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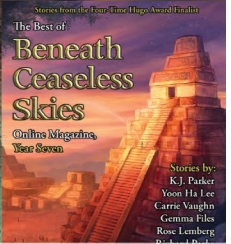
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Jack McDevitt
Norman Spinrad
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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

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The Best of
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Online Magazine
Year Seven

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Yoon Ha Lee
Caitra Vaughn
Gemma Files
Rose Lemberg
Richard Dark
Alette de Bolland
and more ...

Edited by Scott H. Andrews

The State of Genre Magazines



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Khaw • Kingfisher • Kritzer • Valentinelli • You
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SEP/OCT



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ALL-STAR ISSUE!



Michael Cassutt
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ALYX WHITELEY
ANDY HEDGECOCK
NICK LOWE
DAVID LANGFORD

STRANGE HORIZONS

#SFF2020: The State of Genre Magazines

By Jason Sanford

Thank you to all the people who shared information with me for this report, gave their feedback, or discussed issues related to genre magazines either on or off the record.

For this report, I interviewed the editors, publishers, and staff of the following genre magazines. Many thanks to each of these people.

- [Amazing Stories](#) (interview with Steve Davidson)
- [Asimov's Science Fiction](#) (interview with Sheila Williams)
- [Beneath Ceaseless Skies](#) (interview with Scott H. Andrews)
- [Clarkesworld Magazine](#) (interview with Neil Clarke)
- [Escape Pod](#) (Interview with Mur Lafferty)
- [Fireside Magazine](#) (interview with Pablo Defendini)
- [FIYAH! The Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction](#) (interview with Troy L. Wiggins, L. D. Lewis, and Brent Lambert)
- [Strange Horizons](#) (interview with Vanessa Rose Phin)
- [Uncanny Magazine](#) (interview with Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas)

Obviously these are not all of the professional-level digital magazines in the SF/F genre. For a more complete listing of professional-level genre magazines, including their submission response times, [go here.](#))

People are free to share this report online – all I ask is you credit me. If you have questions or see any information which needs to be corrected, email me at jasonsanfordsf@gmail.com or go to www.jasonsanford.com for alternate ways to contact me.

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About Jason Sanford

Introduction

Back in August I [tweeted congrats](#) to the fantasy magazine *Beneath Ceaseless Skies* for achieving their fundraising goal. Which again, excellent news! But I then foolishly used that thread to try and demonstrate why BCS's success was proof that science fiction and fantasy magazines were doing better than ever.

Spoiler: I was wrong. As multiple editors and publishers of genre magazines quickly pointed out.

Now don't misunderstand. In many ways we're living through the best of times for writers and readers of science fiction and fantasy short fiction. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America lists [more than 25 professional-level magazines](#), likely more than the genre has ever witnessed at the same time. And *Locus Magazine's* most recent analysis of the genre's magazines found "[70 magazines, 14 audio sites, and nine critical magazines.](#)"

And that's merely English-language magazines. There are also many great magazines around the world such as [XB-1](#), [Galaxies Science-Fiction](#), and [Fantastica](#). And the biggest SF/F magazine currently in existence is [Science Fiction World in China, which reportedly has a circulation of over 200,000 a month.](#)

In addition, the boon of e-publishing has lowered the traditional printing and distribution cost barriers to creating new genre magazines. This allows more people than ever, including marginalized and diverse voices, to create their own magazines without the need for a large company or trust fund to support their dreams.

But despite all this, times are still tough for many magazines. A number of high-profile and award-winning genre magazines have shut down in the last two years, including *Apex Magazine*, *The Book Smugglers* (although their review site continues), *Intergalactic Medicine Show*, and *Shimmer*. (Update: *Jason Sizemore*, the publisher and editor of *Apex Magazine*, wanted to make sure people knew that *Apex* didn't shut down because it was unprofitable – [he said the magazine was in the black and readership still growing, but he just needed a break.](#))

And during this same time period Neil Clarke, the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Clarkesworld*, has been speaking publicly about the many issues faced by genre magazines and warning that the short fiction market was "[oversaturated when compared to the number of paying readers.](#)" He believed this might eventually result in a market correction and said a big part of the problem was that having so many SF/F short stories available to read for free had "devalued short fiction."

A Short History of SF/F Short Fiction Magazines

Before we discuss the current status of 21st century SF/F magazines, I want to take a quick look at the history of SF/F magazine publishing.

For much of the last hundred years, magazines were the heart of SF/F publishing. For example, Robert Silverberg described in a September 2014 column in *Asimov's Science Fiction* how when he first broke into the SF genre during the early 1950s, he set his sights on what at that time was the true measure of successful SF authors: short stories.

As Silverberg wrote, "Science fiction was primarily a magazine medium in the early 1950s, with only a handful of book-length works being published each year. The best writers of the field – and there were dozens of top-notchers at work then – wrote short stories, bushels of them, more than even the numerous magazines of the time could absorb."

From the early 1900s through the late-1950s, publishing short stories in magazines earned authors far more money than novels. F. Scott Fitzgerald once told Ernest Hemingway that he only wrote short

stories because magazines paid so much for them that they supported his novel writing. Fitzgerald called this "whoring" because it was the only way he could earn enough money to write "decent books."

This pattern held when the first true SF/F genre magazines like *Amazing Stories* began appearing in the 1920s and '30s. The Golden Age of Science Fiction which followed saw the establishment of major genre magazines such as *Astounding Science Fiction* (launched in 1930 and later renamed *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*) and *Galaxy Science Fiction* (launched in 1950).

The reason authors earned so much from publishing short fiction from the early 1900s through the late-1950s is that magazines and periodicals were the main reading material of people in the United States and many other countries. During this period traditionally published books were expensive and out of reach of many people's income, while pulps and other magazines could be purchased for a low price.

However, this changed in 1939 when Pocket Books began selling mass market paperback books at affordable prices. World War 2 then drove a surge in demand for paperbacks which continued through the 1950s and supplanted traditional magazines in people's buying habits. Add to this a general collapse of the United States magazine distribution market in 1957 with the folding of American News Company and the genre shifted from being driven by short fiction in magazines to novel-length fiction.

Despite this change, genre magazines continued to provide a critical market for SF/F short fiction, which did not usually sell as well in book formats as novels (although there was a boom in anthology markets in the 1960s and '70s). During the 1980s the three biggest English-language SF/F magazines were *Analog: Science Fiction and Fact* and *Asimov's Science Fiction*, each with around 100,000 in circulation, and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, with a circulation of around 60,000. These genre magazines were frequently referred to as the "Big Three," although other English-language magazines such as *Interzone* in the United Kingdom and *Omni* also had a strong impact on the genre.

The 21st century saw the emergence of a new generation of SF/F magazines which took advantage of online and e-publishing platforms to reach readers, including *Strange Horizons* and *Sci Fiction*, both launched in 2000; *Escape Pod*, launched in 2005; and *Clarkesworld Magazine*, launched in 2006.

Initially these new magazines struggled.

"It was a very different world for magazines in 2006," said Neil Clarke of *Clarkesworld*. "Online fiction wasn't particularly respected. I remember having established authors tell me point-blank they wouldn't publish online because it was the domain of 'newbie writers and pirates.' The year's best anthologies and various genre awards rarely featured works from those markets."

But over time these attitudes changed. And these new magazines also took advantage of innovative ways of promoting and financing their magazines, options which weren't available decades before, helping create what could be called a new Golden Age for genre magazines.

The end result: There are more SF/F magazines today than at any single time in the genre's history.

Today's Genre Magazines

While some of today's genre magazines like *Asimov's* and *Analog* may have begun as print-only, they now have significant digital audiences. And many magazines which emerged as online or digital-only in the early 21st century, like *Clarkesworld*, now release annual editions in print (along with other formats).

This is an important point to make – just as [e-books have not come close to replacing print books over the last decade](#) despite many predictions this would happen, so have print editions of magazines held on in the marketplace. As Sheila Williams of *Asimov's* told me, part of this is due to many readers still preferring print editions. But she also added, "Print editions are much more visible. They do a lot of our promotion for us."

This last fact helps explain why today's genre magazines span all possible distribution avenues, including releasing podcasts and providing online, e-book, and print editions. There is simply no single

“correct way” for today’s genre magazines to reach their audience. And a magazine which limits its audience to only a single distribution channel may struggle more than those which branch out in many different ways to find their audience.

There’s also a myth about genre magazines which needs to be debunked, namely that more people submit to them than read them. This falsehood is often said about newer magazines which came of age in the digital era but is also sometimes used against all genre magazines. The reason for this slur is to imply that the only people who read genre magazines these days are the writers who publish and submit to them.

According to Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas, the editors and publishers of *Uncanny Magazine*, this myth is absolutely untrue. As they [said in a recent tweet](#), “The number of submitters during a month we’re open is about .05% of the number of readers in a month.”

The truth is today’s genre magazines have impressive readerships. Below are the circulations of all the genre magazines whose staff I interviewed for this report, plus *Analog*, *F&SF*, *Interzone/Black Static*, and *Tor.com*. All of this information comes from [Locus Magazine’s most recent magazine survey](#), which covered the year 2018.

- **Amazing Stories** published two issues in 2018 containing 17 stories. The magazine “gave out nearly 5,000 copies of the first issue (Fall 2018)” at Worldcon76 and reported 30,000-45,000 uniques per month.
- **Analog** published six digest-size double issues containing 88 pieces of fiction plus nonfiction in 2018. The magazine had 11,401 print subscriptions and 8,788 digital, for a total of 20,189 subscriptions. Newsstand sales were 2,880.
- **Asimov’s** published six digest-size double issues containing 66 pieces of fiction plus nonfiction in 2018. The magazine had 7,109 print subscriptions and 10,578 digital subscriptions for a total of 17,697 subscriptions. Newsstand sales were 2,265.
- **Beneath Ceaseless Skies** published 26 issues containing 62 pieces of original fiction plus 21 podcast episodes in 2018. Their website averaged 76,000 uniques per month and 11,000 unique listeners for their podcast.
- **Clarkesworld** published 12 issues containing 56 original stories and 23 reprints plus podcasts and nonfiction in 2018. Their website had 42,000 unique visitors per month while podcast listeners were 14,000. They also had 3,800 digital subscribers and a flat 200-250 digital single-issue sales each month.
- **Escape Pod** has an estimated audience size of 37,000, while all of the Escape Artists podcasts (which, in addition to *Escape Pod*, are *PodCastle*, *PseudoPod*, and *Cast of Wonders*) are downloaded over 365,000 times a month.
- **F&SF** published six digest-size double issues containing 63 pieces of fiction in 2018. The magazine’s print subscription numbers were 6,688 plus 2,652 copies sold on newsstands; digital subscription numbers were not reported by *Locus*.
- **Fireside** published two full-color digest-size print issues with 26 pieces of fiction and some nonfiction in 2018. *Fireside* published the stories first in print, followed by online publication. Unique visitors averaged around 10,000 per month, along with 600 e-book subscribers and a circulation of 1,000 for their print edition of *Fireside Quarterly*.
- **FIYAH!** published four issues with 17 stories and six poems in 2018. They had 325 subscriptions, 497 downloads, and 1,385 average monthly visits.
- **Interzone and Black Static** both released five bimonthly issues, with *Interzone* publishing 31 total pieces of fiction and *Black Static* 28 pieces of fiction. Circulation figures were not reported by *Locus*.
- **Strange Horizons** published 51 weekly issues with 50 stories in 2018 and reported about 40,000 uniques per month.
- **Tor.com** published 30 pieces of fiction along with nonfiction and reported one million unique visitors per month.

- **Uncanny** published six issues with 41 original stories and six reprints, as well as essays, poems, interviews, and podcasts. *Uncanny* had 1,600 subscribers and averaged 28,000 monthly unique visitors.

As you can see from these numbers, magazines allowing online distribution of their stories for free tend to have lower paid subscription numbers than magazines which one must pay to read. However, the potential readership for online stories tends to be far higher than the readership of magazines with paid subscriptions. For example, each month *Clarkesworld* has 42,000 unique web visitors, 14,000 podcast listeners, and 3,800 digital subscribers. *Asimov's*, by comparison, has 17,697 paid print and digital subscriptions. So a magazine like *Clarkesworld* which has a more online focus may potentially have more readers, but *Asimov's* has many more readers *paying* to read their stories.

It is also worth noting the readership for most genre magazines increased in 2018 over the year before. *Analog's* total circulation was up 9.9% while *Asimov's* was up 10.6% and *F&SF's* up 1.5%. Newer genre magazines also saw their circulations increase in 2018 over the year before, with *Clarkesworld* seeing a nearly 8% increase in paid digital subscriptions while their website had 2,000 more unique visitors each month and podcast listeners went from 2,000 to 14,000 in a single year.

Overall, these numbers show that people are reading and listening to genre magazines. But supporting all genre magazines? That's a different issue.

The Business of Genre Magazines

While today's genre magazines may reach their audiences in similar ways, behind the scenes there are larger differences, especially with regards to how the magazines are funded and if they pay their staff or rely to a large degree on volunteer help.

First, there are the English-language SF/F magazines which are either part of larger publishing companies or privately held businesses with paid staff. These are *Analog*, *Asimov's*, and the highly regarded British magazines *Interzone* and *Black Static* published by TTA Press.

In many ways these magazines follow a traditional, for-profit publishing model. *Analog* and *Asimov's*, for example, are published by Penny Publications, which also releases many crossword and puzzle magazines along with *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*.

"*Analog* and *Asimov's* are published by a larger (though not huge) publishing company," said Sheila Williams, editor of *Asimov's*. "Being published by a larger company does have its advantages, though. While only one and a half people are dedicated to each of the genre magazines, we do benefit from a support staff of art, production, tech, contracts, web, advertising, circulation, and subsidiary rights departments. While the support of this infrastructure cannot be underestimated, *Asimov's* revenue covers our editorial salaries, and our production and editorial costs. We contribute to the company's general overhead as well."

Williams added that other than the occasional college intern, *Asimov's* does not use unpaid labor.

I'd also add Tor.com to this group of genre magazines, although it is unique from the above publications in being supported by a large book publishing company (Tor Books) that is part of a much larger media conglomerate. Tor.com also doesn't sell individual issues.

The other general grouping of genre magazines uses a more eclectic model to finance their publications. The magazines in this group were created (or relaunched, in the case of *Amazing Stories*) since the start of the 21st century. Some of them are run like independent businesses; some are nonprofits. These magazines receive funding through various mixtures of paid subscriptions, back issue purchases, other revenue streams, donations and fundraising. And while some of these magazines pay their staff, many of them also require significant amounts of volunteer time to publish each issue.

FIYAH!, for example, is mainly sustained by subscriptions, with around 70% of their funding coming this route and the rest coming from independent donations, merchandise, and back issue sales. *Fireside*'s operations were initially funded by the magazine's annual Kickstarter campaigns, then later by Patreon and direct subscriptions and purchases. The relaunch of *Amazing Stories* was also initially funded by a successful Kickstarter campaign.

At the other end of the spectrum is *Strange Horizons*, which is a 501(c)3 non-profit founded in 2000 on what was then called the "museum model," meaning they run on donations and grants. Another 501(c)3 non-profit is *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, where less than 1% of the magazine's support comes from e-book subscriptions and the rest comes from donations.

The differences in how these magazines fund themselves can result, ironically, in how freely available their fiction is to read online at no cost. BCS and *Strange Horizons* take a very open approach to publishing their fiction online, while magazines like *FIYAH!* and *Fireside* either publish their fiction in subscription-only magazines or first publish their fiction that way and later put it online.

Many of Today's Genre Magazines Wouldn't Exist Without Volunteers

"I wish more readers and writers realized how tenuous the financial situation still is for magazine publishing in our field today," said Scott H. Andrews, the editor-in-chief and publisher of *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*. "I know that that fact seems counterintuitive because short fiction is currently thriving, with dozens of new indie zines launching in the last ten years, hundreds of great short fiction writers, and innovative new formats for short fiction like e-books and audio podcasts. But many zines use staffs that are mostly or all unpaid volunteers, and those ones that do pay their staff still as far as I know are paying their editors far less than novel or freelance editors get for the same amount of work, or they're paying the staff but the head editors are contributing their work for free."

Andrews estimates that he volunteers about 30 hours a week to create BCS – and that means 30 hours every week across the magazine's entire eleven years of existence. Andrews also estimates he has written at least 25,000 personalized rejections to writers!

This high degree of volunteer time is typical of many of today's genre magazines. While the SF/F genre has a long history of relying on unpaid volunteer labor, doing so can also push people to the point of exhaustion.

"Everything you see from us, from our website, to our social media, to our amazing covers and magazines, to our voice and vision, all of that was built and is maintained on volunteer labor," said Troy L. Wiggins, the executive editor of *FIYAH!* "As awesome as that is, it's also worrying. The prevailing business model we have in this field, our overreliance on volunteer labor and crowdfunding is dangerous and, as we are seeing from these recurring conversations about the health of the field, unsustainable."

In addition, the ability to donate many unpaid hours of editorial work to a magazine is a [major privilege and gatekeeping factor on who can work for a digital genre magazine](#). This excludes many people from working on SF/F magazines and likely contributes to the staff of many magazines not representing the larger demographics of both the genre and world.

"Generally, working for no pay privileges people who can afford to volunteer time," said Vanessa Rose Phin, editor-in-chief of *Strange Horizons*, "and devalues the work we do as editors. I'd like to think that at SH, we have partially balanced the former by making our staff so large and so international that no one need put in many hours, and folks can cover for you regardless of time zone."

Mur Lafferty, co-editor of *Escape Pod*, said they raise enough money to pay everyone but their associate editors, and they're working to address that. "Counting the labor from first read to final post," Lafferty added, "we'd estimate a total of 5-6 hours per published story. Of that, only 15 minutes is currently unpaid, and we're working to change that."

And while this may be counterintuitive, a magazine becoming more successful doesn't immediately lessen the need for unpaid volunteer work. For example, *Uncanny* might be one of the most successful new genre magazines of recent years, having won [four consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Semiprozine](#) along with [many individual awards for stories and editing](#).

But [as *Uncanny's* publishers and editors Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas tweeted](#), “*Uncanny* has grown steadily in revenue, our expenses have grown at about the same pace. Publishers/Editors-in-Chief work about a combined 80 hours a week to make the magazine. We aren't paid for this. This is why *Uncanny* remains a semiprozine. We LOVE this work, & think it's important. But it's unpaid labor.”

To clarify, the [Uncanny staff are paid](#), just not Lynne and Michael. And they do have an ultimate goal of also being paid even if they've not yet reached that point.

Obviously not every genre magazine survives only through significant amount of volunteer time. The “Big 3” of *Asimov's*, *Analog*, and *F&SF* pay all their staff, as does *Fireside*.

But without large amount of volunteer assistance, it's a stark fact that many of today's genre magazines wouldn't exist in their current forms.

“Estimating using a salary of \$15/hour for the work our staff does,” Scott H. Andrews said, “we would need a \$45,000 increase in our annual budget to pay all staff a living wage. That's double what our annual budget is to pay for the stories we publish. To cover that, our monthly donations through Patreon would have to increase by 7000%.”

Is Devalued Short Fiction the Problem?

Many of the editors and publishers I spoke agreed with Neil Clarke's idea that the [online publishing of short fiction at no cost had devalued these stories](#) in the minds of genre readers. Their responses on this point are very detailed and full of nuance and can be found in their individual interviews at the end of this report.

However, in many ways this devaluation is already baked into the 21st century genre magazine cake, especially since so many of the biggest and most high profile magazines long ago set a “free online fiction” model as the example of what success looks like for new genre magazines.

“If you're one of the most prominent, highly respected outlets in the field and you're offering free content or functioning on volunteer labor or employing a crowdfunded approach to cover operating costs, the 10, 15, 20 zines who come after you are going to take that as gospel,” said L. D. Lewis, *FIYAH!*'s art director, web master, and POB coordinator.

And as Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas noted, there are also larger forces at work. “We understand why Neil would say this,” they said, “but we think the SFF short fiction magazines are just caught in the same market forces as newspapers and other types of magazines. As the Internet flourished, readers have received a great deal of their shorter reading content for free. This is the case for *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Vanity Fair*, etc., to the *New York Times* and everyone's local paper.”

One result of the devaluation of genre fiction is it hampers the ability of genre magazines to increase the amount of money they can charge or solicit for their content. So while genre magazines have a strong audience base, relatively few in that audience pay or donate to support what they love.

Mur Lafferty of *Escape Pod* estimates only 1% of listeners actually donate to support the podcast, and I saw similar numbers for many other magazines. Based on my research and conversations, it appears most genre magazines which don't require a subscription or purchase to read their fiction are supported by well under 10% of their total audience.

As [Uncanny's publishers and editors said in a tweet](#), “We love all of our readers, but like most online magazines, the vast majority of readers aren't buying subscriptions or supporting via Patreon or Kickstarter.”

An added concern is that if your magazine relies on donations, you also run the risk of tapping out your fundraising base.

“In my observation,” said L. D. Lewis of *FIYAH!*, “the people who contribute to zine crowdfunds also contribute to crowdfunds for individuals in emergency situations. There are a lot of emergencies or people in general need, just within the SFF community and funds are finite. If you’re supporting your four favorite zines every year, donating to three medical funds, two Kickstarters, a moving fund, and also taking on costs associated with at least one fandom-related convention every year, it’s not sustainable for a lot of readers, especially the marginalized ones.”

And there’s also the issue that established genre magazines tend to soak up much of the available fundraising out there, as noted by Vanessa Rose Phin of *Strange Horizons*.

“SH has it easier than newer zines because we’re known,” Phin said, “and we can’t help noticing that big branches tend to soak up most of the rain. What we really want to see is a large, diverse market, not a tiny market narrowed to a few giants.”

What’s the Solution?

Genre magazines don’t exist within a SF/F vacuum. Genre magazines are supported by and help support larger genre-loving communities. As many magazine publishers and editors told me, it’s very hard for a genre magazine to exist these days without being a part of a community of SF/F fans.

“Fans have always built communities around the things they love,” said Neil Clarke of *Clarkesworld*. “What’s changed is the tools we’re using for communication have allowed interactions to be more frequent, interactive, and engaging.”

Genre magazines also help nurture new writers, many of whom go on to publish novel-length works and create beloved video games, films and TV shows. And despite the issues mentioned earlier, creating a magazine or helping edit a current magazine remains one of the more accessible entry points for diverse and new voices to influence and challenge genre trends and conversations.

“When I first started writing and submitting,” said Troy L. Wiggins of *FIYAH!*, “it seemed to be that the SF/F field was content to ignore black SF/F writers, even when they said they were hurting. Like, people heard you yelling about your pain, but little was actually changing. The aftermath of the [#BlackSpecFic report](#) definitely contributed to our being here, but there was always a need for a space that centers black speculative genius in conversation with the rest of the field, that showed that ‘hey, we can do this as well as a *Clarkesworld* or an *Analog*, and our work is just as brilliant.’”

Obviously the biggest thing which would help genre magazines is if more of their audience supported them, either through paid subscriptions or donations. Currently well under 10% of each genre magazine’s audience does this – if that percentage simply doubled, many of the pressures faced by genre magazines would lessen significantly.

As for the devaluation of genre short fiction from being published online at no cost, this is difficult to correct unless all genre magazines agree to change. If many of the most prominent SF/F magazines continue to provide stories for free, there will be pressure on all other magazines – and on any new magazines – to do the same.

That said, it’s possible norms and expectations on this among readers and audience members could change. Many non-genre newspapers, magazines and online publications no longer provide all their content for free, with paywalls increasingly restricting what people can access online. A number of non-genre magazines and publications are also [experimenting with new subscriptions models](#). As more people get used to yet again having to pay or subscribe to read their favorite newspapers or magazines, it’s possible this change in expectations will filter down to genre magazines.

It's also possible more promotional coordination among SF/F magazines, or co-operative business models, could benefit all genre magazines, ideas expressed by Steve Davidson of *Amazing Stories* and Troy L. Wiggins of *FIYAH!* in their individual interviews.

All that said, perhaps the first step to helping is for the readers and listeners of genre magazines to understand the true cost of publishing what they love.

"*Uncanny* doesn't exist without its community," said Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas. "We don't feel that this is anything new to magazines. If you look back in SFF history, a thriving community of readers in the letters' column was there all the way back to Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*. All of the ongoing digests (*Analog*, *Asimov's*, and *F&SF*) are still known for having dedicated communities of readers. For a magazine to succeed, you need readers who are invested in the vision and content of your magazine."

The same could be said about every one of today's SF/F magazines.

Interviews with Genre Magazine Publishers, Editors, and Staff

For this report, I interviewed the editors, publishers, and staff of the following science fiction and fantasy magazines. These interviews are grouped alphabetically by magazine name on the following pages.

- [Amazing Stories](#) (interview with Steve Davidson)
- [Asimov's Science Fiction](#) (interview with Sheila Williams)
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- [FIYAH! The Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction](#) (interview with Troy L. Wiggins, L. D. Lewis, and Brent Lambert)
- [Strange Horizons](#) (interview with Vanessa Rose Phin)
- [Uncanny Magazine](#) (interview with Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas)

Obviously these are not all of the professional-level digital magazines in the SF/F genre. For a more complete listing of professional-level genre magazines, including their submission response times, [go here.](#))

Interview with Steve Davidson, Publisher of *Amazing Stories*

Jason Sanford: *Amazing Stories* was the first science fiction magazine, and helped launch the pulp fiction era of the 1920s and '30s. What is it like publishing a magazine with such history? Has that history presented any difficulties to your relaunch of the magazine?

Steve Davidson: Well, you get unexpected support and assistance; a lot of people in the field are still very fond of both the magazine and its place in Science Fiction's history. But that brings with it two difficulties. One, most younger fans among our potential market seem to assume that we're publishing reprints of older works or new works in a golden-age style, despite the fact that promotion and discussion of the magazine – let alone our contributor's own statements – clearly say otherwise. We're an old, venerable name in the genre publishing new, ground-breaking science fiction from the current era.

The second difficulty are rights clearances/issues. I get so many of these regularly that we're unable to really help with that I had to write a piece on rights and clearances for the website ([which can be found here](#)). And from the other side – most folks out in la-la land seem to think that trademarks work like patents in that they have a maximum shelf life, or they believe that once a trademark goes into public domain, it can't become a mark with enforcement capabilities ever again. Neither is true and I spend an inordinate amount of time chasing down improper/infringing uses of the title, which we make a decent amount in licensing fees from because it is valid and enforceable. While I really hate going after casual infringers whose motivation is one of love for the magazine, I unfortunately have to, if only to maintain the mark and protect its licensees – one of whom is NBC/Universal Studios.

Jason: You held a successful Kickstarter in 2018 to fund the relaunch of *Amazing Stories*. Do you see a need to do any more fundraisers in the future? Any surprises or lessons you've learned in funding and distributing the magazine?

Steve: Well what we learned with Kickstarter is, their instructions and instructional videos on how to do a Kickstarter need some work: just as one example – we had numerous people working on that campaign, including folks who have done successful Kickstarters and no one noticed, nor did Kickstarter explicitly state (where we'd see it) that there would be a hold of 24-48 hours as an internal review of the campaign was conducted. That really hurt us. Maybe that info is out there and apparent to most doing their first project, but none of us saw it. It got us off to a bad start – we sent out all of our notices to early supporters, PR outlets etc, only for them to find that the campaign was "on hold". The lesson I learned was – hire someone with vast and long term experiences with such things, you won't regret doing so. The other thing I learned (as opposed to knowing but not "knowing") was – you really, really, really need to front load your campaign. However many early pledge commitments you obtain – you still need more. However many PR outlets promise to support you, you need more, however many supporters agree to flog their friends and cohorts, you need more. It actually wouldn't be a bad idea to get pledges of support that exceed your goal number before you actually launch the campaign.

Yes, we've already done one with Indiegogo that didn't meet our goal for the special edition (which was double length, all color, all fiction to commemorate our first year) and we do anticipate doing some, at least in conjunction with the website (after 6 years it would be nice to pay the site's contributors even if it's only a token).

Jason: What's your goal for *Amazing Stories* over the next five years?

Steve: Expanding our reach into a full-fledged publisher of both the magazine and books. We'll soon be officially announcing Amazing Selects, which is an imprint for electronic/POD edition novellas, and we're giving some serious thought to theme anthologies consisting of both new and reprinted material. But, bottom line, our real goal over the next five years is survival.

Another one of our goals is to find a way to really engage with indy authors. There are a lot of them out there, some doing interesting stuff and, while most of them are focused on novel length works, I think they'd find that being published in one of the magazine will expose them to a different set of readers.

Jason: Neil Clarke of *Clarkesworld* has said some of the problems experienced by genre magazines come about because “we’ve devalued short fiction” through reader expectations that they shouldn’t have to pay for short stories. Do you agree with this? Any thoughts on how to change this situation?

Steve: Well, I've floated this elsewhere and for both good and bad reasons it's not found traction, but at the risk of annoying an ill horse, I'll try once again. First, I agree with Neil, strongly urge folks to read his editorial on the subject and think that he has managed to successfully outline the problem, which is the first step in solving it: the magazines are in a negative feedback loop right now. Because of the devaluation of fiction, short fiction in particular, the magazines can't command the kind of subscription and cover prices they need to that would allow them to both pay the rates that they ought to be paying for high quality fiction, nor to engage in the kind of advertising and promotion they need to in order to attract new subscribers and bring attention to what they are publishing. If they raise their cover and subscription prices, they lose subscribers; if they can't offer better word rates, they lose contributors, and so it goes, classic catch-22.

What I (and, I am sure, most other magazines) would like to be able to do is pay a word rate that no author, regardless of who they are, would say no to, to pay artists what they're worth and to be able to affordably deliver, in whatever format the reader prefers, regular issues. We'd all like to not have to worry about the added expense of translation when we're considering foreign works (which, quite frankly, is where the market is going these days), etc.

The one place where I think we can all help each other though, is by getting together to promote the idea of the magazines and short science fiction in general; form an org – bring in *F&SF*, *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *Galaxy's Edge*, *Lightspeed*, *Future*, *Clarkesworld*, *Amazing* and whomever else is meeting some minimal set of publishing criteria (paying within some percentage of SFWA qualifying market rates, has published regularly (mostly) for a set time frame), and hire a firm to help promote and market, with the promotion directed towards the idea of magazines/magazine fiction, supported by a one-stop shop for subscribing to any and all of them. Make it perhaps a three year commitment to give it time to show some progress. I base this program on two concepts: one, that no single magazine can afford to promote itself the way it ought to these days and two, that the reader of one science fiction magazine is a reader of multiple science fiction magazines.

Sure, there's detail that would need to be ironed out; some magazines are bigger than others and might feel they'd not benefit as much, but the bottom line is, ALL of the magazines are facing the same issue and I'd much rather be in a race for "who put out the best mag this year?" than I would to be in a race for "the last surviving science fiction magazine".

Maybe we don't have to organize in a formal way; maybe we can all agree to commit to promoting short fiction and magazines independently through our various outlets.

What we can't do is all get together and agree to raise our prices across the board – that would be engaging in unfair trade practices.

Jason: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a genre magazine. What's one aspect of running a magazine like *Amazing Stories* that you wish more readers and writers knew about?

Steve: In general, I think that the collective audience does not understand two aspects of this business: first, that the publisher is not in control of every single element that goes into a publication and second, that things take time to develop.

To expand on that – diversity issues. I and the team that I have assembled are largely comprised of older/boomer generation individuals of a progressive bent. From the beginning we've advocated for better inclusion and representation of minority contributors and have done what we have been able to do to support that with the magazine; we pay attention to the "mix" of contributors to an issue (authors and artists) and how that represents over time, but, practically speaking, the criteria – minority representation, a good story, a good story on a particular topic – often mitigate against a quick fix. Which is one reason why we look at the mix of both individual issues and the publication over time: given the constraints and the "stuff" that happens at periodicals, we may have no choice but to put out a badly balanced issue, but have the ability to make corrections in future issues. If one had the budget and could afford to commission every story you'd get closer, but not even that is guaranteed as "stuff" happens; a writer is unable to make needed changes to a story, an artist get sick and can't complete an illustration and yet, many in the audience for whom these are important issues do not see these things, only a lack of representation. Further, when taking the time to explain these things to those who raise objections, reality is often not seen as an acceptable solution. Complaints can lead to contributors being unwilling to engage, which can further exacerbate the issue. Good we can do tomorrow; perfect will take us a little longer. And understand, "perfect" will never be achieved, even when we try really hard to get there.

Jason Why do SF/F magazines matter to the genre? What do SF/F magazines bring to the genre which can't be found anywhere else?

Steve: Well, my answers to those questions may not resonate with younger readers, but I'll give them anyway. First, the magazines are where this genre was created and that influence and legacy is felt to this day. It would be a shame and a loss if a foundational aspect of this wonderful thing we call Science Fiction were to be silenced.

Beyond that, well, if you look at *Amazing Stories'* current incarnation, especially the print edition, you'll see that we believe that a magazine is an experience separate from just reading. It impinges on all of the senses at once. Holding it, you can feel the weight of all of those words and illustrations, the slickness of the cover, the crispness of the pages. Visually, there's the presentation – the layout, the fonts used, the illustrations. Then there's the flow realized through the placement of individual pieces of fiction, their accompanying art, the non-fiction breaks, the cartoons that give you a pause. You can smell the paper and the inks. Each issue of an individual magazine is a unique and separate experience; the cover illustration sets a tone, the blurbs and intros entice, the voices of the different authors influence the reception of each individual story (even if only on the level of this story I like better than the last); you can engage with it on so many different levels, comparing the art to the story it accompanies, agree or disagree with the editorial, go back and check recommendations in the reviews.

It's a different experience than a book, even an anthology, and especially if the magazine is serving one of its true purposes – bringing attention to new talent, or an established authors attempting to widen their scope.

What do magazines bring to the genre you can't find elsewhere? Well, truth to say, not as much as they once did. In the beginning, the magazines were the ONLY source for this stuff. The one and only. Nowadays that's no longer the case. Original fiction and theme anthologies have encroached on the magazine's preserve of being the place to discover new authors. And publishing itself in general is rewarding longer works, particularly those associated with a series, neither of which fit the magazine model too well. But I think the one place where magazines can and should shine is by giving a platform to new authors and a place for authors to experiment with new ideas and new forms/styles. A good writer can "test" a concept out without making the commitment to a novel length work. Maybe the market isn't ready for the adventures of Bozo the Astronaut Clown...but maybe it is. You could make that short available to your reading list, or get outside your own box and get a whole new set of eyes on it through a magazine.

And magazines also remain a vehicle for authors to expand their readership. In short, they offer an opportunity for both sides of the community – creators and consumers – to come together in a relatively inexpensive and constantly changing way.

Interview with Sheila Williams, Editor of Asimov's Science Fiction

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a genre magazine. What's one aspect of running a magazine like *Asimov's* that you wish more readers and writers knew about?

Sheila Williams: Many people know I have a fun, intellectually challenging job. It's also a lot of work. We have a very small paid staff. Other than the occasional college intern, we do not use unpaid labor. (Our college internship program conforms to the DOL's FLSA seven-factor test.) I read every submission. My managing editor, Emily Hockaday, and I are responsible for editing, copyediting, and almost all of our production work. I'm responsible for the editorials, the next issue page, introductory notes, and most other interstitial writing in *Asimov's*. In addition to her other duties, Emily manages most of our social media. Deadlines never change, regardless of vacations, illness, maternity leave, and whatever other challenges pop up. We just have to find ways to work around these challenges.

Jason: You've worked at *Asimov's* since nearly the magazine's founding. How have things changed since the founding of *Asimov's*? What would you say is harder or easier for your magazine to do these days?

Sheila: It's a lot easier to produce a magazine than it used to be. I'm very happy that we said good-bye to repro around 1996, which was probably before some of our readers were born. In addition, I greatly prefer digital submissions to print submissions.

Jason: In addition to paying your writers, *Asimov's* also pays all of your staff, something which is not common among many of today's newer genre magazines. Is it possible to publish a magazine like *Asimov's* without the support of a larger company, in this case Penny Publications?

Sheila: An anecdotal review of the American market doesn't really bear that out. *F&SF* is published by a small company. *Analog* and *Asimov's* are published by a larger (though not huge) publishing company. Being published by a larger company does have its advantages, though. While only one and a half people are dedicated to each of the genre magazines, we do benefit from a support staff of art, production, tech, contracts, web, advertising, circulation, and subsidiary rights departments. I'm probably leaving some people out of this list. While the support of this infrastructure cannot be underestimated, *Asimov's* revenue covers our editorial salaries, and our production and editorial costs. We contribute to the company's general overhead as well.

Jason: An increasing number of *Asimov's* readers are using digital e-book platforms to read the magazine. Do you see a day coming when *Asimov's* will transition to e-editions only instead of publishing in both print and digital formats?

Sheila: Many of our readers prefer to read print editions. Also, print editions are much more visible. They do a lot of our promotion for us. It's also easier to connect with many of our print subscribers because a lot of them subscribe directly through our online subscription portal. We can send renewal notices directly to them and stay in touch in other ways. For these and other reasons, I don't see any need to transition to an e-edition format only. Also, note that online magazines benefit from print formats as well.

Jason: According to this year's *Locus Magazine* survey, Asimov's total circulation was up nearly 10% over the previous year, as was the circulation of your sister magazine Analog. To what do you attribute this increase?

Sheila: Our social media presence is growing. In addition, we continue to benefit from the strong boost we received in the early days of B&N's Nook and Amazon's Kindle.

Jason: Why do SF/F magazines matter to the genre? What do SF/F magazines bring to the genre which can't be found anywhere else?

Sheila: Magazines are a great place for new writers to break into the SF/F field. They also provide writers with a mechanism for pretty direct interaction and feedback from their readers. Our readers engage with writers on our Facebook pages, they seek out their novels. They look for their favorites and they discover new writers in the magazine. Readers also get a smorgasbord of traditional and nontraditional story telling in each issue.

Interview with Scott H. Andrews, Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Beneath Ceaseless Skies

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a magazine. What's one aspect of running a genre magazine you wish more readers and writers knew about?

Scott H. Andrews: I wish more readers and writers realized how tenuous the financial situation still is for magazine publishing in our field today. I know that that fact seems counterintuitive because short fiction is currently thriving, with dozens of new indie zines launching in the last ten years, hundreds of great short fiction writers, and innovative new formats for short fiction like e-books and audio podcasts. Several prominent ezines have increased revenues to the point that they can pay their staffs enough to place out of eligibility for the Best Semiprozine Hugo Award, and some run very successful funding drives. But many zines use staffs that are mostly or all unpaid volunteers, and those ones that do pay their staff still as far as I know are paying their editors far less than novel or freelance editors get for the same amount of work, or they're paying the staff but the head editors are contributing their work for free.

Artificial cost-suppression measures like that are what's keeping those zines afloat. For BCS, I've put in about 30 hours a week for over eleven years, for free. Without that work done for free – if BCS had to pay me for that time, even at a token rate like half of the per-word pay rate the writers get for the stories – BCS would have gone out of business many years ago.

I also wish more writers realized that the situation in current indie ezine publishing is a shared ecosystem of writers, readers, and publishers. It's not the old-fashioned situation of magazine publishing businesses run by businesspeople to make profit. Today's short fiction ezines are not making profit; most of them are only surviving because they artificially suppress their costs by things like paying their staff little or nothing. Ezine editors also have a much more altruistic motive than businesspeople in old-fashioned publishing. All the zine editors I know were either writers themselves or big fans of short fiction and zines. We put so much of our time and emotional energy into editing and running our zines because we love short fiction, we love writers, we love our field and want to contribute to it.

I put so much time into writing every BCS rejection with personalized comments – over 25,000 personalized rejections in eleven years – because I appreciate writers and the struggle that writing takes (I know that struggle acutely; I was a SF/F short fiction writer myself); I love working with writers, I love teaching and learning myself, and I want to do everything I can to help writers break in and get their work to readers. I put so much time into rewrite requests and working with authors on rewrites – probably 75% of the 600+ stories in BCS have had some level of revision that I worked with the author on – because I see the seeds of greatness in stories all the time, I want to help the author make that story great, and I love doing everything I can to bring great stories into the world. I put so much time last summer into the BCS Patreon and fundraising to raise revenues so we could afford to pay the new higher SFWA-qualifying pay rate because I believe that writers, and artists of all fields, deserve much higher pay for their art than they get.

I understand that the relationship between authors and publishers in past eras was often adversarial, with publishers classically being parsimonious or exploitative. I understand that negligent magazine publishers still exist, and writers must always look out for their own interests. Most writers are tremendously supportive of indie zines; many writers donate to BCS and other zines, and I'm certain they do it not out of self-interest but because they love short fiction and they appreciate the hard work and

commitment of indie zines and their staffs. But I see the outdated mindset of that old-fashioned adversarial relationship persisting among some writers, and it's false and makes it harder to keep this shared short fiction ecosystem going.

Jason: What percentage of your magazine's financial support comes from subscriptions and what percentage comes from fundraisers?

Scott: For BCS, less than 1% of our support comes from e-book subscriptions and the rest from donations. We're a 501c3 nonprofit approved by the IRS, so donations to BCS are tax deductible. I think part of the reason we get so little revenue from our e-book subscriptions is that I have priced our subscriptions and single-issue e-books too low; well below what most magazines charge. Multiple other major ezines charge \$36/year for a subscription; the BCS e-book subscription is \$20/year since summer 2019, but for years it was \$16/year and even \$13/year. Because BCS is a nonprofit, part of my ethos for serving the public is making the fiction available to readers as conveniently and cheaply and widely as possible, but in hindsight I took that approach too far and made a mistake in pricing the BCS subscriptions so low that they are providing the magazine with only token revenue.

Jason: Would your magazine be able to exist without significant volunteer time from yourself and your staff?

Scott: Definitely not. For BCS, I do all the editing, rewrites, and copyediting; sort the slush, reply to about 25% of it (with all rejections personalized), manage the website, format the e-books, do all the social media, handle all the promotion, do all the payments and keep all the books, coordinate and engineer and master the audio podcasts, and narrate many of them; everything except reading 75% of the slush, which is done by my wonderful First Readers Kerstin Hall, Deirdre Quirk, and Rachel Morris, and former First Readers Christine Row, Nicole Lavigne, and Kate Marshall. All that work has been about 30 hours a week for over eleven years, as a volunteer. Without that work done for free, BCS would not be able to exist.

I do pay my First Readers a token honorarium, which they deserve every bit of, for reading slush and writing personalized rejections to every submission. I wish I could pay them more, and I hope to make that possible soon.

Jason: How much of an increase in your budget would be required to pay all editorial and publishing staff a living wage?

Scott: Estimating using a salary of \$15/hour for the work our staff does, we would need a \$45,000 increase in our annual budget to pay all staff a living wage. That's double what our annual budget is to pay for the stories we publish. To cover that, our monthly donations through Patreon would have to increase by 7000%.

Jason: Neil Clarke of Clarkesworld has said some of the problems experienced by genre magazines come about because "we've devalued short fiction" through reader expectations that they shouldn't have to pay for short stories. Do you agree with this? Any thoughts on how to change this situation?

Scott: I absolutely agree that online publishing of short fiction, available for free on the web, has devalued short fiction in the mindset of the readership. I think it relates to online culture in general; the online usership expects articles or podcasts or music downloads or software to be free, and that attitude extends to online fiction too. Online zines in my opinion have exacerbated this attitude by providing the fiction online for free whereas in paper magazines, readers had to pay for it.

However, I think this issue is more complicated than just that we've devalued short fiction in general. I think most regular short fiction readers and short fiction fans understand that it costs money for short stories to get published, and those readers are not opposed to paying something for them. I think this devaluing that's happened is a devaluing of the amount that the readers who are willing to pay think they should pay or think short fiction is worth.

For example, the BCS e-book subscriptions I mentioned above: multiple other major ezines charge \$36/year for a subscription; the BCS e-book subscription is \$20/year but used to be \$16/year and \$13/year. We struggled even at \$13/year to get readers to subscribe, and many of them did it out of charity, wanting to help the magazine. We offer the slight premium of giving e-book subscribers every new issue a week early, but that doesn't seem to lure many subscribers. Our web readership in 2018 was 76,000 unique IPs per month, increasing by 15-25% every year for the past four years, yet our e-book subscription numbers have held static in the low hundreds all that time.

A significant part of that is my own fault; I am not a good salesperson, and I prioritize the editing and podcast work over marketing and drumming up sales. But I think BCS's experience shows that there's a disconnect between an e-book price that provides a sustainable income for a zine and an e-book price that readers think the fiction is worth.

Jason: It seems to me that many of the genre magazines which have succeeded in recent years have built up a strong community of readers and writers. How important is it for a magazine to build its own community and support it?

Scott: I think a community or fanbase definitely helps a magazine succeed. Not just helping it succeed financially, with the community or fanbase members making donations or backing a fundraising campaign; a community or fanbase also is a huge way that word spreads about a magazine and its stories, shared online or through social media, or on sites for writers, or on review sites, or at conventions or writer's groups.

Spreading the word is crucial, especially for an indie zine, which may not have any name recognition at the start. It introduces readers to the stories, the zine, and the authors. It also introduces them to other indie zines; many short fiction writers submit to and publish in multiple different zines.

It draws in new fans. I see readers on Twitter often who have just discovered BCS, even though we've been publishing for eleven years, because of word they heard. Now those readers have ten years of back issues, 600+ stories, to feast on.

It also reaches authors. Every magazine is only as good as the stories authors submit to it. Word of mouth helps authors learn about a zine, read its stories, see what other authors it has published; see what elements and themes the zine favors. I've had numerous new BCS authors tell me that they started submitting to us because they read a great story that we'd published, or they saw us publish an author they admired or respected or had read before.

Jason: Any final thoughts you'd like to share with people?

Scott: I'm very pleased and reassured to see discussion about these issues surfacing in recent months, including the Readercon panel about the effect of the new higher SFWA-qualifying short fiction pay rate on zines, the subsequent discussions on Twitter about editors deserving pay too and many zines surviving only because their staffs contribute time for little or no pay, and your interview series here. In an editorial in 2014 I called for discussion on some of these issues; I'm very glad to see it finally happening. I hope it continues.

For me, because I see the current ezine scene as a shared ecosystem of writers, readers, and publishers, this sort of discussion is vital to us keeping this ecosystem afloat and working to make it better; make it more sustainable for all of us. We're all in this together, all reaping the wonderful benefits of this new golden age in short fiction and ezine publishing. It will take input from all areas of the field to keep things going and find ways to improve.

Interview with Neil Clarke, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Clarksword Magazine

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a magazine. What's one aspect of running a genre magazine you wish more readers and writers knew about?

Neil Clarke: I think it's probably the case for most creative endeavours – not just magazines – that their fans don't fully understand the amount of time, energy, and money that goes into creating something. Ideally, you'd have enough people contributing financially (via donations, subscriptions, sponsorships, advertising, etc.) to cover all of the costs, but at the moment, that's not happening for the majority of genre magazines, particularly those that offer free online editions.

On the surface, it looks like we're living in a great time for short fiction – there's a wide array of quality publications to choose from – but when you scratch the surface and look closer at the those publishing online, you'll discover that less than 10% of the readers are supporting those publications financially. To make ends meet, the staff have been seriously underpaid, if paid at all. No one was forced into this, but it does define the conditions by which these publications can exist and determines who can enter the field. That's not a healthy state of being. Most readers simply aren't aware of just how much of a house of cards that ecosystem is at the moment. The good news, however, is that there are significantly more than enough readers to solve this problem should they choose to subscribe or support them financially in some other manner..

Jason: In many ways Clarksword helped birth the current movement in online and genre magazines. How have things changed since the founding of Clarksword? Would you say it's harder or easier to run a genre magazine these days?

Neil: It was a very different world for magazines in 2006. Online fiction wasn't particularly respected. I remember having established authors tell me point-blank they wouldn't publish online because it was the domain of "newbie writers and pirates." The year's best anthologies and various genre awards rarely featured works from those markets. With two-to-three years, that started changing and today, the awards have heavily swung the other direction – something you could reasonably argue is just as problematic.

On the more traditional side of the industry, the major print magazines had been posting declining subscriptions for years. It wasn't uncommon for new magazines – online or in print – to launch and fold within months. It wasn't uncommon to see someone say that short fiction was dead or dying. It was a challenging time to launch something and every new publication put its own money on the table.

Since then, we've seen three things have completely changed the economics of short fiction and turned things around: Amazon Kindle, Kickstarter, and Patreon. Each has contributed in its own way and made it considerably easier for a new publication to get off the ground. Without them, I don't think we'd still be around.

At the same time, the increased access and awareness of short fiction – courtesy of free online and digital publications, including podcasts – has led to a tremendous growth in the number of markets, readers, and writers. This explosion has created problems of its own that have been exacerbated by the low paid readership percentages for those publications. That's not to minimize the positive impacts of these changes. It just means we still have a way to go.

Jason: Clarkesworld was founded thirteen years ago. Does your magazine still require significant volunteer or unpaid time from yourself and your staff?

Neil: Yes and I accept my share of the blame for that. Early on, we prioritized growth – increasing content – but didn't factor in the cost of our own time. That continued for a long time. For several years now, I've been trying to correct that mistake and while I've made some progress, we still have a long way to go. Everyone is still seriously underpaid for the hours they put in, myself included.

Jason: You've said some of the problems experienced by genre magazines come about because "we've devalued short fiction" through reader expectations that they shouldn't have to pay for short stories. Do you think this situation will ever change? Or could we eventually see a world where all writing, including novel-length fiction, is devalued?

Neil: I tend to talk about devaluation as an umbrella that covers two big problems and probably a bunch of other little ones. You've touched on the expectation that short fiction should be free, which seems to represent an alarming percentage of readers, but there's also a problem with the rates most of us charge for our subscriptions. An average monthly rate of \$1.99 or \$2.99 is too low. I've argued that the starting point should probably be about a dollar higher. That's something we can start making a case for with those who already understand that these things have value and if that extra dollar was earmarked towards staff pay, you'd see an amazingly significant improvement in the health of those markets.

That's not to say we should give up on those who don't see the point in paying for the stories they read and are entertained by. I understand that some of them can't, but when you are talking about 90% of your audience, it seems unlikely it is true of all of them. Every percentage point you can gain is significant, but it's very slow and challenging. I'd like to believe it can change, but I have to view it as a long-term goal. The previously mentioned price change is more obviously short-term and fortunately you can work on both at once.

As for novels, that's not really my area, but it looks like it's already a "problem" in the indie community – though the bug is a feature for them too. Publishing is full of paradoxes. You can have a company that creates wild library policies that is also willing to publish free online fiction. One is marketing and the other is being robbed by customers, but you can flip them and make intelligent arguments each way.

Jason: It seems to me that many of the genre magazines which have succeeded in recent years have built up a strong community of readers and writers. How important is it for a magazine to build its own community and support it?

Neil: It's not really a new concept or unique to magazines. Fans have always built communities around the things they love. What's changed is the tools we're using for communication have allowed interactions to be more frequent, interactive, and engaging. We're in a time where one of the measures of success can come from evaluating the community that has grown around it: size and perception. There's some care and feeding involved, but these tend to be fairly organic.

Authors are a part of that community, but they are actively cultivating their own as well. The result is that it is far more common these days for authors to publish broadly across many magazines instead of working more closely with a specific market or two. That's really changed some of the overall dynamics of the field.

Jason: Why did you originally want to publish a genre magazine?

Neil: The easy answer is “it seemed like a good idea at the time.” (And I still feel like it was.)

I’ve always been a short fiction junkie. When Clarkesworld launched, I had been running an online genre bookstore for about seven years. The magazine section (over one hundred different publications, many defunct) was my pride and joy. I regularly communicated with some of the editors and, with their permission, I experimented with free online fiction from those magazines as a marketing tool – and it did help.

That experience was one of the factors that led to the creation of the Clarkesworld. I saw this as a way to get more of the types of stories I liked in front of readers and I thought we had come up with a way that wouldn’t bankrupt me. I had no expectations of this becoming a career or lasting this long (which led to some of those poor decisions), but it didn’t take long to hook me. At this point, I can’t imagine doing anything else! If I didn’t love it, I would have retired ages ago.

Interview with Mur Lafferty, Co-Editor of Escape Pod

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a podcast magazine. What's one aspect of running a podcast like Escape Pod that you wish more listeners and writers knew about?

Mur Lafferty: I think a lot of people believe that our costs are just to pay for our stories, but we are working toward paying everyone involved with bringing the podcast together. This includes the author, of course, but also the editors, production, the narrators, and we are working toward paying our associate editors, or slush readers. Everyone puts a lot of time and effort into this magazine and deserves to be compensated.

Jason: Escape Pod is the longest-running podcast magazine and pioneered the genre. How have things changed since the founding of Escape Pod? Would you say it's harder or easier to raise funds for and financially support a genre podcast these days?

Mur: It's definitely harder. When Serah Eley started it in 2005, she was the only one on editorial/production and the donations only had to pay for the stories. Now we're a much larger production, with bigger teams and branching out to three sister podcasts. That's a lot more people to manage, keep track of, and pay.

Jason: In addition to paying your writers, Escape Pod also pays the narrators of your stories. Are there any other expenses associated with a podcast magazine which a text-only genre magazine may not encounter?

Mur: Oops, I'm answering the questions too early. But audio production and narrators are definitely a cost that text-only magazines don't need to worry about. In addition, we have to pay for someone to host and stream the audio content.

Jason: Do you pay any of your staff? How many hours of volunteer time does it typically take to create each episode of Escape Pod?

Mur: Again, answering too early! :) We pay everyone but our associate editors, and that's one of our fundraising goals. Counting the labor from first read to final post, we'd estimate a total of 5-6 hours per published story. Of that, only 15 minutes is currently unpaid, and we're working to change that.

Jason: According to this year's Locus Magazine survey, *Escape Pod* has an audience size of 37,000 people, making it one of the largest English-language SF magazines in the world. What percentage of your audience supports the magazine with donations? Any thoughts on how to convince more genre readers and listeners to support the magazines they love?

Mur: I believe we have the typical 1% rate of donation. We have no funding but our listeners, and the couple of times we've been in trouble, we've been honest with saying, hey, we can't keep delivering the show to you if you don't support us, and they've always stepped up. With Patreon it's much easier to allow people to donate on a sustaining level and get rewards as well!

Jason: It seems to me that many of the genre magazines which have succeeded in recent years have built up a strong community of readers and writers. How important is it for a podcast to build its own community and support that community?

Mur: I don't think it's possible to thrive today without a strong community, especially online. Love it or hate it, social media is the fastest way to spread the word about something you like, and when we can get people talking about our stories, we see a difference.

Interview with Pablo Defendini, Publisher and Art Director of Fireside Magazine

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a magazine. What's one aspect of running a genre magazine you wish more readers and writers knew about?

Pablo Defendini: By far, it's the role that good, engaged editors play in the creation of quality work. A good short story (or a novel, or a play, or an illustration, or anything, really) usually doesn't just spring forth fully formed from the mind of a lone author toiling away in their garret – it takes the work of a compassionate and thoughtful editor to take the initial draft and help the author hone it into its most effective shape.

And once the developmental editing process is done, it then takes a fastidious copyeditor to review the work and make sure there's no inconsistencies, errors, omissions, or other little details that can take a reader out of the experience of enjoying the work. As well, there's proofreaders, line editors, etc., all of whose work is crucial to ensuring a final story of superlative quality – better than a lone author can achieve on their own.

All of this work is meant to be invisible to the reader, so there's a real lack of understanding out there about the work that goes into this stuff. A good editor doesn't just pick a story from a submissions pile and calls it a day – that's just the first step!

Jason: You said *Fireside* pays its editors a fee for each issue of the print magazine, with the fee based on Fireside's word rate and the revenue to pay for this coming entirely from subscribers. Was there a break-even point with subscribers where this started to work? Do you still rely on any fundraising to support the magazine?

Pablo: I think using a word like 'fundraising' is misleading. Fireside is not a non-profit, and it's not a charity – so we're not 'raising funds' for anything. Using vocabulary linked to non-profits and charities implies that the people who support us are doing so out of the kindness of their heart, without receiving any direct value in return. The stories, artwork, and publications that Fireside publishes have value, our customers recognize that, and are willing to pay money for it.

But I digress. To answer your question:

Since its inception, Fireside has been sustainable. That is: our operations have always been fully funded by the money we bring in, first via our annual Kickstarter campaigns, later via Patreon, and most recently our direct subscriptions. And this works well for an online-only publication, since there's very few up-front costs associated with publishing online. But when we decided to get into print, I had to invest some money up front in order to pay for printers, shipping, fulfillment, and other costs associated with physical inventory. The financial plan for the print magazine called for a grace period during which we needed to reach a certain number of subscribers in order to regain that 'sustainable' status, and I'm happy to report that we reached that goal at the beginning of this year. I had forecast that we would be able to reach it in December of last year, and it actually happened in January of this year, so we cut it close, but we got there.

Jason: Even though you pay your editors, does your magazines still require significant volunteer time from yourself and your staff?

Pablo: No. Everyone who works on Fireside – from our first readers through to our editors, copyeditors, illustrators, etc – gets paid, period. Even I get compensated. Since I’m the owner of the company that publishes Fireside, my compensation happens in ways other than a cash payment for services rendered, but it happens.

Jason: Neil Clarke of Clarkesworld has said some of the problems experienced by genre magazines come about because “we’ve devalued short fiction” through reader expectations that they shouldn’t have to pay for short stories. Do you agree with this? Any thoughts on how to change this situation?

Pablo: I agree with Neil’s analysis, here. And Fireside obviously shares in his ‘complicity,’ as he puts it. Since my days at Tor.com, I’ve been – and continue to be – an advocate for free-to-read content online. It brings in new readers, helps to raise the profile of the publication, and helps take advantage of the network effects of social media.

But I also agree with Neil in that perhaps we’ve seen the pendulum shift too far in the direction of free-to-read online. Fireside, in particular, has done an okay job in articulating the value of the work we put out there – the proof is in our subscription revenue. But as a whole, I think we’ve decoupled the work from its perceived value, and that’s a problem.

Like any problem worth solving, it’s complicated. We can do a better job communicating the value that we provide, and we also can come up with better models that combine the positive attributes of both the free-to-read model and the paywalled approach. We’re working on some stuff in this area now, and we hope to make some announcements early next year.

Jason: Fireside also publishes a number of genre books. Books generally have better profit margins and sales numbers than individual magazine issues. Do you also experience this? Any thoughts on why this might be the case?

Pablo: Books and magazines are very, very different businesses – it’s apples to oranges, despite superficial similarities. A direct comparison is not a useful exercise, in my opinion.

Books rely on revenue from individual sales. Periodicals rely on either advertising (which is a slowly dying model, in my opinion), or on direct subscriptions (or crowdfunding campaigns, which for the purposes of this question are another flavor of ‘subscription’ revenue) to generate revenue. The way you market each product and build your audience is very different.

With periodicals, the key is consistency over time, in the aggregate, as you cultivate your audience, which is why the successful periodicals out there are the ones that have created and fostered a community. With books, each one is a separate product, that needs to have its own P&L. So in terms of profit margins and sales numbers, it’s hard to generalize about books, in the way that I can be much more confident in our magazine numbers, since I have the historical data to extrapolate future performance from.

Jason: It seems to me that many of the genre magazines which have succeeded in recent years have built up a strong community of readers and writers. How important is it for a magazine to build its own community and support it?

Pablo: It’s essential! See above!

But I would add that it is also essential for any publisher to own the relationship with its customers. Platforms and service providers like Patreon, Kickstarter, Amazon, Ingram, Diamond, and others insert themselves in between publishers and their customers, even as they provide valuable services. The more control they have over the customer relationship, the more vulnerable you are to any changes they may make.

Jason: Why did you want to publish a genre magazine?

Pablo: I believe in the power of stories to shape our culture. It's truly that simple.

Jason: Any final thoughts you'd like to share with people?

Pablo: So many. But I'm gonna save those for my own blog. ;)

Interview with Troy L. Wiggins (Executive Editor), L. D. Lewis (Art Director, Web Master, POB Coordinator), and Brent Lambert (Social Media Manager & Reviews Coordinator) of FIYAH! The Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a magazine. What's one aspect of running a genre magazine you wish more readers and writers knew about?

L.D. Lewis: Marketing and promotion? Absolute hell on a shoestring budget. Coming up with methods of leveraging your social media presence because it's what's available to you for free takes persistence, labor, creativity, and a love for one's own voice because you're going to repeat yourself a lot in order to stay visible.

Brent Lambert: The time away from your own personal pursuits. None of us are doing this because we're making exponential amounts of money and most of us have plenty of goals outside of the magazine. As L.D. mentions, this takes a lot of persistence and a lot of labor. So I find that many of us have to slow down or put aside our own goals in order to keep the magazine running at an optimal level.

Troy L. Wiggins: All of the incidental responsibilities that have nothing to do with the magazine's final product. We knew that publishing a magazine would be a massive responsibility and a lot of work. And, of course, we have programming and projects outside of the magazine that affect our output, but there are several responsibilities that come with positioning yourself as a publisher that you just don't anticipate. Managing partnerships with other publishers, vendors, and other industry resources like reviewers, maintaining data on submissions and stories, working with other editors of best of collections and collaborative issues, managing advertisers, non SF/F media requests, convention requests (often with little or no funding attached) all of this contributes toward making sure that our product – the magazine – has the reach and scale it needs to, but it's a heavy lift.

Jason: FIYAH! is a relatively new genre magazine, with your publication's third anniversary approaching. What are the challenges of starting a new magazine and connecting with readers and writers? Any particular insights you wished you'd known before you started FIYAH?

LDL: I think it's probably easier, actually, when you have a mission. Ethical consumption is more a thing now than it's probably ever been. People want to grant patronage to causes, so if you're trying to innovate or expand the reach of marginalized voices, or if your proceeds fund charitable efforts, these are messages readers will get behind financially (even if they don't always read). I'm not sure about challenges because I think we've always just done what makes sense to us. We are the community we represent in our work, so we know where and how to find our contributors. Our collective experience allows us to speak authentically on our mission, and our genuine interest in creating community removes the obligation feeling of interfacing with our audience. I'll say I wish we had more readers, but I think that's true of every venue.

Brent: I have to say that for us, I don't think staying connected with the readers and writer is hard. The audience we have on both those fronts is staunchly in support of us. One of our biggest points as a Black SFF community is that we're out here and we're getting ignored. FIYAH's existence was birthed from a

need to have this whole swath of people be allowed to be represented. So far that has brought people to our door who have been ready to uplift us wholeheartedly.

Troy: Brent and L.D. say it perfectly here. We knew what we wanted to do and who we wanted to do it for, in a very intentional way, from the beginning.

Jason: What percentage of your magazine's financial support comes from subscriptions and what percentage comes from fundraisers? Would your magazine be able to exist without significant volunteer time from yourself and your staff?

LDL: We're mainly sustained by subscriptions (about 70%) with the rest made up in independent donations, merch, and back issue sales. We don't really do any major fundraising aside from our subscription preorder campaigns in the fall of each year, during which subscriptions are sold at discount rates. Thus far, we operate entirely on a volunteer basis, but we're making moves to change to a paying model in the next couple of years.

Troy: FIYAH has an amazing staff. Everything you see from us, from our website, to our social media, to our amazing covers and magazines, to our voice and vision, all of that was built and is maintained on volunteer labor. As awesome as that is, it's also worrying. The prevailing business model we have in this field, our overreliance on volunteer labor and crowdfunding is dangerous and, as we are seeing from these recurring conversations about the health of the field, unsustainable. It's been a goal of mine from the start to figure out a way to pay our staff for their time, expertise, and labor because their work is worth that, but to do that we need to think of a different business model. I've heard rumblings of a co-operative business model for SF/F magazines, and I believe there are a few magazines out there that use this model. I'd be interested to see how a model like that would work in the larger SF/F field.

Jason: Neil Clarke of Clarkesworld has said some of the problems experienced by genre magazines come about because "we've devalued short fiction" through reader expectations that they shouldn't have to pay for short stories. Do you agree with this? Any thoughts on how to change this situation?

LDL: I'm not sure who the "we" here is, but I think if you're going to identify that as the issue, you have to own your role in its inception and then work toward its solution. Any new zine is going to look to its predecessors for how to structure itself successfully. So if you're one of the most prominent, highly respected outlets in the field and you're offering free content or functioning on volunteer labor or employing a crowdfunded approach to cover operating costs, the 10, 15, 20 zines who come after you are going to take that as gospel. That said, I do think a lot of digital venues operate in that space where you're either literature or you're web content, and people who consider you web content even on a subconscious level are going to be deterred by a paywall when so much of the internet is free reading. If you're a print market or print+digital, you have that physical entity advantage and it's sometimes easier to justify paying for something physical. I don't know that that's anyone's fault, though. Cultural landscapes shift constantly. We're still having the frustrating conversation about e-books not being "real" books. Who knows when we'll finally get that point across?

I think the issue is one of exhaustion on the part of volunteer staff and a strained supporter base. In my observation, the people who contribute to zine crowdfunds also contribute to crowdfunds for individuals in emergency situations. There are a lot of emergencies or people in general need, just within the SFF community and funds are finite. If you're supporting your four favorite zines every year, donating to three medical funds, two Kickstarters, a moving fund, and also taking on costs associated with at least one fandom-related convention every year, it's not sustainable for a lot of readers, especially the marginalized ones.

Brent: I do think, in general, there's a cultural conversation to be had about the devaluation of art, but as L.D. pointed out (I always defer to her lol) there are expectations that are set for readers when you offer free content. And don't get me wrong, I think free content is perfectly fine but I see it as hard to offer that and then bemoan patronage. There's this self-deprecating thing I see in the industry where we constantly have to remind each other that our work has value and that people should pay for it. I'm going to paraphrase something I saw a day ago, but one \$100 client is less work and more valuable than five \$20 clients. Yes, demanding your worth may mean losing some of the audience but the ones who stay are there because they appreciate what you're doing.

Troy: This is complicated. Like L.D. pointed out, the people who support magazines are exhausted, and likely don't have all of the funds needed to support every crowdfunding or donation request that comes around in the SF/F field. And Brent's point that there is a cultural component here is spot on – the who of who has devalued short fiction absolutely needs to be considered and unpacked in order to get to the truth of this conversation – especially considering that there publications who are certainly not part of the SF/F field publishing SF/F short fiction and doing really interesting work there. What does seem to be true is that people are looking for visionary strategies and new ways of seeing how to live and be on our flaming little planet, and SF/F helps with that. Seen that way, this is a moment of great promise.

Part of this is definitely a shifting media landscape that SF/F has been kind of behind the curve on. The internet, especially in the last twenty years, has torpedoed the attention economy, which has deeply impacted how much supporters notice and how much they spend. I look at the difficulties of our field, but then I look at the larger landscape: the SF/F field has to compete with every other thing seeking to get into people's eyeballs, and that's before you start thinking deeply about marketing strategy – the difficulties of which have been pointed out already.

With that in mind, it's hard to run a magazine, or really, a media platform, in this attention economy period. I get fundraising emails from Bitch magazine every month. Magazines and online verticals – even massive ones – shut down or layoff staff daily. Being a freelance writer or a contributor in this economy is difficult, and dangerous. Readers and subscribers don't have enough money, but they also don't have enough time to engage with the thing they're spending money on or look deeply for things. Like I said, complicated.

Jason: I was really impressed by FIYAH's successful fundraiser to [host a staff meetup in honor of your magazine's first nomination for a Hugo Award for Best Semiprozine](#). To me this ties in with how important it is for a magazine to build its own community and support it. How do you see FIYAH both supporting and building a community?

LDL: Our social media presence is critical to this work. It's largely where we find our writers, where we check in on our people and lift them up in their work. Our editors send out personalized feedback in rejections to support their evolution as writers. We keep an eye on the conversations around Black presences in genre spaces and we author studies that illustrate those changes to keep the entire field fertile for the voices we want to see. And we're accountable to the people who support us. When you cultivate a joyful space that's focused on everyone's growth, people want to be part of that, and they follow the tone we've set for them. It keeps us rich in positive engagement and new ideas.

Brent: We made sure from the jump to declare our social media space as something more than just about the magazine. I knew from the moment I got assigned the Social Media Manager gig that I wanted to give writers a place to express themselves, interact with each other and just have a space where they could "let their hair down". I think for the most part we've succeeded with that. I'm forever in awe of every time someone has told us they decided to write again because of our existence. Writers, especially Black writers, need to know that they're loved, wanted and appreciated.

And to be frank, the larger SFF world has been doing a piss poor job at that. So honestly, this was low-hanging fruit in terms of building such a dedicated audience. We're just lucky people decided to trust us and actually stick around.

Jason: Why did you originally want to publish a genre magazine?

LDL: We saw a need. The field swore we (Black SFF writers) didn't exist and that was the reason we weren't being published. We knew they were mistaken. And now they do, too.

Brent: As is so often the burden of Black people, if we need something we often have to build it ourselves. Representation was and continues to be (despite improvements) lacking in the short SFF field.

So sadly, want doesn't really get to come into play for Black creative ventures. We're often boxed in to having to do it in order to be allowed to exist. Or in the case of critiques previously delivered by some SFF venues, "prove" we exist at all.

Troy: When I first started writing and submitting, it seemed to be that the SF/F field was content to ignore black SF/F writers, even when they said they were hurting. Like, people heard you yelling about your pain, but little was actually changing. The aftermath of the #BlackSpecFic report definitely contributed to our being here, but there was always a need for a space that centers black speculative genius in conversation with the rest of the field, that showed that "hey, we can do this as well as a Clarkesworld or an Analog, and our work is just as brilliant."

We're not the first black-focused SF/F magazine in the world. But we try to bring the black perspective, through the work of authors, and through our other programming, to contribute to the conversations that shape the field. We wanted to show the field that black writers existed, but we also wanted to create a space to give black SF/F writers voice and a pathway to success that didn't require them to have a first touch with a publication that didn't understand them or didn't care about them. I shudder to even consider how many black writers have quit writing SF/F because of the kinds of difficulties and traumas that come with submitting to, at best, race-blind or at worst, racist magazines and editors.

Interview with Vanessa Rose Phin, Editor-in-Chief of Strange Horizons

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a magazine. What's one aspect of running a genre magazine you wish more readers and writers knew about?

Vanessa Rose Phin: The answer that tends to give writers the most comfort is to let them know that our not selecting their work isn't necessarily because it is bad. It could be that we got 400 submissions and could only choose two, and those two happened to resonate at that moment or for that issue. We get far more good stories than we could ever use. And given that most of our editors are writers, they understand getting rejections suck.

From my standpoint, the most exhausting thing about running a zine is social media. I love it and it has always buoyed me as an agoraphobe, but maintaining several evolving social media accounts in the voice of a zine, in addition to my own accounts as a face of the zine, can be quite taxing, as anyone who is familiar with the gig economy and marketing yourself understands. It's especially intense during fund drive season. And of course the broader the reach, the larger the population of trolls.

Jason: Strange Horizons is the longest-running digital genre magazine and pioneered many of the fundraising methods now used by other publications. How have things changed since the founding of Strange Horizons? Would you say it's harder or easier to raise funds for and financially support a genre magazine these days?

Vanessa: Strange Horizons was founded on what we then called the museum model, running on donations and grants. The founding editors were told that a magazine on a website would never be taken as seriously as a print zine, and that they wouldn't last, which is amusing to consider in hindsight, but it shows both the dedication they had in those first days and how society has changed in what it values. SH rode the wave that saw, at the same time, the demise of so many print publications, including many newspapers, and it isn't a pleasant thing to consider. Short genre fiction has always been a robust little market, but it still feels starved in terms of how little social support there is for the arts. There seem to be fewer grants with more red tape these days for publications. At the same time, crowdfunding has expanded in ways we couldn't have considered 20 years ago, and folks with good social media presence can capitalize on that. As for ease of funding, SH has it easier than newer zines because we're known, and we can't help noticing that big branches tend to soak up most of the rain. What we really want to see is a large, diverse market, not a tiny market narrowed to a few giants.

Jason: Strange Horizons also helped pioneer the idea that a genre magazine could be run as a nonprofit with assistance from a staff of volunteers. What are the pros and cons of this publishing model?

Vanessa: With volunteer staff, the con is simple: no pay. Generally, working for no pay privileges people who can afford to volunteer time, and devalues the work we do as editors. I'd like to think that at SH, we have partially balanced the former by making our staff so large and so international that no one need put in many hours, and folks can cover for you regardless of time zone. Despite having 50+ folks, we're a close group. Our Slack is a social space, and we bring our worst and best days there for each other. Several members (including me) have volunteered right through periods of un- and underemployment because of the love of the zine and our community.

We have looked to add pay several times, but given the amount of money we raise, we would have to both double our funds and become a tiny 1-3 person crew, instead of a 50-member operation. Think of the narrowing of scope and perspective that would bring. When we did try for an honorarium during one fund drive; sadly, we received very little interest from donors. It isn't out of the picture, though.

Jason: Do you pay any of your staff? How many hours of volunteer time does it typically take to create each issue of Strange Horizons?

Vanessa: We are all volunteer, including me. We don't track our hours, but it is easy to say that it takes hundreds of combined hours to create an issue. We are open to submissions every week, and we get hundreds of them, which the first readers and editors review; there's the back-and-forth of the editing process; podcast creation; contracts and payments; art and layout; technical issues; reviews discussions and assignments and scheduling; columns and articles to be solicited and galleyed. There are the copyediting passes, content warning passes, and my pass before publication, as well as social media announcements and updating the e-book for our Patreon supporters. That's for just one week, and we publish weekly.

Jason: It seems to me that many of the genre magazines which have succeeded in recent years have built up a strong community of readers and writers. How important is it for a magazine to build its own community and support that community?

Vanessa: We do feel it is extremely important to engage with communities – plural, because SFF isn't one big happy family. We have always preferred to prioritize marginalized voices – it makes the genre bigger, better, and truer to humanity. And not only for writers and artists but in the gatekeeping roles of the publication itself. Getting that editing experience is important in publishing.

I wouldn't consider any of those communities ours, though. More like we've organically created a friendly, mutually supportive population by constantly reaching for new hands and new ideas. I don't think it's particularly important that we cultivate an in-group to thrive as a zine. We'd much rather look outward than inward.

Jason: Next year is Strange Horizons's 20th anniversary. Any thoughts about where you'd like to see Strange Horizons go in the next 20 years?

Vanessa: This is my first year as editor in chief, so many of these thoughts are what I hope to bring to the zine in the next few years. Primarily, I'd like to see our international presence increase. With Samovar and our regional special issues, we've seen an uptick in submissions from folks outside the US-UK axis, and that's been great. We co-published pieces with a Brazilian genre zine, Trasgo, for our Brazilian special issue – they did theirs in Portuguese, ours in translation – I'd like to do that with other zines. I'd also like to get into print, put out some SH-sponsored anthologies during my tenure. In the long view, I hope Strange Horizons stays true to its historical focus on SFF at its most expansive. And I hope it stays hella queer.

Interview with Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas, Publishers and Editor-in-Chiefs of Uncanny Magazine

Jason Sanford: I suspect most people in the SF/F genre don't understand the difficulties of publishing a magazine. What's one aspect of running a genre magazine you wish more readers and writers knew about?

Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas: We think it's important that people know the financial margins for magazines to stay in the black are razor thin, and that most of the magazines are unable to generate income for their publishers. (And many aren't able to pay the editors.) Almost all of the income generated by magazines are going to the writers and artists.

We definitely believe that the writers and artists should come first, but the current publishing financial models are still evolving. We do believe that one day magazines will become more profitable, but the process of getting there is a lot of trial and error with different financial models.

Jason: Uncanny is one of the most successful of today's genre magazines, having won multiple Hugo Awards for Best Semiprozine along with Hugos for Best Editor, Short Form, for yourself and Michael Damian Thomas plus awards for many of the stories you've published. Despite this, you've said that as Uncanny has grown in revenue, your expenses have grown at about the same pace. How do the pressures of running your magazine today differ from when you founded Uncanny?

Lynne and Michael: We knew a lot going in, but things keep changing in the industry, and our knowledge has grown with the changes. In order to keep up with other magazines and SFWA recommendations, our pay rates increased. We've tried to offer more content to our readership community, especially as the comparable magazines increased their content. We learned the need for accounting software, a web person, accountant, lawyer, and all of the specialists needed to keep the magazine at the level our readers expect.

The biggest change is really now we know better what to expect, so fewer of the pressures of running a magazine come as surprises.

But fundamentally, this is fairly close to what we envisioned when we started the magazine, at least with the nuts and bolts stuff. We knew that this was going to be a marathon.

Jason: Do you think it's possible Uncanny will eventually transition to a fully professional magazine, with all the staff including the publishers/editors-in-chief being paid? How big a hurdle would this be to achieve, and is it desirable?

Lynne and Michael: All of the Uncanny staff is currently paid except for the publishers/editors-in-chief (Lynne and Michael). We definitely desire this, especially for Michael who puts 60 hours a week into running the magazine. It's a fairly sizeable hurdle, but we knew that going into this. We expect that we will continue to increase our income and make this happen.

When we first developed our business plan before we launched the first Kickstarter, we prioritized making the quality magazine we wanted to make and developing a readership community over quick profits. We had a lot of knowledge from our previous work at Apex and from our peers. Our main goals at the beginning were to be sustainable (which happened right away), to make the magazine we wanted to

make as far as size, content, and presentation (also happened right away), and to build a community of readers (still growing). The ultimate goal has always been to increase our community every year, and eventually that will lead to us earning money for ourselves.

Jason: Neil Clarke of Clarkesworld has said some of the problems experienced by genre magazines come about because “we’ve devalued short fiction” through reader expectations that they shouldn’t have to pay for short stories. Do you agree with this? Any thoughts on how to change this situation?

Lynne and Michael: We understand why Neil would say this, but we think the SFF short fiction magazines are just caught in the same market forces as newspapers and other types of magazines. As the Internet flourished, readers have received a great deal of their shorter reading content for free. This is the case for Time, Newsweek, Vanity Fair, etc., to the New York Times and everyone’s local paper. Online advertising revenue just hasn’t provided enough income, even with periodicals created specifically for the Internet.

With the online SFF magazines, many of the ones that attempted paywalls in the past failed and closed. All of the current SFF magazines are just part of a general Internet trend. We don’t think there was a different way to go.

Jason: It seems to me that many of the genre magazines which have succeeded in recent years have built up a strong community of readers and writers. How important is it for a magazine to build its own community and support this community?

Lynne and Michael: Uncanny doesn’t exist without its community. We don’t feel that this is anything new to magazines. If you look back in SFF history, a thriving community of readers in the letters’ column was there all the way back to Gernsback’s Amazing Stories. All of the ongoing digests (Analog, Asimov’s, and F&SF) are still known for having dedicated communities of readers. For a magazine to succeed, you need readers who are invested in the vision and content of your magazine.

Jason: Why did you originally want to publish a genre magazine?

Lynne and Michael: We absolutely loved our time at Apex. We love short stories. We love essays and poems. We love working creators. We love seeing the responses from readers to these gorgeous works. We thought there was a niche to be served with gorgeous pieces that made readers feel. Uncanny seemed like a good idea at the time, and we’re still having a blast running it.

About Jason Sanford

Jason Sanford is a two-time finalist for the Nebula Award who has published more than a dozen stories in the British SF magazine *Interzone*, which also devoted a special issue to his fiction. In addition he has published numerous stories in magazines such as *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, *Apex Magazine*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, and other places, along with appearances in various "year's best" anthologies, *The New Voices of Science Fiction*, and other anthologies. His fiction has been translated into nearly a dozen languages including Chinese, Spanish, French, Russian, Polish, and Czech. Born and raised in the American South, Jason currently lives with his family in the Midwestern United States. His previous experience includes work as an archaeologist and as a Peace Corps Volunteer. His website is www.jasonsanford.com.