

# FENCON XIX

FEBRUARY 23-25, 2024



*Lafferty*

LAFFERTY • VIA BELLA  
ZRUBEK • SNELLINGS  
MCPHEE • BROADDUS  
LANSDALE



# FOR ALL FENKIND

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FenCon is a production of the Dallas Future Society, a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to the advancement of science, literature and music for the future of all mankind.

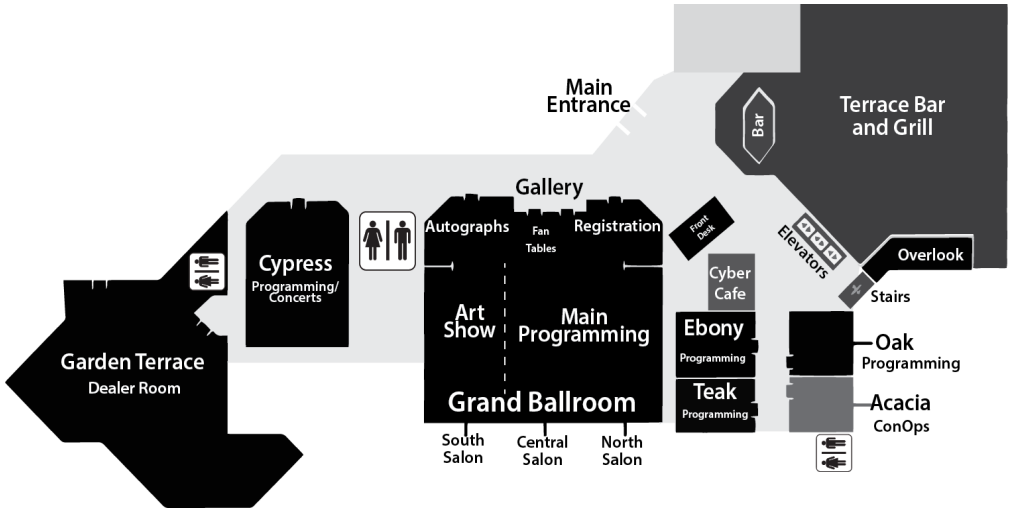
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# DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

## Main Level Map



**Main Programming** . . . . . *Grand Ballroom North and Central*

**Art Show** . . . . . *Grand Ballroom South*

**Dealers Room** . . . . . *Garden Terrace 1-2*

**Programming** . . . . . *Cypress*

**Programming** . . . . . *Oak*

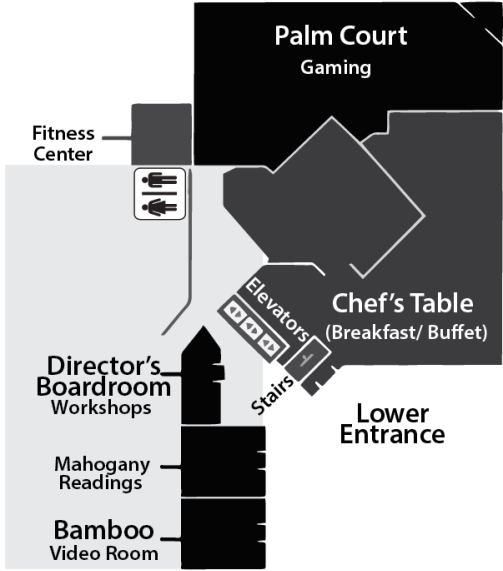
**Programming** . . . . . *Ebony*

**Programming** . . . . . *Teak*

# DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

## Lower Level and 9th Floor Maps

### Lower Level



**Matt's Gaming Room** ..... *Palm Court*

**Makerspace** ..... *9th Floor - The View*

**Costuming** ..... *9th Floor - The View*

**Workshops** ..... *Director's Boardroom*

**Readings** ..... *Mahogany*

**Video Room** ..... *Bamboo*

# LETTER FROM THE CONCHAIR

by Rhonda Eudaly

2024... We're living in **THE FUTURE**. As a kid reading science fiction and watching *Star Trek*, 2024 was unfathomably far in the future and here we are. Maybe we aren't the *Jetsons*, yet, but we have come so far. We have technology that seemed impossible when we encountered it in books, movies, and TV – and we're still waiting for other promises.

This year's theme, *For All Fenkind*, celebrates what science fiction always meant to me: a welcoming environment for everyone. I've always hoped we could move into Gene Roddenberry's future IDIC philosophy of "infinite diversity in infinite combinations". I still live in the hope of getting the *Star Trek* future and not *Babylon 5*.

But that is the awesomeness of Science Fiction and Fantasy. We can have whatever future we want. We can have whatever past we want. We can escape from the rigors of our daily lives and be whoever or whatever we want to be through what we read, write, draw, sculpt or play. There is room for everyone in our community.

And we are at the best and worst of times, there is *so much* to enjoy. We've never had *this much* to enjoy – all our old favorites are available 24/7, often remastered to their original glory. There are new favorites to delve into in either the long term or in a binge. We can carry entire libraries in our pockets. Musicians can work with other musicians in other time zones to mix music without ever being in the same room.

The possibilities boggle the mind.

That's what I love to see when we come together like this. Wondering over the overwhelming possibilities in science and art and writing and making. I am looking forward to hearing the stories that get told on panels and in the common spaces. I am looking forward to reconnecting with old friends and making new ones.

You all are what makes FenCon fabulous. **You** make the effort worthwhile. We had our challenges with connections in the past several years. We remember those we've lost. We celebrate the opportunities to come. As we move forward into this new future, I'm sure we're going to find our way through the challenges and into the possibilities.

Enjoy your time here at FenCon. We're so glad you're here.

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF FENCON

You've waited through the registration line. You handed money to the convention and they gave you a badge, a lanyard, a program schedule sheet, and showed you where to download this book with a pretty cover.

Now what?

First, put your badge on. It is your passport to most of the convention activities, so keep it visible.<sup>1</sup>

Second, take a few minutes to review the Program Schedule. Schedules can be found at [fencon.org/hours.aspx](http://fencon.org/hours.aspx), on printed sheets at Registration, and on printed signs at each room.

It provides a list of when the events start and stop and detailed descriptions of what the panels will cover, when and where.<sup>2</sup> Think of this convention as a circus: lots of performances happen simultaneously, so there is something happening wherever you look.

Third, read through the descriptions, choose which ones you want to see, then find them on the grid on the Program Schedule Sheets. The grid format lets you scan across the different activities during an hour, making it easier to find conflicts (or, if a panel isn't quite what you wanted, to find alternatives).

You may not be so interested in the panels, but the convention has other activities, too. Take some time to check out the Art Show and items in the Auction, play some games in Gaming, explore the Dealers Room and shop for books, jewelry, clothing, collectibles, and more, watch movies and video shorts in the Video Room, or just hang out in the Terrace.

<sup>1</sup> By paying for your membership, you help finance the convention. Although a registered non-profit 501(c)3 organization, the convention still needs real money to pay for the hotel and equipment. Showing your badge shows that you've done your part to make this convention happen.

<sup>2</sup> Wait... what's a panel? Some attendees are happy to meet the Guests of Honor, listen to authors read their own stories, or hear how artists put together that really cool piece of art. The convention schedules these discussions and presentations into panels. The Program Schedule describes what the panel topics are and who is on them (as well as concerts, demonstrations, workshops and guest autograph sessions,) and lists when and where they will happen, in the order they will happen.

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF FENCON

On Friday we start with opening ceremonies, a few special videos, and a few important messages.

Most of Friday and early Saturday, you can bid in the silent auction on various types of art from many talented artists.

After the Dealers Room and Art Show close, you can still watch some great selections in the Video Room, learn some new games, and find the cash bar. On Friday and Saturday nights, you have filk bands playing into the wee hours of the morning, where you may hear strains of music with fannish phrases.<sup>3</sup>

There are many activities to choose from, starting Friday until the convention closes Sunday afternoon, so pace yourself. Schedule time for eating, drinking, sleeping, and being kind to your fellow convention attendees by taking care of personal hygiene (bathing, etc.)

Finally, Programming can change after the schedule sheets are printed. Look for schedule changes posted around the convention.

For the latest and most complete schedule go to <http://www.fencon.org/Hours.aspx> or on mobile at [mobile.fencon.org](http://mobile.fencon.org).

<sup>3</sup> Some terms you may hear around the con that might be new to you:

- fan \ *noun* \ Merriam-Webster lists: an ardent admirer or enthusiast (as of a celebrity or a pursuit) <science-fiction fans>
- fen \ *noun* \ The plural form of fan, just as “men” is the plural form of “man”
- fanzine \ fan-zeen \ *noun* An amateur-produced magazine written for a subculture, usually for little or no compensation (only to defray costs). Original source: fan + magazine
- filk \ Music or songs associated with science fiction/fantasy culture. Allegedly, this was a typographical error of ‘folk.’
- newbie \ nu-bee \ A person who is new to fandom. We were all new, so don’t hesitate to ask someone when you need to.

# Dallas Future Society – Convention Code of Conduct

## ...or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Enjoy the Con

The Dallas Future Society (DFS) is the parent organization responsible for producing FenCon and other events. As such, DFS is committed to providing a safe and congenial environment for all its members, and any other groups at the facility. We expect all members to demonstrate respect and appropriate behavior to all present: members, convention staff, hotel staff, and anyone else present at the hotel.

To promote a positive convention experience for everyone, we have established the following Code of Conduct for convention members. It applies to all pre-convention, at-convention, and post-convention activities associated with each event.

***Above all, we ask all members to exercise common sense rules for public behavior, personal interaction, common courtesy, politeness and respect for private property.***

For the complete Code of Conduct, please refer to the [Code of Conduct page](#) on Fencon.org.

### **1. MEDICAL EMERGENCIES:**

In the event of a medical emergency, please go directly to the hotel staff, not the convention staff – either the front desk or the nearest hotel staff member. The hotel has asked that all attendees work through them directly in these situations.

### **2. IDENTIFICATION (BADGES):**

Each convention member will be provided with a badge. Your badge is your permit into convention functions and spaces. Wear your badge so it is visible at all times. Anyone seen without a badge in any of our function rooms will be asked to leave and retrieve their badge before returning. If you lose your badge, you may be required to pay for a new membership.

If you find someone's badge or lose your own badge, please contact Registration or Convention Operations (Con Ops) immediately. Badge sharing is prohibited. To ensure this, we require that all members give a verifiable real name in addition to any listed badge name when they register. Anyone found to be sharing a badge will be removed from the convention and the membership associated with that badge may be revoked without refund.

### **3. SAFETY:**

We will not tolerate dangerous, illegal, or destructive behavior at the convention. Please



# Dallas Future Society – Convention Code of Conduct

## ...or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Enjoy the Con

report any incidents to Convention Operations immediately. Any members found to have participated in potentially dangerous, illegal, or destructive activity anywhere in or around the convention hotel will be asked to cease immediately and may be subject to the Consequences section listed below (see #17).

#### **4. MANNERS & ETIQUETTE:**

We expect all members to treat all people at the event with respect. The best way to do that is by exercising good manners and by being patient and polite. Areas of the convention can be crowded and stressful at times. Please be aware of your tone of voice, body language, and behavior. In short, be polite and be nice.

#### **5. ANTI-HARASSMENT:**

We want everyone to have a great time, consequently we will not tolerate harassing or menacing behavior. Please report to Convention Operations any incidents of verbal or physical harassment including but not limited to:

- a. Inappropriate language or gestures such as suggestive, insulting, intimidating, demeaning, discriminatory, or offensive comments
- b. Unwanted physical or sexual attention
- c. Unwanted physical contact or proximity
- d. Threatening language or behavior

#### **5. ANTI-HARASSMENT (continued):**

*If you feel you or another member are being harassed, please do the following:*

- a. Tell the individual that their behavior is inappropriate and ask them to stop
- b. If they don't stop, or you do not feel comfortable addressing them, then immediately contact a convention staff member. Request to be immediately escorted to Convention Operations
- c. Provide Convention Operations with as much information about the incident as possible, including badge name (if available) and description
- d. The Chairperson and convention leadership will work to evaluate and address the incident as quickly as possible

*Advice – If someone asks you to leave them alone or tells you “no” or “stop”, immediately acknowledge the request, walk away, and do not approach them again. This will stop most incidents from escalating and allow everyone to enjoy the convention. Always remember your “good fun” might be another person’s harassment.*

# Dallas Future Society – Convention Code of Conduct

## ...or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Enjoy the Con

### 6. ATTIRE & COSTUMES:

No nudity. This is a family-friendly convention. Keep your clothing and costumes PG-13. For your safety, no bare feet please. We reserve the right to request you change into more appropriate attire or put away your props if we find them to be inappropriate or disruptive.

When sitting in panel or performance rooms, please remove any large hats, fezzes, or other items that might obstruct another's view.

*Advice – Body paint is not a costume. Save it for adult-only conventions.*

*Remember – Costuming is NOT consent. Please treat all costumers with respect.*

### 7. OTHER HOTEL GUESTS:

Please be considerate to all hotel guests. There may be other events going on at the hotel. Please treat non-convention guests with courtesy. Do not disrupt other events that may be going on at the hotel. Please observe all rules posted by the hotel.

### 8. CHILDREN:

The convention is an event that is fun for the entire family, and we welcome children as attendees. To ensure your children's safety, please watch them at all times. Parents/guardians are responsible for their minor children and their minor children's behavior at all times. Children with Kid-in-Tow memberships are required to be with their responsible adult at all times and can never be left unattended in **any** convention space or with convention staff.

*Advice – If your child cannot sit quietly through a discussion panel or other event, please take them out in the hallway so that they won't disturb other members.*

### 9. SMOKING & E-CIGARETTES:

Smoking of all kinds is prohibited in all areas of the hotel, including function rooms, sleeping rooms, hallways, and the Atrium. Please obey the hotel's posted smoking policies in other areas in and around the hotel. Use of e-cigarettes or similar devices is prohibited in all hotel function rooms and the Atrium. Please follow the hotel's e-cigarette policy in all other hotel areas.

### 10. ALCOHOL:

The legal drinking age in Texas is 21 years old. Any minors found in possession of alcohol or any adults found to be providing alcohol to minors will have their memberships revoked and be removed from the convention. No exceptions.

Please drink responsibly.

*Advice – If you have had too much, please get a room at the hotel, call a cab, or ask a sober friend for a ride.*

# Dallas Future Society – Convention Code of Conduct

## ...or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Enjoy the Con

**11. FOOD:** No outside food or drink is allowed in any convention space. Food and beverages purchased from the hotel restaurant or bar may be carried into the function space.

*Advice – The hotel has several dining options including a restaurant, the bar and room service.*

### **12. HEALTH AND WELFARE (5-2-1):**

Not only for your own enjoyment of the convention, but also for the enjoyment of your fellow fans, please follow the 5-2-1 rule: at least 5 hours of sleep a night, at least 2 nutritious meals a day, at least 1 shower a day. *Advice – Please minimize the use of colognes and perfumes. Many people are sensitive or allergic. Clean is the best smell of all.*

### **13. WEAPONS:**

Apart from the costume contest, no one is allowed to carry any weapon that would be considered illegal in Texas. A pocketknife is fine, a dagger is not. Please use common sense. Any swords, knives, or other weapons purchased in the Dealers Room must be wrapped before leaving the room and taken immediately to your hotel room, car or other safe place.

### **14. AUTOGRAPHS:**

Most of our guests are willing to give you their autograph, but please follow these simple rules:

When possible, only request autographs during the designated autograph sessions. If there is a line, please limit yourself to 3 items to be autographed per guest. Multiple trips through the line are allowed, time permitting. Please do not ask any guest for an autograph as they are leaving, going to a panel, or while they are at a meal.

### **15. PHOTOGRAPHS:**

The convention will not restrict your right to take photos as long as you respect the wishes of your intended subjects.

Ask permission before you photograph any individual or group. If someone asks that you not take their picture, please respect their wishes. Please do not take photographs in any high traffic areas. Please move to a less populated area instead.

### **16. RECORDING:**

Recording of performances and programming at the convention is allowed only for the private use of the person making the recording. If a panelist or performer requests that there be no video or audio taping, please respect his or her wishes. Recording of any kind within hallways and hotel public spaces is not allowed without prior permission of the subjects or their legal guardians. *Advice — Be polite. Always ask first before recording anyone.*

# Dallas Future Society – Convention Code of Conduct ...or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Enjoy the Con

## 17. CONSEQUENCES:

DFS and the Convention Chair reserve the right to evaluate any and all potential code of conduct violations. Failure to adhere to this Code of Conduct may result in one or more of the following:

- a. Mediation with all parties involved by the Chairperson or designated DFS representative
- b. Verbal warnings
- c. Revocation of membership and/or removal from hotel
- d. Reporting individual to hotel staff/security
- e. Reporting individual to local law enforcement
- f. Any other actions deemed appropriate by the Chairperson

## 18. EVALUATION OF CONDUCT VIOLATION CLAIMS

In all cases, the convention will strive to quickly and impartially evaluate all available facts in order to make a fair determination. Consequently, DFS and the convention leadership reserve the right to investigate the circumstances of all accusations and apply the above list of consequences to individuals who we determine to be in violation of this Code of Conduct.

DFS and the convention leadership recognize that some Code of Conduct violation accusations may be false due to misunderstandings or malice. In cases of misunderstanding, we will strive to arbitrate an equitable resolution for all parties involved. Anyone we determine to have maliciously brought a false Code of Conduct violation accusation will be subject to one or more of the consequences listed above. DFS and the Convention Chairperson are the sole interpreters and arbiters of the Code of Conduct rules for this convention.

## 19. ASK US!

No policy can cover every contingency. If you have any questions or concerns about the policies in this document, please let us know.

# GUEST OF HONOR

By Ursula Vernon

When you think of Mur Lafferty, odds are good that you think of her creative output, which is considerable. Mur is a fabulous editor, a talented writer, and the first lady of podcasting. She's written delightful sci-fi mysteries, edited brilliant stories, and has forgotten more about podcasting than most of us will ever learn.

I, however, think of her as the person who nearly got my husband stabbed by a loon.

Allow me to explain.

I've known Mur for over fifteen years, and so when she invited me to an impromptu writing retreat at the Outer Banks, I said, "Yes! Absolutely!" My husband, a former co-worker of Mur's, was also invited along, provided he didn't interrupt the writers too much. So Kevin and I and a crate of week-old chicks drove to the beach house, anticipating rest, relaxation, and a lot of very intense writing. (The chicks were Kevin's. They were at an important socialization window, and so needed to be handled so that they wouldn't grow up thinking humans were predators. Mur was very accommodating about allowing a crate of live



chickens on the premises. We can add "flexibility" to her list of virtues.)

Upon our arrival, Mur greeted us, looking anxious, and said, "So, uh, I found this duck..."

"Neat!" I said. "What color was it?"

"Black and white," she said, proffering her phone, which featured a photo of a rather disgruntled Common Loon. (Not actually a duck, but that's advanced avian taxonomy, which I don't expect most people to know.)

"Ooh, good bird," I said, and went back to unloading chickens.

Mur wrung her hands. "No, I mean it's still there. And I know you've just had a long drive, and I feel

# MUR LAFFERTY

bad putting you to work, but I think it's injured."

This, of course, put an entirely different spin on the matter. Mur led us out to the loon. It glared at us out of one beady red eye. It wasn't injured, it was *stuck*.

Loons, you see, have their legs set far back on their body, and thus cannot walk very well on land. And they're quite large, with four foot wingspans, and require a long runway to take off, which they can only get in the water. A loon that has accidentally landed on the ground is a loon in trouble.

Mur, Kevin and I stared at the loon. The loon stared back. It had a beak like a dagger and neck muscles like a boa constrictor. (Fun Fact: Bald eagles attempting to prey on loon chicks have been found dead, stabbed through the heart by the parents.)

"Can you help it?" asked Mur, who is a deeply compassionate soul, a compassion that extends even to murderbirds.

She and I made some phone calls. Wildlife rescues were not taking loons at the moment, because of the prevalence of avian flu. We were advised to take

biosecurity precautions before contact with any domestic poultry. (It was not a good week to have taken a box of chickens to the beach.)

However, if we could get the loon to water, assuming that it was merely stuck and not sick, it would take care of the rest. No, not the ocean. The ocean was too rough. Could we cross the island to the sound side, and release the loon there?

"Mur," I said grimly, "we'll need a towel."

Greater love hath no woman than to sacrifice her own beach towel for the rescue of a wild loon.

My husband threw the towel over the loon and himself over the towel. He has much experience wrangling chickens, including roosters. The loon was about the size and strength of a Rhode Island Red rooster, except that it had a spring-loaded shiv wired to its face.

I am told that "Man vs. Nature" is one of the basic plot structures. Mur and I watched it play out, offering occasional commentary. Eventually Man triumphed, rising to his feet with a struggling and furious murderbird wedged under

# MUR LAFFERTY

one arm, head held firmly to avoid stabbings.

The author Gwenda Bond was also on site and offered to drive. I pulled out my phone to navigate. Kevin got into the backseat, still holding the loon, which was hissing with rage.

“You coming?” I asked Mur. “This is technically *your* loon. You found it.” Also it was her towel.

Mur looked at the remaining spot in the backseat. Then she looked at the loon, which was trying desperately to turn around and strike. Then she looked at the seat again, which would put her about

six inches from that dagger-like beak.

“You know,” she said, “I think maybe I’ll stay here and...uh... hold the fort...”

Prudence, you see, is also one of Mur’s virtues.

(The loon was released safely. My husband was also released safely, and laundered everything before touching his chickens. Please do not attempt this at home unless you are very experienced with enraged fowl. But buy Mur’s books, because without her, that loon would never have survived.)



© Lisa Snellings

# MUSIC GUESTS OF HONOR

by Eric Distad, of the Doubleclicks

“Filky Feminist Nerd Rock” - if that idea sounds intriguing, we have a treat in store for you!

[Via Bella](#) are the filk/nerd rock musical duo of Erin and Rand Bellavia from New York state. He has an immense depth of musical and pop cultural knowledge and knows his way around a guitar and a catchy melody; she has a wonderful voice, amazing costuming skills, and a talent for writing incisive lyrics. Together this multi-Pegasus nominated duo creates and performs smart catchy pop/rock songs, full of feminist anthems and pop culture commentary.

I met Rand at the very first Filk circle that I ever attended. I had been brought by a friend and I was nervous to play my songs about NASA and Lord of the Rings. Rand was not only kind and welcoming, but he was also engaged. He got the references; he dug into the music; and he even picked up on nuances I thought no one would get. He helped make that first circle an experience I will never forget.

But more, Rand and Erin made us feel like our nerdy music belonged, and that we belonged.



That our goofy folk pop songs about Han Solo were not only acceptable but welcome and encouraged. That we could be who we are and play the music that was in our hearts. They are both amazingly kind and wonderful human beings and they helped define what Fandom means to us.

And it also turned out they are also funny and snarky, like we were! If you haven't seen one of their MST Cover songs, you are in for a quip-filled musical treat!

Over the years, our friendship has grown as we discovered how we were alike – the movies and pop culture we love, the wide range of music that we absorb – and also how we are different, as Jen and I discovered trying to cover one of Via Bella's songs for an online concert. No one does it quite like Via Bella.



# VIA BELLA

Their first album, *The Way of Beauty*, overflows with fantastic tracks chock-full of insight and fandom references, like “Fight Like A Girl” that celebrates female heroes and characters, the rocking “Do As Peggy Says” about approaching life like Agent Carter, or “Fighting the Black Thing” (a reference to *A Wrinkle in Time*) that stresses the importance of making art.

It also includes their multi-Pegasus nominated song “Cliffs of Insanity” and so much more!

Also be sure not to miss Rand’s new CD, *The Tips of My Fingers*. It’s 40 fun short songs in 40 minutes! It’s a great audio “chocolate box” of fun musical

surprises sure to please a range of tastes.

We always love watching Via Bella live (or on one of their frequent live streams). Whether it’s their fresh take on covers and parodies or their entertaining and heartfelt performances of their original songs, whenever Rand and Erin make music together, it truly is a beautiful thing.

Prepare to be delighted by Via Bella.

\*Rand is also part of the fantastic Nerd Rock band [Ookla The Mok](#). If you haven’t experienced Ookla, add it to your list right after Via Bella! :)



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# FEN GUEST OF HONOR

by Sara Felix

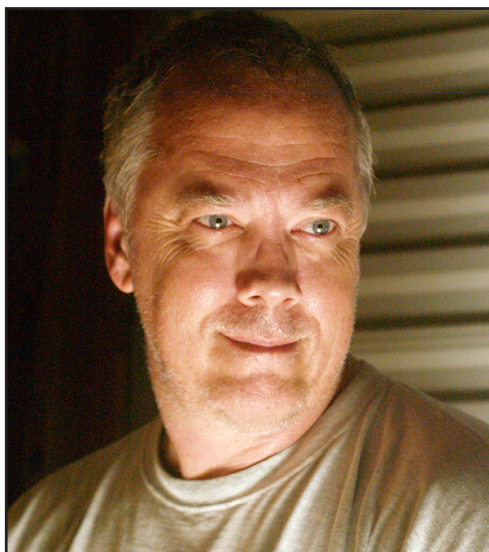
Scott Zrubek - Artist Dude.

I have known Scott as long as I have been going to conventions. Well, maybe. Mostly?

Those first few years were a bit of a blur... So I am just going to go with that. And Scott, in my mind, has always run the Armadillo art show. I know it isn't true too but I am sticking to it. A little Sara revisionist history... Ha! Thank goodness no one asked me to write a bio.

Speaking of art shows, have y'all ever been to an art show run by Scott? Not only have I been to one but I have shown in quite a lot of them and let me tell you, they are classy productions. Software to enter your art into, pegboard put up with signs to show where your space is... volunteers (!! ) helping. And this is all due to Scott. As an artist I really appreciate that, because not all art shows are that organized. Shocker, I know!

But I know when Scott is running the show, it is always going to be a good one. I mean, I already have him penciled in for running a Texas WorldCon art show. There is no other choice!



(He knows it too, I am pretty sure I have told him... if not, surprise! One job I don't have to work to fill... yesssss!)

And you know, as I think about it, Scott has in the past given me a hard time about not saying no to projects or cons or anything fandom related really... and I am aware of conventions he has turned down when they have asked him to run their art show but let me just say... He has run \*a lot\* of art shows. I am not the only person who sometimes can't say no. He does use the word occasionally I guess.

And while I have never seen Scott's art collection I know there are some good pieces in there.

# SCOTT ZRUBEK

Every show I have been to where he is running or working the art show I see him admiring the work and figuring out what he is going to buy. He does it all quiet like and kinda sneaky. Walking down the aisles, checking out the pieces... I can imagine him whistling saying, "Nothing to see here, folks"!

I know collectors aren't going to shout out what pieces they are going to buy but I watch and see. And you can tell by just reading his bio that he has some nice pieces in that collection. Ron Walotsky, Wendy Pini, Richard Hescoc.... I know about the Whelan he is coveting but has yet to get.

It is a nice one ;). One day, Scott!

And not only does he run fine art shows and collect art, he makes it himself. I am always admiring the pens and hats and other leather goods he has in shows. Oh and the amazing stained glass! I am always curious to see what he will bring. He definitely is a man of many talents. And is a bit of a renaissance type with a bunch of different interests.

He has helped me out on many occasions. At one point I mentioned on social media I needed little stands for my tiny

domed critters and Scott turned some wood on his lathe for me and brought them the next time I saw him for me to display my little creations on.

And I am sure I am not the only artist he has helped out with things like that. I really appreciate his craftiness as well as his knowledge of genre art and artists in the field.

He is always working to include new artists in his art shows and as the president of ASFA I appreciate that. He spends his own money to try and attract new artists to the shows. So can you tell? I like Scott. He is a great asset to fandom and particularly the artist community.

And Scott, one day I will get electroforming equipment and won't be afraid to use it!

# ARTIST GUEST OF HONOR

by Rhonda Eudaly

I'm so excited to have Lisa Snellings as our Artist Guest of Honor. Her work has been admired by many for quite some time. It's no secret that she has inspired and been inspired by amazing professionals in our genre – from Neil Gaiman to Peter S. Beagle to so many others.

Since 2006, I've been working with three other red-headed authors to create The Four Redheads of the Apocalypse. And if you're wondering what this has to do with Lisa Snellings, I'm here to tell you... there is actually a connection. The Four Poppets of the Apocalypse. One of the first pieces in my ever-growing collection of death-related things (I write a Death character, for those who aren't aware) was a 3-D shadow box with Lisa's Death Poppet. I've also acquired her Apocalyptic Poppets on shirts. But that's my own personal connection to her. Her Death Poppet shows that death can be softer and cute as well as having a dark but necessary purpose.

I remember seeing her work at various art shows throughout the years at World Cons and World Fantasy Conventions,



including the very first WorldCon I went to – the 59th World Con in Philadelphia in 2001. Her “Dark Caravan” carnival debuted there. I'm pretty sure we met at least in passing in Austin during the 2006 World Fantasy Convention. That, too, was my first World Fantasy convention and one of the first that I helped staff.

Lisa has made a niche for herself with her poppets. The poppets are a microcosm of the world around us. They are sweet and innocent while also being creepy and sinister. They are an adorable version of chiaroscuro artforms – combinations of light and dark with details in the shadows. You see personality and movement and so much in her creations. The poppets tell their own stories in their design and colors and

# LISA SNELLINGS

expressions. But poppets aren't all that make Lisa amazing.

She does all the art. All. The. Art. 3-D art, 2-D drawings/paintings (not just poppets). She has illustrated a book. Her art inspired stories in other authors. She writes her own work. She has written a novel with Alan M. Clark. And she's just starting to explore the possibilities. I look forward to seeing what she has in our art show and what she has planned for the future.

She started out in South Carolina and spent some time in Southern California, but we brought her in

from Oregon, where she moved from The Little Red House to a new home the week before FenCon. You heard that right, she moved just days ago. And yet she is here with us, sharing her art and her experiences with all of us.

So please, please, check out her art in the art show. She has books in the dealer's room. Get to know this amazing woman so writers like me can continue to be amazed by her and find our own stories in her work. I'm looking forward to getting to know Lisa better throughout this weekend.



© Lisa Snellings

# SCIENCE GUEST OF HONOR

by Stan Love

## **A Few Words in General (and One in Particular) About FenCon 2024's Science Guest of Honor, Dr. Jancy C. McPhee**

Do not call Jancy McPhee an amphibian.

First, she's obviously a mammal. Even the nerdiest pop culture fan can determine as much with a cursory sensor scan or a basic clairvoyance spell.

Second, she's an intelligent and well-trained biologist, so she knows full well what "amphibian" means.

Third, she focuses her professional work on microscopic molecules and on macro-scale biological systems partly because she has scarce love for clammy little organisms such as toads... although people close to her may over time infer that she, like many a storybook princess, has had to kiss a few.

Fourth, although she always assumes the best of people, comparing her to a newt will not earn you a gold star in her book. She'll smile back at you – but she won't be smiling on the inside,



and she'll remember your name.

So when you meet Jancy, keep your mouth shut regarding frogs and such. But if you think about the Greek roots of the word "amphibian," which means "both lives" or "two modes of existence," you'll gain useful insights into her personal life and professional work.

Jancy has lived in two worlds since the moment of her birth, to parents from America living in Tokyo, Japan: two worlds about as distinct as possible within the scope of one planet. Her mother was a shy, unassuming schoolteacher, while her father, a flamboyant television producer, later turned out to be an international spy. This sounds

# DR. JANCY C. MCPHEE

wildly unlikely, but it's a fact – and proof that rare conditions yield rare results. Unfortunately her parents' different worlds proved to be incompatible, and they separated while she was a baby.

Incidentally, Jancy's middle initial stands for "Crane" – the bird, not the machine. In Japan, the crane is revered as a symbol of good luck, happiness, and harmony. The unusual name is an apt one. When you meet her in person, hear her speak, or read her resume, you'll sense good luck, happiness, and harmony in everything she says and does.

During and after graduate school, Jancy focused on ion channels: molecules that pump ions across the membranes of nerve and muscle cells to make the signals that enable thought and the contractions that create movement. From that tiny, deterministic world she has moved to a much larger one. Her current work as a manager in NASA's Human Research Project has her overseeing a portfolio of research that covers all aspects of biology with the intent of preserving the well being of entire communities: teams of astronauts exploring the Moon, Mars, and points beyond.

Jancy's work at NASA also spans two worlds of a different type: the scientific and the social. The many researchers in the programs she oversees are all doing cutting-edge biological research – and they all compete for attention and the same pool of funds. To transform this field of antagonistic colored dots into a unified impressionist painting takes an expert both in the research being done and in convincing people with narrow motivations to work together. That the research in question takes place in many countries, some of which have no areas of cooperation otherwise, only makes the task more daunting and any success more remarkable. Jancy meets the challenge instinctively and well.

Finally, Jancy operates in the two independent worlds of science and art. Talk of integration between the two is stylish, especially in the present decade, but unfortunately talk is much easier and therefore much more common than real action. Jancy's contests, collaborations, and exhibitions consistently demonstrate that kind of action. Her continuing success in this area sustains the non-profit organization she founded and leads, SciArt Exchange, and

# DR. JANCY C. MCPHEE

ensures ongoing demand for her to appear at educational institutions, art installations – and conventions of science-fiction fan, whose dedication to integrated arts and sciences is legendary, even if they don't always recognize the essence of the properties they cherish.

Jancy lives like a native in pairs of separate worlds. But you could argue that the concept of “two” in the etymology of “amphibian” is too low an estimate. Maybe “poly-bian” or “omni-bian” would be better. She has distinguished herself as a student, a laboratory researcher, a wife, a mother, a singer, a college teacher, a public

presenter, a government manager, a nonprofit director, and... an aerobics instructor.

In summary, pick any two opposing worlds, and Jancy will thrive in both. So if you cross paths with her at FenCon, go ahead and think “amphibian.” But you'll do yourself and her a favor if you avoid that term in speech and instead talk about other animals. Specifically, the kind that commonly live in human households and purr when contented.

- End -



© Lisa Snellings



# TOASTMASTER

by Jason Sizemore

For most people, meeting Maurice Broaddus for the first time is a memorable experience. I'm no exception.

Let's flashback to a simpler time, where social media didn't exist, and small regional science fiction conventions were still popular. You knew people through message boards and blogs, or you didn't know them at all.

I was at an event called Conglomeration in Louisville, KY. At the time, I was trying to make a name for myself via a short fiction genre journal named *Apex Science Fiction and Horror Digest*. The convention runners were nice people who had given me free table space outside the vendor area, so there I was with my three little issues of *Apex Digest* awkwardly smiling at anyone who looked my way.

A man, kind of small in stature but certainly large in presence, approached. He wore a dark overcoat, dark pants and matching shirt, and carried a clipboard with a yellow legal pad. Did this guy think he was Morpheus, Auditor Edition?

When you're behind a table at a



convention, every person you see is an opportunity. The book on retail marketing I'd read had said so. I was making eye contact with this notable person. I could make this sale.

"Hello," I said. "Are you familiar with *Apex Digest*?"

After a brief glance at his legal pad, he looked back to me and asked, "Are you Jason Sizemore?"

This question was a surprise. Why would he know my name? Maybe he was an auditor? Maybe he was there to serve me court papers?

A bright smile erupted on the man's face. He reached forward and we shook hands.

I learned two things that day. First,

# MAURICE BROADDUS

that many of the people you meet as a book vendor are authors. They rarely have money, but they are valuable all the same because they write the good stuff. Second, the man I'd met was named Maurice Broaddus.

We hit it off immediately. He is an urbane, well-spoken citizen of Jamaica, the UK, and the US. I'm a shy Kentucky boy from Appalachia. Maurice and I ended up hanging out the whole weekend, and he's now a constant companion, a ride-or-die friend.

One of the great joys of our friendship has been watching the wild ride that is his career. He started as a horror writer. Much of his early stuff is gritty and gory. But there was always an underlying poetry to the writing. Maurice's work strove for a mix of Toni Morrison and Clive Barker.

His big break was the dark fantasy Kingmaker series (Angry Robot). It is a visceral alternate history retelling of the King Arthur mythos in modern Indianapolis. Around this time, Maurice became one of the most prolific genre short fiction writers in the business with his work appearing multiple times in nearly every professional

level publication and high-profile anthologies.

Maurice also has shown that you can't pigeonhole him into a single genre. See his middle grade mystery novel *The Usual Suspects*. Most recently, he released the space opera *Sweep of Stars*, which made the Locus Recommended Reading list.

You'll meet Maurice this weekend. You'll find that he's confident, yet genial. Unhurried, yet has some place to go. He's the most observant person I know, yet his attention is always diverted thirty different directions.

I think he is a textbook example of a great GoH. He loves people. His accomplishments are strictly due to hard work and adaptability. He's the consummate professional.

However, I have noticed his Wikipedia entry has listed his age incorrectly. No doubt the work of the Broaddus PR engine. I must go, the internet needs me!

# SPECIAL GUEST

by Kasey Lansdale

I'm supposed to tell you about my brother, Keith Lansdale in 750 words. I'll tell you right now. AIN'T ENOUGH.

Keith was born in Nacogdoches, TX, and not much happened until some years later, I came along. Then the skies opened, and the sun shone down upon us. But this isn't about me, but if you ask him, of course it is. This is about my brother. Screenwriter, comic book guy, short story teller, and dude we ask things about that involve retirement because he's the only one who knows how to math.

Keith has been in the business since he was a teenager, and unofficially, before then. He's had films made from his screenplays, which is more than most of us will ever be able to say, he's optioned films that might never be made but got to cash the checks over and over. (Did I mention the math part) He's placed stories in prestigious collections, adapted some killer comics, knows more random pop-culture knowledge than one human should, and most of all, he never spells my name wrong, which I appreciate about him.



He's a big brother, a son, a fiancé, and until recently, a dog dad. May Buster rest in peace. Sincerely. No one lives better than a dog at Keith's house. He's loyal to a fault, (Keith) and sometimes that can be annoying too. He's loud, so you can always find him in a crowd. These days, he's got a beard, and I guess that's the choice he's making, so that's a thing. Kidding... mostly.

Alright, ball-busting mostly done... He's a good person, a good brother, and the only person who gets the same jokes in the same way as me. Understands the little inside family moments that no one else ever can or will. He sends funny memes and always has a recommendation for what shows

# KEITH LANSDALE

to watch. He's my cheerleader when I need another voice, and he's a cheerleader for the ones he loves.

He lets me volunteer him for things and just shows up and says ok. He will eat what I put in front of him at every holiday without complaint, even though I can't cook and I'm doing my best because as the joke in our house went, the sun rises, the sun sets, and Karen, our mother, doesn't cook.

Good lord it turns out 750 was way more than I needed, so I'll just say this. It's high time Keith gets the recognition of being Fen

Con's special guest. You'll all leave with the warm and fuzzy feeling that comes with hanging out with him, and you'll certainly laugh your ass off at some point around him, even if, let's say for example, you were pissed at him moments before.

Congratulations, Bub. May everyone in the room be lucky enough to know you and spend time with you this weekend. Also, you owe me twenty bucks now.



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# FENCON CHARITY iURBAN TEEN

iEngage | iLearn | iSucceed

iUrban Teen is a nationally recognized program focused on bringing career-focused education to underrepresented teens ages 13 to 18. Youth receive hands-on exposure to a variety of careers and civic engagement that step them outside of their current boundaries.

Our target demographics are African American, Latino, Indigenous and Pacific Islanders, however, the program is inclusive of all youth. We have an almost equal parity of girls that participate in our programs and also youth with special needs.



iUrban Teen programs are now in Washington, Oregon, California, and Texas.

## OUR GOALS – *Creating the Spark:*

- Increase awareness and knowledge of STEM+C+A careers and training.
- Build confidence and critical thinking skills
- Provide mentoring and internship opportunities.
- Create a collaborative learning model for youth to continue to use in various surroundings.
- Create career pathways for historically excluded youth and young adults
- Create economic equity in the communities we serve.

## Social links



<https://iurbanteen.org/>

# FENCON XIX COMMITTEE & STAFF

**CONVENTION CHAIR: RHONDA EUDALY**

**VICE CHAIR: RUTH CRUISE**

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Julie Barrett, Meredith Hines, Russ Miller

## CONVENTION STAFF:

Art Show . . . . .	Jimmy Simpson	FenBase . . . . .	Julie Barrett
Art Show Staff . . . . .	Terri Ellison	Gaming . . . . .	Enrique Alamguer
. . . . .	Mark Davey	Makers . . . . .	Doug Emes
. . . . .	Scott Zrubek	Music . . . . .	Jim Mahaffey
		Video Room . . . . .	Chris Medellin
		. . . . .	Kevin Wright
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Social Media . . . . .	Jon Black	Graphics . . . . .	Michael Braun
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Bio Czar . . . . .	Ava DiGoia	Ed's Corner . . . . .	Amie Spengler
Costuming . . . . .	Mary Millerr		

## SPECIAL THANKS

*FenCon XIX would like to thank the following:*

Big thanks to AnimeFest for their help and support. Thank you to TheLab.ms for running our Makerspace and projects. Extra thanks to Ruth Cruise, Julie Barrett, and British Emporium for Friend of the Fen goodies. Great appreciation to Minuteman Press in Plano for the cover prints and badges, Pinnacle Press for the tote bags, and Jordan Hughes and Terminus Tees for their excellent work printing our Friend of the Fen t-shirts.

# FENCON XIX FRIENDS OF FEN

Shawn Adams	Marsha Diggs	Jim Jacob	Xander Shannon
Leilani Bales	Michael Diggs	Carlee Jordan	Libby Sharpe
Rachel Bannwart	Jack Dingler	Jacob Langthorne	Jimmy Simpson
Ami Barrett	Terri Ellison	Fran Mahaffey	Jacqueline Skelton
Julie Barrett	Rhonda Eudaly	Jim Mahaffey	Patrick St. Jean
Paul Barrett	Byron Fike	Valery Malin	Bryan Taylor
Clayton Bell	Teresa Fike	Eric Mauer	Jackie Teague
Leonard Bishop	Laura Gallagher	Otter Mervryn	Alexander Thomas
Gerald Burton	Maggie Gallagher	Carol Miller	Gerry Tyra
Todd Caldwell	Charles Gatlin	Russ Miller	Rhiannon Tyra
Howard Carter	Daniel Grimes	Lyn Morgan	Sandy Tyra
Kimber Chessmore	Phillip Grimes	Tim Morgan	Shawn Tyra
Ruth Cruise	Aaron Grogan	Marah Murphy	Adam Walker
Sarah Cruise	Macy Grogan	Shelley Nash	Karen West
Mark Davey	Anthony Haber	Emily Nelson	Robyn Winans
Mark Davey	Kerry Hanson	Stephen Nelson	Natalie Winter
Clifton Davis	Tom Harris	Katja Paule	Shalon Wood
Margaret Davis	Meredith Hines	Susan Pierce	
Ron Davis	Keith Hood	Alex Rice	
Suanna Davis	Joe Isham	Heather Roper	

# FENCON HISTORY

## **FENCON I – September 24-26, 2004**

Theme: Of the Fen, By the Fen, For the Fen

GoH: Larry Niven, Filk GoH:

Michael Longcor, Fen GoH: Jim

Murray, Toastmistress: Elizabeth

Moon, Special Guest: Joe R.

Lansdale, Special Guest: Ardath

Mayhar

Chair: Michael Nelson, Attendance:

322

Location: Holiday Inn Select North

Dallas

2645 LBJ Freeway; Dallas, TX 75234

## **FENCON II – September 23-25, 2005**

Theme: What If?

GoH: S.M. Stirling, Music GoH:

Leslie Fish, Fen GoH: Randy Farran,

Artist GoH: Larry Dixon, Toastmaster:

David Gerrold, Special Guest: Mike

Resnick

Chair: Michael Nelson, Attendance:

459

Location: Holiday Inn Select North

Dallas

2645 LBJ Freeway; Dallas, TX 75234

## **FENCON III – September 22-24, 2006**

Theme: Sci-Fi Camp

GoH: Alan Dean Foster, Music GoH:

Heather Alexander, Fen GoH: Judith

Ward\*, Artist GoH: Darrell K. Sweet,

Toastmaster: Jim Butcher, Special

Guest: Lawrence Watt-Evans

Chair: Tim Miller, Attendance: 629

Location: Holiday Inn Select North

Dallas

2645 LBJ Freeway; Dallas, TX 75234

*\*Judith Ward passed away on July 3rd, 2006, but she remained Fen GoH.*

## **FENCON IV – September 21-23, 2007**

Theme: Fantastic Four

GoH: Connie Willis, Music GoH:

Tom Smith, Fen GoH: Kathleen

Sloan, Artist GoH: David Mattingly,

Toastmaster: Steve Perry, Special

Guest: Toni Weisskopf, Shindig

Guest: Jarrod Davis

Chair: Tim Miller, Attendance: 663

Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas

14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX

75001

*FenCon IV was the site for the 2007 Lone Star Shindig, hosted by the D/FW Browncoats for fans of Firefly and Serenity from across Texas.*

## **FENCON V – October 3-5, 2008**

Theme: 50 Years of SF Conventions in Texas

GoH: Gregory Benford, Music GoH:

Three Weird Sisters, Fen GoH:

Gerald Burton, Artist GoH: Real

Musgrave,

Toastmaster: Howard Waldrop\*,

Special Guest: Jay Lake

ORAC Special Guest: Doris Egan

Chair: Russ Miller, Attendance: 591

Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas

14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX

75001

*\*Due to health concerns, Howard Waldrop was unable to attend. He would attend FenCon VI the next year.*



# FENCON HISTORY

## **FENCON VI – September 18-20, 2009**

Theme: Sci-Fi DIY

GoH: Lois McMaster Bujold, Music GoH:

Carla Ulbrich, Fen GoH: Warren Buff, Artist GoH: Kurt Miller, Toastmaster: Paul Cornell (sponsored by ORAC), Special Guest: Keith R.A. DeCandido, Special Guest: Howard Waldrop

Chair: Russ Miller, Attendance: 854

Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas 14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001

*FenCon VI hosted the Region Three Summit for Starfleet International, an annual gathering of Star Trek fans from Texas and Louisiana.*

## **FENCON VII – September 17-19, 2010**

Theme: Mad Science!

GoH: Spider & Jeanne Robinson\*, Music GoH: Jeff & Maya Bohnhoff, Fen GoH: Andy Trembley & Kevin Roche, Artist GoH: John Picacio,

Science GoH: Dr. John Randall, Toastmaster: Joe R. Lansdale,

Special Guest: Jessica Wade, Special Guest: Robert J. Sawyer

Chair: Julie Barrett, Attendance: 724

Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas 14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001

*\*Jeanne Robinson passed away on May 30, 2010, but she remained GoH.*

## **FENCON VIII/DeepSouthCon 49 – September 23-25, 2011**

Theme: Southern Steam

GoH: Gail Carriger, Music GoH: Joe Bethancourt, Fen GoH: Steven H. Silver,

Artist GoH: Vincent Di Fate\*, Science

GoH: Les Johnson, Toastmaster:

Bradley Denton, Special Guest: Lou Anders, Special Guest: Stephan Martiniere

Chair: Julie Barrett, Attendance: 900  
Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas 14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001

*\*Due to professional commitments, Vincent Di Fate attended virtually.*

*FenCon VIII was the host for DeepSouthCon 49, a gathering of fans from across the southern United States. This was the first DSC to be held in Texas.*

## **FENCON IX – September 21-23, 2012**

Theme: The Future's So Bright...

GoH: C.J. Cherryh, Music GoH: John Anealio, Fen GoH: Teresa Patterson, Artist GoH: Donato Giancola,

Science GoH: Dr. David Hanson\*, Toastmaster: Peter A. David\*\*,

Special Guest: Karl Schroeder, Guest Speaker: Stanley G. Love

Chair: Tim Morgan, Attendance: 747  
Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas 14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001

*\*A medical emergency stranded Dr. Hanson in Hong Kong so he was unable to attend.*

*\*\*Peter David's appearance sponsored by ORAC.*

## **FENCON X – October 4-6, 2013**

Theme: Infinite Possibilities

GoH: Cory Doctorow, Music GoH: Heather Dale, Fen GoH: Tom Smith\*, Artist GoH: Charles Vess, Science GoH: Geoffrey A. Landis, YA Author GoH: Amber Benson, Toastmaster:

# FENCON HISTORY

John Ringo, Special Guest: Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Special Guest: Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Gaming Guest: Sandy Petersen  
Chair: Tim Morgan, Attendance: 839  
Location: Crowne Plaza Dallas Near the Galleria  
14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001

*\*Larry Niven was the originally scheduled Fen GoH but had to be replaced due to a scheduling conflict.*

**FENCON XI – September 26-28, 2014**  
Theme: The University of FenCon  
GoH: Eric Flint, Music GoH: Ookla the Mok, Fen GoH: Geri Sullivan, Artist GoH: Rick Sternbach, Science GoH: J. Storrs Hall, Toastmaster: Timothy Zahn, Special Workshop Guest: Carrie Vaughn, Special Artist Guest: Cat Conrad, Special Gaming Guest: Steve Jackson  
Chair: Tim Miller, Attendance: 746  
Location: Crowne Plaza Dallas Near the Galleria  
14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001

**FENCON XII – September 27-29, 2015**  
Theme: It's About Time...  
GoH: S.M. Stirling, Artist GoH: Mitch Bentley, Music GoH: Tricky Pixie, Fan GoH and Toastmaster: Tadao Tomomatsu, Science GoH: Dr. Penny Boston, Special Guest: Jaye Wells, Special Gaming Guest: Rick Loomis  
Chair: Russ Miller, Attendance: 550  
Location: Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport, 4545 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063

**FENCON XIII – September 23-25, 2016**  
Theme: Magical Journeys  
GoH: Jim Hines, Music GoHs: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Fen GoH: Sarah Felix, Artist GoH: Kristina Carroll, Science GoH: Michael S. Brotherton, Toastmaster: Esther Friesner, Special Workshop Guest: Rachel Swirsky, Special Gaming Guest: Tiffany Franzoni, Special Music Guest: Mary Crowell  
Chair: Julie Barrett, Attendance: 681  
Location: Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport, 4545 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063

*FenCon XIII hosted the 1632 Series Minicon.*

**FENCON XIV – September 22-24, 2017**  
Theme: Beyond The Stars  
Special GoH: Kevin J. Anderson, Music GoH: Vixy & Tony, Artist GoH: Tom Kidd, Fen GoH: Ben Yalow, Special Science Guest Speaker: Stanley G. Love, Toastmaster: Selina Rosen, Special Workshop Guest: Cat Rambo, Special Gaming Guest: J. R. Honeycutt, Special Music Guest: Leslie Hudson  
Chair: Ellen Braun, Attendance: 613  
Location: Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport, 4545 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063

**FENCON XV – September 21-23, 2018**  
Theme: It's Alive!  
GoH: Larry Niven, Music GoH: Marian Call, Artist GoH: Travis Lewis, Fen GoHs: Aislinn Burrows and Carmen Bryan, Science GoH: Marianne Dyson, Toastmaster: Timothy Griffin, Special Workshop Guest: Martha Wells  
Chairs: Meredith Hines, Jim Mahaffey, Julie Barrett

# FENCON HISTORY

Attendance: 649

Location: Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport, 4545 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063

## **FENCON XVI – September 20-22, 2019**

Theme: Gateway To The Future...

GoH: Trevor Quachri, Music GoH:

The Doubleclicks, Artist GoH:

Peri Charlifu, Fen GoH:Helen

Montgomery, Science GoH: Julie

Czerneda, Toastmaster: Orlando

Sanchez, Special Workshop Guest:

Angie Hodapp

Chair: Robyn A. Winans

Attendance: 500

Location: Sheraton DFW Airport Hotel,

4440 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063

## **FENCON XVII – September 17-19, 2021**

Theme: Jazzing Up 2021!

GoH: Adam-Troy Castro, Music

GoHs: The Faithful Sidekicks, Artist

GoHs: The Shiflett Brothers, Fen

GoH: Bill Necessary, Science GoH:

Dr. Robert E. Hampson, Toastmaster:

Dr. Charles E. Gannon

Chairs: Rhonda Eudaly and Sarah Brigdon

Attendance: 305

Location: Sheraton DFW Airport Hotel,

4440 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063

## **FENCON XVIII – September 16-18, 2022**

Theme: The Magic Returns!

GoH: Larry Correia, Artist GoH: Chaz

Kemp, Fen GoH: Renee Babcock,

Science GoH: Kevin Ikenberry

Chairs: Sam Gayle and Leah Tharp

Attendance: 600

Location: Sheraton DFW Airport Hotel,

4440 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063



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## FENCON XIX

# PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

### **Larry Atchley**

Larry Atchley Jr writes poetry, fantasy, science fiction and horror. In addition to his short stories and poetry appearing in a multitude of anthologies, he has stories in volumes of the shared universe series *Heroes in Hell*, and *Sha'Daa*. He performs with *The Sea Dog Slam* as *Lars Shortshanks*, the *Pirate Poet*. He likes watching *Britcoms* with his wife *Ali*, bicycling, nature hiking, reading and collecting books.

### **Kathleen Baldwin**

"Master of the unexpected," Kathleen Baldwin, is a *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author who enchants readers around the globe with over 650,000 copies sold. A Japanese publisher adapted one of her books into a manga. Ian Bryce, producer of *Transformers*, optioned her series for film. In real life, Kathleen loves adventure. She taught rock climbing, enjoyed survival camping in the desert and mountains, and inadvertently slept beside a mountain lion. *Sanctuary for Seers*, an *Alternate History* *Spy Romantasy*, was released 6/2023

### **Julie Barrett**

Julie Barrett is a writer, photographer, and maker of interesting things from Plano, TX. She is also a founding member of *The Generic Radio Workshop*, member of the *Dallas Future Society* board, and sells photography, fiber art, and hats through *SteamCat.net*. Julie writes short stories, radio plays, and whatever else helps pay the bills. She hates the bills. Find her at *Stately Barrett Manor* or on *Facebook*.

### **Paul Barrett**

Amongst Paul's many pastimes, a favorite is creating, finding, and programming the sound effects for *Generic Radio Workshop* productions. As with the other *GRW* founders, he's done so many of these shows, he's no longer sure if this is reality, or if he's living in

an episode of *Dimension X*. Other hobbies are prop-building and 3D printing--he has been known to demonstrate all the ways this can go wrong.

### **Paul Black**

Paul Black always wanted to make movies, but a career in advertising sidetracked him. He's the international award-winning author of *The Tels*, *Soulware*, *Nexus Point*, *The Presence*, *The Samsara Effect*, *Cool Brain*, and *Dark Slide*. He has twice won each the *Independent Publishers Book Award*, *London* and the *New York Book Festival*. He has also been on the *Barnes & Noble Regional Best Seller* list, has won the *Writer's Digest Book Award for Genre Fiction*, and was optioned for television.

### **Jon Black**

From a 24-hour coffeehouse in Austin, Jon writes historical fiction with pulp or supernatural flavors. His work includes the *Arthurian historical fantasy* series *Bel Nemeton* and the *Jazz Age supernatural mystery* *Gabriel's Trumpet*. Out in October, *Chupacabra vs. Rougarou*, is a monster-mashup that cuts to the funnybone.

### **K.B. Bogen**

A cat-loving native of Texas, K.B. Bogen is a self-confessed knit-/yarn-aholic. She spends much time knitting something (with the help of her three cats), inventorying her stash (also with the help of the cats), or fondling yarn anywhere within driving range (the cats don't like road trips). She likes to cook and enjoys reading forensic anthropology books. Occasionally simultaneously. For nearly thirty years, she has also been lurking behind the scenes doing editing, copy editing and manuscript repair. With the rise in the numbers of epublications, her client load has increased. Time to come out of the editorial closet! Fortunately, writing and editing are not mutually exclusive pursuits. Her most recent publication, *Everything Works in Theory*, is available on *Amazon*, *Baen*, and

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## PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Barnes & Noble. The first two books of the Quest series are also available. Coming soon Surely, You Quest—book three of the Quest.

### **Maurice Broaddus**

An accidental teacher, an accidental librarian, and a purposeful community organizer (resident Afrofuturist at the Kheprw Institute), his work has appeared in such places as Magazine of F&SF, Lightspeed Magazine, Black Panther: Tales from Wakanda, Weird Tales, and Uncanny Magazine, with some of his stories having been collected in *The Voices of Martyrs*. His novels include the science fiction novel, *Sweep of Stars*, the steampunk novel, *Pimp My Airship* and *Buffalo Soldier*, and the middle grade detective novel series, *Unfadeable* and *The Usual Suspects*. He's an editor at Apex Magazine. His gaming work includes writing for the Marvel Super-Heroes, Leverage, and Firefly role-playing games as well as working as a consultant on *Watch Dogs 2*. Learn more at [MauriceBroaddus.com](http://MauriceBroaddus.com)

### **R. Cat Conrad**

R. Cat Conrad is a jack of all trades ... especially if casting calls for someone named Jack. He's an artist of note who doesn't sing, but writes song parodies, an illustrator who paints, but has been known to draw to an inside straight, and an actor who campaigns for silent films where his non-speaking roles stand out. A dark ale lover, vintage comic historian, celebrated auctioneer and more...Cat's leather trousers have been active in the SF community for decades!

### **Scott Cupp**

Scott A. Cupp is a short story writer from west Texas. His stories frequently feature one or more of the following: a mythological Eest, talking animals, horror, horny toads, cattle, fantasy elements, magic, mystery, and general weirdness. He writes too infrequently. He is married to the amazing Sandi and, as an

impending move indicates, has way too much stuff.

### **Dominick D'Aunno**

Dominick D'Aunno, MD, writer of speculative fiction, is an Internal Medicine physician with a subspecialty in Space Medicine and Physiology. His NASA research includes cardiovascular adaptation to microgravity, immune system alterations in extreme environments, and musculoskeletal alterations to variable gravities. Dr. D'Aunno's clinical practice focuses on the medical needs of patients with psychiatric illnesses, autism, developmental disabilities, and adolescents in Child Protective Services. He is also Board Certified in Addiction Medicine and conduct clinical research trials. Dominick works with writers to increase the use of medicine and physiology in speculative fiction.

### **Linda L. Donahue**

Linda has degrees in computer science, Russian studies, Earth science education, and electrical engineering. Additionally, she teaches tai chi and belly dancing, can borrow moon rock samples, and is a certified commercial instrument pilot, advanced ground instructor, and SCUBA diver. Her latest short stories have appeared in *Heroic Fantasy Quarterly* #25 and *Chicks and Balances*. Her novel, *Jaguar Moon*, is available from Yard Dog Press. She lives with her husband and pet rabbits, sugar gliders, and cats in Garland, Texas.

### **Chris Donahue**

Chris Donahue is an electrical engineer living in the Dallas area with his wife and fellow-author, Linda. A former member of a Joe Bob Briggs' Drive In Review committee, he served the public by counting rolling heads, types of Fu, and exposed breasts in committee films. Outside of that, he has been a Navy Avionics tech, brewer, and writes sci-fi, military fiction, horror, humor, and combinations of those themes. His first novel, *Death's Paladin*, is now available.

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# PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

### Dennis Donigan

Dennis Donigan resides in Boulder, Colorado with his life partner, Cheryl Hogan. Having retired from teaching, he has embraced A retired teacher, he has embraced helping with the grandkids. What an adventure that is! His musical interests are diverse. Recently, he's been exploring Celtic pagan music, mythology and folklore. A common thread is appreciation of nature and its changing seasons. His concert will feature these themes, plus Damh the Bard and Leslie Fish. Come join to hear and singalong with songs about Two Magicians, a Wanderer, a Winter King, John Barleycorn, and many others!

### Rhonda Eudaly

Rhonda Eudaly lives in Arlington, Texas where she's ventured into several industries and occupations for a wide variety of experience. She's married with dogs and a rapidly growing Minion© army. Her two passions are writing and music, which is evident in her increasing horde of writing instruments.

Rhonda has a well-rounded publication history in fiction, non-fiction, and script writing. Check out [her website](#) for her latest publications and downloads.

### Sara Felix

Sara Felix is a mixed media artist working in resin and inks, a four-time Hugo nominee, and a Chesley nominee. In 2021 she won a FAAn award for her cover for the fanzine BEAM. She has designed two Hugo bases (one with Vincent Villafranca), two Lodestar awards, and is working on this year's Lodestar for Discon. She is the president of ASFA, the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists, and is a big promoter of the fanatical arts.

### Mark Finn

Mark Finn is an author, editor, game designer and pop culture critic. His writing can be found in various RPG zines, comics, books, anthologies, and elsewhere online courtesy of his fictitious North Texas Apocalypse Bunker. When he's not waxing passionate about popular culture or Robert E. Howard, Finn writes stories, publishes cool stuff, and performs community theater. He lives in North Texas over a historic movie theater with his high school sweetheart and an embarrassing excess of books.

### Melanie Fletcher

Melanie Fletcher writes SF as herself and romantasy as Nicola M. Cameron. Her most recent Melanie publication is the alternate history mystery novel A Most Malicious Murder, and her most recent Nicola publication (and 20th book) is the Victorian paranormal romance novel To Love a Wild Swan. Her somewhat lopsided smile is the result of recent surgery for oral cancer (the surgeon got it all and she's fine) so don't take it personally.

### Dene Foye

Dene began playing guitar and singing folk music as a teen in Ohio. Little did he know that he would become irreversibly blind from seeing Selina Rosen in a mini-skirt and high-heeled boots!!! (So she says). However, he has persevered and is getting over his PTSD by playing his guitar and learning to play the Irish whistle.

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## PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

### **Bill Frank**

Bill Frank is an evildoer at NASA's Johnson Space Center. He is a Chief Training Officer--he leads the team that creates problems for astronauts and mission controllers during training events. His short story, 'Moon Unit,' was published in *Analog Magazine*.

### **Generic Radio Workshop**

Generic Radio Workshop has been around longer than the Golden Age of Radio lasted -- a little over thirty years. They started with the Texas Broadcast Museum and have performed at festivals, conventions, and yes, on the radio. They use as much vintage equipment as possible for that "old time radio" feel. Plus, many of their sound effects devices are hand-built, following period designs. While they've made a few concessions to modern technology, their core practices follow radio's Golden Age.

### **RJ Hanson**

R.J. Hanson's saga, *Bloodlines Reforged*, spans (and continues to span) generations of knights, wizards, vampires, and more in this epic fantasy.

### **C. Stuart Hardwick**

Stuart is a regular in *Analog Magazine* and has won multiple awards including the Writers of the Future contest, the Jim Baen Memorial Award, and *Analog's* Analab reader poll. He's also a Quora Top Science Writer and has a science channel on YouTube. For free stories and information about his "Open Source Space" series, visit [his website](#).

### **Teddy Harvia**

Teddy Harvia is the well-known pen name of David Thayer. He has drawn scores of wild beasts, strange BEMs, and big-nosed whiz kids from a world far from Earth who use short words to make fun of all kinds of things in scores of

toons and fan art for flyers, zines, and con pubs since 1967. He lives with wife Diana and five fat cats in Dallas, Texas. To earn his keep, he works with words at a high-tech firm.

### **Kissin' the Blarney Stone**

Kissin' The Blarney Stone was created when 3 of the 4 members of the Fogeys performed at St. Patrick Day festivities in Boulder, Colorado. Dennis, James, and Dene have already performed at FenCon in various combinations and once, all at the same time! With their eclectic repertoire, they have performed in many venues to unsuspecting audiences, and didn't even need chicken wire.

### **Mur Lafferty**

Mur Lafferty is a podcaster, author, and editor. She began podcasting in 2004 and in 2005 she launched the still-running podcast "I Should Be Writing," a podcast aimed at aspiring writers. She currently co-hosts the show "Ditch Diggers," a business-focused podcast aimed at authors trying to make a career.

After writing several novellas and publishing them via podcast, her first book was released from Orbit in 2013: *The Shambling Guide to New York City* which won the Manly Wade Wellman Award. Her book *Six Wakes*, a science fiction mystery, came out a few years later and was nominated for the Hugo, Nebula, Philip K. Dick, and Manly Wade Wellman awards. Her current series, the *Midsolar Murders*, features murder mysteries aboard a sentient space station. The series has two books, the most recent being *Chaos Terminal*, published in November 2023.

Mur has also been the recipient of the Astounding Award for Best New Writer in 2013 and was inducted into the podcast academy hall of fame in 2015.

She lives in Durham, NC with her family.

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### **Keith Lansdale**

Keith writes comics, film scripts, novels, and short stories.

Keith has made films such as *The Pale Door*, *The Projectionist* (in production), and *Christmas With The Dead*, adapted for the screen, a stage musical, and even a pod cast.

Keith has written multiple comics such as *Hoot Goes There*, a short *X-Files* series for IDW comics, *Mud for Creepy Comics*, *Prisoner Of Violence* (an extension of the *Prisoner 489* universe), along with comic adaptations of *Crawling Sky* for Antarctica Comics, *Vampirella* for Diamond comics, *Dog, Cat, and Baby* for Dark Horse and Avatar comics, as well as adaptations for *God of the Razor*, *the Dump*, *The Fat Man*, a short comic called *The Hanging* (in production), and others.

Among his writing credits are, the novella *Big Lizard* with Joe R Lansdale, as well as the short story, *Hoppity White Rabbit Done Broke Down*, appearing in the recent collection: *The Drive-In: Multiplex*.

Others of mention, soon to be released are *Elijah's Elixer*, *It Goes With Everything* (inspired by *Ozymandias*), *Two Sides Of The Same Dream* (pirate/Lovecraft).

He was also a co-editor for *Son Of Retro Pulp Tales*, published by Subterranean Press and is editing multiple other collections.

Keith also co-wrote the children's story *The Companion* when he was twelve with his younger sister which was picked up by the tv show *Creepshow* and co-authored the children's book *In Waders From Mars*.

### **William Ledbetter**

William Ledbetter is a Nebula Award winning

author with three novels and more than seventy speculative fiction stories and non-fiction articles published in five languages, in publications such as *Asimov's*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and *Analog*. He's been a space and technology geek since childhood and spent most of his non-writing career in the aerospace industry. His *Killday* novel series is available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Audible and *Interstellar Flight Press*.

### **Jim Mahaffey**

James Mahaffey is a native Midwesterner who is a transplanted "Texan-by-marriage". His introduction to filk began when he worked the first FenCon convention. He spent ten years as ConOps before volunteering as "the sound guy" and co-ConChair. He serves on the BOD for Dallas Future Society and was ConChair for the first two WhoFest conventions, organized by DFS. James works as an architectural services consultant. He is a singer, songwriter, guitarist and bassist. In 2017, he released his first CD, *Transit*, with his project band, *The Scrap Merchants*.

### **Julia S. Mandala**

Julia S. Mandala holds a BA in history from Kansas State University and a JD in law from Tulane. In addition to being editor of *The Fantasy Writers Asylum*, an imprint of *Yard Dog Press*, she is a scuba diver and belly dancer. She lives in Plano, TX with her husband Larry and two demanding, but adorable cats. She is best known as a co-author of the *Four Redheads of the Apocalypse* series and the *Corimar* series.

### **Marshall Ryan Maresca**

Marshall Ryan Maresca is a fantasy and science-fiction writer, author of the *Maradaine Saga: Four braided* series set amid the bustling streets and crime-ridden districts of the exotic city called Maradaine, which includes *The Thorn of Dentonhill*, *A Murder of Mages*, *The*



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*Hover Alley Crew* and *The Way of the Shield*, as well as the dieselpunk fantasy, *The Velocity of Revolution*. He is also the co-host of the Hugo-nominated, Stabby-winning podcast *Worldbuilding for Masochists*, and has been a playwright, an actor, a delivery driver and an amateur chef. He lives in Austin, Texas with his family.

### **A. Lee Martinez**

A. Lee Martinez is best known for his sparkling wit, incredible good looks, and his ability to endlessly debate the Superman VS. Batman dilemma (Correct answer: Tarzan). Also, he's written 10 fantasy novels and managed to get paid for it. If you would like to read random thoughts from him, you can go to his website, or check him out on Twitter or Facebook.

### **Kip McMurray**

Clifford R. (Kip) McMurray is a freelance writer who's been an sf reader and space activist practically from birth. He has served on the National Space Society Board of Directors, including a term as Executive Vice-President and Policy Committee Co-Chairman. He was a founder of the NSS Space Blitz, an annual citizen lobbyist event. He's the CEO of an editing and manuscript coaching company for authors and public speakers. He also filks and sings Irish music at the local pub.

### **Dr. Jancy McPhee**

Dr. Jancy McPhee has always been fascinated about how people think and create. She became a neuroscientist to examine the science behind these human capabilities. She works as a space life science strategist and science communicator and is the Founder and Executive Director of the nonprofit, SciArt Exchange. The nonprofit aims to maximize global human potential by integrating space, science, and technology with the arts, to better prepare each individual and team to solve the future grand challenges on Earth and in space.

Formally, Dr. Jancy McPhee has a B.A. in Neurobiology and Behavior from Cornell University and a Ph.D. in Biophysics from Brandeis University. She was a cellular and molecular neuroscience researcher and lecturer in academia for 17 years. Currently, she works as the Associate Chief Scientist of the NASA Human Research Program where she develops space science strategies that span physiological disciplines, space missions, and international and commercial partners. Since 2010, she has also been developing motivating and novel ways to enhance space education and communication, foster science and technology innovation, and promote global collaboration to solve hard challenges in space and on Earth. Through her nonprofit, SciArt Exchange, her team offers a variety of global science-integrated-with-art activities and training to inspire and prepare the world for the future of space exploration. So far, the nonprofit programs have engaged over 15,000 participants in 68 countries, and over 4.5 million have viewed multi-media artwork displays and performances locally worldwide in person.

Learn more about Dr. McPhee on her episode of the Talk Nerdy with Cara Santa Maria Podcast episode.

### **Iain Miller**

Conceived around the same time as FenCon - by some of the same people - Iain Miller is a local guitarist with folk influences. When not taking photos or playing cricket, Iain is training to be a professional hobo.

### **Tim Morgan**

Tim Morgan is an award-winning professional futurist, past president of the Dallas Future Society, and a former FenCon Con Chair. He also occasionally writes essays on strategic foresight and the future on his Substack blog, *The Everyday Futurist*.

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### **Michelle Muenzler** (*she/her*)

Michelle Muenzler is an author of the weird and sometimes poet. Known at local conventions as “The Cookie Lady”, she writes fiction both dark and strange to counterbalance the sweetness of her baking.

### **Kathleen O'Brien**

Kathleen M. O'Brien began sewing at age 4, learning traditional techniques from her mother and grandmother. She collects and studies vintage clothing to decipher mysteries of drape and fit found in previous eras. Her costumes include both original designs and reproductions, utilizing many historical techniques. She enjoys sharing both these skills and her collection with others and has published several books including “*Victorian Smoking Caps*” and her “*Writers' Resources*” series. Check out her website at [Vintage Fashion Explained](#).

### **Avery Parks**

Avery Parks (*she/her*) is a science fiction writer, with stories at *Solarpunk Magazine*, *Cossmass Infinities*, and *Infinite Worlds*, among others. She lives in Texas with her family, a variety of pets, and (according to some) too many books.

### **Stephen Patrick**

Born in the Kentucky bluegrass, but inspired by the Lone Star state, Stephen Patrick's storytelling ranges between historical, thriller, science fiction, and horror. His most recent offerings include The Holocaust Engine trilogy with David Rike, and stories in Road Kill: Texas Horror by Texas Authors, Vol 1 and 2 and Crimson Streets. Every year, he explores new skills/disciplines to find ideas for his work. This year is yoga/breathing as a discipline and 3D design and printing, which have more in common than he cares to admit.

### **Teresa Patterson**

Teresa Patterson's work includes The World of Shannara with Terry Brooks, The World of the Wheel of Time with Robert Jordan, No Quarter with Robert Asprin, Combat Corpsman with Navy SEAL Greg McPartlin, numerous short stories, and

humorous history essays. When not writing, she works for the non-profit Trinity Coalition, managing the Trinity River National Water Trail.

### **Ted Pennella**

Ted is an Oklahoma-based architect, gamer, pithy observer of the human condition, and author of the forthcoming sci-fi novel *Infinity*. As an architect for twenty years, he's keenly aware of layout, design, and spatial relations, which benefits him as a storyteller. With short stories published in various anthologies, Ted writes to not just entertain, but also to show the struggles of finding meaning in life, family, and love amongst those called friends and enemies. When not listening to his characters eager to be fleshed out in his writing, he fills his copious free time with woodworking, gaming, and endeavoring to create the perfect cheesecake.

### **Alan J. Porter**

Alan J. Porter writes about stuff and makes up stories too. Most recently he can be found Galloping Around the Cosmos for Becky's Books and regenerating in the latest volume from ATB Publishing's Outside In series celebrating 60 years of a certain Time Lord. His writing in various books, magazines, and websites covers the worlds of Pop Culture, Comics, High-Adventure fiction, Movies, Music, Business Strategy, and more.

### **Dusty Rainbolt**

Dusty Rainbolt was raised by aliens after being abandoned on Earth by grays who abhorred the School System in the eastern spiral arm of the galaxy. An award-winning veterinary journalist, she authored/coauthored 13 fiction and nonfiction books including *Death Under the Crescent Moon*, *All the Marbles* and *The Four Redheads of the Apocalypse* series. Her latest book, *Ghost Cats 2: More Encounters with Feline Spirits* will be released in August 2022. Her feline behavior books, *Cat Scene Investigator* and *Finding Your Lost Cat* have saved many family felines.

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### **Ravenar**

Ravenar (Amora, Linda Donahue, and Julia Mandala) performs traditional and SF/Fantasy-themed belly dance. They have appeared at several World Cons and at regional conventions in the Midwest and South.

### **Kim Redford**

Kim Redford is the bestselling author of fantasy, horror, romance and history under several pen names. Her first novel sold a half million copies and *Out of the West* was optioned for a television movie. Fresh Fiction says “Tightly plotted, impeccably paced, and rich in Texan detail” about her cowboy firefighter series. She divides her time between city and country, frequently escaping to her ranch where she rides horses and plots her next novel.

### **M. T. Reiten**

M. T. Reiten comes to FenCon after relocating to the National Capitol Region after pursuing a new job during the pandemic. He is a Writers of the Future winner, Phobos award winner, and Jim Baen Memorial winner. His stories have appeared in S. M. Stirling’s *Change* anthology and *Robosoldiers: Thank You for Your Servos*. His newest story is due out in June in *Tales of the US Space Force*, edited by C. Stuart Hardwick.

### **David Rike**

David Rike is the author of the *Holocaust Engine* series with Stephen Patrick. He is also the host of the YouTube channel “From the Bunker” which explores topics of literature and the possibility of societal collapse.

### **Rook Riley**

Army vet Rook Riley is a writer, game enthusiast, and linguist trained in Krav Maga. They split their time between teaching middle school in the DFW area and the family farm where the bulk of their writing is done. They are a member of *Missing in America*, the Horror Writers Association, and the PTA. Their hobbies include binge-watching streaming services and collecting tattoos. Their

newest short story, “Joy Against the World”, will appear in *The Haunted Zone: A Horror Anthology* by Women Military Veterans in March 2024.

### **Selina Rosen**

Some of Selina Rosen’s short fiction has appeared in *The Lorelei Signal*, *Sword and Sorceress*, *Turn the Other Chick*, and *Thieves’ World*. Her most recent novel, *The Territories*, is the 5th in the *Sword Masters* series. Among her 33+ novels are the *Chains* trilogy, *Strange Robby*, *The Holmes & Storm Mysteries*, and *How I Spent the Apocalypse*. She has also written a self-help book, *It’s Not Rocket Science*, and non-genres including *The Pit* and *Vanishing Fame*. Visit her on YouTube.

### **Amber Royer**

Amber Royer writes the *Chocoverse* comic telenovela-style foodie-inspired space opera series, and the *Bean to Bar Mysteries*. She is also the author of *Story Like a Journalist: a Workbook for Novelists*. She teaches creative writing and is an author coach. Amber and her husband live in the DFW Area, where you can often find them hiking or taking landscape/architecture/wildlife photographs. If you are very nice to Amber, she might make you cupcakes. Amber blogs about creative writing technique and all things chocolate.

### **Ken Ruffin**

A Trekkie and a former Aerospace Engineering student, Ken serves on the Board of Advisors of the National Space Society (NSS) and is the Vice Chair of the International Space Development Conference (ISDC) in the DFW Metroplex in May 2020. Ken has also been serving as the VP of the award-winning NSS of North Texas (NSS-NT) since 2016. Across the DFW Metroplex and beyond, Ken gives presentations to inform and inspire the public about “the latest and greatest information in space travel and space development.” Contact Ken with space questions or comments at [ken.ruffin@nss.org](mailto:ken.ruffin@nss.org).

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## PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

### **Patrice Sarath**

Patrice Sarath is an author and editor living in Austin, Texas. Her novels include the fantasy books *The Sisters Mederos* and *Fog Season* (Books I and II of the *Tales of Port Saint Frey*), the *Gordath Wood* series (*Gordath Wood*, *Red Gold Bridge*, and *The Crow God's Girl*), and the romance *The Unexpected Miss Bennet*. She is a film student at Austin Community College and has won awards for her student film *Do Over*.

### **Adrian Simmons**

Adrian Simmons writes and edits from a well-stocked location in central Oklahoma. When not working on his own writing, he hammers out Heroic Fantasy Quarterly ezine. There is backpacking in his life, and taekwondo, too. He's helmed 49 issues of *Heroic Fantasy Quarterly* released and three best-of anthologies. His fiction has appeared in James Gunn's *Ad Astra*, *Tales From the Magician's Skull*, and *Giganotosaurus*. His nonfiction has been published at *Strange Horizons*, *Internet Review of Science Fiction*, and *Black Gate*.

### **Brad Sinor**

Bradley H. Sinor's short stories have appeared in many anthologies. His collections include *The Game's Afoot: A Sherlock Holmes Miscellany* and *Of Two Minds*, including stories by both Brad and Sue. Novels include *The Hunt For The Red Cardinal*, written with Sue, *The Eye Of Dawn*, and two new publications, *The Grantville Inquisitor*, written with Tracy S. Morris, and *Megan Thomas, Forensic Sorceress*. Check Amazon for availability of these books.

### **Sue Sinor**

Sue Sinor started writing at the urging of her husband, Brad. She has stories in several *Yard Dog Press* publications, as well as others. Sue and Brad have collaborative stories in the anthology *Rotten Relations* and in *Grantville Gazette 4*, as well as several for *Yard Dog Press*. Most recently they have a joint collection, *Of Two Minds*, and a novel in the *Ring of Fire* universe titled *The Hunt*

For *The Red Cardinal*, both available on Amazon.

### **Amy Sisson**

(Amy Sisson) (LibraryThing) Amy Sisson is a writer, reviewer, librarian, Trekkie, and crazy cat lady. Her recent short story publications include "Places We Call Home" in *Perihelion* and "Jackpot Time" in *Devilfish Review*.

### **Libby A. Smith**

Libby A. Smith's short stories have appeared in *Avast*, *Ye Airships* and *Haunted Holidays*, online at *4 Star Stories*, and in small press comics. Her adaptation of 'Rainbow Bridge' was designed for cross-stitch by Sue Hillis. A member of the filk pirate group *Bad Bards & Beyond*, she has been known to burst into songs at inappropriate times. Libby lives in Central Arkansas with Oscar Wilde and Dolly Parton, her cats.

### **Mike Stewart**

Mike Stewart is a writer of fiction and games in the tabletop RPG industry for 20 years, including an award-winning *Steampunk RPG*, *Victorious*. His fiction has appeared in several anthologies for various publishers. Mike is a prolific podcaster and is a founding host of the *Save For Half* podcast, a show about Old School games and their modern inspirations for the past seven years. In his secret identity, Mike is a professor of US history, but don't tell anyone!

### **Bonnie Jo Stufflebeam**

Bonnie Jo Stufflebeam is the author of the short story collection *Where You Linger & Other Stories* and the novella *Glorious Fiends*. Her fiction has appeared in over 90 publications such as *LeVar Burton Reads* and *Popular Science*, as well as in six languages. She has been a *Nebula* nominee twice. By day, she works as a *Narrative Designer* writing games. She lives with her partner and two cats, *Wednesday* and *Ichabod*.

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### **Kathryn Sullivan**

Kathryn Sullivan writes young adult science fiction and fantasy. Any place and any object is at risk of appearing in her stories--the river bluffs surrounding Winona, MN, where she lives, can become the windswept cliffs of an alien planet or the deep mysterious woods of a fantasy tale. She is owned by a large cockatoo, who graciously allows her to write about other animals, as well as birdlike aliens.

### **Jess Tucker**

Jess Tucker is an archivist, avid reader, pop culture critic, and artist. She curates the Science Fiction and Fantasy Collection at the University of North Texas, collecting the papers of Texas authors (past and present) as well as documenting the history of fandom and SFF conventions in Texas. Jess has presented for CUNY on the evolution of Red Sonja and coauthored a chapter on Wonder Woman's Historia. In her art, she explores the whimsical macabre through jewelry, paper art, and her award-winning skeleton tableaux.

### **TheLab.ms – Everyone's Makerspace**

TheLab.ms is an all-volunteer, non-profit makerspace located in Richardson, Texas in the heart of the Innovation Quarter. A makerspace is essentially a "gym for tinkerers". We provide 24/7 access to equipment and facilities to our members for a monthly fee, including many technology-based disciplines: 3D printing, laser cutting, CNC milling. We also have areas and equipment for more traditional endeavors, including painting, ceramics, fiber arts, and then some!

### **Mel. White**

Known to her kids as "Indiana Mom", Mel. has gone back to school to become "Dr. Indiana Mom." She still works on fossils for the Museum of Nature and Science, and is now a volunteer educator at Trinity River Audubon Center as well as a Texas Master Naturalist. She's also a proud member of the Yard Dog Press gang,

with a story in A Bubba in Time Saves None.

### **Ben Yalow**

Ben has been to 800+ cons, including the last 51 Worldcons, and worked on about a third of them, including most of the Worldcons on four continents. He was Fan GoH at the last Worldcon, and will be co-chairing the 2023 Worldcon in Chengdu, China. He's edited four books for NESFA Press – the Hugo nominations were for the excellence of the author, not the editor. He's just moved to Texas from New York.

### **John Yarrow**

John and Leanne Yarrow have released a striking debut novel, Future's Dark Past, launching their series, the Time Forward Trilogy. Their writing appeals to fans of science fiction and speculative fiction, blending scientific concepts with human emotion to transform their work into a journey through "future" possibilities. They enjoy travel, hiking in the great outdoors, experiencing new places, and relishing a good meal and bottle of wine with family and friends. Book two, Future Unfolds comes out in June 2024

### **D.L. Young**

D.L. Young is a Pushcart Prize nominee and winner of the Independent Press Award. He's also much less serious than his author photo implies. A lifelong science fiction fan, his intense, fast-paced novels echo his many influences from books and movies, including Star Wars, the Mad Max films, Dune, Blade Runner, Star Trek, Harlan Ellison, and the novels of William Gibson. If you like page-turning, edgy science fiction, you're definitely his kind of reader.

# BROOKFEATHER 110

by Mur Lafferty

The realtor was flirting with Jessica. And she was into it.

The snake opened one door in the brightly lit, all new fixtures kitchen, then pointed to a second one. "I'm so glad to be able to show you this one, it just went on the market today! This kitchen is really special: it has a sizable pantry, but also a closet, you can put cleaning supplies or extra dog food or misbehaving husbands in here, right, Jess?" And then he fucking *winked*.

He winked. While Bruce was standing right there.

"Now I want to show you something special on the porch," he said, taking Jessica's elbow and guiding her out of the kitchen. And Jessica, who hated when men herded women like that, was eating out of his hand.

*She's going to want this house, and I will have to say no since I won't live anywhere this snake has slithered.*

Bruce ground his teeth and tried to open the "stash a husband" closet. To his surprise, the knob moved, but the door didn't budge. It was bolted in place.

He opened his mouth to call to them, but saw that Bruce had left his keys on the counter top. All the front doors had numerical codes, but the doors inside the house used traditional locks. With one furtive look over his shoulder, Bruce grabbed the keys and started going through them.

It only took him three tries, but the black key with a white rubber cat face to set it apart slid home with a *snik*, then he turned the deadbolt.

The door swung outward and Bruce stared into nothingness.

—

*Congratulations! You are in possession of a new PRTL 4.0, manufactured exclusively by the red fairies. Remember, if it's not red fairy, it's blue fairy, and they make terrible things.*

*Please read the instructions thoroughly—in all languages. There may be little hints hidden by our fae folk that are exclusive to different languages, and you don't want to miss out! 1*

*Follow all instructions, or the warranty will be voided. 2*

*Despite what any salesperson or fairy told you, you will NOT be able to decide where the PRTL 4.0 takes you. The random aspect is part of the fun, after all. If everyone had their choice, then they'd all go to the red queen's land and all of the tourist traffic would really get on her nerves.*

*We do guarantee that you will be **transported to another realm**. You have a 60% chance of landing in a fantasy realm, but 40% of you will go to lands that are more machine-based with magic still underlying in the community. Anything with "punk" in the vernacular name is possible.*

—

If Bruce had just found the book, he would have thought it was a self-published fantasy. But the book sat on the floor, *by an actual fucking portal*, pages slightly bent as if it had fallen while open. Or someone had dropped it. Between the wall and where he had picked up the book was a crumpled plastic covering, the thin kind that often covered instruction manuals.

Realtor Snake and Jessica were on he porch. He was making her laugh.

The pantry had the same white linoleum as the kitchen, with

dingy white walls. Metal shelving lined both walls, making it look more like a corporate janitor's closet than a suburban pantry. The real-ness of it only stretched about a foot into the pantry, then everything, the ceiling, walls, floor, everything, was encompassed by a swirling black abyss.

He was surprised it didn't suck him in, but it didn't have a huge pull like a black hole. The book had managed to stay on this side.

But that book was seriously strange.

—

#### **BEFORE YOU GO:**

*Dress for the occasion. Layers are good, since you don't know what climate you will arrive in. We recommend a small piece of luggage that will carry any medicines you will need and any finery that must be worn to address royalty.*

*Also pack a sandwich or two. You may not be near a city with food options, and you'll need to be extremely wary of people who offer you things, especially food and wine.*

*Tell your family: This is best done with a letter that will no doubt go astray. But you should write one since your time away will either be nothing (ie, it will look as if no time*

*has passed in your home realm) or a lengthy stay. 3*

*If you have a pet, procure a pet sitter, since the pet has only a 63% chance of following you, with or without your knowledge. If this does happen, we cannot guarantee the animal will be able to speak.*

*The PRTL 4.0 transition should be painless, but some testers found tingling in hands and feet, tingling in tongue, remove of hands and/ or feet, growth of a separate body part, full transformation into a fantasy race. Many of these side effects can be blamed on the realm the people landed in and not on the PRTL 4.0 magic. You travel at your own risk.*

—

Is this what happened to the owner of the house? Had she gone willingly? Was she seeking her own adventure? Was she still there?

Bruce slipped the snake's keys into his pocket and closed the pantry door thoughtfully. He wandered into the living room with the cathedral ceilings and understated blue carpet. The front window was framed perfectly with climbing red rose bushes. # 115 was at the bottom of the cul-de-sac, and he had a clear view of the other houses on the street,

each of them with a PURELY REALTY sign out front. Just like this house.

Snake realtor aside, this house was perfect. It was in their price range, had a heated room over the garage that would allow him to set up a studio, and flowers everywhere that Jessica could mess with.

The conversation on the porch had gone from louder jokes and laughter to low murmurs that were hoping not to be overheard.

—

**YOUR ARRIVAL:**

*Come June, 2034, your arrival will be in our welcome centers, where you will get a pamphlet on the local sites and cultures before you adventure forth. Until then, you could manifest in a field, over an ocean, astride a great bird, or in the red queen's court. Be ready with an explanation or swimming assistance.*

*The red queen's magic is infallible and you will be able to speak with everyone in your new world. 4*

*You would be best to immediately find either an inn or a cave in which to rest.*

*An animal may attempt to befriend you. If it is wounded, or cannot speak, care for it and you will be*



*rewarded. If it does speak, be wary of blue fairies shapeshifting to trick you into things. Accept no gifts.*

*Do not promise anything- an apple, a stone, a child, anything tangible or intangible- to someone in this land. The Red Fairies are not responsible for poor choices made when dealing with fantasy beings.*

*If you are a normal schlub who no one pays attention to, you will undoubtedly be the chosen one who must save the land. If you are able bodied and intelligent and generally likable, you will be a no one, but with a much better chance of coming out alive. The very young and the very old should NOT travel by PRTL 4.0, as they will be the chosen one **and** be unable to hold a sword.*

*Please carry this book with you, as well as the companion booklet found in the box, So You're a Chosen One: Did you choose this? This booklet should answer any questions you have about your role in this story.*

—

Huh. The 'chosen one' book seemed to be missing. He wondered if it was in the snake's briefcase, which, unfortunately, he had carried with him to the porch. That spelled bad news for

whoever had gone through.

Bruce had met the old woman who owned this house. He'd met her while he was checking out the place on his own. She'd been working in the garden.

He could save her. He could hop through right now and try to find the old woman, who could probably use a hand. It was that or back to his manager job working for Pindy, the fantasy map making app. The work had been great when he started, but he did it too well so they made him a manager and took the fun part of his job away.

—

#### COMING HOME:

*No matter how long you stay, your time in the next realm will be over when the PRTL 4.0 opens nearby you; it is tuned to your frequency and cannot miss finding you. Even if you have lost your memory, go into the shiny door, you will return home unscathed.*

*When you are home, fold the PRTL 4.0 back into its complicated shape and return it in the postage paid envelope. If you'd like to visit the same world again, note the ID sewn into the fabric and you can ask for it the next time you do business with us.*

*You will not be able to tell others about your journey. There will be a magical geas placed upon you, making you physically unable to communicate about your experience in any way. Your family and friends will notice you are possibly more introspective, quieter, or sporting a large wound, but you will just have to tell them you had a quiet (and/or dangerous) weekend at home where you were able to think through some things.*

*Don't be surprised if the problems of your everyday life are tiny compared to fighting a dragon or fighting back a lich queen's army! And don't be surprised if you want to come back!*

*Are you ready? Come on through!*

*Your red fairy PRTL ambassador,*

*Red Red Rose*

—

Bruce wandered back into the kitchen, pretending he hadn't seen the snake rubbing Jessica's lower back, creeping further down with each circle. He opened the pantry door wide and put his hands in his pockets, attempting a nonchalant pose.

"Hey, Ronald?" he called. He saw their heads spring apart as someone had pulled them violently apart. "Can you come

in here a second? I have a quick question, then you can go back to showing Jess the porch."

"Sure thing!" Ronald called. When he stepped into the kitchen, his face went white.

"Yeah, the question I wanted to ask was about this portal," Bruce said pleasantly. "Did you use it to get rid of the old lady who owned this house before? And everyone on the block?"

Ronald's jaw worked, panic driving his eyes wide. "That's actually a new feature," he began, but Bruce shook his head.

"Leave it, don't embarrass yourself," he said. "I don't know whether to call the cops on you for murder or not. I guess it's hard to prove sending someone through a portal is technically murder."

"No proof of a body," Ronald said with a sneer. "Her family is getting postcards every week from an extended vacation she's taking. Come on, she doesn't even need a house this big! I'll give you an amazing deal on it."

Bruce looked at the portal, purposefully taking his eyes off Ronald. In his peripheral vision, Ronald moved slightly, gathering the strength to try to push Bruce in.

"I don't think so," Bruce said.  
"You have bigger problems." He gestured to the nothingness. "Your keys are in there."

Every ounce of smooth bravado slid off Ronald's face and pooled at his feet. "You bastard! How could you do that? I had everything on that keyring!"

Bruce nodded. "I know. You probably really want them back."

Ronald bared his teeth and growled in frustration. Bruce held the user guide out to him. "You might want this."

Ronald snatched it from him. "This isn't over," he snarled, then walked with all of his unearned bravado into the pantry.

Bruce shut the door behind him, then locked it.

"Jesus Christ you're a moron," he muttered.

Jess was still on the porch, looking thoughtfully into the sunset.

The wedding was in four months. This house was a debt meant to tie them together, some said it was harder to separate a mortgage than get a divorce. Maybe he didn't need either.

But he still loved this house.

He waited patiently for Jess to come looking for Ronald. She finally gave up and came in, an inquisitive look on her pixie-like features. "Where's Ron?"

Bruce shrugged. "He left. Said he could tell we weren't in love—"

"Oh God," she said, holding her hands to her cheeks. Her blue eyes filled with tears. "I wanted you to hear it from me, first."

"—with the house," Bruce finished pointedly, raising his eyebrows. "What did you think I was talking about?"

"I want out," she said in a rush, her skin turning red under her hands. "I can't get into a marriage with you, I can't enter this purchase with you. I hope we can still be friends." She dropped her hands and tears began to fall.

Bruce shrugged. "Okay, no problem. You call off the wedding and your side, and I'll take care of the caterers and venue and my side."

She was so shocked the tears clung to her lashes like they were waiting further instructions "What?"

"I said 'okay, no problem.' But since you officially ended it, you get to pay the deposits on the venue and caterers." He walked out of the room, looking interested

in the dining room.

She followed him, grabbing his shoulder. "But you are just going to let this happen? You aren't going to fight for it? Is this what our relationship meant to you?"

He gave her a cold smile. "Well, you'll never know what it meant, since you ended it."

She flounced out of the house with all the moxie she could summon, which wasn't much. Bruce caught her looking at Ronald's car in confusion, then she pulled out her cell phone and studied the yard sign for Ronald's number.

Bruce locked the front door so she couldn't come back inside, then toured the rest of the house. It was as amazing as the old woman said it was when he had visited last week. She had been digging in the flower garden, holding a trowel in her strong hand, sweat staining her shirt. She was a strong 65, and through the front window, Bruce had spied a wooden quarterstaff against the far wall.

She had been very kind. Said the staff was for martial arts. Gave him a quick tour while explaining she was going on an adventure and wanted a smaller place anyway.

Bruce put his hand on the pantry door. He would go through, of course he would. Who knows what other homeowners were stuck in whateverland?

Besides, if he saved Ronald, he might be able to offer less on the house. Because he really did love it.

---

*1- our mortal-realm legal department has stated that if you can't find anyone to translate for you, please call our toll free extra-planar line to have the full instructions delivered to you. We recognize not everyone has access to a Korean translator.*

*2- the PRTL 4.0 has no warranty; to guarantee one, we would have had to claim the red queen's magic could fail, and that is not the kind of thing you say to the red queen. If you misuse the PRTL 4.0, it's on you.*

*3- Red Fairy is not held responsible if you find a world where time moves slower than your realm and when you return, your loved ones are deceased and the world as you knew it is gone.*

*4- the red queen's magic is infallible and so we were ordered to redact this footnote.*

# LET'S NOT FIGHT (ABOUT STAR TREK)

## Via Bella Lyrics

Lyrics by Erin Bellavia  
and Rand Bellavia

Music by Rand Bellavia  
© 2023

When there's a show I like  
Seems like I never get to savor it

Before a week goes by  
In walks some random guy  
With the battle cry  
"Which one's your favorite?"

One sure way to fail my friendship  
test  
Is to make rank something from the  
worst to the best  
"Angel or Spike?"

"Kirk, Sisko, or Pike?"  
Why make me choose?

Can't I just like what I like?

I don't want to rank the captains  
Can't I like them all?  
Why insist on a definitive list  
Are you trying to start a brawl?

Let's not fight about Star Trek  
I don't care which one is "the best"  
This incessant need to rank things  
Just makes me want to scream  
So let's not fight about Star Trek  
I can't think of anything more banal  
They're all great so why debate?  
Why can't we just enjoy them all  
And not fight about Star Trek

"Bashir, Crusher, or McCoy?"

Must you destroy my joy?

And make me explain my disdain?

You're gonna give me a migraine

This isn't hard  
It's not just Kirk or Picard  
And I can't disregard  
That you forgot about Janeway

I like the new and the old Trek  
I like Lower Decks and Deep Space  
9

I like the odd-number movies  
I like Shatner and Wesley and  
Bennett and Pine

Chorus

Must you ask such ridiculous  
questions?

"Do you like Noonien Singh or  
Noonian Soong?"

I know it's what nerds do  
But I don't need to hear some yahoo  
Say, "Let me explain to you  
Why your opinion is wrong"

I disapprove of your disapproving  
That doesn't make me a hypocrite  
You're allowed to like it or hate it  
Just don't expect me to accept it as  
holy writ

Chorus

# SO SAY WE ALL

## Via Bella Lyrics

Lyrics by Erin Bellavia, Rand Bellavia, and Merav Hoffman

Music by Rand Bellavia  
© 2023

I dreamed about falling through  
magical wardrobes  
Of crossing the universe by  
wrinkling time  
Of shoes I could use to cross  
deadly deserts  
Of walking in wonder in fractal  
designs

I'd talk to the mirror and whisper  
my secrets  
Call on my image by character  
names  
Look for a like mind in the world of  
reflections  
My door to that world never came

And I dreamed of a world where  
we shared the same dream  
Where we all were there on the  
same team  
Where we all were aware and  
we cared and all sang the same  
theme

I'd say "This is the way"  
And "May the force be with you"

Raise a Vulcan salute

"Wakanda Forever!"  
"Avengers Assemble!"  
"Does not compute"  
"Live long and prosper"  
"Be excellent to each other"  
"Do or do not. There is no try"  
"So say we all"

Then I found a whole world where  
they like the same movies  
And everyone there seems to talk  
just like me  
I don't have to translate the words  
I believe in  
They know what I mean and they  
happily agree

They all know my fandoms and  
quote from them freely  
Sometimes it feels like we all  
share the same brain  
We chorus the phrases we  
secretly cherished  
And say them again and again

And I dreamed of a world where  
we shared the same dream  
Where we all were there on the  
same team  
Where we all were aware and  
we cared and all sang the same  
theme

We sang "This is the way"  
And "May the force be with you"  
Raised an Orkan salute  
We sang, "Make it so!"  
"The truth is out there"  
"Shazbot" and "Na Noo Na Noo"  
"Live long and prosper"  
"Never give up, never surrender"  
spoken: "By Grabthar Hammer!"  
"So say we all."

We sing "This is the way"  
And "May the force be with you"  
Raise a three-fingered salute  
"As you wish"  
"Don't panic!"  
"I volunteer as tribute"  
"Live long and prosper"  
"Be excellent to each other"  
"To infinity and beyond!"  
"So say we all"  
"Have fun storming the castle"  
"So say we all"

And we dream of a world where  
we share the same dream  
Where we all are there on the  
same team  
Where we all are aware and we  
care and all sing the same theme



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# HOPE

Via Bella Lyrics

Music and Lyrics by Rand Bellavia  
© 2023

Look around

Seems darker than it's ever been  
before  
We've been knocked down  
Funny that it's harder to stay  
grounded  
When you're laid out on the floor

It's getting harder to stay warm  
Seems like we won't survive the  
storm  
We're suffering, our bodies seared  
with scars  
Feels like we're stuck in polar night  
and it's hard to see the light  
But it's only in the dark that we can  
find the stars

Seems like we're stuck  
But I'm not giving up  
With a lot of love and a little luck  
We can reconstruct

I know things suck  
But I'm not giving up  
With a lot of love and a little luck  
I'll get up

It's a crime  
Sometimes I find that I'm inclined to  
be resigned  
We're in a bind  
I know it's mind over matter but it  
matters and I mind  
That the world is so unkind

Yet from the artist to the clerk I know  
it's all about the work  
Whether done with a spade or a  
microscope  
Just look at all that we've attained  
Armed with just our brawn and brains  
All we needed was the will and the  
hope

It seems like we're stuck  
But we're not giving up  
With a lot of love and a little luck  
We can reconstruct

I know things suck  
But we're not giving up  
With a lot of love and a little luck  
We'll get up

Take a look and see at all that we've  
created  
From the rocket to the spindle  
Eventually you'll see that nothing is  
easy  
But most things are simple

Things suck  
But we're not giving up  
With a lot of love and a little luck  
We'll get up

It seems like we're stuck  
But we're not giving up  
With a lot of love and a little luck  
We'll get up

We will get up



# MANNA FROM HEAVEN

A collection of Roger Zelazny short stories, the creation of a book  
by **Scott Zrubek**

I've been a fan of Roger Zelazny's work ever since I first spotted the black paperbacks with Ron Walotsky's artwork on them in high school. I was working at Allen-Maxwell books in Houston at the time. I was straightening the sci-fi section and got to the end of the alphabet and came across the covers. I pulled out "Nine Princes in Amber" and the blurb drew me in.

From that point on, I read everything he wrote that I could get my hands on.

Years go by. Roger is in Houston for the Houston Chronicle Book & Author dinner. He spent some extra time in town and visited a couple of bookstores in town to sign stock and books for customers. One of the bookstores happened to be about 500 feet from where I worked at the time.

I was prepared for the day. I had my entire collection with me. At the time it was probably only 20 books or so (my collection of Zelazny now is in the multiple hundreds). I took the books over to Jeremy's Bookshelf and got them signed. (I may have

skipped out on work for a bit to make it there while he was signing.) I don't remember if I had a conversation with Roger. I was probably too starstruck to do more than ask for his signature.

More years go by, and I never encounter Roger again. And he passes away. Far too soon.

Shortly thereafter, I realize that some of his stories were published in magazines and fanzines of small enough circulation that they will never be seen by many people. I decide to try and remedy that situation. With the help of "Amber Dreams" (a bibliography of Roger's work by Daniel Levack) I come up with a list of stories that I think need more exposure. At the top of the list are the Amber short stories he wrote to fill in spaces between the novels.

I've got the stories, but how to get permission to publish them in a book? I've never done this sort of thing. Somehow, I found contact information for Roger's agent, Kirby McCauley. It might have been his phone number or maybe even a physical address. It would

not have been e-mail, as that was not Kirby's thing.

I steeled my nerve, picked up the phone and called Kirby, a major agent in the science fiction world. I'm not sure where I got the guts to do that. I'm not certain I could do that today if the situation presented itself. I explained my idea to him, and he turned me down. He didn't say not to call him again.

The next month, I called him again. He turned me down.

The following month, I did the same.

And again. And again.

For five years. I called him every month.

During this time, I struck up a relationship with Warren Lapine, who ran DNA Publications. And Warren is probably as much a fan of Roger's work as I am. He was willing to publish this collection if I ever got the rights to do so. We corresponded on what stories should go in the collection and worked on contacting some of the co-authors for the few pieces that were co-written with Roger.

After five years of calling, Kirby finally agreed. I don't know

whether it was a change in Roger's survivor's thoughts about the project, or Kirby's thoughts, or something else. I agreed to the amount of the advance for the project and mailed off a check to Kirby.

We got the rights from the co-authors. I'm glad Warren had connections. Finding some of the co-authors was not easy. And the thought of talking to Harlan Ellison to get rights to one of his stories did intimidate me.

I don't remember if I typed some of the stories in, or how the manuscript got created. I don't believe any of them were electronically available. But it didn't take too long for us to get the stories together and into an electronic file. We came up with a title, a dedication, and the rights to use a piece of art by Bob Eggleton for the cover (unfortunately, the original was already in a collector's hands). We passed all of this over to one of Warren's colleagues to get this into final form and off to the printer.

It took a couple of months for the book to make it to us from the printer, but it did make it.

I got my copies in the mail. I opened the book, and my name (listed as editor) was misspelled,

the dedication was missing, and a couple of the stories were not in there.

I was heartbroken, and overjoyed at the same time.

From 2004 to 2016, we sold copies of this book. Every 6 months, I'd send Roger's agent a small check for the amount we sold, once we covered the advance. After 12 years, in 2016, they told us to stop selling them. We'd gone over the original timespan of the rights for the book and they were well within their rights.

At this point, Warren took over as lead on this project. He thought he could get the estate to let us have another shot. Several years later he managed to do so.

We were able to produce an expanded version of the book, with the missing stories, the missing dedication, and a corrected spelling of my last name.



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# A NU-PHAN'S GUIDE TO THE ART SHOW

by Scott Zrubek

So, you've never been inside a convention Art Show. They can be overwhelming experiences at first, but soon you'll relish just crossing the threshold of one.

As you approach the hallowed doors leading into the museum-like environment, you find open doors and a welcoming light. You walk in and find yourself faced with an array of art and a small table behind which you spot a forlorn and exhausted individual surrounded by a mass of papers and other paraphernalia.

One of the items on the table is a register of all bidders at the convention. In order to bid, you need a bidder number. In order to get a bidder number, you need to fill out a line in the bidder registry. It requires just a few bits of information: name, address, phone, email, and maybe a few more tidbits (possibly a driver's license number). This information is needed in order to contact you if you've won an item through either the silent or live auction and you don't pick it up.

After filling in the registry, you've got a bidder number attached to your name, perhaps even a little piece of paper with that number on

it. Remember that number. Love that number. Commit it to memory. You'll be using it for all of your transactions in the Art Show.

Now it's time to wander the aisles of the Art Show, examining the work of the artists you find there. Some of the art may be available to be handled, while other items are best just being admired. Some of the art may be a bit more risqué than you expected and might be inappropriate for unaccompanied children.

But wait! What's this? You've stumbled across a piece of art that goes just perfectly with your pink SnarfBlaster and you must have it! What do you do now?

As you look around the piece of art, examining every minor embellishment, you see a small rectangular piece of paper. On that piece of paper it says "Bid Sheet", maybe in English, maybe Esperanto, maybe some weird form of Vogon poetry.

On this bid sheet, you will find numerous pieces of information. One is the title of the piece. This one happens to be entitled "Pink SnarfBlaster Accompaniment #1." Also on the bid sheet will be

a number of monetary values and some lines waiting for stuff to be written.

One of the monetary values will be “Minimum Bid.” This is the lowest amount of money that the artist is willing to accept for this piece of art. The minimum bid for “Pink SnarfBlaster Accompaniment #1” is \$5.

Another monetary value may be a “Quick Sale” value. This is a value that the artist has decided is the amount that they really want to have for their piece. The Quick Sale price for “Pink SnarfBlaster Accompaniment #1” is \$54.

Some art shows have yet a third value: Sunday, After Auction, or After Closeout. This is a value that the artist has decided is the amount they are willing to accept so they don’t have to take it back home. The Sunday price for “Pink SnarfBlaster Accompaniment #1” is \$35.

You’ve decided that your budget for the weekend allows you to spend up to \$100 on artwork at the convention but, after perusing the rest of the Art Show, you’ve decided that you might commit all of the money to “Pink SnarfBlaster Accompaniment #1.” However, being the savvy soul that you are, you don’t want to spend that much if you don’t have to. You’re going

to try to get the piece for \$5, the minimum bid.

So, looking at the bid sheet some more, you see that it has a spot for a name, a bidder number and a bid. Aha! This must be how you record your desire to purchase this piece. You reach into your pocket and pull out a pen. As your pen approaches the bid sheet, you notice that someone else has already written a bid on there. Jack Spratt, your old high school nemesis, appears to have bid \$30 on the piece.

Since the bid is already \$30, you can’t bid just \$5, the minimum bid. The next bid on the piece must be higher than \$30. You can’t bid \$30.01 or \$30.67, but you can bid \$31.

You consider your options. You contemplate bidding the Quick Sale price, \$54, and walking off with the piece right then and there. That, unfortunately, is not allowed. Once a piece has a bid on it, neither the Quick Sale nor the Sunday price allows you to take the piece home immediately. If there had been no bids on the item, you could have done just that.

So, you’ve decided to outbid Jack Spratt and write a bid of \$35 on the bid sheet. You also write down your name and your bidder number in the space provided.

Referring to the rules for the Art Show that you were provided in your program book, or in a handout from the Art Show staff, you know that if a piece receives 3 bids or more, it will go to the Live Auction. "Pink SnarflBlaster Accompaniment #1" now has two bids on it. One more bid and it will go to the Live Auction.

You've got several panels to go visit, so you wander through the rest of the convention. You know that the silent bidding portion of the art show ends at noon Sunday, so you've got a while to go.

Time passes.....

You come back into the art show at 11:55 a.m. and wander back to check on bidding on "Pink SnarflBlaster Accompaniment #1". You discover that several more bids are on the piece, with the current bid at \$76, by Jack Spratt. Since there are more bids than required for a piece to go to the live auction, the art show staff have marked the piece as going to auction. The auction happens at 3 p.m., so you've got time to get some lunch and then try to win "Pink SnarflBlaster Accompaniment #1" at the live auction.

It's time for the live auction, and there are a number of pieces that have made it to the auction, but none as beautiful as "Pink

SnarflBlaster Accompaniment #1." The auctioneer is doing a good job of generating interest in each piece, something you hope he doesn't do when PSA #1 comes up. And then the auctioneer holds up PSA #1 and you remember how beautiful it is. The auctioneer asks for a bid of \$80 and you hold up your hand to bid that amount. You see Jack Spratt, off in a corner, cringe. Jack raises his hand to bid \$85.

This time, you cringe. You've got \$15 left in your budget. What to do? You make a bold move, bidding \$100 and hoping that you scare off Jack. After the auctioneer acknowledges your bid, you look over at Jack. He's crestfallen. It appears you've beaten him.

The auctioneer calls out "going one, going twice, sold for \$100", and you rejoice.

You relax through the rest of the auction knowing, for a certainty, that you got the best piece in the show.

All you have left to do is to pay for your treasure.

You're no longer a nu-Phan.

# FINDING AND SHARING YOUR SUPERHERO SELF

by Jancy C. Mcphee, PH.D.

## Superheroes are Real!

Whether you are a die-hard fan of superhero tales or not, you can probably name many superheroes from modern pop culture, and perhaps a few from early stories (Hercules anyone?) What is the purpose of creating and sharing those tales? They teach us and give us hope; at their best, they also inspire us and provide models of coping with adversity, finding meaning, discovering our strengths, and using them for good purposes. These superheroes are often superhuman in capabilities though – able to leap tall buildings in a single bound – and thus not possible for us mere mortals to copy.

I believe we all have at least a tiny bit of superhero quality inside each of us, waiting to be identified, mastered despite challenges, and put to good use. As with the grand fictional superhero tales, these steps are hard on a realistic scale, but by sharing our stories, we can empower each other in our journey to achieve our passions to do good using our best capabilities. These stories can also be powerful, albeit often on the one-to-one scale, not the generational scale, but that doesn't make them any less important.

I'd like to share my tale of attempting to walk two paths at the same time to do good - through science and art - and then encourage you to develop your story and share it as well. That way, we can work together as a community of people who know that they have and can develop a kernel of "reality-grade" superhero inside. I recently looked up the 10 characteristics of a superhero, and spoiler alert, physical strength won't be one of mine, but maybe I may have demonstrated a bit of the others? (You can be the judge later.) If you are curious, here is the list: courage, selflessness, strong sense of justice, empathy, determination, intelligence, physical strength or other unique abilities, leadership, humility, resilience. Perhaps you see a bit of these qualities already in yourself? No worries if you don't quite yet. This story is about always striving to be our best, not obsessing over our falling short.

I'm here to share my story of self-discovery and challenges, hoping it will encourage you in your own journey. In return, I hope you will share your tale to inspire and empower others.

## My Realistic and "Superhero-like" Journey

## Origins

I grew up just outside of Philadelphia, at the low-income end of a middle-class neighborhood—just me and mom. Mom and dad separated when I was only 7 months old, and dad was not involved in my childhood. Thus, mom had the challenge of supporting us both, being a single parent, and getting a college degree simultaneously. She worked hard to educate and take care of us, and because of her, I always had food and a roof over my head. She was my first real hero role model and mentor. From her, I learned to work hard to get what you want and need and to not give up, no matter what others say or present as obstacles.

Eventually, mom finished college and became a high school English teacher in the inner-city public schools, where her students had challenges with poverty and racism. Her stories, and some of my own experiences with chauvinism and intolerance, developed my earliest interest in understanding people from multiple backgrounds and how to bring them together. Since I was also born in a foreign country, I was fascinated with the idea of traveling the world and getting to know people from other cultures as well. Until I was an adult, though, I never traveled more than 100-150 miles from my house: I was 21 years old when I flew on my first airplane to attend graduate school interviews.

My mother was also a closet writer of poetry, short stories, and novels and a painter. Our home was thus full of books and half-done writings and paintings, and I remember many trips to the free for children Philadelphia Art Museum. Later, I contributed musical instruments and theater costumes. Through the arts, my interests in the unique thoughts, emotions, creativity, and intellect of each person and what makes people “people” expanded.

During my school years, I grew more interested in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Before then, I had a few toys that allowed me to use wrenches and bolts to craft toy robots from pre-made scaffolding material, but I did not “tinker” with machinery like many of the boys my age. I played with insects and explored the life around me, but mostly that experience was observational, except for caring for my pet cat “Snowflake.” In my teens, I was still in orchestra, choir, theater, and honors English classes, but my amazing teachers helped me to love honors biology classes too. Frog dissections were cool in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and then by 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, we were dissecting lampreys, turtles, perch, sharks, and fetal pigs. So, in addition to loving the arts, I loved studying scientific facts, analyzing with precision and clarity, explaining the unknown and learning how things work. It all



seemed perfectly natural to love both types of subjects and do it all.

The realities of college, and later graduate school and postdoctoral positions, required that I make a choice between being a scientist or studying the arts. As an undergraduate at Cornell University, I could still take a few courses in literature and sing in the choir, but having grown up always keenly aware of what was within my financial means, I felt I needed a college major that would most likely get me a job that allowed me to support myself! I did not want to ask for any more financial contribution from mom; she had already worked hard enough on my behalf. So, following my internal hope of integrating my skills and interests, I decided to study the science of thoughts and emotions and the basis for the creativity behind literature and theater by becoming a neuroscientist. This choice was the beginning of my science career.

After college, I decided to get a Ph.D. at Brandeis University and be a scientific researcher. My scientific career guided my focus smaller and smaller, into the microscopic world of cells and molecules. I explored how the structure of these molecules encodes their functions. At times I found myself the only woman in the room, acting like the men to “fit in,” not because they required it, but more because I was

not yet quite comfortable being me. On a positive note, during this time, I finally got to take my first few trips abroad. I touched truly “old” walls, heard different languages, and saw different customs, loving those differences but also the confirmation that people were people no matter their origin.

I continued to do postdoctoral research at the University of Washington and the California Institute of Technology, but I was haunted by the sense that I was a “good” scientist, but perhaps not a “great” one. Likely this sense was partly because I was comparing myself to one-day future Noble prize winners with whom I shared a lab. I could also not forget the evaluation comment of one of my Ph.D. advisors, “Jancy is brilliant, but not a natural experimenter.” My uncertainty was exacerbated by my having a bit of a perfectionistic character trait, which can drive a person to accomplish many things, but can also make one feel forever unsuccessful. I had a sense that there must be some better way that I could use my scientific and people skills, that would give me more personal fulfillment and through which I could contribute more. I struggled to identify what that was, and my incredible science mentors only understood how to navigate a path in laboratory research and not any alternate routes. I did not want to give up, as my mother had taught me long ago, but I was truly

floundering.

### ***Initial Challenges to Further Train the One Day Superhero***

After 17 years of doing cellular and molecular laboratory neuroscience, I had my laboratory research career path abruptly interrupted by my husband – who got the job of his dreams. His job required us to settle indefinitely in one place only, Houston, Texas.

In hindsight, this major pivotal challenge was a good thing, but at the time, I was hopping mad. I wanted to support my husband's dreams, but I also wanted to keep my own career going. Since I was already disrupted, I searched for a different sort of position that would still allow me to take advantage of my in-depth training and experience as a scientist but not at the laboratory bench. I also wanted to be close to home so that I could be a very engaged parent, since my husband's job had him working odd hours, often far away. My Houston-area prime sector choices? – medical (long commute), energy (unfamiliar) and space (alien to me, no pun intended, but not without promise since they do have human exploration!). Would I be willing to shift and slow down my career to find life balance? The answer was "Yes!"

That's the unglamorous reality of how I began working in space

life sciences! My first job was to coordinate life science research aimed to help keep astronauts healthy and able to perform on space missions. I was evaluating programs and strategizing how to implement them in the future for optimal success, essentially forming bridges between different scientific ideas and types of people. Oh, happy day, I also had the chance to coordinate large international research projects and travel abroad! These tasks required me to work with people with different skills, countries of origin, languages, priorities, jargon, cultural customs, etc. The job was sometimes a bit like herding cats, but I came to appreciate and ponder the challenges of communicating ideas and collaborating in diverse teams.

At the same time, I was getting innovation training, stressing the maxim "Think Out of the Box." This training helped me identify new terms for some of my interests, "innovate" and "creatively problem solve." I had already been wondering how to better solve our space exploration challenges creatively, possibly by bringing IN ideas from different sectors or types of people. It was 2009, the beginning of the incredible space ecosystem expansion that we are experiencing today, with more space agencies and a huge array of space companies developing opportunities for non-professional astronauts to fly to space. Change

is always hard, and sometimes our NASA community was uncertain how to navigate these changes, and morale was occasionally low.

I was also pondering how to better communicate ideas OUT from our space science community to the public. NASA money and support was changing along with its morphing role. Many of the public clearly misunderstood and lacked interest or education about future space programs. They focused on what was easy to digest, entertaining, and clearly linked to them. We needed to do a better job explaining why space is interesting and benefits Earth, how it will impact their lives, and how they could have an important role, if they wanted to.

2010 proved to be a pivotal year for me. My early life and career, with its duality of expert scientist and amateur in the arts, converged with my new developing focus on how to be open to “crazy” ideas, bring new ideas in, and better communicate information out. That year, I was on the proposal and scientific planning committee for a space life sciences meeting. The committee chair decided that the conference theme should be the “Next Golden Age of Human Space Flight.” When he named the theme, it was like a light bulb moment for me. While it was clear to me that we can plan that next golden age, we were unlikely to implement and

enter this Golden Age for 10 or more years. The next generation, today’s children, would likely be the implementers of this great phase of human spaceflight. Thus, we ought to include their ideas and priorities in our thinking and planning now, bringing in new thoughts but also communicating outward to get their investment in the plans that they will ultimately carry out decades later. Ideally, any type of child should be involved, not just the ones who are already interested in space and studying science and technology. Similarly, anyone of any age could benefit from information about the impact of space exploration on Earth and humanity, as they are the world’s current and future workers, decision-makers, and citizens. But how would we enable this “dialogue” between youth and adults?

What about the arts? I knew from personal experience how powerful the arts could be communicating imagination and reality: hadn’t I read science fiction, watched lots of Star Trek, Star Wars, and Lost in Space movies and television? I also had a great respect and love for the arts from childhood. Through my convergent thinking, the international, online, Humans in Space Youth Art Competition began. Originally, I wanted to bring in visual, literary, musical, and video youth artwork, and then showcase the artwork to the adult Symposium attendees and the public, via a display or live performance.

Although they kindly agreed to help, the greater team's expectations for a space art contest were low; they certainly saw the educational value for the child, but not the possible benefit to the listeners and viewers of children's art. Through the online Competition though, we received many high-quality artworks from around the world with incredible messaging. In an about face, I was then encouraged to put my theatre experience to use and create a multimedia live performance for the Opening Ceremony and a display. Some of the youth artists even showed up in person to talk to the attendees and each other. In later feedback, adult attendees remarked how moved they were by the artwork and in some cases, re-inspired about the future of space exploration.

Over the next 5 years, while still a scientist and with help from colleagues, we grew the contest into a Program with a portfolio of projects for people of different ages and backgrounds. The first phase invited participants to learn about space and communicate their visions of the future of space travel and exploration through visual, literary, video, and musical artwork. The second phase displayed and performed winning entries in locations online, locally worldwide and in space, allowing the creativity and ideas of the participating artists to inspire others and promote a public dialogue about the future

of space. Whenever possible, we also hosted a winning visiting artist event to bring key participants and the larger community together. We also spearheaded an activity for professional artists, where we inspired them with information about space, and they created artwork. Through these activities, I had my initial foray into building bridges to bring together space, science, technology, and the arts to foster space and STEM communication, creative ideas, and collaboration.

### ***The Makings of a Minor Superhero – Enter the “Villains” and Things Get Really Tough***

Eventually, the Humans in Space Art Program became too big to be under NASA. So, despite my total lack of business experience, I created a nonprofit called SciArt Exchange. I tried scaling back my science and developing the nonprofit over the next two years to grow the programs even more, with support from my colleagues. By 2017, I took the plunge and left NASA completely to idealistically develop the nonprofit business to be sustainable and execute what I now realized were real dreams that allowed me to integrate my two favorite worlds, the arts and sciences. Secretly, I also wanted to do my little part to help “save the world” – going back to my childhood and adult interests in bringing people of many types together to work collaboratively.

Now, the real challenges began. I needed to find and mobilize my inner “superhero” self. Suddenly, I was acting as a marketer, graphic artist, videographer, accountant, fundraiser, networker, and business strategist – NONE of which I was trained to do. I had to learn everything from scratch (thank goodness for the internet and kind strangers who answered cold email cries for help!), work long hours, be constantly stressed, and receive no pay.

In addition to my own lack of skills, my ideals hit obstacles. For one, the now dubbed Humans in Space Art Program was not easily embraced. Some of the STEM organizations didn’t understand the value of putting money into the arts and informal STEM-plus-Art or “STEAM” education. They preferred to fund pure STEM subjects or research. On the other hand, some art organizations found the Program’s space artwork messages too obvious and thus not really “art.” They were also unhappy showcasing artwork not executed by seasoned professional artists. Money was also a huge obstacle for the nonprofit. It was not a properly “pre-planned” business, and thus it did not have a sustainable business model or seed investment to pay people. Working mostly with sponsorships and having no diversified funding plans, I really struggled to keep the nonprofit alive.

What kept me going during this tough time? I lived for those inspiring once-a-year moments with participants. A previous youth awardee later made another video and accompanying book about why girls should do science. She used both to tour Kindergartens to inspire young students. She was 14. Adult and youth participants were grateful for having a “voice” and a sense of empowerment and value. Children from different countries learned more about each other and forged lasting relationships. The world got to see commonly shared hopes and dreams for the future of space and humanity, portraying culturally specific styles but often the same shared messages. Sometimes, participants would come to visit me in Houston or contact me years later and share their journeys.

The nonprofit had some real successes during this four-year time. It executed an annual NASA-themed calendar art contest for very young children, and small projects associated with eclipses and missions to asteroids. It invited conference-attending professional scientists to “STEAM their science” through multimedia artwork and held a major Humans in Space Youth Art Competition in 2019, completely independent of NASA, related to “What will we do on the Moon”, with two major events to showcase the artwork in Los Angeles and Houston. It also hosted a very large adult project in

collaboration with NASA, the Project Mars Film and Poster Competition, which generated great visibility for the nonprofit and the artists' artwork. I also presented the artwork at as many in-person and virtual venues as I could, alone or with volunteers, and mentored dozens of interns in their first entry level experience with professional communications.

When the pandemic began in 2020, two board members and I responded with an "emergency" effort to help, using our nonprofit online skills, even though we had no funding to do so. We called it the Design Your Habitat Campaign and encouraged people to imagine their ideal habitat on Earth, in space or on another planet, and share that artwork via social media to connect with others worldwide living remotely. We hosted engaging and positive activities multiple times a week for 8 weeks, related to the then isolated and confined habitats on Earth and drawing parallels to those naturally occurring on space crafts, stations and outposts. The series included video podcasts with professional artists, sci-fi writers, astronauts, engineers, architects, fashion designers, chefs and more – all relaying how they professionally combine art with space, science, and technology to do innovative and impactful things – and their tips for thriving in isolated conditions. We later augmented activities with STEAM-based informal education activities. A growing global

movement now existed of people valuing STEAM education, although a clear way to implement this type of education was still missing, and we hoped to provide some useful online, informal curriculum for students, parents, and teachers. Through all these activities, we hoped to support our global community, socially as well as educationally. Inadvertently, we also had the opportunity to experiment with a few new types of activities.

I am very proud of the successes we had in the early years of SciArt Exchange, with the help of large-hearted volunteers, but to be sustainable and have greater impact, I really needed a staff. Nonprofit staff expect to be paid, even if they don't expect to get rich, and SciArt Exchange still lacked a clear business concept and seed funding.

This time was exhausting for me: I often felt hopeless and occasionally abused by some funders who feel free to take advantage of nonprofits – treating them as though charities were meant to "suffer." I also was not contributing much if anything to our household income. Many small businesses suffered financially during the pandemic, including SciArt Exchange. I began thinking that it was possibly time to let the nonprofit go, and so when NASA asked me to go back to work there, I said yes.

## ***Can Our Hero Continue Onward to Strive to Do Good?***

Literally overnight in August 2021, after 11 years of developing ideas, 6 years as a struggling nonprofit with only one person consistently engaged, we got a surprise grant from the Club for the Future (Thank you to those amazing heroes!). It was highly unrestricted, directing us “to inspire future generations to pursue careers in STEM and help invent the future of life in space.” That funding finally allowed me to hire a small team to increase the impact and sustainability of the nonprofit. It allowed us to experiment in new areas as well. For instance, we are currently exploring the value of in-person multi-sensory art installations to help people understand and experience large scientific data sets that are hard to comprehend. Our current project, “Sensing Deep Space: Pandora’s Cluster,” is transforming data from the James Webb Space telescope into an easily accessible and interactive audiovisual art experience opening in early 2024.

I have expanded my knowledge of why and how the arts could help space, science, and technology. I continue to do in person speaking, remote webinars, podcasts, and videocasts about the power of storytelling space and science, to communicate not just the what but the why and how it is

important, offering role models and symbols, and promoting a greater understanding. I try to provide an evidence base of facts about the psychology and neuroscience behind art’s effectiveness when integrated with science and the power of this integration to foster creative problem solving, to allow one to use the “whole brain”, rather than just the stereotyped “logical” and “creative/artistic” halves. Along with my colleagues, I also continue to present examples of individuals and teams working collaboratively across the arts and sciences. I share how creativity requires a broad experience base, an open mindset, and motivation, since creating something novel (small or large) is VERY hard. Maturing a nonprofit is still not easy for me, but at last count through 2023, the early prelude and later nonprofit work has engaged over 15,000 participants from 68 countries and over 4.5 million in person viewers at almost 500 events.

And not to be forgotten...I am really enjoying my current work at NASA in human research. I am responsible for scientific strategies and implementation plans that span physiological disciplines, space missions, and international and commercial partners. All my work, and that of the larger NASA team, aims to move us into an era with a thriving ecosystem in space around the Earth, and then proceed in person further into the solar

system and beyond, to live, work and explore. It's a very exciting time to be working in space. I believe that I am a better scientist after my nonprofit experiences and that I am using my scientific and performing arts experiences to help humans at home and in space.

### **What Next for Our Superhero(es)?**

My real challenge now is work-life balance, as I am working two demanding jobs. I have a great (although still small) team at SciArt Exchange, and an incredible group of colleagues at NASA. Space is a wonderful umbrella to motivate the evolution of not just space exploration and development but also of science and technology on Earth. Can we engage everyone to try different ways to approach problems? By prepping individuals with more training and experience across space, science, engineering, and the arts, can we make better collaborators on diverse teams? Can we make people feel inspired, welcomed, and passionate about engaging in our future? In a nutshell, can we really prepare and convene people to solve the grand challenges ahead? Through both my nonprofit and NASA work, I'd like to foster better global understanding and collaboration to do the hard things we need to do as humanity.

My dreams are not about the impact numbers for the nonprofit or at NASA, but about changing one person at a time. That's when I feel closer to my imagined superhero self. All my experiences, as disparate as they are, both the pleasures and the pivotal challenges, allowed me to find my special talents. I will leave it to you to determine whether I have any of the traits of an actual superhero. I certainly know that many others have experienced the same challenges as I have, but in the end, it's not important exactly what our specific challenges are but rather what we do about them. I hope that sharing my story can empower other "regular" people like me to find their own inner superhero selves.

Because now... It's your turn. What is the creative and hard thing you want to do? I encourage you to find your inner talents and strengths, don your superhero coat, and unleash your own superpowers! We don't need to see through walls or have incredible strength, and it's never too late to do good. Each of us can be real superheroes, and together we can achieve amazing things in Space and on Earth.



# AXIOMS OF CREAMY SPIES

by Maurice Broaddus

“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” –Exodus 2:5 - 12

To survive in polite society, Ishmael Washington learned that no one was what they seemed. Each day he rose to carry out his duties for Lord Leighton Melbourne’s household, considered one of the best in Indianapolis. The kind of home bred by immense wealth and idleness. Seven bedrooms, eight full baths, and five half baths, the residence spread out over 30,000 square feet, not including the four autocarriage garage. Though his official title was butler, Lord Melbourne had come to value Ishmael’s intelligence and discretion. Even in dealing with his own son.

“Is he in?” Gervais Melbourne’s shirt in tatters, pants slung low on his hips, he wore a driver’s cap and a pair of goggles, his cap canted to the right. He brushed

past Ishmael without waiting for a response. “Never mind, I’ll find him myself. Father, where are you?”

It was difficult to believe that he was the scion of Lord Melbourne, much less being groomed to assume the family fortune. Deep as a puddle, Gervais fancied himself egalitarian, a man of the people, with a liberal spirit, though he saw no irony in it being fashionable with him and his peers to dress as if they were poor. Upon closer inspection of the woven complexity of the threads on his coat, one could detect the feigned distress of expensive materials.

Despite the gulf between them, Ishmael felt an odd kinship with Gervais. Born and raised in The Tombs, the undercity of Indianapolis, Ishmael’s parents had to apply for a unipod license once they had obtained a marriage contract simply to have a child. The poor had to prove their intentions to start a unipod or else they risked Unperson status for their children, their rights stripped away before they were born. His mother passed away

before the five-year contract could be renewed.

Ishmael followed the junior Melbourne into the drawing room, a hint of frustration on his face. Lord Melbourne reclined in a chair while Nurse Reel attended him. Sleep eluded the elder Melbourne more and more these days. He normally had the energy of a man half his age. The night found him much livelier, mostly due to the fact that the business day brought the drudgery of business dealings. His nurse oversaw the medical research staff of the Allisonville Correctional Facility, which Lord Melbourne funded. She had a miserable countenance, as if she perpetually dealt with bad news.

“There you are,” Gervais said.

Lord Melbourne nodded to assure Ishmael that the situation was fine. With the slight raise of his hand, he dismissed Nurse Reel. Ishmael remained by the door.

“You’ve torn your drawers with me,” Gervais said.

“What an unfortunate turn of phrase.” Lord Melbourne gestured for Ishmael to pour him a drink.

“What is it this time?”

“Don’t play coy with me, father. I’ve heard tell that you were planning a dinner party. Its guests

include some of the major players in the city.”

“I am. What of it?”

Over fifty years ago, Leighton Melbourne came into his fortune. Despite the severe debts that came with his inherited property and businesses, he soon prospered. It helped that being young, handsome, and clever, he wooed a young lady from the Quayle family, heiress to that family’s fortune, resources, and connections. His estate and many business dealings occupied him for most of every day, leaving him little time to devote to Lady Melbourne when he troubled himself to pay her any attention at all. They managed to have one child, Gervais. She passed away three years later, a flower withered from neglect. To hear Lord Melbourne speak of her, she was the love of his life and their romance the stuff of legends. Her ghost was more real to him than she ever was in life.

“I should be there.” Gervais turned a scornful eye toward Ishmael.

“He probably will be.”

Ishmael was an invisible man, a convenient window, transparent unless needed. Allowing the architects of The American Experiment room to

work. He worked state dinners, inaugurations of governors, and many of the large events at the Columbia Club. His main duty was to Lord Melbourne's estate, though very so often, he was loaned out for the occasional cocktail party or soiree for an acquaintance.

Lord Melbourne regarded the lad with the stern accounting gaze which withered many a businessman. "Why? There shall be no young ladies there, nor enough alcohol to warrant your attention. We shall not be dancing, card-playing, or otherwise cavorting into the night. In short, your particular brand of expertise is not required."

"I should know what's going on. Your health...you won't be around forever." Gervais' shoulders slumped, weighted by more leavened disappointment.

"Perhaps. Tonight is mostly about briefings, none of which you have clearance for. Perhaps if you attended the occasional board meeting it would encourage a belief that you are genuinely interested in the governance of my interests, not simply content to live off their excess."

A few of the housemaids giggled watching Gervais leave for the

evening. Ishmael issued a slight frown, reminding them whose house they worked in. When he first joined the staff, they were ever ready to gossip to him about the Melbourne family history. Warning that Lord Melbourne's heart was a shriveled thing, that everyone who dealt with him hated him, that he opened and closed doors in society and business, a petty tyrant who ran the country club set like he was the head of an organized crime family.

Ishmael's grave looks and air of authority gave a profundity to his directions, putting a stop to the practice of gossip. Information was to be guarded, hoarded even, not bandied about carelessly. He kept the family's secrets because secrets were power. His was the protocol of discretion.

#

The usual business of the Melbourne house was a series of meetings, even before parties. Ishmael escorted the superintendent Alan Wykeham and the assistant of the Chicago branch of the Pinkerton Agency to Lord Melbourne's elegantly appointed study. His thick cravat bulged over his vest, Superintendent Wykeham handed his silk coat to Ishmael. Bald, with

a thick beard, and a thicker walrus mustache, deep wrinkles filigreed about his eyes like spider webs. The butler handed him a glass of brandy. The assistant was new, a thin, young gentleman with a moony face and mutton chops. He had the formal reserved manner of a man educated in a private seminary. He kept his thick cloak when Ishmael offered to take it.

“Are you going to get on with the report?” Lord Melbourne sat behind a claw footed desk, his chair the finest Moroccan leather. Sweat trickled down his forehead, his complexion reddening with the exertion of dabbing it with his handkerchief.

Ishmael refilled his glass and then retired to the corner of the room.

The assistant motioned to the butler. “He hasn’t been read in.”

“You’ve barely been read in, don’t let it go to your head,” Lord Melbourne said.

The Pinkerton Agency provided security on a national level. They investigated on behalf of the government, but because they were a privatized entity, were given latitude when it came to the civil liberties of citizens. Lord Melbourne had many meetings with Chicago office. With his connections on the security

council of Parliament, he had put into motion the plans to establish an Indianapolis office. Every two weeks they issued a summary report referred to as the General Business Letter. Little more than a financial statement, plus assessments, sent to the head of the Pinkertons. While never receiving a General Business Letter, Lord Melbourne was personally read into the reports.

“I think of him as office furniture. No offense.” Superintendent Wykeham raised his glass.

Ishmael hinted at a nod. Protocol required discretion. The work and conversations he witnessed shaped the direction of the city. Even the nation. Ishmael wore the mask. The one that allowed them to assume that he had a servant’s heart, the result of a steady diet of Sunday School lessons drummed into him. That he never had ambition nor the desire to lead himself but wanted to aid the one who did. A good representative of his people because he knew his limitations. On his liberty, at home, he was raised to question why this had to be his life. To wonder if this was the way his people was destined to be treated. The whites were never washed ahead of the colored clothes in his house.

“Dinner means a heavy

recruitment effort. What do you want?" Superintendent Wykeham asked.

"I'm thinking about recommending Kayt Siringo for an assistant," Lord Melbourne smiled, a broad, disingenuous grin. "If you'll have her. I want her to learn from the best. Here, if need be, if we get the Indianapolis bureau office greenlit."

"What's the brief on her?" Superintendent Wykeham turned to the assistant.

"Born in Matogorda State, in southwestern Tejas, she almost died from smallpox when she was young. A bit of a cowgirl, friends with both outlaws and law enforcement. Her profile says that a phrenologist convinced her to become a detective. She moved to Chicago, saw political corruption up close, but also learned to hate the anarchists. Her first job was to conduct background checks and watching of the Durham jury. She's a rogue, without team spirit or diplomacy. Her way of dealing with intra-office politics, rumored had it, was that she shot her first superintendent in the leg over some playful banter."

"So, you may want to watch your back." Lord Melbourne smirked.

Or thigh."

"The agency covered it up," the assistant continued. "She went on to do some great undercover work, since as a woman, she was practically invisible and constantly underestimated. She broke up a theft ring and went on to union busting. Taking on the role of secretary, she became convinced that union leaders were killers and reported all union plots and plans to the owners. She befriended a suspect, became his companion two years, and her testimony took down the entire operation."

"She passed the civil service exam with high marks," Lord Melbourne added.

"So she can at least fake loyalty to the system well," Superintendent Wykeham said. "Such agents could be of great use to us in the games that we play."

"I give her my personal recommendation."

"Well, if she had your personal recommendation," the superintendent said with mild derision, falling just short of being good natured. He sipped his brandy. "Tell me about Operation: Orphan."

"I inquired after an orphan." Lord Melbourne appeared stricken.

The veins in his neck bulged. He adjusted his collar. He continued on in code although Ishmael knew all about this operation. “The ... nuns told me he wasn’t where he was supposed to be.”

“You inquired across Tejas and into the Five Civilized Nations,” the assistant said. “Why were you so interested in the boy?”

“Why were there operatives in Tejas?” Superintendent Wykeham interrupted. “America remains a loyal colony of Albion. I’m the Secretary of Under Affairs, Adjunct to her Majesty’s secret intelligence service, and yet I have no recall of any such request coming across my desk.”

“Command requested their assistance. Advance work for some mission.” Lord Melbourne took a drink of his water and grimaced. “The request came from Number Two directly.”

“Carry on then. About the boy.” The Superintendent knew his way around a skilled liar.

“Mine is the heart of compassion,” Lord Melbourne said. “But Kayt ran into a complication. An operative from the Jamaican government acted as his guardian. Then she faced diplomatic resistance from the Five Civilized Nations.”

“What about the operative who ... inquired after the boy in Jamaica?” Superintendent Wykeham eyed Ishmael with caution. No one was truly invisible as far as he was concerned.

Ishmael stared straight ahead, not acknowledging him. Office décor in the shape of a man.

“He wasn’t one of mine,” Lord Melbourne said. “What do we have?”

“Very little,” the assistant flipped through some additional files. “Before 1989 you could go down the hall and pull his black file. At one point a Special Operative. Nothing but redactions in his mission logs. Now he’s strictly private sector. Obsidian Group.” The assistant flipped through his files. “Owned by a consortium of Kabbalists. We’re still sifting through their financials and filings.”

“That was a sloppy operation.” Superintendent Wykeham emptied his brandy. “Get everything prepared for the book. The regent will want a full briefing.”

“What about Kayt Siringo? The operation ...” Lord Melbourne said.

“... was a failure. Besides not

delivering the orphan, she brought back intelligence solely for you, but nothing for the agency. Reporting more like your personal agent than ours. I want all evidence of the operation scrubbed.”

“Well, that’s all to be said on that then.” Knowing when to concede a failed venture, Lord Melbourne rose, indifferent to his butler’s gaze. “Our guests are arriving.”

#

A private carriage pulled into the long drive. An autocarriage too flashy for such old school money. A coat of arms gilded their door. They enjoyed the pomp and circumstance of footmen riding in back to attend to them. Ishmael opened the door and noted the alarm on the visitors faces. Eyes wide with surprise and fright, with a hint of indignation. The woman reached for her purse and the gentleman clutched his umbrella, ready to brandish it as a sword. He knew what they saw: a black man, tall and gaunt, a mustache framing his jaw. His black jacket ran to his knees, matching his shirt and cravat. A threatening storm cloud. They scrutinized him, not seeing the expensive wardrobe, dignified air in which he comported himself, nor his noble bearing, but came

to the conclusion that some robber were about to beset them. Ishmael watched the familiar scene payout with grim patience. After a few heartbeats of no one moving, he opened his hands, first to demonstrate that they were empty, then in a sweeping motion to usher them along.

The furnishings of the Melbourne house were every bit as expensive as they were impractical and a step out of fashion. With his refined eye for art, sculptures, antiquities, and objets d’art, the home was part showcase, part museum. Yet there was a cool detachment to it also, like his art, much like the books in his library, were carefully chosen and arranged to project an image rather than reflect one.

“You ought to have one of automata cleaners who vacuum.” Lyonessa Jefferson was the wife of Lord Melbourne’s chief rival. Flecks of gray mottled her long, brown hair. A handsome woman whose figure had thickened from giving birth but who still carried herself as if she were fresh from her debutant ball. “We have a similar contraption. I almost long for the days when we’d use a dustpan and brush.”

“My dear, I can’t imagine you using a dustpan and brush,” Lord

Melbourne said gently.

"I said 'almost.'" Lyonessa smiled when he took her hand and kissed it.

"So many servants makes one useless and soft," A heavily built man, fat settled about Chancellor Pruitt's belly which he didn't carry well. His face looked as if he'd been beaten often and aged him by a decade. His hands however hadn't seen a day's worth of work. "Soon we'd need help with the act of chewing our food."

"I never understood why you don't replace him and much of your staff with automata. It'd be more efficient and cost effective," Superintendent Wykeham said.

"Sometimes I prefer the old ways. Not all new technology makes life better," Lord Melbourne said.

An automaton could serve the food or hang an overcoat, but it could not arrange a pied-a-terre, places and people their wives knew nothing about to engage in activities no clergy could conceive of, so that they could remain respectable in the eyes of society.

Idle vapping typically filled such gatherings. The conversation spun its usual course. From the Jamaican dilemma to the reign of Queen Diana to matters of

local politics. All were animated by the conversation except for the assistant, who looked uncomfortable. His eyes cold, brooding with the patience of a hawk. Ishmael had to step away to perform some of his other duties. The cook was drunk again. Ishmael had to rescue the lobster bisque. His palate could replicate anything he tasted not to mention mask any flavor. When he took up his post again, the conversation hadn't drifted much further.

"Perhaps we ought to do away with 'The Tombs' entirely. Sweep out the underclass and ship those who won't work to the Allisonville Correctional Facility and be done with them. We solve crime and the drain on the societal teat in one fell swoop," Superintendent Wykeham said.

"Such a vulgar course of action," Lyonessa said.

"Thoughtful men, men smarter than you and I, believe that urban growth can be controlled through ... medical science." Chancellor Pruitt had a way of looking through people. No one existed to him except himself and anyone who could service his next opportunity. Many people in his circle still had his drying footprints on their backs from when he stepped on them to get to his next



goal. He didn't wait to be escorted to the dining room. He strode through the house as if he owned it, not pausing once when he got turned around in the labyrinthine corridors and ending up in a water closet.

"Is this more of your eugenics nonsense?" Lord Melbourne asked. "We don't want the rumor to get out that we want to exterminate the Negro population."

"Population planning is the province of a mature society. The poor are infants, incapable of caring for themselves," the Chancellor said.

"And we are Spartans, dashing weak newborns against rocks?" Superintendent Wykeham asked.

"I'm surprised to hear a superintendent sound so squeamish. Our ways are not barbaric. They are scientific." Chancellor Pruitt attempted to slow a waiter to procure one of the bacon wrapped scallops on his tray.

The waiter pretended to not see him. Another black man, one who'd extinguished the light of recognition in his eyes when he saw Ishmael. Another invisible observer. Ishmael nodded his approval, their true loyalties

were outside of this house.

The opulence of this party sent exotic meats from lamb to crab, desserts, and even bottles of wine carted off, discarded as leftovers. A king's ransom he brought home for his unipod. Ever cognizant that they dined on scraps from the master's table.

"Though I don't subscribe to your paranoia about an inevitable race war," Superintendent Wykeham said. "I have heard tell of some vague organizing. Right now it appears to be in its infancy, all of their efforts falling under what they call The Cause."

"And should they ever get organized, even with their knives and occasional gun, they would have it out with us once and for all." Chancellor Pruitt cut a sideways glance at Ishmael. Wanting the butler to understand his complete and utter impotence. "This argument reminds me of that paper that—oh, I forget his name—wrote. The Treatise on the Nigger Question."

But Ishmael was a man of occasion and a man of protocol. His black tuxedo, white shirt, black pants, white gloves, and a hand-tied black cravat which fit snug as a noose strung by any of the Knights of the White Camelia. Ishmael was well

compensated. While so many feared being thrown off the work cycle and becoming an Unperson. Ishmael earned more than any City Ordained Pinkerton. His life of service provided housing, food, and clothing for his unipod. Plus tips. Enough to buy his silence though not his loyalty. Enough to support his unipod and cover the expenses for his other work. And no matter the amount, they couldn't purchase him. He was never not free.

"I hope he didn't offend." Lord Melbourne dismissed the Chancellor with a wave. Ishmael's presence allowed Lord Melbourne the thinnest veneer of being a social liberal.

"No one of our class should dare apologize to a servant. It is not his place to pass moral judgment on his betters," the Chancellor continued.

"You are a man of our times." Lord Melbourne signaled for a tray to be brought to him.

"I fear I must disagree with you, sir, if by your comment you meant to demean my position. High standards must be maintained. Our values are being constantly diminished. Manners forgotten. Authority questioned. Our quest for civil liberties and tolerance

are undermining the natural way of things. No one wants to admit that subversion lies at its root, twisting the minds of an entire generation to erode our social mores and order." Chancellor Pruitt adjusted the turquoise pin in his cravat. "Appearances matter. Albion's place, our place in the world, is slipping. Just about the edges for now, but the fraying is apparent for those who choose to see it. Look at how slaves received freedom in London. That spirit immediately spread to here. They can dismiss it as a matter of practical economics, but precedent has been set and a mindset clear. Jamaica continues to mock it. We're forced to negotiate with the First Civilized Nations as an equal partner. That's before we get to inconveniences like Tejas or the Kabbalists."

"My poor nerves." Though not a frequent guest of Lord Melbourne, Lyonnessa was a most accomplished woman with a vivacious disposition. Whenever she was bored or wished to change the topic of conversation, she experienced one of her conveniently timed megrims.

"Perhaps this is not suitable dinner time conversation." Superintendent Wykeham shifted

uncomfortably during most of Chancellor Pruitt's discourses.

"Perhaps these are matters best not discussed in front of a woman," Chancellor Pruitt said.

"You are a bit of a condescending ass." Lord Melbourne raised his glass to her. "You have an amicable quality to your eyes. The American Colony is an imperfect dream. What say you?"

"Some of the wealthiest men in the colonies are in this room. Surely one of you must have some practical design in mind as a starting point."

"I wish to purchase The Tombs," Lord Melbourne said.

"You lack vision," Chancellor Pruitt said, "though displacing the ... element ... will increase property values."

"She said 'starting point.' Let's not be so quick to rule out war. If we were to convince the Queen, no, better yet, Regent Bush that it was in the Crown's best interest to commit to solving the Jamaican issue with more than the token airstrikes he currently fancies ..."

"Or the Five Civilized Nations." Superintendent Wykeham sniffed his cup before wanting it for a refill.

"I doubt we could get the public on board too quickly." Lord Melbourne inclined his head with all due consideration. "The who matters less than the what. Our role is to make money. War is big business."

"You are all so tiresome." Though the measure of his tone was little more than a whisper, the assistant's words silenced the room. He backed away from them. "You go on and on. People don't matter to you. You are lost in your decadence, blinded by your greed. You don't know how hated you are. Nor by how many."

He stood, allowing the cloak to slide to the ground. Part automaton, definitely Albion in construction. The fine gears of his lower torso rotated like a clock kept in a clear casing. The cloak muffled the fine sounds of the whirring gears.

The assistant cried out something which sounded like a foreign language. His hand skittered across his body, to grab some weapon hidden on his body. Lyonessa let out a shrill scream, but was the only person to react at all. The men froze, the expression on their faces ranging from shock to fear to struggling to decide if this was some sort of impromptu dinner theater. Ishmael

ran over and dove at him, sending them both tumbling away from the table.

They rolled for a turn, with Ishmael ending up astride the assistant. He hammered the machine man with several blows to the head and attempted to pin him until the others could help restrain him. The assistant's body wound about, his hips distending from the rest of his body and turning 180 degrees to find leverage to force Ishmael from him. A single shot rang out. The assistant's body froze and then slumped. Superintendent Wykeham stood with a derringer in his hand.

"Well, that certainly got the heart going," the Superintendent said.

"Who do you think he was with?" Chancellor Pruitt rose from behind the chair.

"Kabbalists? Who else?" Lord Melbourne said.

"Not caught by our background checks?" Superintendent Wykeham asked.

"They have friends in high places. Perverse ideologues and warped theocrats inspire this lone wolf act of terrorism." Lord Melbourne tsked before twirling his finger for the party to resume.

Ishmael saw to the assistant's body being disposed of without fuss.

#

"Privilege. Power. Pride. The axis of ego." Lord Melbourne mumbled, staving off sleep. "Don't fall into that trap."

Ishmael prepared Lord Melbourne's nightcap once his guests left for the evening. Lord Melbourne returned to his study for the comfort of silence with the lights dimmed while he plotted. A spider perched on a half-constructed web, re-thinking its design, thus having to spend more time considering the placement of each additional strand.

"I dream of immortality." His thoughts tumbled out, unfiltered by so much brandy. Ishmael wasn't convinced that the man knew he stood there. "Everyone moves in slow motion. I look at them with their cow-like eyes and cow-like thoughts and cow-like dreams. I envy them."

Only when Ishmael shifted did Lord Melbourne's eyes focus to take notice of him. A blanket draped around him, swaddling him like an infant. His head slightly turned towards Ishmael without quite meeting his eyes. He looked so small.

“My father was a good man. Worked hard to put food on the table, the best food money could buy. You must understand, he not only wanted the best for his family, he also never wanted them to be able to even imagine want. So, I never knew what it was like to be without. The thing is, I think I may have missed out on a few lessons of life your people understand so well. Deprivation builds character. Want drives perseverance. Doing without strengthens a man.” Lord Melbourne sighed; his eyelids heavy with a soul-deep weariness. “Do not accept the station into which you were born. I do not. We all serve a master. So you have to put your heart into whatever you choose to do to make your own fortune. Every job has scope to it, you just have to put your mind to it. Find an angle to work. Take advantage of the ... scope when it comes.”

Exhausted for the evening, Lord Melbourne slumped in his seat. Ishmael Ishmael covered him with a blanket and called for Nurse Reel.

#

Alone in his room, Ishmael sank into the chair, gray and exhausted. A feeble light shone and he began to write his daily report to his contact in The Cause.

In the morning, as a part of his morning duties, he would go to the post office. He would slip his letter in among Lord Melbourne’s correspondence.

From memory he recorded the contents of the General Business Letter. He reported of Lord Melbourne’s business dealings and provided a ledger of his meetings. He detailed the attempt on Lord Melbourne’s life and briefly lamented not letting the assassin succeed and just be done with the matter. But The Cause’s long-term plan was better. The idea of slowly poisoning Lord Melbourne allowed Ishmael to watch the old man suffer while learning as much about his network as possible.

Every job had scope to it. One just had to put their mind to it

# DAD AND MOM

by Keith Lansdale

I went back and fourth a few times about what to submit, but in the end, the most important part of my life is how much I owe my parents for everything. Most people reading this are likely familiar with my dad, Joe, and my mom, Karen, but if you don't know them, let me introduce them to you in a couple articles I'd written about them a few years ago.

## DAD

Joe R. Lansdale, my dad, is Batman.

Well, maybe not exactly, but he's not far off.

He grew up in the 50s reading comic books. Not just of the Dark Knight, but any comic he could get his hands on. And it wasn't long after he realized he wanted to become a superhero. Battling evil. Standing up for the little guy. With each panel he knew more and more this was what he had to do.

He wasn't an alien with super strength, so that ruled out

Superman. No one had given Dad a magical ring, so scratch any Green Lantern idea. And he didn't have the legs for Wonder Woman's outfit, so that just wouldn't do.

But Batman. That was the answer. That was doable. Though he wasn't a billionaire, couldn't fight, and wasn't much of a detective, but those were all just minor speedbumps. Nothing he couldn't overcome.

Growing up, he rarely had two nickels to rub together so the billionaire issue was going to have to be put to the side.

His own dad, Bud Lansdale, was a boxer, but not the flashy kind with the big gloves, colorful shorts, and all the rules. He rode the rails into other towns in backyard-type events where you hit the other man until they couldn't get up. And you didn't dare let it happen to you, as it was either win and make enough money to eat, or lose and spend the next few days hungry with a headache.

So Bud started teaching him. His first step towards becoming the caped crusader. And he was learning not only how to box, but also discovering his love for self-defense. He learned from anyone who would teach him. Kenpo. Karate. Judo. Jeet Kune Do. Martial arts schools came and went, and he absorbed everything he could find.

But what good was Batman in a fight if he could simply be outsmarted? The world's greatest detective's best attribute was his vast knowledge of everything, and the only way Dad could learn everything, was to read everything.

Comics, books, magazines, even writing on the bathroom walls if it looked interesting enough. He even once read a set of encyclopedias, simply because it might have known things he didn't.

And after reading everything he could get his hands on he started filling blank pages with his own ideas, discovering a love of fiction and storytelling.

And as life slugged forward into adulthood he got a job that paid a wage, and had to hang

up the cape before he even got to wear it. It's hard to be Batman when you have to go to work early in the morning.

Then, something amazing happened. Something he had written and submitted got noticed. And not just in a way that ended in a kindly worded rejection letter, but actual interest. And again. And again. And before he knew it, he was making a living writing stories.

He's continued to practice self-defense, eventually forming a martial arts style himself known as Shen Chuan, or Spirit Fist, combining the best of everything he had learned, and eventually becoming prestigious enough to earn him a place in the Texas, National, and even International Martial Arts Halls Of Fame and the title of Grandmaster.

He never got a light in the sky. Never discovered a cave under his house full of bats. And never had a wise-cracking butler. And despite all this, my dad is still Batman.

My Dad's the wisest man I know and a talented martial artist, which are both solid enough reasons to crown him with pointy

ears, but one thing makes him more qualified than anything else.

His integrity. He's always been honest, stood up for the little guy, and never lost sight of a set of principles that stood for what was right.

And he passed those qualities onto me.

"You're only as good as your word," he'd say.

The world needs loyal, kind-hearted people who believe in the good of humanity. And there's no better way to describe my father.

Batman is Batman for one reason alone. Not because he thinks he looks good in leather. Not just because his utility belt had everything someone could ever need to fight crime from smoke bombs to shark-repellent. Not even because he got a cool car.

Batman was Batman because it was what that world needed.

People like my Dad is what this world needs.

My dad is a superhero without powers.

My dad is Batman.

## MOM

"I'm so tired of mean."

I've thought about that phrase several times since my mother said it. It was years ago, and I was telling her about how much I enjoyed a Bender line from Futurama, and that was her response. It never really registered to me that while, yes it was funny, it was funny because of how mean it was. His robotic coldness hits hard, but my mom instantly sympathized with the someone who had to be the butt of that joke.

I'm laughing at the attack, she cares about the victim. Even in this case when the victim isn't even real, she can't help not to think of them.

Now, it might be hard to remember, but I was a teenager at one point, as was my sister. And like a lot of parents, just knowing we were allowed to survive those years was an accomplishment in itself. So, it's not like she's never been angry. I've seen her upset, so yeah, she's human.



But she's also the same person who made sure I had everything I ever needed. And I mean EVER needed. If it was within her power, she did everything she could to make it happen. There's multiple school projects that I can look back on and know the only reason they got done is because she stayed up late helping me finish them. She also carting my sister and I between every extra activity and school.

And when I'd go to see her, she'll have a bunch of things to give me because I might have mentioned it offhand or showed a bit of interest at one time. She'd do that, where I'd tell her about something very passively, and the next time I saw her, she'd found something she thought I'd like to have because of it.

And I know some of that probably has people saying, well, everyone feels that way about their mother, and if I told her that she would remind me that's a good thing. I hope when I say these things about Mom, it reminds you of your own, because we should all be so lucky. Though I'm also not naive to think we all can. She took in every single kid

in the neighborhood with the same kind of love and compassion. And some of those very kids who grew up with us were some of those who were not so lucky.

She cares about the people she meets and gets to know who they are and what they love. And when she sees something that reminds her of someone or a conversation they had, she's excited to give it to them or take a picture to share, just in the hopes it adds any bit of happiness to their lives.

My mother recently showed me a folder she had of certificates from organizations she had given donations to. She wasn't doing this for a tax write off. She was just excited to know she was helping. They'd sent her recognitions for all kinds of groups. Animals, veterans, minorities.

And when she got through flipping through, she said, "I'm sure no one cares."

And it broke my heart, because I do, but I know that feeling. These days it's cool to like comic books or video games. Growing up, when I'd have something that was in my world

and wanted to share it, I'd be deep into the explanation before I noticed that no one was even paying attention.

I never stopped loving those things, I just quit talking about them. And if the topic came up, the whole time I was scanning the room, waiting to see interest wain as I went on about them. At least growing up.

Mom's always been the real power behind the rest of us. Dad's the powerhouse he is because he knew he could always count on Mom for everything needed behind the scenes. And it's funny, because there's center-of-attention, storyteller Dad, standing in front of a room of people telling jokes, and then my mother, quietly laughing, knowing she heard Dad tell that same joke 10 times before.

If you didn't know her, you'd think she was shy. But her personality is often the biggest one in the room. She just doesn't do it with all the song and dance the rest of us do.

People ask her sometimes if she wants any of the spotlight, and it just doesn't interest her. Though when it comes to

telling jokes, one of my favorite memories of my mother will always be about a joke she refuses to retell. She'd get halfway through and start laughing so hard she couldn't finish it. What was funny wasn't the joke, so I'm not going to tell it. What was funny was seeing my mother so tickled she'd get to laughing so hard she wasn't able to finish it.

If I live to be a million, I'll never forget my mother, doubled over laughing at a joke she never finished. I hope my mother knows I'm proud of who she's always been. And I love how much light she tries to bring to my family and everyone else. And hope she knows I wouldn't be who I am without her.

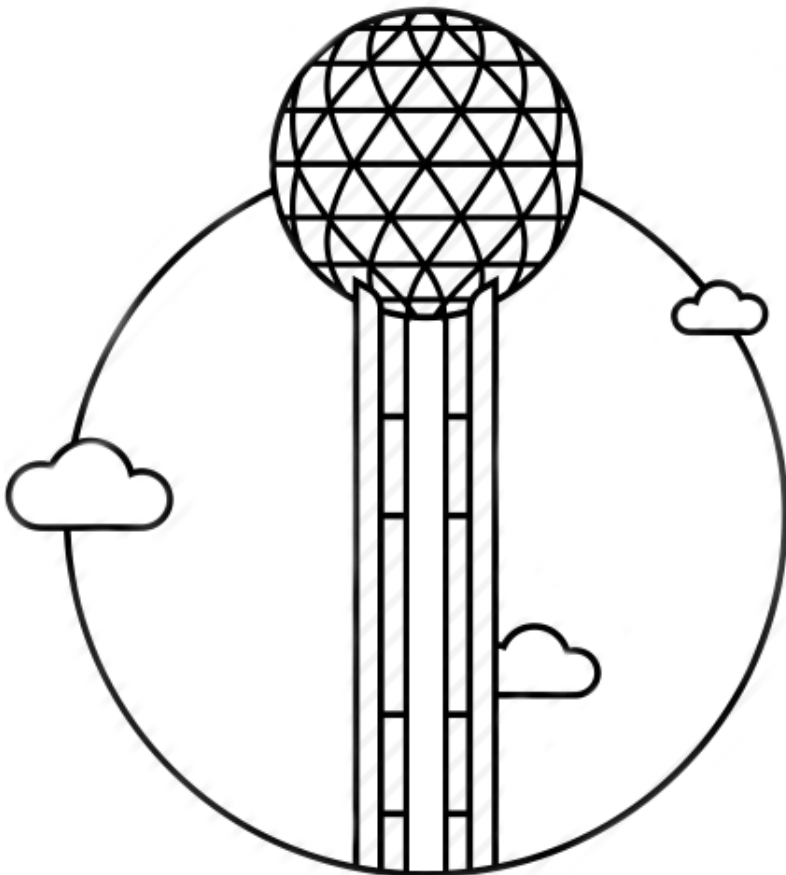
# FINAL THOUGHTS

We could not have a FenCon without the tireless work of our dedicated staff and volunteers.

Thank you for all of your efforts!

We also thank our families for their support.

Without you we could not do this.



We're Putting the Pieces Together!

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