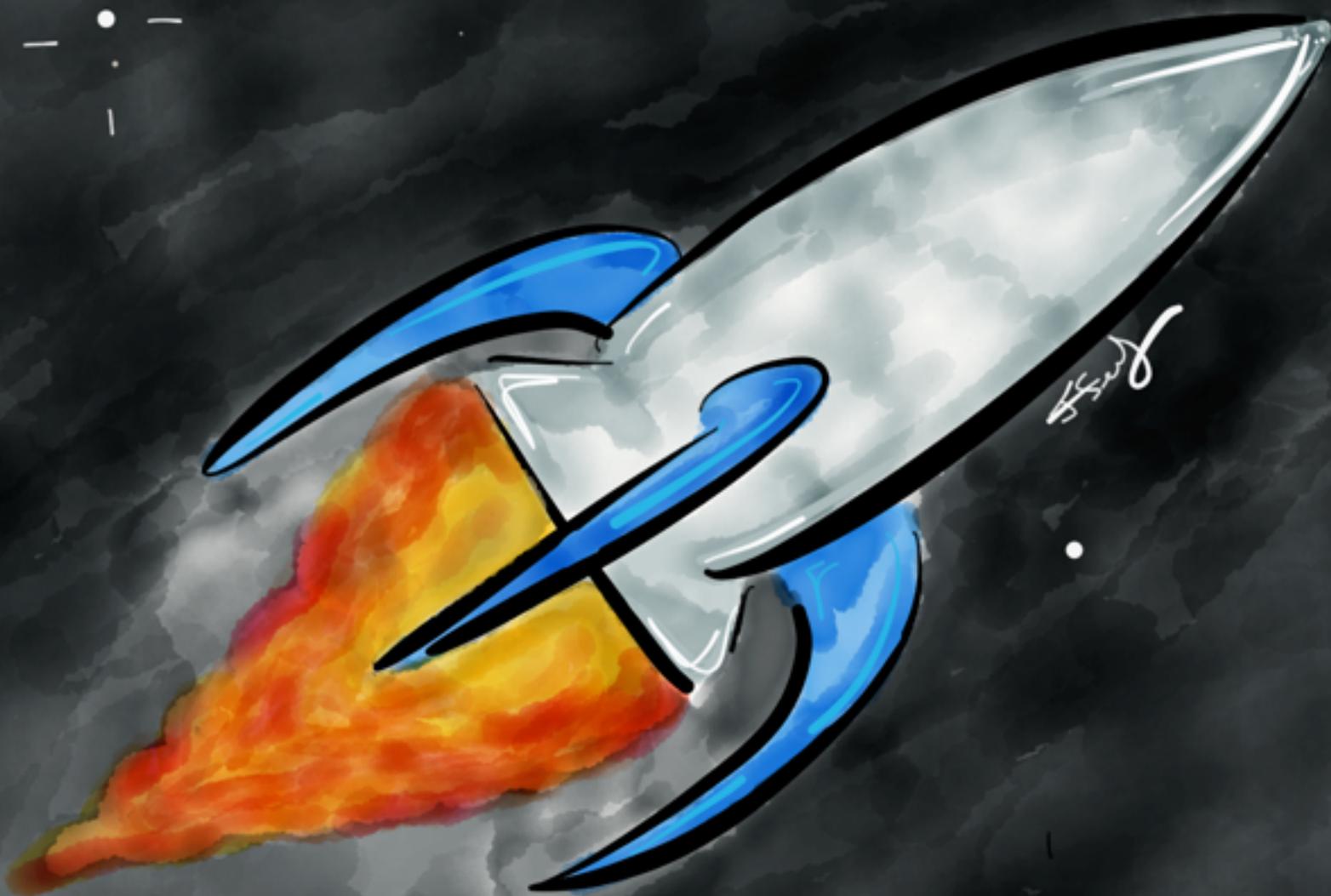
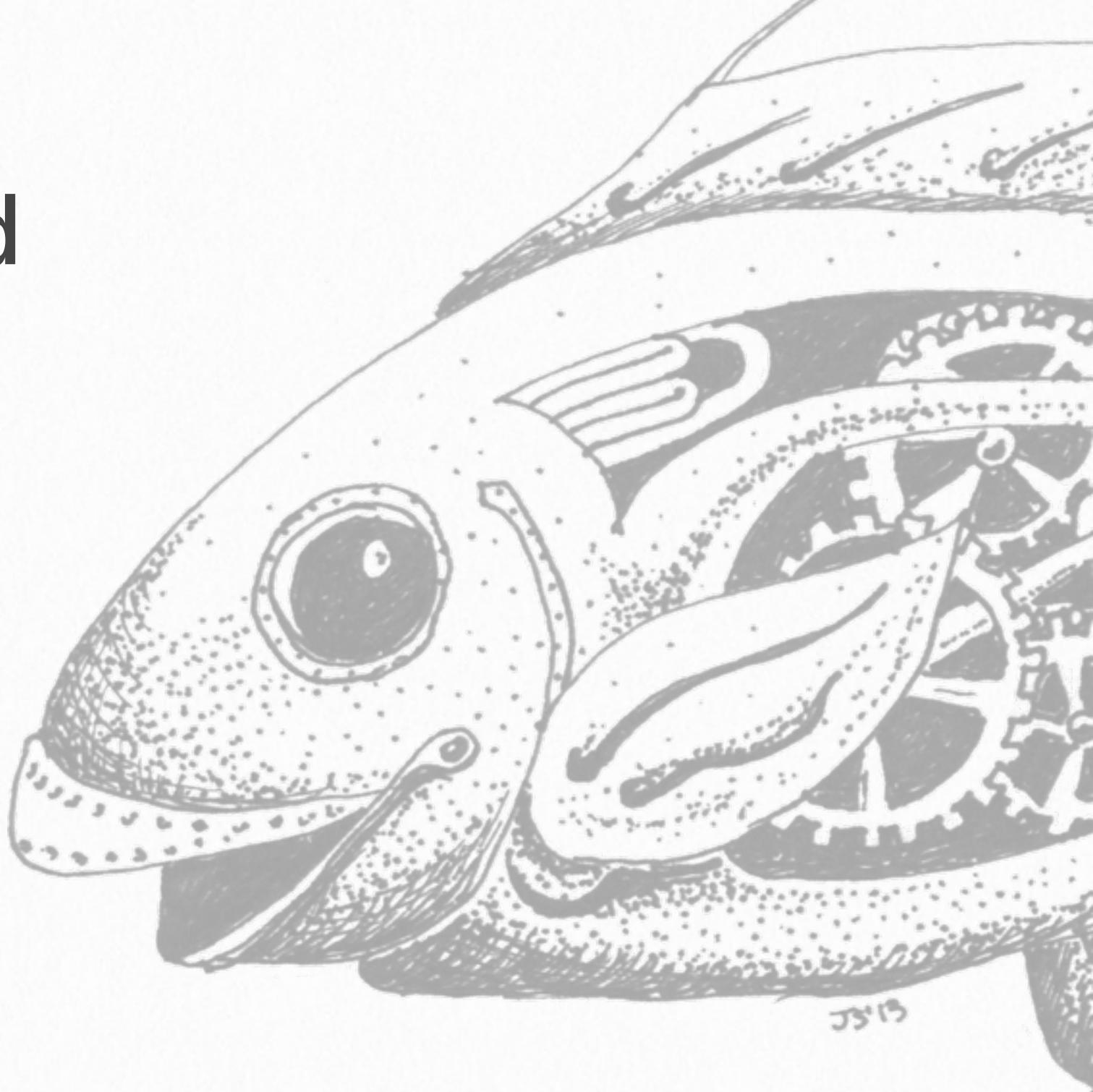


No. 4 / October 2014

# Ecdysis



# Masthead



*Ecdysis*

No. 4 / October 2014

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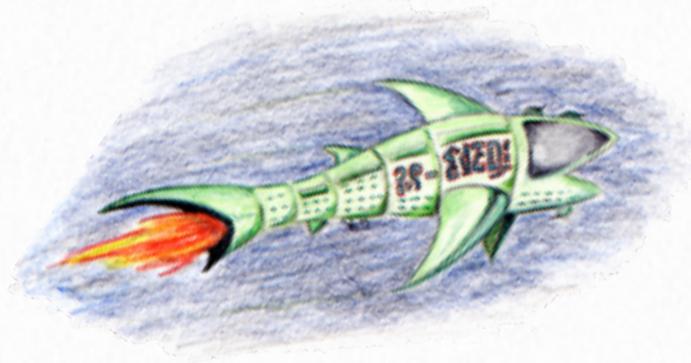
Back issues are available for free download at [mcwetboy.net/ecdysis](http://mcwetboy.net/ecdysis).

[Jonathan Crowe](#) (editor) gave a talk on the history and design of fantasy maps at Readercon 25. His past projects include [The Map Room](#) and [DFL](#).

[Jennifer Seely](#) (art) teaches high school science in Shawville, Quebec.

[Tamara Vardomskaya](#), a Ph.D. student in Linguistics at the University of Chicago, attended the Clarion Writers Workshop this past summer.

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# Editorial: 'But It's Not Science Fiction'

The problem with a literary ghetto is that it's frequently the residents, not those outside, who want to lock the doors and throw away the key.

During the Hugo voting period, a few articles and blog posts discussing the nominees made the point that while a nominated work might be good as a *story*, it wasn't science fiction or fantasy, and therefore the author could not in good faith vote for it. (Or, conversely, that it would be a travesty if that nominee were to win the award.)

The nominees in question included Andy Duncan and Ellen Klages's novella "[Wakulla Springs](#)" (Tor.com, 10/13), Rachel Swirsky's short story "[If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love](#)" (Apex, 3/13) and the Alfonso Cuarón film *Gravity*. And had Vox Day not made the ballot they might have said the same thing about Ken Liu's "[Litigation Master and the Monkey King](#)" (*Lightspeed*, 8/13).

Before anyone gets the idea that this is a new phenomenon, it isn't: this is actually only the latest iteration of something that has been going on for at least several decades. I can think of a few examples off the top of my head. I'm sure you can think of others.

In the 1970s, if I recall correctly, when Spider Robinson's Callahan stories started appearing in *Analog*, there were complaints that they weren't proper science fiction. And in the 1980s the pseudonymous Sue Denim, writing in [Cheap Truth](#) (now *there* was a fanzine), had this to say about Kim Stanley Robinson's "Black Air" (*F&SF*, 3/83):

It's so nice to read a straightforward historical story, like that Frank G. Slaughter used to write, and it's just too bad he had to tack on that fantasy mumbo jumbo at the end just so he could sell it.

"Black Air" was nominated for a Nebula and won the World Fantasy Award in 1984. And while this line of thought doesn't like getting chocolate in its peanut butter when it comes to its reading material, its reaction is positively anaphylactic when it comes to awards. I wasn't there for it, but wasn't there a big fuss when *Apollo 13* won the best dramatic presentation Hugo?

In the story notes to his most recent collection, *The Pottawotamie Giant and Other Stories* (PS Publishing, 2012), Andy Duncan writes about how the Sturgeon Award jury

was torn about “**The Chief Designer**” (*Asimov’s*, 6/01), his secret history of the Soviet space program. Jury member Fred Pohl was against awarding to Duncan’s story, until James Gunn asked whether Pohl, as former editor of *Galaxy* and *If*, would have had any problems publishing the story in an sf magazine. Of course he wouldn’t have, and that settled the matter: “The Chief Designer” won the Sturgeon Award in 2002.

The problem here is a too-narrow definition of genre. Trying to define science fiction and fantasy is a tremendous waste of time that we nevertheless persist in indulging in. “*This* is science fiction; *that* is really fantasy; and *that* is actually mainstream and I don’t know why we’re discussing it here.”

It’s boring. And the truth is, each of the works I’ve mentioned here can have a case made for its genre status.

“Black Air” and “Wakulla Springs” are fantasies; it’s just that the fantasy element doesn’t box you about the ears with its obviousness. The existence of fantasy elements in “The Litigation Master and the Monkey King” largely depends on the reading protocols you bring to it.

Fantasy is allowed to be subtle.

“The Great Designer” and *Apollo 13* are about the space program, and they’re fiction, albeit fiction based on real events. (One of my reading interests is the history of human spaceflight: believe me when I say that *Apollo 13* is a fictionalized version. You’re not watching a documentary.)

*Gravity* is about the space program, but it isn’t based on real events: strictly speaking, it’s in an alternate universe where the Hubble and ISS are in compatible orbits, and the space shuttle (retired 2011) and Chinese space station (planned for 2020) coexist.

Explain to me, please, how stories about spaceships aren’t science fiction.

As for “If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love,” its main sin is that it’s a 950-word prose poem written in the subjunctive—*if you were*—rather than adopting the usual genre trick of making metaphors literal. In the indicative it would have passed any purity test thrown at it.

Science fiction is allowed to be literary.

Truth be told, there’s a lot of science fiction without spaceships and fantasy without dragons that some readers would fail to recognize as science fiction or fantasy. And would, having it pointed out to them, refuse to accept it as such. No matter how loosely or tightly you define the field, there will always be some works at the edges—or even at the core—that some readers will simply refuse to accept as science fiction or fantasy.

Truth be told, some readers don’t want to be challenged. The field is broader and more interesting than they want to believe.

And really, the issue is a red herring. As I see it, the first question about a work should not be whether it’s genre, but whether it’s any good. The second question should not be whether it’s genre, but whether it’s *of interest to genre readers*.

That's an important distinction.

I've often argued that we read science fiction and fantasy because it gives our brains a certain fix. There's no rule that says that fix can't be found anywhere else—that was the premise of the "Nonfiction for SF/Fantasy Readers" panel at SFContario 3, which produced [a long list of recommended reads](#) that readers of the genre might like. They ranged from science to history to histories of science to biography.

Regarding fiction, we could have an interesting and fruitful discussion about what, outside the genre, genre readers might like. Prehistoric fiction certainly comes to mind: the genre embraced Jean M. Auel long ago, and had no trouble considering Kim Stanley Robinson's *Shaman* (Orbit, 2013) on various award long lists. And to some extent historicals: witness the presence of Nicola Griffith's *Hild* (FSG, 2013) on the Nebula final ballot.

From which I infer that the feeling of being transported to another world, supported by a richness of detail—in other words, strangeness—is key to the genre reading experience.

If an ostensibly non-genre work—and remember, genre is basically a marketing category—pushed all these buttons and managed to make it to the final ballot, so what?

Isn't it a good story?

Isn't that what really matters?

It might mean that we've decided to grow up, a little, as a subculture—not because we've outgrown our genre roots, but because we've decided not to be constrained by them.

But I suspect the problem comes down, once again, to our obsession with awards. We don't have nearly as much of a problem with these stories appearing in genre venues or even on our reading lists as we do with them appearing on our awards ballots.

Which is to say: it's okay to date them, but for God's sake don't marry one.



This issue is late for several reasons.

We were delayed first by a very full and busy summer that featured trips to Readercon, Detcon, and the Maritimes for Jennifer and me, and the Clarion workshop for Tamara.

Then, less pleasantly, we were entirely derailed by Jennifer's cervical cancer diagnosis in early September. Her treatment is ongoing and proceeding well; she'll make a full recovery—but, as you can well imagine, getting the next issue of the fanzine out the door is rather far down on the list of priorities.

I've had to cut out a lot of material that I had planned for this issue, simply because I didn't have the time to write it. Fortunately, there's still more than enough for you.

We talk about ourselves a bit more than usual in this issue, which is not something we normally make a practice of: we tend to like to stay behind the curtain. But Tamara's Clarion experience deserved attention, and I don't mind—least of all not now—drawing attention to Jennifer's drawings. I won't apologize for being proud of my collaborators.

—Jonathan Crowe



# Invitation to the Clarion Game

The Internet and print abound by now with reports and diaries processing the experience that is the Clarion Science Fiction Writers' Workshop. Before I departed for San Diego this summer, I spent a great deal of time that may have been better spent on my graduate studies reading them, trying to see between the lines, and trying to guess what the experience would be like for me.

I was at Clarion 2014 as an emphatic Canadian, adding diversity to a group that also included writers from Australia, Bulgaria, Finland, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Spain. And as a Canadian I will use the structure of another Canadian SF writer's masterwork to tell my story. For Clarion reminded me most of that classic I read in Grade Six, Monica Hughes's 1990 novel *Invitation to the Game* (now republished as *The Game* by Simon & Schuster Teen).

Hughes's book was strangely prescient to the generation of today: a group of talented young people, coming from good schools, yet finding that they cannot get satisfactory jobs, find rumours on the street of a mysterious Game that offers hope and change and magic.

And one day in March, their own invitation comes: "We are pleased to invite you to the 2014 Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop . . ."

Actually, theirs said something different. But without hesitation, we said yes, and in three months, we entered the virtual reality that is the Game, and found ourselves in the middle of a beautiful desert, each with our own talent to bring, having to help each other in order to win.

### *The Players*

The players in Hughes's novel included a man with a perfect memory, a den mother and painter, a historian, a martial arts expert, a chemist, a woodworker, a doctor and a farmer. Likewise, we had writers who could

spin a metaphor that takes your breath away; writers whose characters you long to just call up for a coffee date that turns into an entire evening; writers who sent us rolling on the dorm floor with laughter, writers whose horror gave us nightmares, writers whose tragedy made us weep into the cafeteria breakfast, and writers who made us ponder for months afterward. All of my classmates, without question, deserved to be invited to this Game. Many already had publication credits; a few had even gotten honourable mentions and reprint invites in prestigious anthologies. Others, like me, had never sold a story before, and some of them you just want to shake and ask why the heck not?

But creating a story that is publishable is different from creating one that is amazing. And there are many things that can go wrong on a first draft, on a draft that at times was turned in the evening or at night, and many signs of struggle and frustration. We grew proficient at seeking out all the ways things can go astray in each other's stories, from underdeveloped characters to logic flaws, to someone with expertise in law, science, languages, computers, acrobatics speaking up as to why this premise would not work.

The Game is difficult. The Game is punishing. The Game throws us off a cliff and only afterwards reminds us that this is all fiction, a virtual world, that rationally we should not let any of this affect us so much, but of course we do.

Which is why we had the advantage over the players in Monica Hughes’s novel: we had mentors.

And oh, what mentors they were. Four—Gregory Frost, Geoff Ryman, and Ann and Jeff VanderMeer—had taught at Clarion before (Greg and Jeff were themselves alumni) and had seen a hundred ways before that a story could go awry, that a heart could break, and could suggest ways to fix it. Catherynne Valente and Nora (N. K.) Jemisin were new to Clarion instruction, but left us incredibly grateful that they were invited.

Cat held us to exacting standards of word choice (explicitly forbidding certain overused words that week, to the point where a writer had to use “vascular organ” instead of “heart”), character motivation, thematic archetype use, and most of all, drive. Why did we feel we were the ones to tell this story? Why now? And don’t you dare write a word without passion behind it.

And Nora, with her kindness and wisdom and most of all empathy, was the ideal person to lead us through the exhaustion and breakdown and tears that almost inevitably

The Clarion Class of 2014 at Torrey Pines Cliffs. *Kneeling:* Leena Likitalo. *Front row, left to right:* Nino Cipri, Martin Cahill, Vida Cruz, Tamara Vardomskaya, Haralambi Markov, Marian Womack, Noah Keller. *Back row:* Kristen Roupenian, Ryan Campbell, Jeff VanderMeer, Amanda Fitzwater, Amin Chehel Nabi, Sarena Ulibarri. *Missing:* Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi, Zach Lisabeth, Manish Melwani, Ellie Rhymer, Ann VanderMeer, Kayla Whaley.



occur in Week Four. In the Game, when you are injured and likely to die, the gamesmasters whisk you back—until they do not any more. In Clarion, although no one got injured beyond a cut thumb while cooking or a bad leg cramp, and catching the next flight out of San Diego was technically an option, we all knew that this was an option we won't take, no matter how badly bruised our egos were.

### *The Lessons*

I came to Clarion prepared to be unimpressed, wondering what it could teach me beyond the books on the writing craft and, in the end, the usual writing advice I heard from the late Pierre Berton: “read, read, read, write, write, write, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite.”

Well, in the end all writing success does come down to that. But what shortens the process, for a new writer, is getting feedback on his or her own particular developing voice. Books on craft would tell you how to fix craft issues that the book writer had struggled with, while your issues may be entirely different, and that, only interactive feedback from other living and literate humans can tell you.

For example, a lot of revision advice tells you to cut, cut, cut down on the assumption that first-draft stories are like rough marble, for which you need the blue-pencil chisel to remove everything unneeded. So when I turned in stories over 5,000 words, I expected to hear where I could cut them down. Instead, to my astonishment, I kept hearing: “You

need to expand this”; “We want more detail”; “This can probably be a novel”; “Let the story breathe . . .”

Some writers are indeed sculptors, their first drafts like roughed-out marble, the polish happening in the removal of needless words. But some writers are painters, their first drafts pencil drawings of what happened, waiting for the revision to add all the background and all the colour. They keep wondering why they can't apply this blue-pencil chisel everyone seems to be using, without ending up with shreds. Because it's the wrong tool for the job.

(The job of a good editor is to never let the readers know what kind of first-drafter the writer was.)

That was what Clarion teaches you, rapidly: your own weaknesses, as well as your own strengths, as well as what works fastest for you under pressure. These are things that are hard to learn by yourself, things that are hard to simulate. You learn to re-evaluate your assumptions. You learn that there is more than one way to write a good story, and your own acquired values may be working against your own strengths.

My background is in math, logic and analytic philosophy of language, fields that take pride in making things equally clear for every reader (ironic as that may seem to those who find the notation impenetrable, but the notation exists for a reason). If one reader disagrees with another on what a proof says, it's the writer's fault. Even at

Clarion, I joked that I hated vagueness and ambiguity.

In Week Four, I wrote and submitted a story, based on an idea and several paragraphs that I had written a few weeks before. I felt I had to write an ending that explained everything in the story, even as I cursed and struggled with that ending all weekend because I had to cram it in and whack it with a hammer to make it fit into a short story.

Every single person in the workshop hated the ending, as did I. Then came Nora Jemisin's turn, and she agreed that the ending was flawed, but she saw an easy solution.

"Just cut it." Leave it ambiguous. Not everything has to be explained and solved and revealed. Clarity sometimes makes things worse.

In Week Five, for one-on-one conference with Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, I sent them my Week Four story with the ending cut off, asking for any further advice to improve it.

And that was how I ended up among the four Clarion 2014 writers (with Haralambi Markov, Nino Cipri and Noah Keller) whose stories Ann VanderMeer bought for Tor.com.

Mine has ambiguity in it.

### *The Players Who Came Before*

In *Invitation to the Game*, the protagonists, looking for ways to survive in their urban environment, discover a library. As did we—the great neo-Brutalist Geisel Library (named after Dr. Seuss), used as a spaceship in several science-fiction movies, led to by a

path in the shape of a winding, scaly snake. They do say serpents are a symbol of wisdom.

"It was a dusty place, with shelves of pre-electronic books, yellowed and mouse-nibbled . . ." But "once I got used to the oddness of moving my eye down and turning the page at the bottom, I found I enjoyed reading for its own sake."

Unlike some of the other Clarionauts, I didn't use the general resources of the library for story research. But we were all fascinated by the Clarion Archive. Every story that has been critiqued at Clarion (well, almost) has been carefully filed into boxes by year, that we could request to read. On paper only, the early stories with errata hammered over by typewriter, some of it yellowed if not mouse-nibbled. Photocopying or photography is not allowed, and our Clarion alumni instructors joked that they were glad of this, that those were the only copies remaining of their early efforts.

Of course, we had to request the years with authors that would go on to fame: Kim Stanley Robinson, Gregory Frost, Cory Doctorow, Jeff VanderMeer, Nalo Hopkinson, Kelly Link, Lucius Shepard, Ted Chiang . . .

It was heartening for many of us to read the early stories, showing talent but also raw and flawed, and know that these authors, too, didn't spring whole like Athena from the brow of Zeus, that they also struggled with first drafts.

Unless of course, they were Kelly Link, whose story "**The Specialist's Hat**" would go

on to be a classic of the Weird, and would win the World Fantasy Award, and I really don't know how she possibly thought of it. And having read the draft in the Clarion Archive, I still don't know, because the draft of "The Specialist's Hat" submitted to Clarion matches the published version almost word for word. If I get a time machine, one of my priorities would be scooting back to 1995 and watching that story get critiqued.

But I went to the Clarion Archive with one big question:

How many stories did the notoriously slow producer Ted Chiang write at the notoriously rapid pressure cooker of Clarion?

And I did find my answer, which is "one and a half." (One story written solo, and one co-written with a classmate who did not go on to a science fiction career.)

There are many, many writers in the Clarion Archive who do not get read because they did not go on to a science fiction career.

Yet.

### *The Prize*

*Whatever the Game was, we were totally committed to it. We breathed, we talked the Game. . . . We had left school plump, pale, and more or less unmotivated. Now we were lean and keen. The Game had become our life. Everything we did sprang from some need of the Game.*

And in the end, the Game becomes real. The players have moved from our world into

the world of the Game, and may never go back.

We Clarionauts went back to the real world, to jobs and loved ones and people who have no idea what science fiction stories even are. But the world has changed, or at least we have, having had the taste of breathing the life of a science fiction writer for every hour of six weeks. We cannot help but read critically, re-reading a beloved classic by Monica Hughes and noticing that the plot structure can be tightened, that the characters are underdeveloped, that an antagonist appears in the first third and then never surfaces again. It is an issue Gregory Frost warned us about, of approaching every story from the fundamental assumption it is broken. Recalibrating to seek out the good parts is a struggle. For many people, just writing again is a struggle for the first while.

But we have a team to cheer us on when we do, and that is the true, lifelong gain of Clarion. Our classmates and our instructors, held together by social media for exchanging jokes and critiques, are there for us.

We do end the Game on a different world. The Prize, as the players called it in the novel. Because Week Seven of Clarion lasts forever.

—Tamara Vardomskaya



*Tamara's Week Four Clarion story, "Acrobatic Duality," will appear on Tor.com on February 11, 2015. It's her first professional sale.*

# The Cost of Writing Workshops

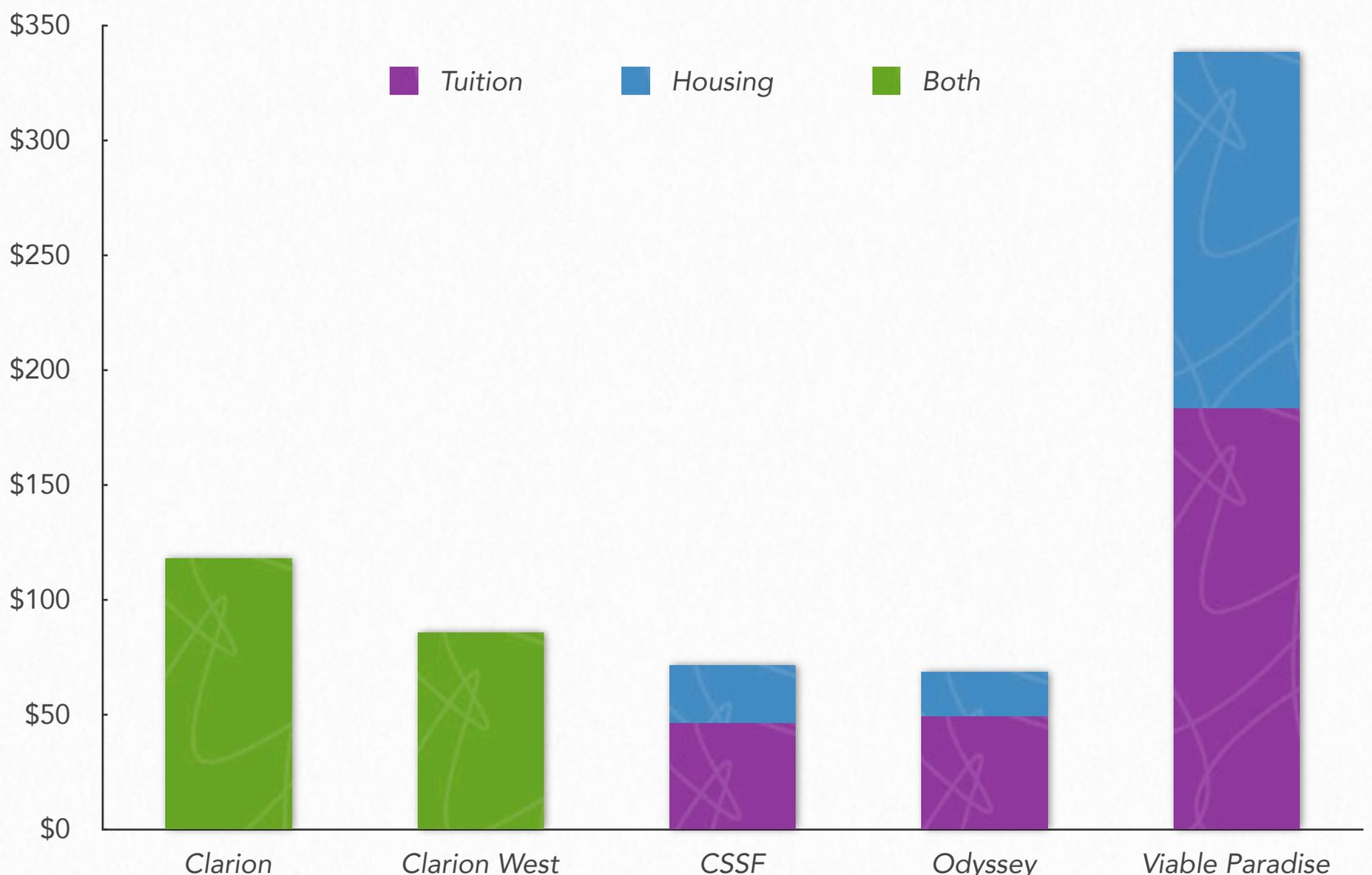
A significant barrier to attending writing workshops is their cost: [Clarion](#) charges a stiff \$4,957 for tuition, room and board. Other workshops are less expensive: [Clarion West](#) is \$3,600, all in; [Odyssey](#) charges \$1,965 for tuition (room and board are extra).

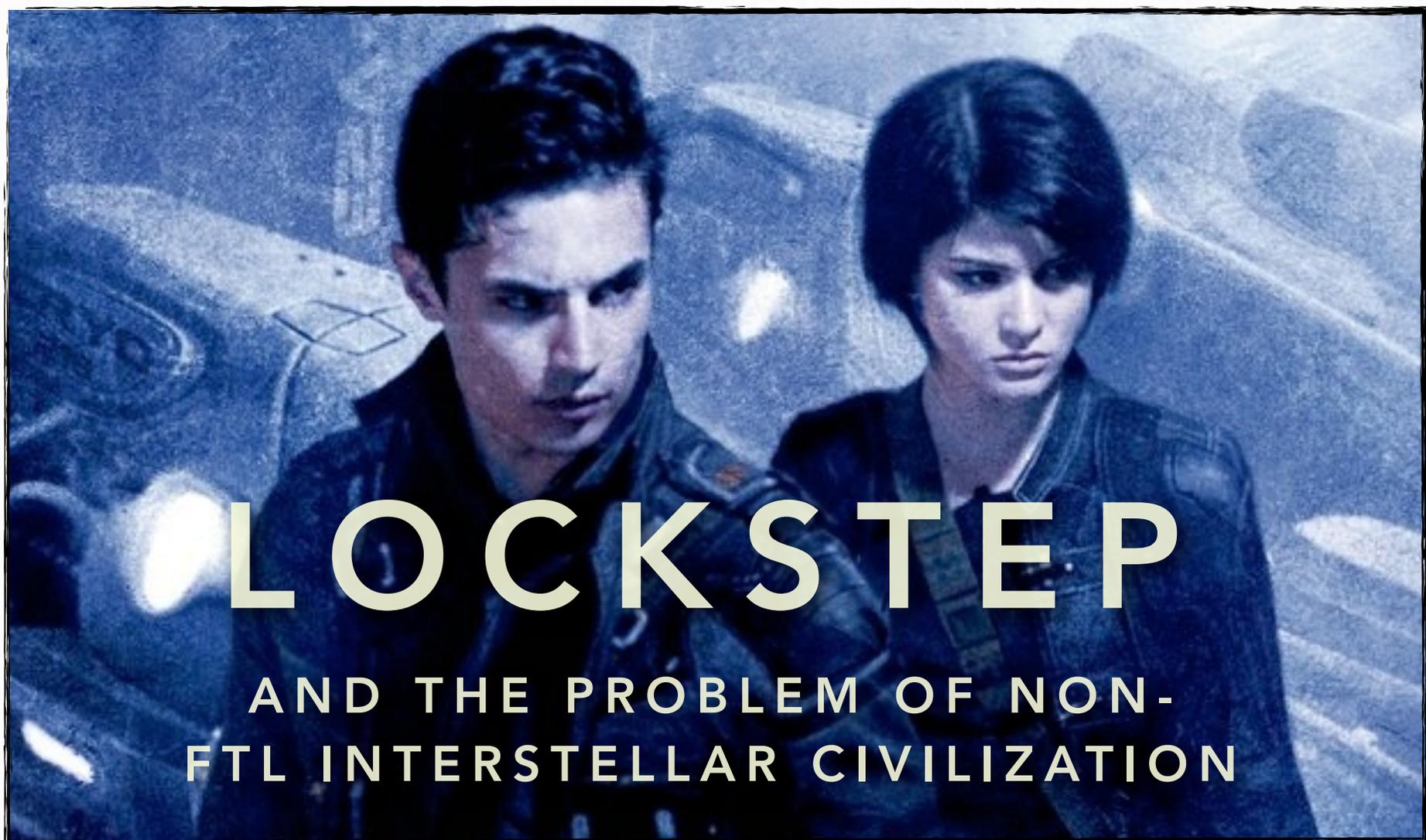
The other barrier is time: not everyone can afford to stop working for six weeks these three workshops require. There are shorter

workshops: the Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction's [Speculative Fiction Writing Workshop](#), held at the University of Kansas, is just under two weeks long; [Viable Paradise](#) is one week. With tuitions of \$600 and \$1,100, respectively, they're considerably cheaper, too—but not necessarily on a per-day basis, as this graph shows.

—Jonathan Crowe

Workshop Cost Per Day





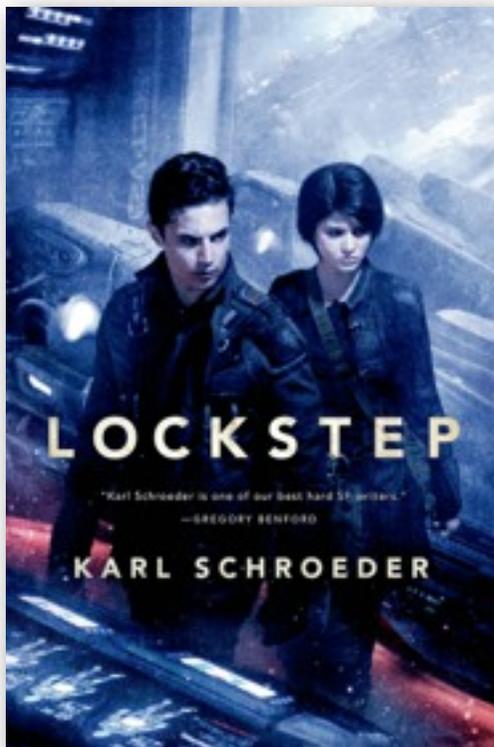
In science fiction, faster-than-light travel is a narrative convention that allows you to move standard human beings over interstellar distances cheaply. But if you want to do science fiction rigorously—with the net up, as Gregory Benford calls it—you have to go without FTL (it's not an engineering problem; it breaks known physics). They're mutually exclusive. The problem is, you can't have an interstellar civilization without FTL, can you?

My father and I have been debating this back and forth for years. On the face of it it's intrinsically impossible: if you can't have FTL, the distances and costs involved in travel make trade and communication prohibitive. To accelerate goods and people to relativistic

velocities would be insanely expensive, and it would still take decades to get there. Hardly anything would be worth the shipping costs: it would be easier and cheaper to synthesize what you need rather than import it. Transmutation is less expensive than interstellar trade. (No doubt this is why sf focuses on rare goods, from melange to unobtainium.)

Absent that trade, there's no rationale for having an interstellar civilization. Even if you were able or willing to colonize other planets (though again, the cost of sending a colony ship is of a magnitude that many in science fiction fail to grasp), the colonies would be on their own. With no reason to trade, how would the investment in a colony ship be re-

*This review first appeared on the author's blog on 31 March 2014.*



## Lockstep

by Karl Schroeder

Tor Books, March 2014

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couped? And what purpose would there be for an interstellar government—Empire, Federation, whatever—if there was no trade for it to regulate?

One exception, dealt with in some depth at a panel at the Chicago Worldcon in 2012, is trade in information: planets could beam intellectual property at one another. Inventions and works of art. An interstellar government's role would be to regulate copyright and patent law. (Enforcement would be trickier: at said panel, Charlie Stross suggested the use of a [Nicoll-Dyson Laser](#).) But there would be no travel, and no spaceships; everything from trade to diplomacy to war would be conducted remotely. (So much for space opera.)

Thing is, FTL isn't a solution to the problem of interstellar civilization; it's a solution to the limitations of human biology. Both interstellar travel and a galactic civilization become a lot easier to contemplate if you take our limited lifespan, and the need to keep us alive (fed, watered, breathing and sheltered from cosmic rays) for the duration of the voyage, off the table in some fashion. Time dilation takes care of the lifespan of the voyagers (at least if they're travelling at relativistic velocities), but it means that origin, destination and traveller get out of sync.

Fortunately, human immortality is an easier problem to solve than Einsteinian physics. Sf writers have had some luck moving that lever instead. Take, for example, Scott Westerfeld's Succession series—*The Risen Empire* and *The Killing of Worlds* (Tor, 2003)—which posits a galactic empire where the ruling elite possesses a life-after-death form of immortality: those who are not immortal must deal with relativistic sublight travel. And Charles Stross's *Neptune's Brood* (Tor/Orbit, 2013) not only features posthuman protagonists, it builds an entire economic system on the limitations of interstellar travel: Stross's solution for the problem of interstellar trade is *banking*.

With *Lockstep* (Tor, 2014), Karl Schroeder has come up with something quite different. And also quite extraordinary. He's managed to square the circle of space opera and known physics, and

arrived at a scenario that is both startlingly original but makes use of what is known and what is possible.

*Lockstep*'s 17-year-old protagonist, Toby McGonigal, emerges from a cryogenic sleep 14,000 years long to discover that a civilization has sprung up among the [rogue planets](#) between the Sun and Alpha Centauri. Resources are scarce on these planets, so the human inhabitants survive by use of the locksteps: for every month they spend awake, they all spend thirty years in cold sleep, which allows those resources to replenish themselves. But more importantly, space travel is done during cold sleep: ships use the thirty-year gap to move from one world to the other; the passengers awaken as though it was an overnight trip. When they return, a month later, the same amount of time has elapsed back home: by spending only 1/360th of the time awake, Schroeder's civilization has shrunk the virtual distances between the worlds.

The result, [Schroeder says](#), "is a classic space opera universe, with private starships, explorers and despots and rogues, and more accessible worlds than can be explored in one lifetime. There are locksteppers, realtimers preying on them while they sleep, and countermeasures against those, and on and on. In short, it's the kind of setting for a space adventure that we've always dreamt of, and yet, it might all be possible."

Whereas a space opera universe that requires FTL isn't.

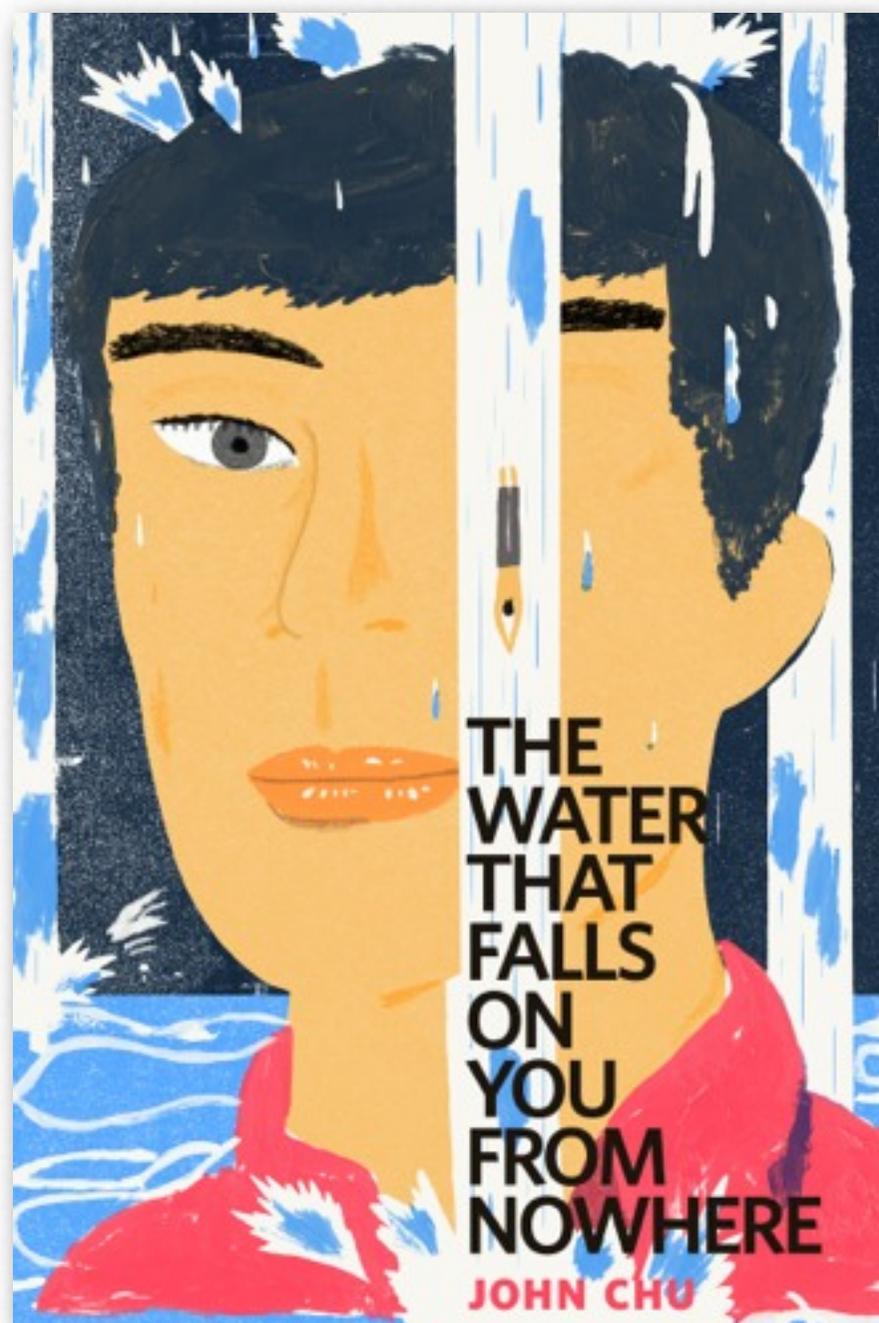
Schroeder wraps his cutting-edge setting around what is from all appearances a fairly traditional adventure story, replete with a missing heir and family drama, that would not be out of place in, dare I say it, a Heinlein juvenile. Toby discovers not only that it was his family who created, and controls, the lockstep, but that a cult in his name had arisen in the millenia since his disappearance. I recoil to some extent from stories about young people who discover they're the Most Important Person in the Universe—oh look, another Chosen One—but Karl does a reasonable job with it. *Lockstep* is fast-paced and clever, and makes full use of the implications of the universe he's built.

I mentioned Heinlein juveniles, and *Lockstep* is being referred to as a young-adult novel (what with its teenage protagonist), but Paul Di Filippo, in [his review of \*Lockstep\*](#) for *Locus Online*, argues that it's reductionist to call it that. Rather, he says, it's an example of what others have called "entry-level sf": more accessible to readers who haven't spent the last few decades absorbing sf's advanced reading protocols. In that I think it succeeds admirably. It's certainly an easier read than, say, *Neptune's Brood*, but the clarity and accessibility of its prose should not mask the importance or significance of what is clearly a major work of science fiction.

Full disclosure: I received an ARC of this book via [Goodreads First Reads](#). The author and I are also socially acquainted.

—Jonathan Crowe

*Conditional  
and Future  
Falsehoods:  
Thoughts on  
'The Water  
That Falls on  
You from  
Nowhere'*



In the past month or so I've read at least two stories that posit a fantastical event taking place whenever someone tells a lie. And each time I get disappointed at the lack of complexity in following through on this premise. I'd like to concentrate on John Chu's Hugo-winning short story, "[The Water That Falls on You from Nowhere](#)" (Tor.com, February 20, 2013).

Chu's protagonist, a Chinese-American biologist, is trying to come out to his family about his gay fiancé over Christmas. This is

complicated by a fantastical phenomenon: water falls from nowhere on people whenever they tell a lie. The stronger the lie, Chu suggests, the heavier the water, from light humidity to furniture-ruining downpours.

Having some semantics and philosophy of language at the back of my brain, I read this with the burning question: well, what is a lie?

A first answer is easy: a lie is a statement that is not true. But then, why don't Chu's scientist protagonist and his fellow scientists

seize upon this phenomenon as an amazing new way to shortcut science?

Stand in a tub and shout, “The Goldbach Conjecture is true! Time travel is possible! A cure for all cancers can be found! That cute person says yes if I ask him/her out!”

Water? No water?

That water falling on you from nowhere seems basically a line up to God. Speaking of which, does water fall on you if you say “Christ is risen!”? Or only if you are not a Christian?

What about wild guesses or bullshit that are only coincidentally true, like “A coin has been tossed right now in Yellowknife, and it came up heads” or “Desdemona has fantasies about Cassio”? Do you have to know that you are intentionally telling a false statement for it to count as a lie? What if you are deluded, and convinced that you are telling the truth—or don’t care?

When philosophers began to investigate language, everything seemed straightforward—statements that aren’t true are false. If you’ve ever taken a basic logic course, you may recall assigning every statement a *T* or *F* value, setting up truth tables, and learning the paradox that “If Tom Cruise is the Queen of England, then the moon is made of green cheese” is always true (as is anything preceded by “If [a false statement].”)

But actually, the majority of our daily utterances are neither true nor lies. Take “avocados are delicious”—it may be true for some of you reading this, and false for me and others.

Do we get wet? Or would I only get wet if I nod appreciation of my host’s guacamole?

Even more fun: every time we use “will” in the future tense, rather than the future present, we are not saying something either true or false. Consider the scenario that tomorrow, tennis superstar Serena Williams is facing an unseeded player barely qualifying for her first tournament. It would be perfectly reasonable to say, “Serena will win tomorrow.”

However, if I say, “Serena wins tomorrow”—the match must have been rigged.

In a fair match, Serena’s opponent does have a chance, no matter how small, of pulling an upset. Using the future present presupposes certainty, and can be either true or false. Using *will* . . . allows for the small possibility that the opposite might happen.

So if I say “Serena will win tomorrow,” am I telling the truth at all? I’m not lying, either.

Which means that in John Chu’s story, his characters are in a suspended state of neither rained on nor dry, every time they may talk about the future. Or, logically, if they do not get wet if they are not telling a lie (whether they tell the truth or not), they would get into the habit of framing every single statement that comes out of their mouth as a modal, so as to avoid ruining the carpets: “*Perhaps* we’re out of gas”; “I *will* promise to love and cherish my lawfully wedded spouse”; “I *may* have won the Hugo.”

Prefacing every utterance with “If Tom Cruise is the Queen of England” works too.

—Tamara Vardomsкая



## Lee Killough's *Aventine* Formula

My copy of Lee Killough's *Aventine*, ordered on Abebooks, arrived today, and so I confirmed my realization that I am subconsciously trying to be the literary reincarnation of her. While she is still alive (as far as I or Wikipedia knows).

I'll forgive you for never having heard of (Karen) Lee Killough. Until today, I had only read one story by her, and that one in a second-hand copy of an anthology from five years before I was born. She seems to have been most

active from 1970 to 1980 in short fiction, 1980 to 1990 in novels, and the 1990s involved forewords and introductions only (she did lose her husband, Pat Killough, apparently much beloved, in 1993). She published four novels in this century, but all with small presses I've never heard of, although I really should have heard of Meisha Merlin Publishing. She was born in 1942, so is about 72 years old, and had worked for many years as a veterinary radiologist at the University of Kansas.

All of this I've determined from her Wikipedia and ISFDB pages. She doesn't have an author website that I've found.

I encountered her in Terry Carr's *Universe 10* anthology, acquired secondhand, possibly by my brother, possibly from a garage sale. There were four stories in that anthology that stood out for me: Michael Bishop's "Saving Face," Howard Waldrop's "The Ugly Chickens," R. A. Lafferty's "And All the Skies Are Full of Fish," and Killough's "Bête et Noir." This would have been my first encounter with at least the last three authors, and both Howard Waldrop and R. A. Lafferty are known in science-fiction circles as "Nobody else writes like this, at all." (And they don't write like each other. Since then, I've grabbed onto Lafferty whenever I come across his stories, because they are so darned effortlessly-ineffably-weird, but I have not read more Waldrop that I know of. But Jonathan knows and loves Waldrop dearly.)

But it was "Bête et Noir" that must have sunk its tendrils into my heart, on multiple re-reads, and told me that "this is what you want to write like." In early 2012 I wrote my first science fiction story that I felt could be made publishable, narrated by a young woman artist creating a sculptural Guardian to protect a coastal city against floods, but discovering it has a terrible price. An artist, as well.

At Clarion, I showed it to our Week One instructor Gregory Frost, who made some very kind comments and revision recommen-

dations, and pointed out that the opening had to change, as I lost all tension in it by having the sculptor reminisce in the first paragraph how she made the Guardian, giving away that she survives and that she achieves it. I hadn't seen that myself, and only later did I realize that, like most novices, I had been unconsciously emulating an influential author's style and work.

I had opened my story that way because "Bête et Noir" opened like that, with a first-person narrator looking back many years later at an immensely important and possibly tragic event. Then panning to some setting information, situating the narrator and key players in it, and thus beginning the plot, and then ending with the same reminiscence. Even my narrator's voice is very much like Noir's voice.

And "Bête et Noir" was about the arts. And what I'd been telling people at Clarion who asked me what I write, is that I write about the interaction between humans and the arts. Well, sometimes I write about other things, but the stories so far that have had a hope of working were about that. For some science fiction writers, the science is astrophysics, or anthropology, or biology, or computer science; for me, it seems so far to be art history.

I went looking for the copy of *Universe 10* to re-read the story and couldn't find it any more. So I finally consulted the almighty Internet, and discovered that Killough had written seven stories set in that universe, the arts col-



## Aventine

by Lee Killough

Ballantine/Del Rey, January 1982

Mass-market paperback, \$1.95

ISBN 0-345-29521-8

ony of *Aventine*, with “*Bête et Noir*” the final story, and they were collected in 1982 in a book titled simply *Aventine* (Del Rey)—which was out of print, but of course I was compelled to seek it out on Abebooks because I felt I *needed* to read the rest. To find out how much of the vein I’ve been mining.

The taglines were “A haven for the rich, the powerful, the famous . . . and the deadly” and “Where beautiful women and twisted artists can get away with murder.” It’s a slim volume of 172 pages—they wrote shorter in those days. I sat down to re-read “*Bête et Noir*,” and then re-read the rest of the stories through.

And that formula of starting with a first-person reminiscence hinting at something very important and tragic, naming the crucial antagonist and protagonist, before panning back to some scene-setting and the start of the plot—is very, very characteristic of the *Aventine* stories. Six out of the seven stories do it exactly, the only exception being “*Ménage Outré*,” and I will discuss its exceptional status in a bit, once I show the rule.

All of the stories are in the first person, and the voices are for the most part very similar. And I think I can deduce the formula she is working with.

We have a Narrator, usually male (usually an artist of a science-fictional variant art form—crystal landscaper, tropic sculptor, holo-composer, choreographer, computer-guided writer, or theatre-*verité* actress—the exception being “*A House Divided*,” where he is a real-estate manager, but in even that, one can read his house-decorating as his art). The Narrator gets involved with a fascinating *Personne Fatale* of the opposite gender, and starts creating a *Work* for her. The *Work* is generally a reflection or other function of her personality in some way.

The Narrator may or may not be sexually interested, but is always artistically transformed by the *Personne Fatale*. That *Personne Fatale* always has a dark secret that leads to inexplicable behaviour, almost always involving a *Secondary Character* whom the *Personne Fatale* has some power over (dependent, adoring lover, actor to director), and inevitably involving death in the past.

The Narrator uses a Confidante (often either the Narrator's agent—the agent Margo Chen appears in that role in two different stories—or a coworker) as a sounding board, and the Confidante drops a crucial clue about the Personne Fatale that the Narrator didn't know. Finally, crisis as the Narrator finally realizes what is actually going on, too late to avert tragedy, either death or maiming, of the Secondary, whom the Narrator has also been sentimentally attached to, and the tragedy is partly the Narrator's fault. The Narrator cannot deal with the Work again. The Personne Fatale and the Secondary are almost always both mentioned in the opening reminiscence paragraph. (“Bête et Noir” and “**The Siren Garden**” do not mention the Secondary.)

“Bête et Noir,” the last story and the only one not to be published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (except for “**Shadow Dance**,” original to the collection), is also exceptional in gender-flipping the formula. In all the others, the Narrator is male, and the Personne Fatale is female. In most, the Confidante is also female, but “The Siren Garden” is an exception; the Secondary is sometimes male. In “Bête et Noir,” Noir is the actress narrator, Brian Eleazar the brilliant director is the Personne Fatale, and the Confidante is Noir's male agent while the Secondary is her male co-star.

The effect of the gender-flipping is that, coming in cold, it is much less apparent that Eleazar is Fatale. In stories like “The Siren Garden” or “**Tropic of Eden**,” we know as soon

as she enters, “Oh yeah, femme fatale, you foolish narrator, don't you see it?” Mysteries and noir movies are part of our culture; we know a femme fatale even if we learn about her from *Calvin and Hobbes*. However, in “Bête et Noir,” Noir and Eleazar are explicitly not at all sexually interested in each other, he is described as having given up romancing his leading ladies, and his actions as a director seem quite reasonable . . . or is it that we as readers are more likely to give men the benefit of the doubt for behaviours that in women would be dismissed as a type?

I am not sure. Killough's world is very, very heteronormative. There is one character, the Confidante role in “The Siren Garden,” who is homosexual; “Since a ‘man’ of your sexual persuasion is incapable of understanding love between a man and a woman,” the Narrator tells him (p. 12). The scare quotes around the word “man” tell modern readers all they need to know about the narrator's views, but the author seems to be on the narrator's side: all the rest of Killough's speaking role characters are flamingly heterosexual. It would have been interesting if she had gone further and tried a story where Narrator and Personne Fatale were the same gender, with or without a sexual component to the relationship, but that does not appear in the Aventine stories.

Another indicator of the stories' age is that Killough was writing before the days of the Internet: having a futuristic Google handy to look up gossip on the Personne Fatale, rather than the Narrator vaguely remember-

ing some of the details but not all until his or her memory is jogged, would obviate the need for the Confidante in most cases. (I also found amusingly dated in **“Broken Stairways, Walls of Time”** that the Narrator places a call to the Confidante from the Personne Fatale’s home landline, and realizes that the Personne is listening in on an extension—something imaginable in the late 1970s that simply jarred me today, as I assumed “I called Margo” meant on his cell phone.)

Of course, within this formula, there are variations on the theme. In “Shadow Dance,” the Personne Fatale is actually two people, one of which the reader expects until the climax to be the Secondary role, the real Secondary being a man. In “A House Divided,” besides there being no Work, the Personne Fatale and the Secondary are two personalities in the same body, and the Narrator learns the dark secret, and so becomes part of the secret, before the Secondary does. “Broken Stairways” does not have an overt separate Secondary, but as the Personne Fatale is the Narrator’s ex-lover from twenty-five years back, the Secondary can be taken as the person he remembers her as, in comparison to the reality.

“Ménage Outré” upends the formula by having the Narrator, Jason Ward, expect it, and so interpreting that the Personne Fatale is Simha Barnard and the Secondary is his sister Dee, he rushes to the crisis to prevent Dee’s doom. However, Dee had willingly chosen her involvement with Simha, and in fact, the formula is being told from the wrong perspec-

tive: it is Simha who is the artist character creating a potential Work for Jason and Dee, and it is Jason who is actually in the Personne Fatale role of power over Dee that Dee finally breaks free of, his dark secret being that their relationship is abusive, and so Jason is shown as a prejudiced fool (which was a relief, as his narration, particularly about hunchbacks, was making me uncomfortable as I read it, and I was glad to see that it was the narrator’s prejudice and not the author’s). Clever, very clever subversion.

Why did Killough’s formula work surprisingly well even over seven iterations, while my attempt at writing something inspired by her did not, at least in the form I wrote it in? Because I was missing some essential parts of the formula. There was no real Personne Fatale with a dark secret, as my primary antagonist in that story is the sea. The sea doesn’t have dark secrets that keep the reader in suspense finding out what they are: the sea just makes people drown, because people can’t breathe water, no secret that.

And the Guardian cannot be read as the Personne Fatale, the dark secret being the limitations of its magic in keeping back the sea, because the Guardian is already fulfilling the role of the Work. So the suspense got shuffled from “What is the secret of the Personne Fatale?” to “Does the Narrator manage to make the Work?” and the answer to that question, I give away in that opening paragraph.

The thing is that I may be similar to Killough in writing about the arts, and in having

similar voices—but she had a very strong interest in the mystery genre, and apparently many of her non-Aventine works are told from the perspective of private investigators. In a mystery, there is a clear hero, the investigator, and a clear antagonist/villain, the murderer, who has a clear dark secret, that he or she did the deed. (Of course, you will point out that in noir, the investigator is not a hero and may only be slightly better than the murderer villain—but the noir villain still begins the story having a one-dark-secret advantage over the noir hero, the secret of who killed Archer or Harry Lime or Mahalia Geary or Mendel Shpilman and/or why, which gets resolved at the climax of the story.)

I, on the other hand, tend to write like Miyazaki, without real villains. Nor do I find it easy to have people be keeping dark secrets, although Killough's *Personnes'* reasons for keeping them make more sense than most (career risk, usually). For the stories of mine so far that worked or are close to working, the antagonist is usually something systemic (sea, magic system, competition rules, prejudice, socioeconomic class, talent-based class).

And systems and environments do not really have dark secrets without the narrator looking stupid, and so tantalizing the reader with them at the opening is not the way to go, because the reader's curiosity is tantalized by other things, like whether the protagonist accomplishes his or her desire.

Basically, the moral of the story is that you can tantalize the reader at the opening

with a What, but not with a Whether. And it is not always clear to a writer like me whether a How is actually closer to a What or a Whether.

I think that realization, as to what a Person-System conflict tantalizes the reader with as opposed to a Person-Person conflict, will make me think differently about how I plan my plots. Somehow, when in grade seven we learned all the different types of conflict and had to diligently identify them, we never got into a conversation as to what literary tricks each one prescribes and proscribes.

I am very glad I read *Aventine*, because I don't think I would have figured this out without a whole bunch of examples ramming it home. Here's what my strengths are; here are other people's strengths that are my weaknesses; and beyond the fundamentals, if you work on the weaknesses, you will just be good, but if you work on the strengths, you will be brilliant.

And it also makes clear what, in arts-inspired science fiction, has been mined, and what has not.

If the *Aventine* stories and Lee Killough have been forgotten, though, that is an injustice. They are beautiful and absorbing even if you know her formula; and if they abound with phenomenally gifted people, these people are vivid and flawed. Even if over a few stories, you recognize that they fall into types. I still fell for it.

—Tamara Vardomskaya



# 10 Books That Made a Lasting Impression on Us

***Jonathan Crowe:***

*Ficciones* by Jorge Luis Borges (1944)

*Stories of Your Life and Others* by Ted Chiang (2002)

*The Islanders* by Christopher Priest (2011)

*Maus* by Art Spiegelman (1986–1991)

*The Iron Dragon's Daughter* by Michael Swanwick (1994)

*Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* by James Tiptree Jr. (1990)

*The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien (1954–1955)

*Night of the Cooters: More Neat Stories* by Howard Waldrop (1990)

*Among Others* by Jo Walton (2011)

*The Fifth Head of Cerberus* by Gene Wolfe (1972)

***Jennifer Seely:***

*The Clan of the Cave Bear* by Jean M. Auel (1980)

*The Windup Girl* by Paolo Bacigalupi (2009)

*The Haunted Dollhouse* by Susan Blake (1987)

*Taltos* by Steven Brust (1988)<sup>1</sup>

*The Stand* by Stephen King (1978)

*Dragonsinger* by Anne McCaffrey (1977)<sup>1</sup>

*Eutopia* by David Nickle (2011)

*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (1964)

*The Iron Dragon's Daughter* by Michael Swanwick (1994)

*Among Others* by Jo Walton (2011)

***Tamara Vardomskaya:***

*Mirror Dance* by Lois McMaster Bujold (1994)

*The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov (c. 1940)

*Dragonsbane* by Barbara Hambly (1985)

*Comet in Moominland* by Tove Jansson (1946)

*The Adventures of Nils with the Wild Geese* by Selma Lagerlöf (1905)

(1940 Russian translation by Z. M. Zadunayskaya and A. I. Lubarskaya<sup>2</sup>)

*Dragonsinger* by Anne McCaffrey (1977)<sup>1</sup>

*My Friend Flicka* by Mary O'Hara (1941)

*The Twelve Chairs* by Ilya Ilf and Evgeni Petrov (1928)

*The White Deer* by James Thurber (1945)

*The Hero and the Crown* by Robin McKinley (1984)

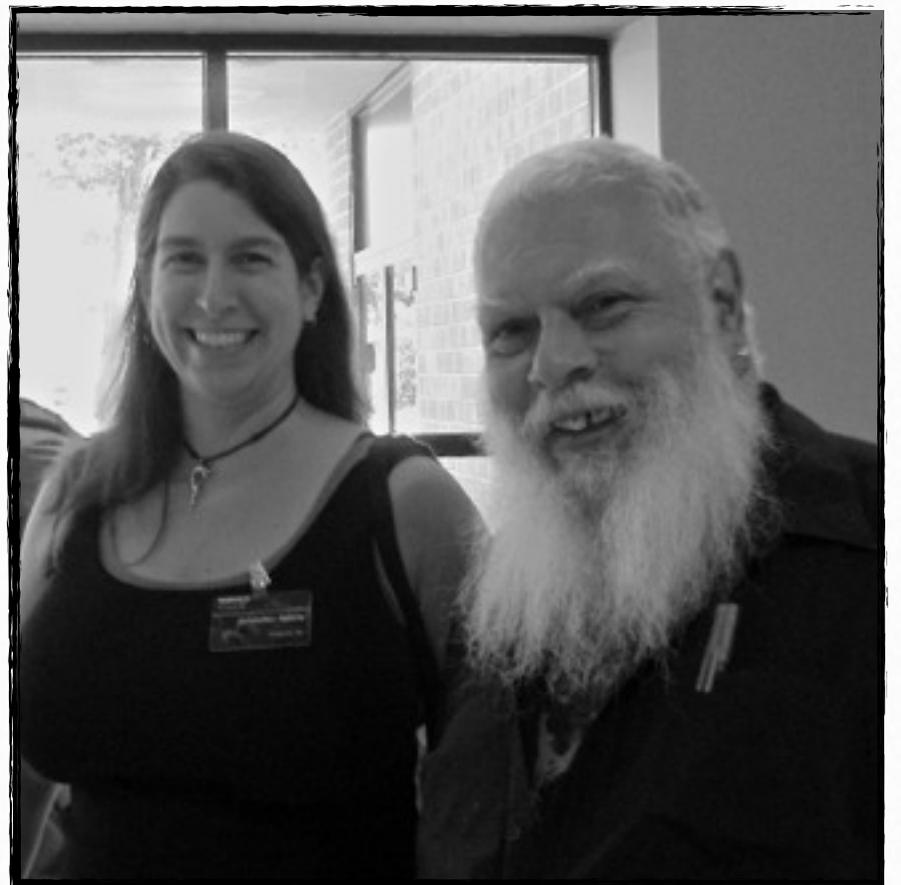
<sup>1</sup> While not the first books of the series, these were the books that sold us on that series.

<sup>2</sup> The original volume was a commissioned guide to Swedish geography in the form of a story. The Russian translation for children was the “good parts” version, condensing the plot to the adventure and leaving out the geographical information.



## *Ecdysis* at Conventions

**Top:** Jonathan Crowe and Chris Gerwel on the “Map and the Story” panel at Readercon 25 (photo: Ed Gaillard). **Bottom left:** Jonathan Crowe on the “Books That Deserve to Remain Unspoiled” panel at Readercon 25 (photo: Scott Edelman). **Bottom right:** Jennifer Seely and Samuel R. Delany at Readercon 25 (photo: David G. Hartwell). All photos used with permission.





**Top left:** Jennifer Seely browses the dealer's room at DetCon1. **Top right:** *Ecdysis* gets featured on the eFanzines.com poster in the fanzine lounge at DetCon1. **Bottom:** Tamara Vardomskaya takes time out from Clarion to visit the San Diego Comic-Con.



# Tallying Two Conventions



On July 10, 2014, Jennifer and I drove to Readercon. Exactly one week later, we drove to Detcon1. The two conventions are not the same—each has its own remit—but they were roughly the same distance away (745 km from our home in Shawville, QC to Burlington, MA; 757 km to Detroit) and were of the same duration. How did they compare, cost-wise? The graph above tallies the key expenses.

(I haven't included gas and travel expenses, because we didn't start with a full tank and didn't track fuel consumption that closely. It's not important for my point either.)

Right away you can see one major difference: food was *much* cheaper in Detroit. Each hotel's bar/restaurant had similar prices (they were both Marriotts) but the Detroit Ren-

aissance Center had a food court, and that made all the difference. The breakfast buffet at Readercon was \$40 for two people before tax and tip, but two of us could eat a decent (if fast-food) breakfast for \$15 at Detcon1. And off-site eating within walking distance was also inexpensive: two coney dogs for two came to all of \$23 after tip. At Readercon you needed a car to eat off-site, which generally meant we didn't, because you ran the risk of missing people or program.

On the other hand, as a Readercon program participant I received a free membership, and parking was free at the Boston Marriott Burlington; neither was enough to offset the difference in food costs.

—Jonathan Crowe



## She Draws While They Read

Above: **A Turn of Light** by Julie E. Czerneda (DAW, 2013). Drawn at Ad Astra 2012, Markham ON, April 2012.

For the past few years, Jennifer Seely, my spouse and the person responsible for all the original artwork in *Ecdysis*, has been drawing her way through readings at conventions—in much the same way that people livetweet panels, or knit.

She fell into this naturally. Jennifer found herself gravitating toward readings rather than panels at conventions, and drawing has always been a natural thing for her to do. “I always used to draw during my lectures at university—doodles in the margins of my

notes. I just always had drawing paper with me.”

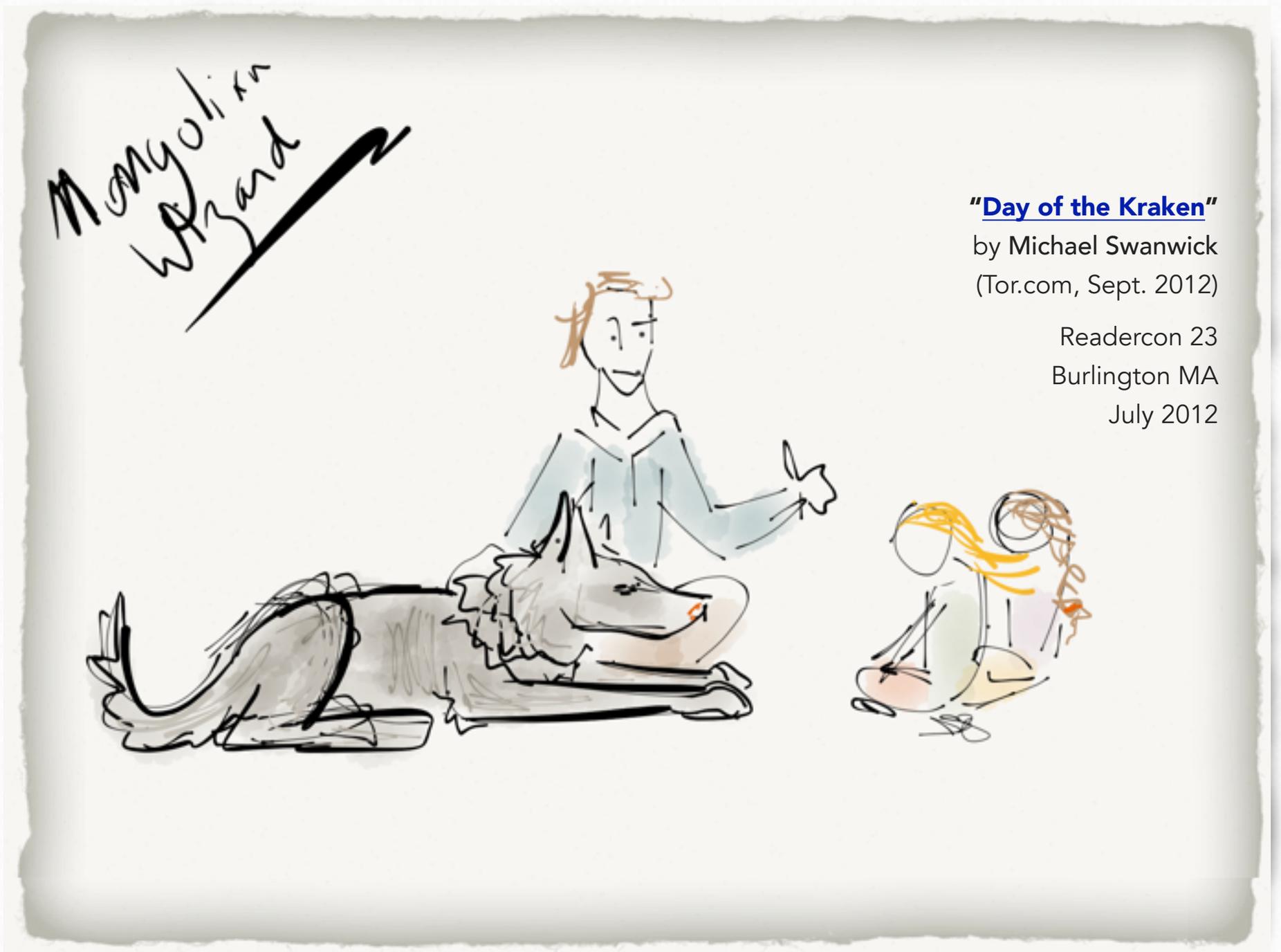
She starts by looking for an image—not necessarily the most vivid or the most central to the story, but what comes first to mind—and begins to work as the author reads. These are quick sketches, rough and unrefined, done in haste during a thirty-minute or hour-long reading.

While she has brought drawing tablets and pencil cases to conventions, that usually only happens at small, single-track conventions like Farthing Party. Usually she uses her

iPad, and usually the app she uses is [Paper by FiftyThree](#), precisely because of its ease of use. “The tools and the palette are very simple. There are no layers. It’s not technical. It’s the closest I can get to pen and paper.”

The results—some of which we’re sharing here—have been rather well received. The authors invariably love it: they’re chuffed to finish their reading to discover a bespoke bit of artwork inspired by their story. Think of it as instant fan art—often for a story that has not even been published yet.

—Jonathan Crowe



**“Day of the Kraken”**

by Michael Swanwick  
(Tor.com, Sept. 2012)

Readercon 23  
Burlington MA  
July 2012

**"Martyr's Gem"**

by C. S. E. Cooney  
(GigaNotoSaurus,  
May 2013)

Readercon 24  
Burlington MA  
July 2013



**"The Maiden to the  
Fox Did Say"**

by Amal El-Mohtar and  
Nicole Korhner-Stace  
(Lone Star Stories,  
April 2009)

Readercon 25  
Burlington MA  
July 2014

# Letters of Comment

*Ecdysis* welcomes letters of comment. Send yours to [ecdysis@mcwetboy.net](mailto:ecdysis@mcwetboy.net). Letters are lightly edited for typos, punctuation, spelling mistakes, and great justice.

Thank you kindly for the third issue of *Ecdysis*. I am getting caught up with a veritable mountain of zines, and you're next. Let's see what's inside.

Awards do have some merit, and it does feel very good to receive one. I've won a couple of Auroras, and some FAAn Awards, and for each award, there is the complaint of why did he win and not me . . . we're not good sports about this kind of thing. In some ways, I don't feel qualified to nominate or vote or win any more; SF and fandom have passed me by. The request to keep a fan or writer in mind for a nomination is an old trick, but has become pretty common. With the Auroras not handing out a trophy for Best Fanzine because there were too few nominations, fewer of us are participating in the process. I did not nominate at all this year, and I might be partially responsible for no Best Fanzine award. Perhaps I will feel better about the award next year, but I have my doubts. I guess we just want to get a little recognition for what we do, and sometimes, we feel overlooked and forgotten.

Samuel R. Delany's works have been a joy to read . . . I even got through *Dhalgren*, and while it was a tough slog, there were rewards waiting at the end. I did meet Delany once at a science fiction convention in Niagara Falls, NY some years ago . . . he taught for a while at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

The letter column . . . I was not aware that there was a new anime fanzine. I am not an anime fan, but just finished being a dealer at an anime convention. There are so many different story lines, thousands of programmes. Your response to my letter . . . we can easily see the generation gap in fandom. The shared experience that I liked, even if for a short time, made fandom more of a community for me, and I have tried to encourage it. I guess you won't miss it, if you never experienced it. We will return to SFContario this year, but if you wondered where we were all of last year's convention, we had a table in the dealer's room, selling steampunk jewelry and other merchandise. I expect we will be there this year, but I think for the Saturday only.

We have a lot of celebrating to do very soon . . . tomorrow [May 25] is our 31st wedding anniversary, and my birthday is on June 2, and both Yvonne and I start new jobs next

month, me on the 2nd (what a great birthday present!), and Yvonne on the 16th. So, I am glad I have been able keep in touch, and continue with correspondence. I can see the differences in our instances of fandom; mine was about the fans, and their activities. Many thanks for this issue, and please do keep them coming.

—Lloyd Penney

*Belated congratulations, Lloyd—unfortunately they could not have come sooner, on account of **Ecdysis** being on a quarterly-ish schedule.*

To explain what Lloyd is talking about: the Aurora Awards are Canadian science fiction awards voted on like the Hugos. The Aurora for Best Fan Publication won't be handed out this year "due to insufficient eligible nominees." This means the category could not achieve (1) a minimum of three nominees (2) each having a minimum of five nominations (see [eligibility rules](#)). Given how few nominations were received for last year's Auroras (see detailed results at [this link](#)), it's easy to see how that happened: a few fewer votes for each nominee would have been enough to cancel the category. (Though to be fair, it doesn't take many votes to make the final ballot in any Aurora category: even a spot on the Best Novel final ballot took only 20 nominations.)

As for SFCOntario. Well. (Deep sigh.) Even before Jennifer's cancer treatment made our attendance at this year's convention a bad idea, we weren't planning on attending this

*year. Now I have a lot of affection for that convention: I've been to all four iterations so far and done programming for three of them, I'm on friendly terms with the con organizers, and it's where a lot of the **Ecdysis** contributors first met one another. But last year the con seemed a bit abandoned, to be honest. It was much the same in 2012, but then it had the excuse of having the World Fantasy Convention the week before, which drew away a lot of potential attendees and participants who couldn't hack two conventions back-to-back. But it seemed just as depopulated in 2013. This con should be growing; instead it seems to be limping along. (There were some more specific problems last year, but I shouldn't get into them here.)*

—Jonathan Crowe



Derek Newman-Stille receives the Aurora Award for Best Fan Publication at Can-Con in Ottawa on October 6, 2013.

## NONFICTION FOR SF/FANTASY READERS:

# Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen*

What do a cyberpunk author's famous aphorism and 19th-century rural France have in common?

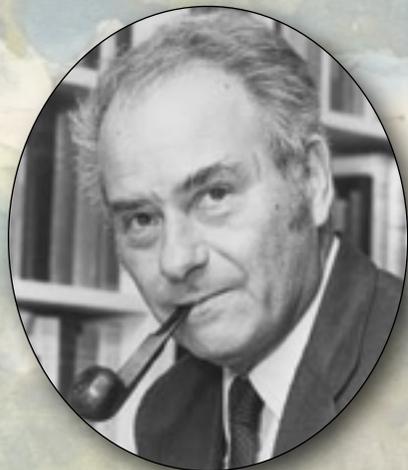
Published in 1976, Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* foreshadows that famous quote of William Gibson: "The future is already here—it's just not very evenly distributed." In 19th-century France, it was the 19th century that was not very evenly distributed: in the book, Weber shows that while some parts of France were chugging away at industrial modernity, other parts were carrying on as though the French Revolution never happened. Weber describes France as existing in several different "time zones" that were only brought into sync by force of the policies of the French Third Republic (1870–1940), but truth be told there were a lot of French villages for which time never really started. France existed largely

on paper, and most of the French didn't even speak French, instead speaking a local dialect or regional language, like Occitan or Breton, that a French speaker would not be able to understand. That is, until the Republic, whose railways, compulsory education and military service, among other policies, built a more homogeneous, more modern French state out of a differentiated and diverse rural population.

*Peasants into Frenchmen* is a key text of modern French history, one that, when I read it during my fourth year of university, blew my head clean off. Weber, the Romanian-born, Cambridge-educated historian of France who taught at UCLA until his retirement in 1993 ([he died in 2007](#)), wrote books notable for their accessibility and readability. The most accessible and readable are titles like *France: Fin de Siècle* (1986) and *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (1994). But *Peasants into Frenchmen* is arguably his most important: while a little less accessible, it's full of eyeball kicks and startling revelations: think Charles C. Mann's *1491* for the French countryside. Fantasy novelists in particular should find it instructive and illuminating; everyone else will find it merely fascinating.

*Peasants into Frenchmen* is still in print as a trade paperback from Stanford University Press. An ebook is not yet available.

—Jonathan Crowe



Eugen Weber  
1925–2007

