fake accounts. Yet Goodreads can't do this?

And Goodreads could also easily program their site to block the creation of usernames which copy already existing account names, or contain expletives and racial epitaphs, or are created by someone using a proxy server or VPN.

After numerous complaints over multiple days, Goodreads moderators finally removed the fake users and reviews attacking Tomlinson. But just as they did with last year's attacks, they manually corrected these issues instead of actually fixing the overall flaws allowing the attacks. This is like slapping a bandaid on a severed artery.

Another example of a problem with Goodreads security is you can still easily create a new account without a valid email address or even verifying that the email works. This security flaw enables trolls to rapidly create multiple fake Goodreads accounts.

Tomlinson revealed to me that some of the recent fake accounts were created using his own email, which he had associated with his own personal Goodreads account. So not only does Goodreads not verify that an email account works and can be accessed by the person creating an account, the site doesn't even compare the emails associated with new accounts with already existing accounts.

And to repeat, now criminals are using the lax security at Goodreads to extort authors.

Goodreads is owned by Amazon, which means they have the financial resources to fix security issues like this. And honestly, the problems with Goodreads have gotten worse under Amazon. [As](#)

[Victoria Strauss writes](#), after Amazon acquired Goodreads "the already toxic atmosphere increased while the responsiveness of the people running the site underwent an equivalent decline."

In January of this year [Alina Leonova was told by Goodreads](#) that the site had their engineering teams investigating possible solutions to prevent these extortion scams "from happening in the future."

Investigating possible solutions? This isn't rocket science. Implement email and/or phone verification and allow people to easily report fake accounts. Put in place simple measures to prevent criminals and trolls from creating large numbers of fake accounts.

As [SFWA said in a statement about last year's Goodreads attacks](#), "If readers lose their faith with the site because of false reviews, that's a problem for all of us."

It's obvious that a year and a half of people pointing out the problems at Goodreads hasn't convinced the site to actually fix their security issues.

It's obvious at this point that Goodreads simply doesn't care.

And We Also Have a Goodreads ARC Problem

Another issue Goodreads ignores is the problem of users posting fake reviews and ratings for books that haven't been published and haven't even seen the release of advanced reader copies (ARCs). This personally has happened to me and has also happened with many other authors.

And this issue also heavily affects marginalized writers, [as Neon Yang points out in this thread](#). As Yang writes, one-star reviews begin appearing on Goodreads "before ARCs are even out, just b/c there's a queer relationship or the author is visibly non-white."

I recently asked Goodreads why they allowed ratings and reviews before ARCs are available. I also asked if they could delete entries for books that are created before review copies are available. The site responded in an email by pointing me to their [review guidelines](#), which state "We have no way of knowing the exact date that review copies are available. As such, each book is eligible to be reviewed as soon as it appears on the site."

[Goodreads also told me in that email that](#) "Goodreads policy allows users to rate a book as soon as it is listed on the site. We do not dictate on what basis Goodreads members form their personal opinions about a book, so we have no rules about reading a book before rating and reviewing it."

Reread that last sentence: We do not dictate on what basis Goodreads members form their personal opinions about a book, so we have no rules about reading a book before rating and reviewing it.

Wow. That policy statement is essentially Goodreads begging trolls and haters to use their site to harass authors with bad reviews. I understand that most of the time it could be hard to determine if a reviewer actually read a book. But when a verified author or the book's publisher says ARCs haven't been released, Goodreads should listen, especially when these one-star reviews are frequently being used to harass marginalized writers.

But if we've learned anything about Goodreads, they don't know how to listen.

Conventions Consider Pros and Cons of Reopening

As the United States reopens from COVID, many genre conventions are exploring the same.

Larger conventions with paid staff look like they will be the first to return with in-person events. For example, Gen Con 2021 in Indianapolis was originally scheduled for August 5-8 but [the convention has now announced they'll hold a mix of in-person and virtual sessions from September 16-19](#). Gen Con's in-person attendance will also be capped. Dragon Con also plans to hold a [mix of in-person and virtual sessions from September 2 to 6](#).

After talking with people in the genre, there appear to be a couple of reasons larger genre conventions are moving quickly to again hold in-person events. First, there appears to be pent-up demand for in-person conventions as more people receive COVID vaccinations. Second, these large conventions financially depend on people attending and face massive penalties from hotels and convention centers if

they don't take place this year. Finally, since these large conventions have full-time paid staff to manage and run their events, they can move more quickly to reopen.

In addition, some volunteer-run conventions are also aiming to reopen this year. [Back in April DisCon III announced](#) they'd hold Worldcon from December 15-19, the latest the convention has ever been held in the year. And [World Fantasy Convention 2021](#) in Montréal has announced that "given the expected timeline of the vaccine rollout in North America, we expect to be able to hold an in-person convention."

However, not all genre conventions are expected to move so quickly to hold in-person events. Because most small and regional genre conventions are run by volunteers and non-profit organizations, these conventions are relatively risk-averse with their finances. As a result many smaller conventions appear to be waiting to see what will happen with the pandemic, fearful of locking themselves into hotel contracts they may not be able to get out of if the pandemic flares up in the USA. As a result smaller, regional conventions may be the last to reopen, with many of them not returning until 2022.

To understand the financial risks that genre conventions face, consider the case of DisCon III. In their announcement about hosting a December convention, DisCon stated that their staff had contractual obligations to their previous hotel of \$500,000. And if they'd tried to keep their original convention dates in August but use an all-virtual format, they'd have faced additional financial penalties from the new hotel of up to \$400,000. All of that definitely tied in with Worldcon going forward with an in-person event in December.

While the financial risks faced by other genre conventions are usually not as large as those faced by DisCon, they are still significant. Add in concerns around the safety of attendees and how much time it takes to plan a convention, and it's easy to see why many genre cons won't return this year.

But in some good news, the Speculative Literature Foundation has stepped up to assist the return of conventions, with the foundation offering a new Convention Support Grant for 2021-2022. Conrunners interested in applying for the grant [can find more information here](#).

Lots of Genre Award Stuff

- Douglas F. Dluzen & Christopher Mark Rose [published an analysis of possible seasonal bias in the major speculative fiction awards](#), with stories published in September and October appearing more often on final award ballots than stories published in other months. In addition, online short fiction appears to currently have a greater chance of making the final ballots than stories in print publications. However, Dluzen and Rose also admit more analysis of the issue is needed and editors of some genre publications question the findings.
- Jenn Northington at Book Riot has created [an excellent guide to the SF/F awards scene](#). I bookmarked this for future reference.
- Voting for this year's [Hugo Awards has opened](#). However, the Hugo Voter Packet is not yet available.
- Congrats to the [winners of the 2020 Bram Stoker Awards](#).
- The 2021 longlist for the Nommo Awards [has been released by the African Speculative Fiction Society](#)
- The [2021 Aurora Award final ballot is also available](#).
- And don't forget the [Nebula Awards Conference takes place from June 4 to 6](#), with the award winners announced at a [virtual reception on June 5](#).

Other News and Info

- The subReddit Am I The Asshole sometimes provides pure gold, [as in this question from a senior editor in book publishing](#). Turns out this editor's mother is so proud of her job that mum keeps telling people to submit books to her daughter, who then has to reject the manuscripts. "I told

mum that if they get pushy after they receive the (rejection) template, I reserve the right to give them everything I've got, but mum has said that I'm being really unfair, both to her and the aspiring authors, and that I'm ruining her reputation, so I need to stop being so rude." Among the highlights of the editor's comments in the post's response thread are "I don't have the energy to deal with spoilt rich kids in adult bodies saying 'but mummy told me that I have a gift!'" and that her mother even gave aspiring authors her personal number. The editor also notes that "The majority of the people my mum refers to me don't need their work published, they need a handful of beta readers, followed by an agent, followed by a junior editor, they won't need me for several more steps of the process."

- Eric Carle, author of the beloved children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, [recently passed away at age 91](#). In response a story went viral about Carle and his publisher "fighting bitterly over the stomachache scene" in the book. However, this story isn't true. [As Avi Naftali shares in this thread](#), the story came from an April fools issue of *The Paris Review*.
- Matthew Broberg-Moffitt [presents an insightful essay on neurodiversity and the business of writing](#). The first of three parts, this essay covers the harmful stereotypes found within many stories. This topic is very personal to me and I look forward to reading parts 2 and 3 and urge everyone to check it out.
- Sophie Gonzales was attacked by book Twitter for her novel *Perfect on Paper*, [about a bi-sexual character being in a m/f relationship](#). The [attacks were led by Gretchen Felker-Martin](#), who implied that queer books had to feature a "[ton of graphic gay sex](#)." A number of people came to the defense of Gonzales, including [Implausibly Josh, who critiqued the behavior of Felker-Martin](#). And as Neon Yang says, "[there is more to being queer than sex](#)." [As Gonzales writes](#), "if you're tired of book Twitter recycling the biphobia stuff yet again, imagine how tired bi people are feeling right now."
- If you're worried you didn't publish your debut novel by a certain age, [C.L. Polk is here to reassure you](#). "I signed with my agent on my forty-seventh birthday. I won the world fantasy award for that novel when I was fifty years old. The only thing that art asks of you is to do it."
- [In a press release SFWA announced](#) that comic book and graphic novel publisher BOOM! Studios is now working with the [#DisneyMustPay](#) task force.
- Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) [has signed an agreement with Amazon Publishing to make approximately 10,000 Amazon Publishing ebooks and audiobooks available to libraries](#). As the announcement states, "this marks the first time that ebooks from Amazon Publishing have been made available to libraries."
- [Good article about Zakiya Dalila Harris](#), a former editorial assistant whose debut novel *The Other Black Girl* focuses on what it's like being one of the few Black people at a major publishing house.
- To understand some of the BS that is allowed to happen in the publishing world, [read this article about why Simon & Schuster staff are angry at CEO Jonathan Karp](#) about the company's decision to publish former Trump officials. [And in this thread](#), Preeti Chhibber dives into some of the particular concerns raised in the article about Karp.
- [Black Gate's](#) site has been down for a few days. According to editor John O'Neill, their ISP messed things up following a recent server migration. But the good news is they hope to be back up soon.
- Book Riot [examines how much authors get paid](#). An excellent primer and refresher for every writer.
- Turns out this advice to kids on [avoiding the toxic aspects of fandom can also help adults avoid the toxic aspects of fandom](#).
- Excellent essay by Charlie Jane Anders [on the pitfalls of inventing an alien civilization](#).

- Sarah Chorn [shares messages from a brand new fantasy author as a way of showcasing how not to treat an editor](#). Note all the comments from the author took place before Chorn even woke up in the morning and read them.
- The [virtual TorCon is returning and will run from June 10 to 13](#). There is no cost to take part.
- Clarion Workshop [will not take place for a second year because of the pandemic](#). Students from the cancelled 2020 workshop will have the option to attend in 2022.
- The [entire world wants to read John Steinbeck's werewolf novel](#). But his estate refuses because of what I believe is a case of "oh noos, we can't release a werewolf novel by a Nobel Prize winner!" [According to Professor Gavin Jones](#), the manuscript is complete and worth sharing with the public "It's a potboiler," Jones said, "but it's also the caldron of central themes we see throughout Steinbeck's later work." But the agents representing Steinbeck's heirs say the book won't be published.
- Tade Thompson asks, "[Is it fanfic if I write a werewolf novel mimicking Steinbeck's voice?](#)"
- Amazon could give their employees more pay and benefits. [Instead, the company provides dystopia-imagined ZenBooths](#).
- Stephen Graham Jones [shares a powerful open letter about what Indian writers shouldn't have to put up with at conventions](#).
- [As Dr. Chesya Burke says](#), "Ever notice how the Handmaid's Tale is both a TV show and an ongoing part of the U.S.'s evolution right now?" Yep.
- I totally agree with Maria Haskins about being "[tired of the idea that short story writers should stop wasting time & write something important, like novels](#)." Definitely read this tweet and the many responses, which showcase why short fiction is an amazing genre and the equal of novel writing.
- It appears news about Taylor Barton/Brooklyn Ray will keep popping up over and over in my column. [Previous coverage here](#). In the latest update, [Aiden Thomas states that Barton returned using a new Twitter handle, again pretending to be a person of color and resubmitting the same book](#). As Thomas writes, "It's the same book they pitched last time, people noticed and they deleted shortly after. they also keep querying an agent who can spot their writing."
- Victoria Strauss and Writer Beware warn about a new phishing scam, [which approaches writers and invites them to take part in a conference](#).
- Aidan Doyle [does a deep analysis of the genre's different year's best anthologies](#), including where the stories come from.
- I wish the lede of my obituary [could be this awesome](#): "Hollywood lost one of its last vestiges of golden age glamour on Tuesday, as actor Charles Grodin, whose on- and off-screen romance with his Great Muppet Caper costar Miss Piggy electrified audiences and ushered in a new era of frank sexuality in motion pictures, died at the age of 86."
- If you ever stress about the level of worldbuilding needed for your novel, remember that in the so-called "real world" [a farmer moved the border between France and Belgium so his tractor could have more room](#).
- For today's insect horror story, [many of the Brood X cicadas now emerging are tripping on a sexually transmitted psychedelic fungus which will cause their butts to fall off](#).
- This [thread about Raptors basketball Superfan Nav Bhatia](#) is a great, heart-warming story.
- This [zoetrope inspired by Hayao Miyazaki's Catbus is so peaceful I could watch it all day](#).

Opportunities

- Submissions are open through July 23 for the Analog Award for Emerging Black Voices. [Details>>](#)
- FIYAH Literary Magazine will be open to submissions from June 1 to July 31 on the theme of Love, Death and Androids. [Details>>](#)

- Hugh Howey is launching the Self-Published Science Fiction Competition, drawing inspiration from Mark Lawrence's Self-Published Fantasy Blog-Off. "Ten book bloggers, up to 300 science fiction novels, a year of reading and reviewing. We will end up with ten finalists and one winner." The competition will open to submissions from authors on June 30. [Details>>](#)
- Diana M. Pho updated her manuscript wishlist about what kind of sci-fi, fantasy & horror podcasts she'd like to acquire for Realm Media. [Details>>](#)
- Martian magazine is seeking submissions of drabbles, stories of exactly 100 words (excluding title). Deadline June 9. [Details>>](#)
- Reminder that Nightfire will be open for unagented submissions from June 15 to 22. [Details>>](#)
- Crone Girls Press will open submissions for the anthology Stories We Tell After Midnight from July 1 – 17. [Details>>](#)
- Note: Column updated to include link to the extremely hidden Goodreads info on reporting a fake account. And remember, when a site makes it nearly impossible for users to figure out how to report a fake account, that site is definitely making a statement about how much they care about their users' security.

Genre Grapevine for 9/26/2021

(Note: All links in this column worked at publication, but some may have since changed.)

Are We Facing an Increasingly Anti-Science World?

The [other day on John Scazli's Big Idea](#) feature I asked if fantasy is the end result of all science fiction.

I wasn't referring to the marketing categories separating those two speculative fiction genres. Instead, I talked about the approach many people have to our world's advanced technologies and how anti-science attitudes are spreading using the very tools resulting from our understanding of science.

You can [read the essay if you're interested](#) in a deep dive into all that.

But the TL;DR is that too many people now believe the science behind our modern world can be ignored or discarded if they disagree with it. And we're seeing this attitude in not only how humanity responds to global warming but also to the largest pandemic of the last century.

People are refusing to get the life-saving COVID vaccines because they don't trust the science behind them — but do believe an unproven horse dewormer is an effective treatment! And now [anti-vaccine groups are telling people not to go to the emergency room if they get COVID, and if a family member is already in intensive care to get them out](#).

If this is the reaction we're seeing against a vaccine that can easily save lives — again, a VACCINE, an easy to understand technology with vaccinations existing in different forms for centuries — imagine how much worse it'll get in the coming years as the effects of global warming increasingly threaten every human and living thing on Earth. If you thought people would eventually pull together to overcome the threat of global warming, the reaction against the COVID vaccine should show this isn't certain to happen.

If you read my Genre Grapevine column odds are you're someone who cares deeply about stories. If so, this growing anti-science movement is something you should keep firmly in mind. If you're a writer, how will you address this in the stories you write? If you're a reader or genre lover, how will you respond when a friend or family member spreads fake stories about vaccines not working or the science behind global warming being wrong?

Stories have the ability to create our world. Stories have the ability to change our world.

But this can cut both ways, with harmful stories hurting people as much as other stories can help. And the anti-science stories we're currently seeing — or to be more accurate, these anti-science lies — are literally killing people. And if these lies are allowed to go unchecked and spread, in the years to come they have the potential to kill all of humanity.

It's up to each of us to decide how the story on all this turns out.

As If Things Weren't Bad Enough, Now We Have a Paperpocalypse

Due to supply chain and industrial production problems, it appears the book industry is facing a paper shortage that could impact books through early next year. In particular, this could affect holiday book sales, traditionally a big time for book buying.

Andrew Liptak [dives into this so-called paperpocalypse](#) as does [the Mary Sue](#), but the issue boils down to fears that publishers may not be able to release as many print copies as desired. In addition, any books in the coming months that hit the bestseller lists may have difficulties in getting additional editions released. It's also possible the paper shortage could result in higher prices for printed books.

And as Mike Chen points out, [the issue will also impact authors receiving printed ARCs](#).

In response to these issues, publishers and authors are urging people to pre-order their favorite books. But it's not merely printing the books that's a problem. Shipping is also being impacted, with the

cost to ship books rising both due to increased shipping demands resulting from the pandemic and a shortage of cardboard to use in shipping boxes.

For an example of what this means check out the popular Avatar Legends tabletop RPG from Magpie Games, which broke Kickstarter records last year. [However, the shortage of cardboard might mean the company's ability to ship the RPG is delayed.](#)

If the paper shortage is affecting a Kickstarter like Avatar Legends that raised millions of dollars, [imagine what it will do to smaller presses](#) or individuals who ran much smaller fundraisers. Small press are especially at risk, as they frequently release books on very slim margins and are now facing a 5% or more rise in the cost of printing books (if they can even get the books printed) and a possible similar rise in the cost of shipping.

Paperpocalypse indeed.

Global SF Discussions

[Ray Nayler kicked off a discussion in the genre when he tweeted that](#) “SF must be global. Its voices must be global. Its concerns must be global. Editors and publishers must think globally -- about the entire human race and beyond it to all beings on this planet. If we can't make this genre truly global, how can we claim to write about the universe?”

A number of authors responded either directly or indirectly, including [Yudhanjaya Wijeratne who wrote](#) “It'll be global the day someone writing from South Asia gets the same shot and the same advances as someone from New York meeting an agent and an editor at their favorite SFF con. Money. Education. Discoverability. Without those three, we only have good sentiments.”

[Fabio Fernandes also pointed out that](#) “SF is already global, as its voices are. But the Anglo readers only started to understand this very recently.”

[Mário Seabra Coelho wrote](#) “Translations of non-English stuff should be the norm and not a niche. This is why SFF is leagues below lit fic when it comes to diversity.”

Renan Bernardo [wrote an excellent short thread saying](#) “I've been reading a lot of short fiction in the last years, and I can say that most of the SF published in magazines is still heavily focused on Anglo/Eurocentric conflicts and mindsets. Even in magazines who actively encourage writers from outside of the Anglo sphere. ... What often happens, IMO, is that non-Anglo authors (who want to figure in the Anglo magazines) ‘mold’ their stories so they can fit. It's rarely the other way around ...”

And while not directly in response to Nayler's tweet, [Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki wrote a must-read thread saying](#) “More than skill in the art & craft of writing, the African writer needs power. & I don't mean electricity. Tho that too. But power power. Access, influence, decision making power.”

The Marvel Lawsuits and #DisneyMustPay Are Two Sides of the Same Coin

The Walt Disney Company and Marvel Entertainment have been [served with copyright-termination notices by a number of the artists and illustrators who created some of their most famous characters, including Iron Man, Spider-Man and Thor](#). While a win wouldn't give these creators sole rights to the characters — Marvel would essentially be co-owners with the creators — it would result in Disney and Marvel having to share money with the people who created their billion dollar entertainment empires.

A fear of these legal challenges is what led Marvel and DC earlier this year to begin offering [“shut-up money” to their writers and artists](#). Instead of simply paying their creative people what they're worth, these companies want to slip writers and artists a small amount to keep quiet.

It's important people don't separate these lawsuits from the larger #DisneyMustPay movement started by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, which aims to make Disney honor their author contracts. [A few weeks ago the #DisneyMustPay task force expanded its focus](#), “reaching out to all comic book and graphic novel creators who may be missing royalty statements and payments from Disney and its companies.”

For decades Disney, Marvel, and many other major entertainment companies have abused work-for-hire laws and/or ignored what they owed under contracted agreements. With these companies now earning billions from the characters and stories created by creators who aren't sharing in this windfall, it's only natural writers and artists are finally pushing back.

Unfortunately, there's still a ton of work to do, including educating the public about the abuses these companies have enabled for far too long. When the Marvel lawsuits were announced many people supported the writers and artists. But I was astounded at how many others complained that the writers and artists were wrong for trying to make Marvel actually pay what is owed. People even complained that these lawsuits are an attempt to stop the next Spider-Man movie from being released.

Please. Neither #DisneyMustPay nor these lawsuits will stop any movies or other big-money Hollywood projects. Instead, Disney and Marvel will simply have to share some of their revenue with the creators.

I personally agree with what [Nadia Shammam wrote on all this](#): "It is very disheartening to see how many people value Intellectual Property over the actual people who make your favorite stories. We all love these characters but for the most part comics creators are underpaid, overworked, and not sure how long they can stick this out for."

#FIYAHCON2021

[FIYAHCON 2021](#) wrapped up last week to rave reviews from across the SF/F genre. The convention is definitely showing what a great virtual convention can and should be like. FIYAH [shared a good thread with highlights from the convention](#) and L. D. Lewis also [shared some simply amazing #FIYAHCON2021 numbers](#): "1072 Registrations, 965 Active attendees, 83 Sessions (ceremonies, panels, calm rooms, games, etc), 189826 Emoji reactions used, 22 Booths, 2316 Booth visits."

It's impossible to link to everyone who had great things to say about FIYAHCON. For examples of the convention's impact, first check out [C. L. Clark's must-read acceptance speech after winning the Ignite Award for Best Short Story](#). Kel Coleman also wrote a powerful thread on how the convention "[enriched my life in just one weekend](#)." And finally, convention guest Brandon O'Brien showcased the marketing power of FIYAHCON when his poetry collection Can You Sign My Tentacle? [jumped to the Amazon Caribbean poetry best seller lists as a result of his convention participation](#).

However, L.D. Lewis and the FIYAHCON staff also had to deal at the last-minute with some very unjust accusations that their panelist Release Consent Terms were predatory. Lewis [detailed what happened in this thread, including sharing the consent terms](#). Alex Brown also had an [excellent thread on the controversy that wasn't](#).

In reality the terms were extremely fair. The terms were also optional, since panelists didn't have to sign them, and they simply allowed FIYAHCON to record the panel presentations for later viewing. Diabolical Plots, which runs the Submission Grinder and is well versed in the differences between good and bad contracts, [wrote](#), "having read the agreement, it is extremely straightforward and easily readable. ... I am honestly not even sure what, like, a theoretical objection to this would be?"

In the end, these accusations didn't derail a great convention. As the [Twitter user known as Brown Sugar Boba said](#), "@Fiyahlitmag has set the bar as far as virtual cons go and this is only their 2nd year?! Just goes to show that there's no excuse as to why your event can't be accessible, inclusive, and fun for everyone."

Awards

- Award season continues. Congrats to all the winners.
- The [2021 Ignite Awards were announced at FIYAHCON](#).
- The [2020 Otherwise Award winner is Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki](#) for "Ife-Iyoku, the Tale of Imadeyunuagbon." The Otherwise Awards also released their 2020 Honor List and are also [taking recommendations for the 2021 Awards](#).

- The [Science Fiction Poetry Association's Dwarf Stars Awards were announced](#).
- Susanna Clarke [won the 2021 Women's Prize for Fiction for Piranesi](#).
- The winners of the [2021 Deutscher Science Fiction Preis have been announced](#).
- And don't forget the [deadline for voting in this year's Hugo Awards is November 19](#).

Other News and Info

- Foz Meadows [shared a must-read thread on numerous concerns related to the new site YABookratings.com](#), which as the name states planned to give ratings to YA books. The site appeared to base their ratings on a very puritanical idea of what YA literature should be, with books getting dinged for such things as “moderate kissing (light travel of hands).” [As Meadows wrote](#), I am so goddamn TIRED of this relentless need to pigeonhole and limit everything in YA because The Wrong Kid Might Know About It, as though teens are fundamentally incapable of putting down a book that squicks or upsets them.” After the thread was shared a good bit in the YA community the site took down their ratings guide, which now merely says “YA Book Ratings (Coming Soon).”
- For a good laugh, after checking out the [images of the YA ratings provided by Foz Meadows](#) go immediately to this [wonderful tweet by Claribel A. Ortega](#).
- Timaios Press had a social media meltdown after [Jayaprakash Satyamurthy called them out](#) for publishing the horror anthology Secret Asia's Blackest Heart, which contained not a single Asian author. As [Areeb Ahmad wrote](#), "wild how non-asians are writing stories about 'secret asia's blackest heart', whatever the fuck that means. also that cover... i think it's supposed to be kali? absolutely wild." Which prompted a response from someone on the official Timaios Press Twitter feed who said [“my girlfriend is Asian.”](#) SMDH! And yes, they spelled girlfriend as “girlfiend.” Randy Milholland [digs into more on all this, including information on the anthology's editor Robert M. Price](#), as do [Alistair Caradec](#) and [Shaun Duke](#).
- Jessica Price discussed the many [workplace issues related to role-playing game publishing company Paizo in this must-read thread](#). As [Price wrote](#), this includes “such hits as The White Woman Fighting Diversity Efforts But Claiming Credit When POC Manage To Do Them Anyway, The Time Paizo Was In Debt To The Mob, The Executive Who Sexually Harassed A Senior Woman Out Of The Company, and more.”
- [As Deanna Raybourn wrote](#), “THIS is a hill to die on, folks. Rhythm MATTERS. So much of the advice floating around about cleaning up prose fails to take into account colloquial usage, flow, the sheer joy of lushness. Not everything needs to be Hemingwayesque. And don't even get me started on how MUCH of that advice places a premium on language that codes masculine... Also, adverbs are not the enemy.”
- [Stephen King's offered some essential vaccination words](#): “Let’s keep it simple, you ainti-vaxxers: You have a right to kill yourself, whether with booze, cigarettes, chew, or high living. You do not have the right to kill others by spreading a virus. That’s not freedom, it’s selfishness.”
- Back in 1998, there was a San Francisco restaurant that gave a lifetime supply of food to anyone who got a tattoo with their logo on it. Well did you know Uncanny Magazine has done one better, [giving a lifetime subscription to anyone with a tattoo related to their magazine?](#) As an example of this, [check out the reader with a tattoo containing the title of Brooke Bolander's story “Our Talons Can Crush Galaxies.”](#)
- N.K. Jemisin has been [named to Time's list of the year's 100 Most Influential People](#), with the essay about Jemisin written by Stacey Abrams.
- Tessa Gratton wrote an excellent essay on [“Horns, Feathers, and Scales: Reclaiming Genderqueer Monstrosity.”](#)
- I'm a big fan of good endings that wrap up all your feelings for a character and a story. So even though Blue's Clues is now celebrating their 25th anniversary, [I'm glad they finally gave](#)

[everyone a few words about that time Steve went to college](#). I know this short video hit many people in the feels.

- Gone Girl author Gillian Flynn and writer-producer-actor Lena Waithe [will each run imprints at Zando, a new house headed by Molly Stern](#).
- Alyx Dellamonica [discussed how you can determine if your short story is really a novel idea](#).
- Instead of [asking why e-books are so terrible](#), maybe The Atlantic could have used far fewer words to explain why essays about e-books being so terrible are always so terrible?
- [The Strand Magazine published](#) a new Tennessee Williams story [found in the author's archives at Harvard University's Houghton Library](#).
- Eliot Schrefer [described discovering how Plum Creek Literacy Festival's host institution, Concordia University, has an anti-LGBTQ+ code of conduct](#) and how he withdrew from the festival over how they treated his YA book with queer characters.
- This [short obituary showcases the power of storytelling](#). Be warned, it's a tear-jerker.
- According to a new scientific paper, 3,600 years ago “[a Tunguska sized airburst destroyed Tall el-Hammam a Middle Bronze Age city in the Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea](#).”
- Some people got upset on social media after a trailer for the upcoming video game God of War showed Thor with a large belly. In response [Lucky Chanz created a viral thread showcasing how truly strong people don't have cut abs and muscles](#). People also express their love for “[Chonk Thor](#)” while Coelasquid's [wonderful guide to drawing realistic abs also made the rounds again](#).
- You can now [print your own Murderbot cosplay helmet!](#)
- Tom Gauld on the [different types of writing criticism](#).
- McSweeney's wants 17th century British sailors to wake up, [because scurvy is merely a hoax](#).

Opportunities

- Deep Cuts in a Lovecraftian Vein is looking for guest-bloggers—specifically women, people of color, LGBTQ+ folk, writers with disabilities—to write brief essays about their experiences with the works of H. P. Lovecraft, the Cthulhu Mythos, and interactions with publishing, fandom, and scholarship. Pays 10 cents/word. [Details>>](#)
- Ghost Orchid Press is seeking stories for Beyond the Veil: Queer Tales of Supernatural Love. Deadline October 31. [Details>>](#)
- Applications for the Speculative Literature Foundation's Working Class Writers Grant are being accepted until September 30. [Details>>](#)
- The Omega Sci-Fi Awards, presented by Sci-Fest LA and the Light Bringer Project, are accepting story submissions for several awards, including the The Roswell Award & Feminist Futures Award. They're also open to submissions for the The Tomorrow Prize & The Green Feather Awards for Los Angeles County high school students. The deadline for all awards is December 21. [Details>>](#)
- The Samuel R. Delany Fellowship is accepting applications. Deadline October 31. [Details>>](#)

Genre Grapevine for 10/31/2021

(Note: All links in this column worked at publication, but some may have since changed.)

The Stories We Tell Can Change Our World!

The [Facebook Papers](#) have revealed that the social media platform has been actively harming much of the world, including by allowing high-profile users to get away with stuff that gets ordinary users banned, amplifying hateful and violent behavior, enabling human trafficking, allowing censorship at the request of dictatorships, and generally putting profits far ahead of any shred of human decency.

None of this is to imply that other social media platforms are much better. [As I reported not long ago](#), many authors are now leaving Twitter or limiting their exposure to that platform. This is in part due to Twitter's "algorithmic timeline" where the tweets you see first are generally controversial or angry ones, resulting in discourse on the platform frequently ranging between horrid and cesspool.

Sadly, Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms have a perverse incentive to amplify and increase anger and hate because that means more clicks and revenue for them. These platforms are literally changing how people relate and interact to each other, and they have the potential to do long-term damage to human cultures, relationships and practices across the globe.

It sometimes seems like there's nothing but doom and gloom everywhere. If it's not social media destroying the world, it's humanity destroying the world's environments, or the political climate getting worse and worse nearly everywhere.

But things can change for the better. In the United States, being a well-behaved employee is often viewed with a near religious zeal, with employees being expected to put up with poor treatment from their bosses, bad pay, few vacations and no benefits. And we're supposed to put up with this because of the myth that all "true Americans" are hard workers living in a [Horatio Alger](#) fantasy where we'll be rewarded one day, even if that day never comes.

Except that story appears to be changing. Employers are now upset because the pandemic has changed how people view their work-life balance. And a tight labor market is allowing people to leave bad jobs for better ones, in what's being called the "great resignation."

Of course, bad employers don't like this. They're complaining that people simply don't want to work, trying to rely on the same-old Horatio Alger BS they've sprouted for decades. But they don't realize that the world has changed. That, perhaps, the stories we tell each other about what we will put up with from a job are changing.

Stories matter. Stories can change the world, for better or worse. Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms are sharing certain stories that benefit their bottom line and little else, and the stories they amplify are harming the world.

But the rest of us can push back against that with our own stories.

We can change the world with the stories we tell and believe in. We can change ourselves with the stories we experience and share.

It's easy to grow depressed about the path the world is taking, but things can change. And that change frequently starts with stories.

Your Data, Our Meta

I wish I'd come up with that headline but the words [flowed from Adrian Tchaikovsky](#) in response to Mark Zuckerberg's attempt to hide Facebook's problems by changing their overall company name to Meta.

The change was met with derision across the metaverse. No, sorry, the internets, because as [Charlie Stross pointed out](#) "the metaverse is bullshit (because it already exists, and it's called the internet)." Shiv

Ramdas shared a [“Fun fact: changing your name to avoid a penalty is actually against Facebook's Code of Conduct”](#) while Tressie McMillan Cottom [said about the name Meta that](#) “Honest to god thought this was satire. Honest to god. This is the kind of pseudonym they give tech companies in Hallmark movies because it’s so ridiculously fake.”

And [Neal Stephenson also shared a viral take, saying](#) “Since there seems to be growing confusion on this: I have nothing to do with anything that FB is up to involving the Metaverse, other than the obvious fact that they’re using a term I coined in Snow Crash. There has been zero communication between me and FB & no biz relationship.”

Halloween Horror

Happy Halloween! Tons of horror-related stuff to share on All Hallow’s Eve:

- Christina Sng and Interstellar Flight Press [asked members of the Horror Writers Association how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed Halloween this year.](#)
- Alison Flood at the Guardian [asked if horror novels are entering a new golden age.](#)
- Molly Odintz at CrimeReads [discussed horror in the time of COVID with a number of authors including Alma Katsu, Stephen Graham Jones, V. Castro, Gabino Iglesias, and Grady Hendrix.](#)
- Goodreads talked with [Stephen Graham Jones, Caitlin Starling, Lee Mandelo, LaTanya McQueen, Mona Awad, Cassandra Khaw and others about their new horror novels.](#)
- Finally, the Horror Writers Association is [accepting applications for its Scholarship From Hell through January 1, 2022](#), with the winner receiving an intensive, hands-on writing workshop environment at Horror University.

Paperpocalypse

As [discussed in my previous column](#), we’re experiencing a paper and printing shortage that is driving up printing and shipping costs for publishers and has the potential to hurt bookstore sales over the crucial holiday period.

Vox released a [good overview of the issue earlier this month](#). Since then more publishers have announced changes or discussed the difficulties they’re facing. For example, [Image Comics informed comic book retailers that they will no longer publish second printings of any of their titles due to these issues](#). Essentially this means if retailers don’t order enough initial copies of a title, they won’t be able to buy more.

[And as the NYTimes reported](#), “shipping delays, printer backups and worker shortages are forcing publishers to postpone new titles and leaving booksellers in a lurch for some old ones.” The article opened by stating:

“Days after the release of Rebecca Donner’s book, All the Frequent Troubles of Our Days, its hardcover edition sold out on Amazon, then at the online retailer [Bookshop.org](#) and at Powell’s Books. When it made its debut on the New York Times best-seller list, the country’s largest book retailer didn’t have any copies. ‘I spent the better part of a decade researching and writing this book,’ Ms. Donner said. ‘So of course, it’s frustrating. Of course it’s disappointing. And it’s entirely out of my control.’”

And this isn’t only happening in the United States. Spain is [experiencing the same issues](#), which threatens to hurt the recent growth of the country’s book industry. And it appears the issue is also hitting all of Europe, with [British-based Vertebrate Publishing saying](#) “It now looks that Europe has essentially run out of paper to print books on. Spent yesterday speaking to our factories and the story is the same throughout the continent. No paper now until the new year.”

The Last Dangerous Visions Saga Continues

J. Michael Straczynski continues to work toward releasing his version of The Last Dangerous Visions after five decades of Harlan Ellison's delays and lies. (For more on the history of this infamous anthology and the harm it did to more than 100 writers, see my 2020 essay "[Excavating Harlan Ellison's Last Dangerous Lies.](#)")

Anyway, the other day Straczynski [named many of the authors selected for the book](#). And in a surprise (or maybe not), almost all the listed authors were men.

[In response Karen Osborne wrote](#) "I am so tired of watching my colleagues from every class, race, gender, location, religion, philosophy, etc., working their fingers to the bone attempting to survive as writers, only to have important anthologies come out with 90% white men on the TOC." [And Ian Rose asked](#) "How does a list like this happen in 2021, in genres absolutely brimming with brilliant women and non-binary people?"

And [Cat Rambo had possibly the best response](#): "Nothing says 'dangerous and bold' more than 'oh we had to use this structure because it was the original one and we couldn't tamper with it so we didn't bother about any the problems.'"

Straczynski [quickly turned defensive](#), listing all the women and diverse authors who either withdrew their stories from Ellison's original line-up or didn't respond to Straczynski's request for a story for the updated edition.

[As Naomi Kritzer said](#) "I think there's multiple things going on here, including that if you go to the most prominent white men working in SFF at the moment, they're more likely to be inherently impressed by the idea of appearing in THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS than pretty much anyone marginalized, because they're a lot more likely to think 'Harlan Ellison, the GENIUS' rather than 'Harlan Ellison, the creep.'"

Genre Awards

The genre awards keep coming. And [don't forget the deadline for voting in this year's Hugo Awards is November 19.](#)

- The winners of the [Xingyun Awards for Chinese SF were announced on October 23.](#)
- The [nominees for the 2021 Chesley Awards](#) were announced by the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists.
- The [2021 Aurora Awards winners](#) were announced by the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association.
- The [2021 Ditmar preliminary ballot for Australian SF was released.](#)
- The Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association [named the winners of their 2021 poetry contest.](#)
- Rebecca Campbell [won the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award](#) for her story "[An Important Failure.](#)"
- T. Kingfisher has won the [2021 WSFA Small Press Award](#) for her story "[Metal Like Blood in the Dark.](#)"
- And in exciting news, [the African Speculative Fiction Society's 2021 Nommo Awards Ceremony will be held at DisCon III in December.](#)

Other News and Info

- There's lots to love about [the new Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction](#), including the \$25,000 cash prize for a work of speculative fiction. But I'm most thrilled by this single line in the nomination process: "A writer may receive the Prize only once." This allows the prize to recognize a ton of worthy works and authors, sort of like the MacArthur Fellows program does. I look forward to seeing next year's award shortlist.

- Reddit Fantasy is [encouraging authors of short fiction who have been published in pro/semipro markets to take part in their Ask Me Anything feature](#), with marginalized authors highly encouraged to reach out. I did [one of the AMAs for the launch of my novel Plague Birds](#) and it was a great success. So I highly encourage all authors to consider doing one if they have works to share with the genre-reading community.
- From 2009 to 2019, Kate Nepveu ran Con or Bust, which helped people of color attend SFF conventions. The foundation has been dormant the last two years and Nepveu has decided “that it's time either to actively hand it over to someone willing to revive it, or to formally wind it down.” [Anyone interested in taking over or becoming involved should speak up](#).
- Publishers Weekly asks "[why are there so few independent publishers of size? There is a dearth of what can be called midsize publishers that fall between the Big Five and the many independent publishers with sales of \\$20 million or less.](#)" Interesting that nowhere in the article is the word MONOPOLY used, and how that could help answer the question.
- I totally agree [with what Usman T. Malik said](#): “I'm often asked when I will write a novel (quick answer: someday maybe), but we needn't underestimate the power of short fiction, even if the market will: I love many writers because of their short works, not bc of their novels. Bradbury and Flannery O'Connor are two examples.” To those examples I'd add Malik's own [Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan](#), which is one of the best collections of short stories I've read in years.
- Dune dropped on HBO and in theaters and the genre was consumed with discussions that varied from “loved it” and “hated it” to “why doesn't Hollywood film some more recent SF novels?” and “WTF, is this film really taunting viewers by saying ‘Part 1’ in its opening title sequence?”
- Apex Magazine [released its Indigenous Futurists issue](#), edited by Allison Mills and featuring stories and interviews with a number of authors including Rebecca Roanhorse, Pamela Rentz, Theodore C. Van Alst, Jr., Jessie Loyer, Kevin Wabaunsee, Tiffany Morris, and Norris Black.
- [Great tweet from P H Lee](#): “Not all stories are hero's journeys. inasmuch as the hero's journey is a thing at all (it's mostly not) it's a pattern from initiation-to-adulthood stories for young men. there are many other stories, though, because the rest of us are not just variant forms of young men.”
- In a direct challenge to Amazon, [France is setting a minimum book delivery fee in an effort to protect independent bookstores](#).
- Female Spanish thriller writer Carmen Mola [was revealed this month to actually be three men writing under a female pseudonym](#). As Spanish media noted, the men used the woman's fake biography for publicity, playing off “the tensions between the apparent creator's life and ‘her’ creations.” I can't even begin to dissect all the BS here, but the funniest take came from [David Cochrane who said](#) “The main takeaway here is that it takes three men to do the work of one woman.”
- [Anna Stephens compared](#) "short fiction edits with authors who present as female and authors who present as male and finding the former have approx. 2x as many edits, in far more condescending tones, than the latter. E.g. ‘be clear not clever’, ‘mundane’, ‘cheap hack’. All from the same editor.” Devin Madson [shared her own experiences with editing](#) along with a [powerful follow-up thread about the editor's apology](#).
- [The Atlantic wants to hire newsletter writers](#), in an apparent challenge to Substack.
- Game publisher Paizo [has officially recognized the unionization of their own staff](#). Paizo is evidently [one of the first game companies in North America to be unionized](#).
- On a related topic, [Wired offered a deep dive into why working conditions are so bad for employees at role-playing game companies](#).
- [Bad Writing Takes described how](#) “In an apparent bid to create the Worst Literary Thing Ever, six popular YA authors have come together to try and create an NFT based writing project called “Realms of Ruin”. Marketed towards teenagers. And which will rely upon using those teens’

creative work.” The project quickly was withdrawn in the face of incredible pushback from the writing community.

- Peter Fenton [shared a warning video](#) about his [experience with City Limits Publishing](#). “I’ve heard it said over and over again that sharing your story is helpful, so I’m choosing to share my experience publicly about the abuse I endured and witnessed from (City Limits Publishing) and its founder as author and employee.”
- Neil Clarke [discusses 15 years of Clarkesworld](#).
- We all knew [Willy Wonka was a horrible boss](#).
- Gwen C. Katz [discovered the best author's note of all time](#).
- The award for [best one-line summary of Dune goes to August J. Pollak](#): “In a move so unsurprising there is literally an eons-old galactic prophecy about it, powerful, horny men are unable to peacefully share a planet made of cocaine.”
- In a world of cute dog costumes for Halloween, [this is the cutest](#).

Opportunities

- Weirdpunk Books is seeking horror stories for the anthology *Stories of the Eye*, which explores the complex relationships between artists and models. “Go beyond the male gaze. Show us the queer gaze, the disabled gaze, the un-colonialized gaze, the intergalactic gaze. Turn the model's gaze on the artist or audience.” Deadline November 30. [Details>>](#)
- Erewhon Books seeks an editorial assistant enthusiastic about adult & YA literary speculative fiction. [Details>>](#)
- CatsCast, a new podcast from Escape Artists, is open to submissions of fun speculative cat stories. “A CatsCast story should leave cat-loving listeners a little happier after listening than they were before.” [Details>>](#)