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הַחַיִּים הַמְּשֻׁלָּטִים

# HELIOsphere 2019

April 5 - 7, 2019

DoubleTree by Hilton

Tarrytown, New York

Guests of Honor:

**Charlie Jane Anders**

Winner, 2017 Nebula for Best Novel,

*All the Birds in the Sky,*

Co-Founder, [iog.com](http://iog.com)

**Laura Antoniou**

Author of the Marketplace series

*(with more guests to be announced ...)*

*(Early Bird Registration Opens on Sunday of HELIOsphere 2018)*

## **Welcome to HELIOSphere 2018!**

We, the members of New Amsterdam Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom, Inc. (NASF3), welcome you to HELIOSphere 2018. With the success of our debut last year, we just had to do it again ...

We'd like to thank our fantastic Guests of Honor and Featured Artist, Eric Flint, Charles Gannon, Mark Oshiro, Cecilia Tan, and Tom Kidd, for gracing us with their presence and participation. As well, our thanks go out to all of our other guests participating in our program.

When we founded our club and started planning our first convention two years ago, it was because we thought the New York area needed something new and different — something that was very much a part of fandom as we know it, but also not just open and inviting to the novel and innovative, but in active pursuit of it.

We think we accomplished some of that at the first HELIOSphere and hope to continue doing so this year. We're confident you'll agree as you check out our programming, participate in a Books'N'Brew session with a favorite author, display your house pride at the Hogwarts social on Friday night, or boogie down in your costume, cosplay ensemble, or snazzy threads at the blues dance on Saturday night.

The heliosphere is “the region of space where interstellar medium is blown away by solar wind”; in a sense, the bubble defining the extent of the solar system. In that respect, HELIOSphere, the convention, is a bubble lasting for this weekend wherein fandom and our dreams hold sway.

Join us, and enjoy ...

### **About NASF3**

New Amsterdam Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom is the corporate entity that presents HELIOSphere, but it is more than that.

We are a club and group of fans into Science Fiction and Fantasy in all of its forms. We are readers, gamers, costumers, cosplayers, and more.

HELIOSphere is currently our biggest project, but we have had gaming nights/social meetups in Riverdale, in the Bronx during the past months. We plan on having more, as well as socials, author readings, and other special events.

NASF3 is incorporated in New York as a Not-for-Profit Corporation and has 501(c)(3) tax status. We are all volunteers, and if you're interested, we invite you to check us out and get involved.

Mary Catelynn Cunningham  
Chair, HELIOSphere 2018

Mark Richards  
President, New Amsterdam Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom, Inc.

The Committee and Staff of HELIOSphere 2017  
[www.heliosphereny.org](http://www.heliosphereny.org)

The Board of Directors of New Amsterdam Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom, Inc.  
[www.nasf3.org](http://www.nasf3.org)

# SAFER SPACE POLICY

HELIOsphere Convention and the Board of New Amsterdam Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom intend to have an enjoyable and friendly event; therefore we have set up the following rules to make our space safe and fun for all. Any violation of these policies or other behaviors that the Convention Chairs and Event Staff deem inappropriate will result in actions up to and including, but not limited to, revoking the offender's membership and possible removal from the hotel.

Be respectful and courteous towards other attendees.

Unacceptable behavior is generally any behavior that annoys, alarms, or threatens another person or group. This includes unwanted physical contact, following someone around a public area without their consent, or threatening to physically attack someone. If you approach someone and they tell you "no" or to leave them alone, you must do so and have no further contact. If you fail to honor their request, they may have a legitimate complaint of unacceptable behavior.

Harassment of convention members online or in electronic venues will be treated as seriously as physical harassment. If you aren't sure what constitutes harassment, err on the side of caution and restrict your contact.

If you are having a problem, please ask any convention staff member for help. They will assist you in reporting the incident and make sure that you get any help that is needed.

You can also come to the Info Desk in Grand Pre South (near registration)

Please remember that we need to know about any incidents during the convention to be able to take immediate action. If you have been accused of harassment and feel that a committee member's response was unjustified, you may appeal to the convention chairs, but their decision will be final.

If you wish to report an incident after the convention, or would like to express your concern about an incident that occurred outside of the event involving a convention attendee, you can contact the Event Chair via email at any time.

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*Artwork on covers and interior — sketches by Tom Kidd*

## HELIOSphere Committee & Staff

### **Mary Catelynn Cunningham, Chair**

GoH Liaison	Debi Chowdhury and Ira Donewitz
Graphic Designer	Ken Winter
Hotel Liaison	Mary Catelynn Cunningham, Dennis McCunney (on-site)
Publications	Mark Richards

### **[Area Head — Liz Crefin]**

Programming	Liz Crefin, Gabi Morel, and Mark Richards
Filk	Mark Grossman
Gaming	Daniel Adler
	Double Exposure/Envoy ( <a href="http://www.dexposure.com/envoy/">http://www.dexposure.com/envoy/</a> )
	Staff: Kevin Greaves and Chris Ramos
Green Room	Kathleen Morrison

### **[Area Head — Mary Catelynn Cunningham]**

Website	Mary Catelynn Cunningham
Tech	Rick Kovalcik and Mike Panciera

### **[Area Head — Gabi Morel]**

Registration	Dave Cantor, Andrea Senchy, Mark Richards
Volunteers	Gabi Morel and Monet Johnson

### **[Area Head — Tara Walsh]**

Dealers' Room	Joni Brill Dashoff and Saul Jaffe
Fan Tables	Mark Richards
Con Suite	Susan Isaacs and Vicki Schnoes
Ops	Tara Walsh
	Staff: Don Weimer and James O'Connell

## ABOUT ERIC FLINT

Eric Flint came to the writing game relatively late in life. After winning the 1993 Writers of the Future contest, his career as a writer began in earnest with the publication in 1997 of his first novel, *Mother of Demons*; two years later, he became a full time writer.

Since then, Eric has been busy at work as a writer, and not long after, as an editor as well. Working with other writers came early, starting with *An Oblique Approach*, the first of what would become six novels in the Belisarius series, written in collaboration with David Drake. An alternate history set in the Byzantine Empire, featuring Justinian's general Belisarius, its premise of interference from the future would become a theme in his other alternate history work.



Among Flint's other collaborations (and by no means a complete list!):

- With Dave Freer, the Rats, Bats and Vats series of two humorous SF novels and *Pyramid Scheme* and *Pyramid Power*.
- With K.D. Wentworth, and then with David Carrico, the Jao Empire books.
- With Ryk Spoor, the Boundary series and the followup, the Castaway series.
- With David Weber, three novels and an anthology set in Weber's Honor Harrington universe.
- With Dave Freer and Mercedes Lackey, the Heirs of Alexandria series, an alternate history/historical fantasy set in a 1530s Republic of Venice and a Europe where magic works.
- Again with Freer and Lackey, sequels to James H. Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres*, *The Wizard of Karres* and *The Sorceress of Karres*.

**The preceding is not an exhaustive list — but we would be remiss if we didn't mention Eric's new collaboration with Gorg Huff and Paula Goodlett, *The Demons of Paris*, the first novel in their Demon Rift series — which is being launched here at HELIOSphere this weekend!**

In the alternate history column once again, Flint has written two novels set in Jacksonian America, *The Rivers of War* and *1824: The Arkansas War*.

It's in a period about two hundred years earlier that a large part of his work has been based, however. We're talking, of course, of 1632 and the Ring of Fire shared world that has grown up around it, consisting of over 20 novels, several anthologies, and the continuing e-zine *The Grantville Gazette*, all of which we go into more detail about elsewhere. The 1632-verse is itself part of a larger set of milieus grounded in the same premise, the Assiti Shards universes.

In addition to his own writing and acting as gatekeeper and referee for the 1632-verse, Flint is editor of several series, reissuing the work of past SF authors, including the previously mentioned James H. Schmitz, Keith Laumer, Christopher Anvil, Murray Leinster, Randall Garrett, Tom Godwin, and Howard Myers. From 2006 to 2010 he edited the e-zine Jim Baen's Universe.

With so much of his work in the genre of alternate history, it's no surprise that Eric Flint graduated *summa cum laude* and then earned his masters in history from UCLA. He left his doctoral program to become a political activist in the labor movement, supporting himself in a variety of jobs that included machinist, longshoreman, and truck driver, as well as labor union organizer. Then he started to write science fiction (which is where our story started ... ).

## A LITTLE BIT ABOUT CHARLES GANNON

Three of Charles Gannon's award-winning Terran Republic hard SF novels featuring Caine Riordan have been Nebula finalists. The fourth, *Caine's Mutiny*, came out last February, and we were pleased to have copies, as well as Chuck himself, at the first HELIOSphere.

Fans of the series who are themselves well known authors have come together to contribute to an anthology set in the same universe, *Lost Signals of the Terran Republic*, the Kickstarter for which crushed both its initial and both of its stretch goals. More news to come!

In the gaming world, Chuck's credits include extensive contributions as a writer and editor for the second edition of the Game Designers Workshop's classic SF RPG (role playing game), *Traveller*, as well as other RPGs published by GDW, including *Twilight 2000*, *Dark Conspiracy*, and *2300 AD*. The collaborative nature of game design served him well ...

Besides contributions to the *Starfire*, *Honorverse*, *Man-Kzin*, and *War World* universes, Chuck is a major contributor to the 1632 or Ring of Fire shared world, co-writing with Eric Flint *1635: The Papal Stakes* (which made the Wall Street Journal hardcover SF bestseller list), *1636: Commander Cantrell in the West Indies*, and the recently released *1636: The Vatican Sanction*.

Dr. Charles Gannon is not only an accomplished creator and contributor to fictional worlds. In *Rumors of War* and *Infernal Machines* he proves to be an astute observer and analyst of how those hard SF narratives may have actually affected and shaped real world military imagination and policy.

Finally, besides being a prolific and accomplished author and polymath, Chuck Gannon is a genuinely nice guy. As you will discover.



## A FEW WORDS ABOUT 1632 AND THE RING OF FIRE

If you're at this convention and are already a fan of the 1632 or Ring of Fire series, then you don't need this brief introduction.

If you haven't encountered it before, then perhaps a few words about it are in order.

In 2000 Eric Flint wrote, and Baen Books published, the novel *1632*. The underlying initial premise is that the Assiti, an advanced alien species, in pursuit of what they consider Art, habitually displace bits of the world into other times and places, exchanging them with what was there before.

(By the way, we don't meet the Assiti, at least not in this book. We don't know why they do this, or why they consider it Art.)

In *1632*, they have scooped up a six mile wide tract of land consisting of the fictional town of Grantville, West Virginia, complete with its power plant, from April 2000 and exchanged it with a same sized tract from the region of Thuringia, in Germany, in May 1631 ... smack dab in the middle of the Thirty Years War.

The inhabitants of Grantville must cope with the town's space-time dislocation, the surrounding raging war, language barriers, and numerous social and political issues. Resourcefulness and their technological advantages grant them some initial success by the end of the book, where it looks like a sort of American Revolution may be brewing ... 150 years early and in the Old World.

Having solicited interest and online advice from the beginning, including on Baen's Bar, Baen Books' online forum, rapidly growing fan involvement inspired Flint to throw open his universe, inviting other authors to contribute to the milieu.

Possibly the most expansive example of the shared world phenomenon, it now consists of a growing collection of novels, anthologies, and a periodical, *The Grantville Gazette*, with the action spreading throughout Europe and beyond.

It has also spawned an annual gathering for the fans and contributors of the series, a mini-convention that for the last several years has been hosted by another convention. Last year's 1632 mini-con was held at Balticon.

This year, HELIOSphere has the pleasure of acting as host for the fans of 1632. Welcome!

Want to know more about it? The official 1632 fan site is *1632.org*. Issues of *The Grantville Gazette* can be found at *grantvillegazette.com*. And while you're here at HELIOSphere, check out our program items "Welcome to the Ring of Fire and the Terran Republic" on Friday evening and Jim Freund's GoH interview with Eric Flint on Saturday.

And finally, the first taste is free ...

The novel that started it all, *1632*, is available as a free e-book from Baen. Go to *www.baen.com*, and under "Read Baen" on the menu, select "Free Library."

 **DUBLIN 2019**  
AN IRISH WORLDCON



**August 15 - 19, 2019**  
**Convention Centre Dublin**  
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**[info@dublin2019.com](mailto:info@dublin2019.com)**



## MARK DOES HELIOSPHERE



A couple of months ago, three of us on the HELIOSphere committee had dinner with Mark at this great tapas restaurant in Washington Heights.

No convention, Mark wasn't on tour; Mark lives in New York now. If you've followed him at all, then you know he moved here from California last year.

We had previously met him, at the Worldcon in Kansas City, but this was the first time we spent more than a few moments with him. Mark is articulate, knowledgeable and funny. A fantastic dinner companion, and more ... lucky us.

(The food was fine as well. Manolo, at 176th and Broadway — free plug.)

You might, or might not, have expected this from the Hugo-nominated writer of Mark Does Stuff, comprising Mark Watches and Mark Reads. That sort of talent with the written word does not always translate into great face-to-face interaction, but in Mark's case it does.

That's not all however. Mr. Oshiro's a man of many talents.

One is as an editor. For the acclaimed June 2015 *Queers Destroy Science Fiction* special issue of *Lightspeed* magazine, Mark served as nonfiction editor. He also conducted an interview with David Gerrold for that section. (David was one of last year's HELIOSphere Guests of Honor.)

With Foz Meadows, he co-edited *Speculative Fiction 2015*, a collection of online commentary on SF and fantasy appearing during that year. Celebrating diversity and change and featuring a stellar cast of contributors, this collection showcased the best of the field.

Mark is in the trenches as an activist as well, both online and offline. One of his gigs is as board member and President of Con or Bust, a not-for-profit organization devoted to increasing opportunities for people of color/non-white people to participate in science fiction fandom, chiefly by helping them attend SFF cons and be their own awesome selves.

He has now also joined the ranks of writers of fiction. Mark's debut novel is a YA contemporary tale, *Anger Is A Gift*. Mark's gifted us with an excerpt, but I can't wait to get my hands on the whole thing when it's released in April. The advance reviews promise a compelling masterpiece; as one Goodreads reviewer wrote, "This book was excellent and brutal and so, so necessary."

(Which reminds me, I need to ask Mark whether the book's title being the same as a lyric from Rage Against the Machine's song "Freedom" is a coincidence. I suspect not.)

Before wrapping up — at least for now — let's also talk about Mark's facility as a raconteur and performer. Over the last couple of years he has acquired a reputation for his hilarious readings of the work of Chuck Tingle, author of the 2016 Hugo-nominated short story *Space Raptor Butt Invasion*. He'll be reading a Tingle opus for us on Saturday night at the con; come on down, it'll be fun.

So, welcome to HELIOSphere, and to the opportunity to hang out with our awesome guests, including Mark Oshiro. Lucky you.

## CECILIA TAN — AN APPRECIATION

“Cecilia Tan writes about her many passions, from erotic fantasy to baseball. Not only is she an author, but she has also edited over fifty erotic anthologies, and founded her own publishing house, Circlet Press. Her short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines, and her non fiction on baseball has been in *Baseball Ink*, *Gotham Baseball Magazine*, *Yankees Magazine*, *Yankees Annual*, and elsewhere.”

- bio taken from **Taking the Lead**



That’s a pretty good author bio, as bios go. It tells you enough about Cecilia to give you a hint of who she is. Yes - just a hint. You’d think - Author! Publisher! Baseball! Erotica! FIFTY anthologies! might be enough to fill a life. You’d be right, if we were talking about any other person on the planet. But this is Cecilia Tan. There’s just not enough room in any back-cover bio to even begin describing all the passion and wondrous complexity of Cecilia Tan.

One thousand words or less? Still not enough.

Let’s start with just words, then. Trailblazer. Genuine. Mentor. Generous. Activist. Creative. Visionary.

Find them all in relation to one of her greatest life works, the groundbreaking and still-clinging to life publishing company of Circlet Press. In a world where erotica and science fiction and high fantasy never went together, Circlet was the Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup of an imprint that went where no publisher had gone before, putting erotic scenes in outer space and swords and sorcery in sexual coming of age stories.

This is how legends are born. Someone hears “no” and they respond “Oh, yeah? I got this.”

You might have already heard of how Cecilia printed up the first batch of Circlet Press chapbooks and sold them at conventions. Since then, Circlet Press has focused on genre fiction featuring erotic and positive sexual encounters between people of all gender identities, and featured the works of such authors as:

- Nebula Award winning author Catherine Asaro (*Soul of Light*)
- Hugo Award winning author N.K Jemisin (*The Dancer’s War*)
- Multiple award winning author Laura Antoniou (The Marketplace series)
- Multiple award winning author Elizabeth Schechter (**House of Sable Locks**, among others)
- Hugo Award Nominated author Mary Ann Mohanraj (**The Stars Change**)

It’s quite clear that over the past twenty five years, Circlet Press has had a lasting impression on the publishing world. By showing that sexual pleasure is part of the human experience, and that it has a place in speculative fiction, Circlet Press opened the eyes of authors and publishers alike. Erotically charged science fiction and paranormal romance may be commonplace and popular now, as seen in the works of Sylvia Day, Jacqueline Carey, Anne Bishop, and Laurell K. Hamilton, but Circlet Press did it first. *Cecilia* did it first.

Oh, and while she was doing that, she was also throwing play parties at science fiction conventions and hosting geeky meet-ups at kinky conventions. Teaching and speaking on topics ranging from bisexuality and kink to baseball and Harry Potter house identities. Occasionally while cosplaying. There is not enough space to get into her passion for gourmet dining, her adventures with cats, her two black belts, her famous hospitality. Like the New Year's open houses and the duck day extravaganzas and of course, Porn Camp. I'd tell you about Porn Camp, but then you'd all want to come and there's only so much room.

The world occasionally notices how awesome Cecilia Tan is and gives her some plaques and statues. She's has been honored for her work as part of the leather and kink communities, first in 2004 with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Leather Association, then in 2011 with the President's Award from the Pantheon of Leather. In 2010 she was inducted into the Saints & Sinners Literary Festival's Hall of Fame for GLBT Writers and Editors. Circlet Press was co-winner of Bisexual Publisher of the Year in 2014. Her online web serial "Daron's Guitar Chronicles" won the inaugural Rose and Bay Awards for Crowdfunded Fiction. Because she was a trailblazer there as well. Oh, and her "billionaire BDSM" novel *SLOW SURRENDER* won the 2013 RT Reviewer's Choice Award for Erotic Romance because seriously, one of us had to write something like 50 Shades and make some money and Cecilia stepped up to the bat and whacked it out of the park.

But you know what? It's more important to know Cecilia Tan is a true mensch. A role model of humanity with whom you can kick off your shoes and relax. People often tell of sitting down with her and talking about completely unrelated topics — tattoos, cats, scotch, baseball — only to find out at the end of the conversation that they were talking to one of their favorite writers. She is interested in everyone at face-value — in addition to writing stories, she will listen to yours. That's Cecilia.

And of course, Cecilia was — and still is — part of the immense, record-breaking event known as the Fetish Flea. Founder and guiding light, organizer and inspiration, this event owes an interstellar debt to her, not only for her work, but for the years of planning and recruitment, of training up volunteers, giving people pushes into leadership, developing and maintaining a standard of business and community service that makes the Fetish Flea a unique star in a crowded field of pageants and ever-splintering special interest groups. WWCD? — What Would Cecilia Do? — should be stamped upon every meeting agenda forever and possibly issued as locking bracelets for those who need that sort of thing.

No, there really isn't enough room to describe Cecilia Tan and all the things she's done and why she deserves to be lounging on a beach somewhere. (Except we need her like our own personal Wonder Woman climbing up the ladder into No Man's Land and she will always answer the call if she can.) But if you have never heard of her before, just imagine the wealth awaiting you! And if you're a friend from afar, find a way to let her know, she really isn't scary or distant. (Just busy.) And if you're lucky enough to go back with her a long way like the people who got together to try and describe the ineffable here — boo-yah! Lucky us.

*Elizabeth Schechter, TammyJo Eckhart, Lori Perkins & Laura Antoniou*

## ABOUT TOM KIDD



Tom Kidd has worked for a number of publishers: Baen Books, Random House, DAW Books, Warner Books, Doubleday, Ballantine Books, Marvel Comics and Tor Books. He has illustrated two classic works of literature: *The Three Musketeers* (1998 — William Morrow) and *The War of the Worlds* (2001 — Harper Collins), and there are four books of his art: *The Tom Kidd Sketchbook* (1990 — Tundra), *Kiddography: The Art & Life of Tom Kidd* (2006 — Paper Tiger), *OtherWorlds* (2010 — Impact) and *How to Draw and Paint Dragons* (2010 — Quarto). His art has won him a World Fantasy Award (Best Artist 2004) and eight Chesley Awards. Kidd has also done design

work for film, theme parks, entertainment products, and all types of conceptual design work for such clients as Walt Disney, Rhythm & Hues, and Universal Studios. His work has been displayed in a wide array of venues, including The Delaware Art Museum, The Society of Illustrators, and the Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame. His painting “Port Rockwell” was used for the invitation and poster for the show “At the Edge: Art of the Fantastic” at the Allentown Art Museum in 2012.

Tom is the official artist for the “1632” series of alternate history books by Eric Flint and others published by Baen Books, for which he has done over 30 covers and counting.

With Subterranean Press he did an illustrated version of *Songs of Dying Earth: Stories in Honor of Jack Vance* as well as a deluxe illustrated version of *Dying Earth*.

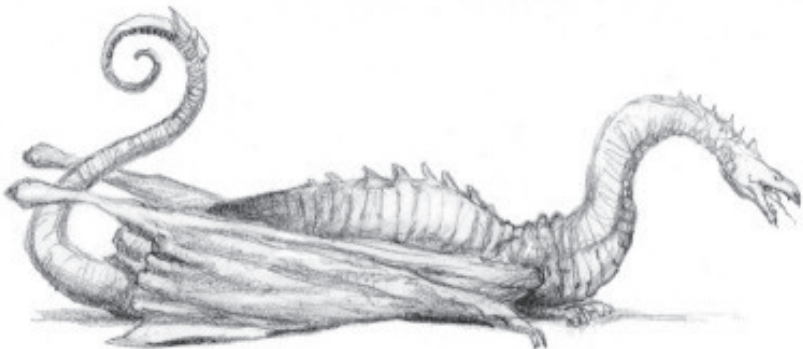
For Topps, and for the sheer goofiness of it, he did some *Mars Attacks!* cards in 2013.

He illustrated for Centipede Press (2015 – 17): *Swords and Deviltry* by Fritz Leiber, both cover and interior illustrations, it is the first book of the Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser series. In 2015 he illustrated the first book of the Kane series *Dark Crusade* by Karl Edward Wagner. Right now, Tom is finishing up work on a deluxe illustrated edition of *Elric: Fortress of the Pearl* by Michael Moorcock.

His favorite and most time-consuming obsession is a unpublished book called *Gnemo: Airships, Adventure, Exploration*. This is the sort of stuff that makes him happy.

You can see an alliterative selection of his art here:

<https://tomkidd.myportfolio.com>.



## FROM ANGER IS A GIFT

Mark Oshiro

Shamika's gold hoop earrings jingled as she moved her head from side to side. She let out another laugh and put a plate of biscuits on the table. "Oh, Wanda," she said between breaths. "Your son *definitely* got something to say."

"I knew it," Moss's mama said, and she brought over a plate stacked high with chicken. "He always gets all quiet when he's trying to avoid something."

He sighed with exasperation. "Am I *always* that obvious?"

Wanda sat down to his right and then caressed his arm. "Not always," she said.

"But usually," Shamika blurted out, and then she and Wanda had a good laugh at that. Moss smiled at her and grabbed a couple of wings from the plate, then dropped them quickly because they were still hot. He hadn't seen as much of Shamika in the last few months; she'd given herself a much-needed vacation after tax season. Her afro was huge now, and he admired how well-kept it was. *I need a cut soon*, Moss realized. His hair had started getting long on top, and he needed a touch-up to his fade. He made a mental note to hit up Martin for this weekend.

"So spit it out, Moss," his mother said, breaking off part of a biscuit that Shamika had made. "What's going on?"

He stuck a broccoli spear in his mouth and chewed on it, his eyes locked with his mama's. *Just say it. Stop delaying.*

"So . . ." he said, drawing it out, his heart pumping in a familiar flopping rhythm. "I wanna ask if I can go over to a friend's house Friday night." He breathed out. "A new friend, I should say."

"Okay," his mom said, continuing to eat. "Do they live far? How long you planning to be out?"

He ignored those questions and went for the bigger issue. "It's a boy, Mama."

It took a second for this to register; her face was confused at first, and then the realization of what Moss meant grew, lighting up her eyes, her mouth slowly dropping open. "Oh," she said. Then: "*Oh.*"

Shamika, however, was not at all fazed. She leaned forward, her elbows on the table, a

mischievous smirk on her face. "I want to know *everything*," she said. "What's his name? Where'd you meet him?" She paused, went quiet. "He got money?"

"Shamika!" Wanda reached across the table and playfully swatted at her.

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding!" Moss could tell she was having fun with it, though. She zeroed in on him again. "But seriously, I need to know everything."

"Actually, I *do* need to know more," Wanda agreed. "Who is this? You're not on those dating apps, are you?"

His face curled up in disbelief. "*No*, Mama, I'm not. I wouldn't dream of it."

She nodded her approval at him. "You wait 'til you're eighteen for those," she reminded him.

"I'd stay away from them *entirely* if I were you," said Shamika. When Wanda made to say something, Shamika raised a hand to stop her. "They're creepy! I got some dude on one of them telling me that he wished I would do more than his taxes." She shuddered. "Men are trash." She fixed Moss with her gaze. "But tell us about this guy anyway."

He shook his head. *She is so extra*, he thought, but it was why he loved the days when she took up cooking duty in their house. Moss adored Njemile's parents, but Shamika was somewhat younger than his mother, and he found he could relate to her more. He set down the wing he'd been working on and wiped his mouth with a napkin.

"I met him on Sunday," he began. "On BART. His name is Javier. He said something nice about my bike, and we started talking."

His mother narrowed her eyes. "How old is he, baby?"

He paused, and he instantly knew that the pause was a mistake.

"Moss, how *old* is he?"

"I didn't ask," he said. "But he goes to Eastside so he can't be more than a year older than me."

"Just checking," she said. "Go 'head."

"Anyway, he seems pretty cool. We swapped numbers and have been texting—"

“So that’s who you been on that phone with,” said Wanda, and she smirked at Shamika.

“I swear, Mama, you and me are too close,” he said, shaking his head at her.

“It’s fine, Moss, I promise. Was he there for . . . you know. . . .”

In the silence that Wanda let hang there, Shamika looked from Moss to Wanda and back again. “For *what*?”

Moss pushed his food around for a bit. “I had another panic attack,” he said, his voice sheepish.

“Oh, honey,” said Shamika. “I’m sorry. Cops again? Or something else?”

“Actually, I’m surprised it wasn’t the cops,” he said, looking up at her. “There was a rally at the West Oakland station for some dude who got killed, so the place was swarming with ‘em. But no, it’s cuz I got recognized again.”

Shamika’s cheery manner dropped off her. “Sometimes,” she said quietly, “this community is too much.”

“Anyway, yeah, he was there,” Moss said. “Saw the whole thing.”

“Wait,” said Shamika. “Did you give him your number before or after that?”

“After. Why?”

“Whew,” she said, throwing her hands up. “Marry that man right now.”

Wanda swatted at her again. “Shamika!”

“Look, I’m just *sayin’*,” she said. “This boy already knows Moss is crazy and is *still* interested?” She turned back to Moss. “He’s a keeper. Trust me. I have to go through this whole routine to explain my medication to every person I date, and I hate it. Some people bounce the second I bring out one of those orange bottles.”

“Really?” Moss said. “*That* soon?”

“It’s already not easy bein’ depressed,” said Shamika. “Adding another person to that rarely makes it better. So take it from me: If he’s already cool with you and your head, that’s a step above most people I’ve met.”

“She’s not wrong,” said Wanda. “Though please don’t propose to this Javier just yet, honey.”

Moss chuckled. “I won’t.” He crossed his hands over his chest. “So what do you think? He lives over near Fruitvale, wants me to come over and play video games and stuff.”

“Will his parents be there?” Wanda asked.

“Parent,” corrected Moss. “It’s just his mom. And yeah, it will be supervised. I’m not *that* scandalous.”

She pursed her lips, then took another bite of one of Shamika’s biscuits. “Okay,” she said. “I mean, it’s time. I been wonderin’ if you were ever going to date anyone.”

“*Mamaaaaa*,” he droned. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means you’re hella cute, Moss, and boys should be throwing themselves at you,” said Shamika, and her earrings tinkled as she laughed.

“You have any condoms?”

The question from his mama hit him square in the chest, and he actually choked on one of the biscuits. Shamika roared with laughter as she passed Moss a fresh glass of water. He swallowed it down and glared at Wanda, who looked far too pleased for his comfort.

“We are not having sex, *Mama*,” he shot out. “Certainly not with his mom in the same apartment.”

“I feel like I would be remiss in my parenting if I didn’t bring it up,” she said. “I had sex by the time I was sixteen, and your seventeenth is next month. It’s not like it’s unreasonable to assume it’s going to happen soon.”

“I don’t think I’m ready yet,” Moss admitted, his voice dropping in volume. “I just don’t feel like I wanna hook up with someone without getting to know them.”

“A true romantic,” said Shamika. “You’re gonna have this boy  *swooning* over you.”

Moss smiled at her, then his mother. “So it’s okay? You don’t have a problem with it?”

Wanda didn’t say anything at first. She was examining his face, and he saw her eyes well up and sparkle. “Of course it’s okay, Moss,” she said. “I just want you to be happy.” She sniffed. “*Responsibly* happy, I should add.”

“I promise, Mama,” he said, standing up and grabbing his plate. “I’m gonna go tell Javier, if you don’t mind.”

“Go ahead,” she said, and she handed Moss her empty plate. He walked over to the sink to deposit them, and she added, “After you do the dishes.”

*She’s evil*, he thought. *But I love her.*

## COMING OUT AS SLYTHERIN

Cecilia Tan

It's Pride month, but I have a slightly different story of coming out to tell you this time around. This is the story of how I became a Slytherin. More precisely, it's about how I discovered I already was a Slytherin and how internalized Slytherphobia had me in denial until I found my people. Going to my first Harry Potter convention was very much like going to my first Pride parade, and here's why.

I loved Harry Potter from the moment I read the very first book, but I didn't fall headlong into the community of fandom until around 2005 when I started reading copious amounts of Harry Potter fanfic online. At the time my career as a fiction writer was in a slump and I was ripe to be distracted by a new obsession. I soon decided it was rude to lurk. After all, in the fanfic economy comments are the only currency an author receives. So I created a LiveJournal account. (Remember LJ? LJ is dead; long live LJ.) At the time I had never taken a "Sorting test" online and I assumed on the basis of my nerd quotient that I was a Ravenclaw. I even took the fandom name "Ravenna" to reflect what a Ravenclaw I felt I was.

Of course, the reason I took a fandom name at all was because I was in the closet in a number of ways. Within the online fanfic community I was in the closet about being a "real" writer (I'd been publishing fiction professionally for well over a decade at that point), and in the real world I was in the closet about being into fanfic. Now in the post-50-Shades world, it seems quaint that authors used to hide their fanfic pasts when they "went pro" and that those who continued to write fanfic on the side for fun still felt they had to keep it a "dirty secret."

The fact that much of this fanfic was actually sexually graphic, and much of it queer, was secondary to it being fanfic at all, but only just. Some authors were simply afraid to be identified as playing in "someone else's sandbox," even if what they wrote was G-rated, as if doing this were some kind of failure of their own imagination. This didn't make sense to me. Painters are encouraged to go to the art museum and sketch and copy the masters. Musicians are urged to perform the songs of other composers before they ever write their own. Writers, though, are expected to lock ourselves in a room alone

and strain until somehow genius pops out.

My skepticism over this prohibition about writing — for fun, not profit — in other universes or with pre-existing characters was only deepened when I added in considerations of how judgmental people were being about erotic fanfic in particular. Slash was not a new thing. The heyday of Kirk/Spock began back when *Star Trek: The Original Series* was merely called *Star Trek*. (1966-1969. Yes, slash fanfic started before I, or most of us reading this, were born.<sup>1</sup>) Having been an activist for LGBT rights and visibility since the 1980s, and an erotica writer and BDSM activist since the 1990s, I was Not Okay with people saying that erotic or gay romance fanfic was something to be ashamed of. Excuse me, but no. Some pro authors even likened fanfic writers to pedophiles or rapists.<sup>2</sup> It was the same old sex panic that forced LGBTQ people into the closet in the first place.

So once I realized that was a closet, my activist side took over and set about trying to kick the door down. That's been my m.o. all my life: find a closet door? Kick it down. That goes for closets within closets, too. I'm bisexual. I always have been. But when I was in college in the 1980s, the predominant advocacy group for queer students on campus was the LGSA (Lesbian Gay Student Alliance). Bisexuals were basically only considered "half-gay" and therefore only half welcome.

It was because of feeling ambivalent about whether I belonged that I stood outside the building to listen to the keynote speech given during Pride Week (this was back when Pride was only allotted a week on the campus, instead of a month like it is now) by Gerry Studds, a US congressman who had been forced out of the closet when his relationship with a congressional page was turned into a public scandal. I stood in the courtyard and listened through the windows of the hall where he was speaking. I still remember the big applause line of the speech. "If Harvey Milk's message of the past was 'come to San Francisco and be gay,' my message to you today is stay where you are and be gay." This was 1986, right in the teeth of the AIDS crisis.

The speech was followed by a Pride march through the campus. It was nighttime. I'd never been in a protest march before. The speech had been attended by hundreds of students who had

come from universities around the country for a lesbian and gay student activist conference being hosted at my college that week. Hundreds more joined in the march, though, carrying signs and chanting “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!” as we went through the campus and even right through the heart of the frat area. (Some of the frats were notoriously anti-gay, even on our ultra-liberal campus.)

That march was a life-changing experience. I decided I didn’t need any gatekeeper’s permission to be part of the overarching queer community, whether I labeled myself bi, queer, or pansexual. I graduated and moved to Boston where I was active in Queer Nation and various bi community groups, as well as the leather/BDSM community. I’m here, I’m queer, I got used to it.

Flash forward to 2008. By then I had been writing Harry Potter fanfic for a couple of years. I had started breaking down the walls between my fanfic writing and my pro career. I kicked down the closet door the best way I knew how: by simply being out about it. I started suggesting fanfic panel topics at sf/f conventions I was attending as a pro. I added links to my fanfic from my pro website. I put a pro-fanfic statement onto my pro website.

But there was still a closet door to be broken down, and it was buried deep in my love for Harry Potter. One of the magics of the Potter books for me was that as I read them, I was transported back to feeling like a kid again. Reading rarely does that for me. I read like an editor because I am one. It’s difficult to read “for pleasure” because I’m always criticizing or analyzing what I read. With the Potter books I was able to let that go, at least for the first read of each book, and experience them with all the unfiltered, breathless wonder of a child. True magic.

One of the other things that is magical about the books, though, is how they hold up to analysis and scrutiny. And one of the magical things about Potter fandom is that there is so much scrutiny and criticism of the books without ever losing sight of why we loved them in the first place. It’s not a blind devotion at all. One of the reasons I fell so deeply into the fandom was that ethos of questioning the text being part of it. My journey as a fan, then, started from a childlike devouring of the books where on first read I ascribed to the worldview being put forth by the author. I took Harry’s journey at face value.

Harry hated Snape and Draco? I hated Snape and Draco. Harry thought all Slytherins are bad? I thought all Slytherins are bad. It’s a book for kids, right? A simplistic worldview is appropriate and comforting, no? That was how I felt leading up to my leap headlong into fandom, but it’s probably not a coincidence that when I leapt into fandom was when book six, *Half-Blood Prince*, came out. It’s another book where Harry keeps on thinking that Snape and Draco are villains.

But it’s the book where many adult readers start realizing Snape and Draco are victims. On my first read-through I saw everything through “the Harry filter.” But in the two-year wait for book seven I re-read the book several times and wrote reams of fanfic leaping off from that point of departure. I started to realize Harry’s a bit nuts by then. What kind of hero, after almost accidentally killing someone, instead of being sorry about the accident is pissed off he has to have detention? I went back and re-read the entire series through Snape and Draco’s eyes and what I saw was very different.

I guess you could say it was the Potter fandom equivalent of being woke. The anti-Slytherin bias throughout the series was so strong and yet I had never noticed it before. It was so pervasive. Harry takes the word of various characters throughout the books as “truth” so long as the person saying it was considered one of the “good guys.” Take Hagrid for example. When he tells Harry in the very first book “There’s not a witch or wizard who went bad who wasn’t in Slytherin,” Harry believes him and so do we.

Hagrid probably believes it, too. But it’s not even true within the books. We meet plenty of non-Slytherins who “went bad,” including Peter Pettigrew (Gryffindor) and Gilderoy Lockhart (Ravenclaw) among others. We also find out that Sirius Black defied family tradition to go into Gryffindor instead of Slytherin, as if this were the equivalent of choosing to join the police instead of the Mafia. The idea that maybe Sirius could have been both a good guy AND been in Slytherin anyway is never even considered. So much bias! Before the Final Battle at Hogwarts, Professor McGonagall orders all the Slytherin students to leave the castle as if they’re traitors, but never once considering that there could be traitors in any of the other houses? And in the epilogue, 19 years later, although Harry himself seems to have finally decided that Snape was a hero and all Slytherins



aren't bad, the rest of the Wizarding World was clearly fallen right back into the old bias since his son's angst about being Sorted basically boils down to "Daddy, what if I'm in Slytherin?"

Try replacing that with "Daddy, what if I'm queer?" Harry has the good-parent response: we'll still love you. But society won't.

By the time book seven had come out, I had spent two years learning to recognize anti-Slytherin bias, but I still considered myself a Ravenclaw. Learning to recognize bias, after all, is simply smart, and Ravenclaws are smart. But as I was saying, in 2008, I attended my first big Harry Potter convention. This was a huge convention in Chicago called Terminus, with thousands of attendees. There I met Slytherins in person for the first time. Slytherins who essentially identified me as one of their own right from the first social event of the con. At first I resisted. What? No, I'm a Ravenclaw. I was, I admit, scheming how we could get the most house points out of the ice-breaker dueling game. "That's just smart," I tried to say. But my self-delusion was starting to crumble.

What is it that defines a Slytherin, and all the people who self-identify as Slytherins? In the canon it's "ambition." In other words, the desire to be the best. Why is this bad? To anyone who isn't at the top already, if you're ambitious you strive to get there. If you're not ambitious, you...what? Complain about elitism, that's what. Slytherins make easy villains for writers because all you have to do is add a dash of cold-blooded disregard to that ambition. If you're willing to trample or betray others on your way to the top, you're a villain. Hm, that sounds like Lockhart and Pettigrew. What had happened to my ambition, I wondered? As I mentioned, I'd partly started writing fanfic because my writing career was in a slump and I was looking to rediscover the joy in writing. I found that in fanfic. But was my Ravenclaw persona a way to hide in a safe space? If I embraced my Slytherin nature did that mean I was going to try to rise above, regardless what criticism or social censure I might face for doing so?

Prior to our arrival at Terminus, the organizers had sorted us into new houses (the conceit of the convention was that this was the "university of the four winds" and we came together once a year for wizarding higher education). I had been placed in something called Bru-Bru House.

Each house had a Head of House who was a prominent celebrity within the Potter fandom. Our head of house was none other than Brian Malfoy of the well-known Wizard Rock band Draco and the Malfoys. A Slytherin, of course.

The convention was held at a huge historic Hilton hotel in Chicago. For the Opening Feast each house entered a massive function hall as if in a parade. Brian mustered the thousand-plus Bru-Bru House contingent in a nearby ballroom and then off we marched, chanting "Bru-Bru House! Bru-Bru House!"

And it clicked. *We're here, we're Slytherins, get used to it.* As with my bisexuality, I realized I didn't need a gatekeeper to let me in. I had to kick the closet door down in my own mind. It's very difficult to do when all the subtle (and not-so-subtle) signals of your society are negative, telling you there's something wrong with you for being different, right up to telling you you're downright evil. You have to take pride in who you are. And it helps to feed off the pride others have in that identity.

Ultimately accepting that it was okay for me to be driven was as important for my writing life as accepting my bisexuality was for my love life. And confronting bias is crucial, even when that bias is supposedly fictional or imaginary. As Dumbledore says to Harry when Harry asks if their conversation is real or if it's been all in Harry's head, "why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" Emotions, identity, sexuality, personality: these all exist in the intangible realm but they define us as humans. Love yourself, even when the mainstream doesn't celebrate you, and find the places where you are celebrated. Happy Pride, everyone.

*Cecilia Tan is the award-winning fiction author of over 20 books and a co-writer of GEEK ACTUALLY, a fiction serial celebrating fandom, female friendship and sexuality, and the power of online spaces to connect communities. Her new series, The Vanished Chronicles, will launch in 2018 from Tor Books.*

1. Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.)
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