

IONISPHERE 17

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**Journal of the National Fantasy Fan Federation
Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau.**

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The purpose of Ionisphere and of the Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau is bringing science fiction fandom into a close relationship and maintaining good possibilities for interrelating among fans, writers, editors, publishers, and artists specializing in fantasy and science fiction.

Ionisphere provides a contact for the bureau with the membership and with casual readers who visit the NFFF site, and is a visible way for us to maintain our activity. Jeffrey Redmond maintains fan pages on Facebook. John Polselli contacts paper fandom. Jon Swartz keeps information moving, Jefferson Swycaffer provides support, and I keep a watch over internet fandom, with a view toward stimulating fan and pro interrelations, and also get pro interviews through Facebook with writers who have Facebook.

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EDITORIAL



Taking Care of Business, Taking Care of Business... Taking Care of Business the Old Hard Way. Hanging Around.

As we approach the beginning of our fourth year of publication, we stop to take an estimate of what the Fan-Pro Bureau has been doing and what has been accomplished in the time we have been around. One accomplishment has been making fandom aware that there is such an activity as Fan-Pro relations, which was managed by the earlier existence of this department, which was notable, I think, for the amount of publicity it produced and the amount of interactivity it produced within the N3F. That was the groundwork for the present existence of this bureau, and we are being even more successful than we were then, when we had only occasional author interviews (with Phil Farmer, Jack Williamson, Somtow Sucharitkul and others), for we presently have author, fan, and editor interviews in every issue. Back then we interrelated with the some of the other N3F bureaus better than we do now, and I would welcome contact with other bureau heads and staff regarding the N3F. We do have some by way of crossover. Of course, that should happen more in TNFF and TIGHTBEAM than here, but it should happen here too; there should be mutual awareness among all the N3F publications.

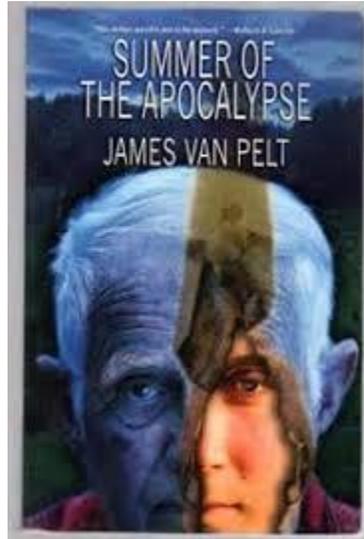
Back then I had more correspondence in IONISPHERE than I do now; often enough there is none in the issue. I will say of this that IO was on paper and did paper business back then, and it may be that the lack of correspondence is due to being on the net, where there seems to be some communicative impairment; I have emailed several

people repeatedly who were people I thought would surely email me back, and therefore I wonder whether there is some communications blockage responsible. If so, I am doing my job by pointing out this possibility and asking questions about it. We would thrive better if we always answered our emails. Is net correspondence inferior to correspondence through the US mail service? I am wondering how our ground adjutant would fare doing regular correspondence with the membership. He's a very good letter writer.

Having established the bureau and expressed its purpose is an accomplishment, just like getting it going at all was. What have we accomplished? We started the bureau and introduced the concept behind having it. We built the bureau up. Well, you might say, that's what other enterprises have done, built themselves up, and that's very self-sufficient of them. You have to do something in, say, the space of three years. Something else, that is, you might add, having noted what I've said. Next was making people aware of our existence, people outside the organization, which is helpful because our activity extends out of our organization when we try to make good contact with science fiction and fandom in general. The bureau makes fandom aware of the N3F and its purposes. We've done plenty of that, having the fan-pro relations concept as our focus. Next, we stand straightly in our bureau zine Ionisphere, for people to respect as they read us at our N3F site. We urge activity—something Jeffrey Redmond is doing well. We try to be outgoing, seeking this quality in others. Our author, editor and fan interviews give readers insight into the workings of science fiction writing, editing, publishing and fan activity, so that people need not fear being "strangers and afraid in a world they never made". We seek participation and interaction. We have seen some results to our efforts to get things going; big things change slowly, but there have been some changes since we instituted our initiative. And our efforts continue to show improvement.

So, my friends, there you have it—we're in business and we're doing our jobs. If you want a piece of the action, just contact us. If you have trouble contacting us, just let people know. It's high time we started getting the most out of our sf reading, making it profitable to have this interest. If you follow the policy of having some gain out of what you are doing, you have the same attitude that we have here. There is no reason not to live what we read, and have science fiction be something aside from what we consider to be our living experience. For a fuller existence, make what you read a part of your life.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW—James Van Pelt



Mr. Van pelt won the Campbell Award for Best New Writer and was a finalist in 2002 for the Nebula Award. His first novel was SUMMER OF THE APOCALYPSE (2006) and his stories appear in a collection called STRANGERS AND BEGGARS (2002). Both are published by Fairwood Press. His Analog publications include September 2002, May 2005, and June 2009, and Asimov's are September 2003, December 2004, June 2005, and January 2013. He's listed in the Wikipedia. You can find him at <http://jamesvanpelt.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/public/James-Van-Pelt> "Interesting set of questions! I'll do my best" says James. And here's the interview:

IO: I saw a lot of you at the Dell Forums, where you showed a lot of interest in the various topics Analog readers were discussing. When did you become aware of these forums, and when were you first on them?

JVP: I sold my first story to Analog in '97 and my first to Asimov's in '02, so I started visiting the places where the fans discussed the magazines then (because, like many authors, I liked feedback). Of course, a lot more was going on there than discussion of the magazines I discovered, and all of it was a great deal of fun. Well, most of it was fun. Wherever fans get together, there seems to be opportunities for conflicts, too. Sometimes the boards read like bare-knuckled fist fighting. I remember a particularly awful few weeks of discussion in an Asimov's group between an author who felt the magazine discriminated against conservative writers, and fans (and other writers) who took one side or the other.

IO: When did you become net-conscious, and what net activities related to science fiction did you engage in? What was your overall impression of the net?

JVP: Wow, tough question. I see that I started my Live Journal (remember Live Journal?) in October of 2006. We forget sometimes how recent the personal computer is. I started learning how to write on a computer on an Apple II C in 1986 or so. The world wide web wasn't even a thing then. I see that I joined AOL in November of 1995, and that's my introduction to the internet. My immediate interest was in gaming, but I also started using e-mail for correspondence. It wasn't too long after that that I found places where fans were discussing science fiction. I mostly lurked. By the late '90s and early 2000s I was regularly corresponding with editors and other writers. I participated in online discussions and online creative writing courses.

In 1999 I made a website to feature the authors eligible for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. I had been nominated for the award, and I realized that mostly novelists won, which made sense because a novel is a splashier event than a pro short story sale. I wanted to give short story writers more of a chance. Because of that website, I was constantly corresponding with new writers and the magazine editors. I really feel that running that website made more connections with the professional and fan world than anything else I had done. It was a sort of baptism by fire.

I think that the net is an amazing gift. Like many writers, I find it to be a great research tool, plus it gives me so many more opportunities to interact with the rest of the writing and fan community. I went from being an isolated writer who made weekly pilgrimages to the post office to mail submissions, and one who dashed out to the mailbox every day in the hope of good news, to one who can prepare submissions from the comfort of my living room and find out the fate of my stories at any moment. I'm constantly interacting with readers, writers and publishers online. The net has been a great way for me to stay connected even when I'm in a small, western Colorado town.

IO: Were you ever involved with fanzine fandom, or convention fandom? What experiences did you have with these, if so?

JVP: Although I am a lifetime reader of science fiction, I didn't know anything about fandom until I went to the WorldCon in Anaheim in 1996. That was my first convention. I'd been a member of a science fiction fan club starting in 1981, but that was because it was the closest thing I could find to a writing group. Mostly they bickered over Star Trek and arranged group meetups at science fiction movie debuts. I'd heard about fanzines, but I'd never read one. I was forty-two when I went to that first convention. I recall going from one of the buildings to another one during an intensely hot afternoon. In between the two buildings was a bench and a single tree. I headed for the shade, but

when I got there, a Klingon was on the bench smoking. He said, "Great day, isn't it." I remember thinking at the time, "My god, I'm home."

That convention was my first real introduction to fandom. I'd driven to Anaheim from Colorado by myself. I didn't know anyone there. The only reason I went was that a couple weeks earlier I'd been talking online with Dave Truesdale, the editor at *Tangent*, a short story review magazine, and he asked if I was going to the WorldCon. I laughed and said, "A science fiction convention? Isn't that where people dress up like aliens and party for the weekend?" He said, "No, no...well, yes, but it's also where you can meet other writers and publishers and editors. It's where you can network." So I went. The first night I was there, though, I realized that I had no plan to meet these writers and editors, so I made a list of every editor I had sent work to and every writer who I would like to meet, and I went to the room parties. I'd find whoever was in charge of the party and ask them if anyone on my list was in the room. It was a terrible plan to meet the pros, since none of them were in the rooms, but I did get to talk to a bunch of fans. That was my true introduction to fandom.

The next night, Dave Truesdale got me into the SFWA suite. Robert Silverberg was there, and Joe Haldeman and Connie Willis and David Brin and Larry Niven. I was bedazzled. So many of my writing idols all within speaking distance!

IO: I was in the Lafayette Interstellar Society, and they used to go to town about getting science fiction movies in the theaters, and they'd go to bookstores and magazine shops asking them to bring in science fiction, like the clubbers you mention going to movie debuts. Was that science fiction group promoting sf?

JVP: The science fiction club I joined when I moved to Grand Junction in 1981 was a repurposed Star Trek fan club. Why they broadened their mandate is unknown to me; they were still mostly a Star Trek club. There was a woman in her late forties, very tall and thin, who only wore Star Trek bridge officer costumes. I mean that's all she wore. She wore it to work (she worked in the back offices in a bank), and she wasn't the most fanatical member of the group. Another woman, also in her mid 40s, decided she wanted to win a celebrity auction for a phone call with William Shatner. She took a second mortgage on her house to do it. I got to listen to her side of the conversation. I swear she was a couple of heart beats from stroking out the entire five minute phone call. At no point did she ever call him "William" or "Mr. Shatner." He was "Captain Kirk" the entire time.

You have to be impressed with that kind of fervor.

Mostly what I remember the club doing, besides going to movies and talking about Star Trek, was that it hosted a yearly short story contest. I won twice—this was before I had ever sold any fiction. Then one year they did a fake-a-UFO photo contest. I won that one too.

There was another writer in the group. We both heard about a writing group forming in town, so we quit the science fiction club and joined that. I was a member of that group for a bunch of years.

IO: Do you have a personal acquaintance with any of the editors, or with other writers of science fiction and fantasy? Or if not a personal acquaintance, an acquaintance by way of correspondence? If you do, are there any anecdotes about these acquaintances or any enlightening interchanges you'd like to share?

JVP: I've been lucky to meet a goodly number of editors and writers. At that first WorldCon, I ran into David Brin while walking from one panel to another. Generally I don't ask for autographs, but this was David Brin! I asked him to sign my pocket program. He wrote, "I hope you have a wonderful WorldCon", and then signed it. I thought that was awesome. About a minute later, I ran into Larry Niven. I asked for his autograph too. He opened my pocket program to the same page David Brin had signed on. He read what David wrote, then signed it "Me too".

I have lots of anecdotes. How's this one: I've sold stories to most of the major magazines, but I've never cracked The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, even though it has gone through multiple editors since I started sending work to them in 1984. The longest tenured editor there was Gordon Van Gelder. He wrote many personal, helpful rejections to my stories, but he never bought one. He became my great white whale. So I was disappointed when he handed the reins over to Charles Coleman Finlay. I'd never get a chance to sell to Gordon! But at World Fantasy two years ago, my latest collection of stories came out and Gordon came by the dealers' room while I was at my publisher's table with the book. I called Gordon over and said, "Gordon, you have a chance to fulfil my greatest wish!" He said, "How's that?" I said, "Buy my newest collection, then I can tell everyone that Gordon Van Gelder bought a bunch of my stories." He put the book down. "I didn't realize that fulfilling your wish was going to cost me money."

Dang. Failed again.

Another story that I like a lot was that in 1997 I sold my first story to Analog. Although I grew up reading Analog, and I loved science fiction, most of my writing

output had been semi-literary fantasy. I didn't think I'd ever sell to Analog. When I wrote a piece, finally, that I thought might qualify, I sent it, and Stan Schmidt bought it. At the next WorldCon, Stan invited me to lunch. This blew me away, of course. During the lunch he said that I needed to get with Jay Kay Klein so he could take a picture of me. I asked him why. "Jay writes our bilogs of authors for the magazine. I want to have your picture for when you sell your next story to me." I thought, fat chance of that, but I was intensely flattered. It was the nicest thing he could have said. I wasn't very good at telling the future, however. My 16th story in Analog is in the current issue.

IO: When did you first read science fiction? What was your original impression of this form of writing? Did your views of science fiction develop as your reading of it progressed? What do you think of science fiction from your present perspective?

JVP: It feels to me like I've been reading science fiction since I first started reading. At elementary school when the teacher handed out the Weekly Reader Book Club catalogs, I always ordered science fiction titles. I read every book in our public library that had the little space ship logo on the spine. By the time I was ten, I'd gone through every title in the kids' section and then read through all the adult section. Nothing else really interested me.

I hated most of the stuff the teachers had us read in the text books in English class. First, the stories weren't science fiction, and second, I was scolded for reading ahead. It sucked, until fourth grade, when the teacher assigned Edgar Allen Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum". Heavens! What an abrupt shift in tone from everything else in that book. So, I sought out everything I could read by Poe. I gave school reading a second chance after that.

I don't think I read science fiction as pure escape literature (although there was a lot of that in what I was doing). I liked the world view: that the world we are in now isn't the only way a world can be. I liked that science fiction taught me stuff and made me want to learn more. I can't tell you how ecstatic I was when I was a senior in high school and the A.P. Biology test asked this essay question: "How would you design an enclosed environment for a ten-year journey in a space ship?" I had a lifetime of reading that had prepared me for that question.

As I grew, my tastes grew too. For the longest time I didn't pay attention to who the author was. If it was science fiction, I wanted to read it. But somewhere in late elementary school I read The Martian Chronicles. Ray Bradbury has been my strongest literary influence ever since. I looked for all the Bradbury I could find. After that, I went

back to the books I had liked most to see who had written them. I went through all of Heinlein, all of Wells, all of Asimov (which was a lot), all of Clarke and all of Zenna Henderson. I've been a streaky reader ever since. Right now I'll read anything by Connie Willis, Daryl Gregory, Carrie Vaughn (her short work is exceptional), George R.R. Martin, Stephen King, Joe Hill, Kelly Link, Neil Gaiman, and many others.

When I started reading science fiction, I could keep up with everything that was published. The productivity of the field has long since outstripped my ability to read everything. That's good for readers, but a little sad for fans. I think there was a time when you could go to a convention and you could be sure that most of the people you talked to were familiar with the same books you were. Now, the sheer bulk of readable, fun, worthy work has splintered the fan-reading community. The best place to find literary commonality is in discussing the movies.

IO: I got the Weekly Reader in grade school too. It seemed to me to represent mortality, unlike the educational system. Where did it come from? In what way did it connect with the educational system? Would this connection last? It didn't come to the high schools, and I used to ask my younger brothers if they were still getting the Weekly Reader.

JVP: How old are you? I did Weekly Reader all my elementary school years, from 1959 through 1966. The teacher would hand out flimsy, saddle stapled catalogs at the beginning of the week. The kids who were interested would go through them, decide what books they wanted, fill out the order form, and then take it home to get a check from the parents. The next week a box of books would show up and the teacher would distribute them. My parents, who would never buy me candy or toys on demand, would always buy me books. I'm pretty sure that's one of the reasons I was such an avid reader from the beginning.

My wife, who teaches first grade, says that she doesn't think that the Weekly Reader Book Club exists any more, but they do something similar through Scholastic Books.

IO: I didn't see any Poe in grade school, but when I was a senior in high school the assigned reading included "The Masque of the Red Death". There was a lot of controversy among the students about that. They weren't sure a story about a plague was fit reading for the younger educational system. How did your fellow students react to that?

JVP: It seemed we got one Poe story a year for several years. They might not have been in this order, but I know we did "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The Black Cat", and "Masque of the Red Death". As a student, I don't remember a discussion

about the appropriateness of the material. I was among that group of students who loved Halloween, which was the time we did Poe, and I frequently drew ghosts, skeletons and tombstones on my folders.

I didn't retire from teaching high school English until last year. I loved teaching Poe. The appropriateness of the stories never came up in discussion. We did have very spirited controversies in the English department about teaching Romeo and Juliet. This was particularly intense last year because we had a couple of suicides in the school.

IO: Your own writings seem to me to have at least a tinge of the *avant garde*. Do you see them as being this way?

JVP: No, not particularly, but I might not be the best judge of that. When I finished my creative writing master's degree in grad school in 1990, my mentor, who had been reading my science fiction and fantasy for two years, said, "Jim, I'm afraid you might not have much luck in publishing. Your work is too literary for the science fiction magazines and too *genre* for the literary ones." Fortunately, he didn't know the science fiction and fantasy market very well.

I have had this reaction from editors several times, also. Stan Schmidt took a couple stories from me where he said, "I don't generally buy stories like this, but I like yours," and then he'd buy it. Gardner Dozois sent me a long letter once where he spent the first half of it telling me what he didn't like about my story, but half way through, he said, "Somehow, though, you made it all work. I'll buy it."

When I was in school, my habit was always to subvert the writing assignments. The teacher would give the assignment, and then I'd try to figure what she wanted and what most of the other kids were going to write, and then I'd try to do something totally different from that, but still stay within the parameters of the assignment.

All of that might mean I'm a shade *avant garde*, but only a shade.

IO: What do you have in mind overall as a writer? Are there special things you're trying to put across to readers?

JVP: Mostly, it seems to me that I write to discover what is on my mind. I like what reading a story did to me when I was young, and I like to do that for other people. So, when I come up with a story starter, I'll work away at it for a while (several pages), until I start thinking, why is this important to me? I mean, story ideas are like dreams. At first they're only important to the dreamer, but the dreamer doesn't know why. If you've ever known someone who tells you their dreams *verbatim*, you'll know what I mean. The dreamer may be filled with the import of what he dreamed, but the poor sucker who has

to listen to this unfiltered dream will be lost, and probably bored. This is what writing a story feels like to me. I'm swept away with the image, but pretty soon I start thinking, why is this important? Why does it matter? Why am I thinking about it? As I write, I try to answer that question so that when someone else reads it, they don't get bored with the ramblings of my dream, but they get to dream it themselves, as if it were their own dream.

I've never explained writing quite that way before. Hopefully it makes sense.

IO: What relevance do you think science fiction has to the world in its past, and what relevance do you think it has to the world of today?

JVP: When I teach science fiction, I start with the premise that no matter where or when a science fiction story is set, it reflects the concerns of the age that produced it. A great example of that is H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. When he wrote it in the late 1800s, his concern was about society and economy. The Morlocks in his future were the descendants of the poor who had been suppressed back to their animal origins by the elite working class, whose descendants became the Eloi. In a nice, poetic flip, the Morlocks now raised the weak and defenseless Eloi as cattle. The whole story, though, was speaking to the world Wells lived in.

In 1960, the story is turned into an American movie. Now, though, the Morlocks are the descendants of the people who fled to the bomb shelters when the nuclear war happened. They stayed there afterwards. The Eloi were the remnants of the people who stayed on the surface. Like the original book, the Morlocks ate the Eloi. Same setup but different antecedents. In the 1960s, society didn't worry so much about the economic forces that Wells worried about, but they did worry about nuclear war.

In 2002, the story is remade as a movie, but this time runaway development of the moon causes the moon to break up. The people who would become the Morlocks once again flee underground while the ancestors of the Eloi stay on the surface. The same Morlocks eat Eloi theme plays out again. By 2002, the fear of nuclear Armageddon has faded from the public consciousness, but a fear of unchecked corporate ambition and ecological disaster are a concern.

Science fiction is constantly commenting on the world of today. Now there's a ton of interest in virtual realities, which may be a reflection of our concerns about what is real and what isn't, or may be a wish to escape reality. Zombie stories all seem to me about our fears of living in an overpopulated world where everyone else looks vaguely the same and lifeless. Our fear is that they want to make us just as dead and lifeless as them.

We may be standing too close to the pattern to see the whole picture, but I'll bet you in twenty years we will look at what is going on in science fiction today and see that it was a reflection of today's concerns.

IO: What other writers of science fiction do you most appreciate?

JVP: I listed some of my favorites already. Not all of these are science fiction writers, but this is who I'm reading: Connie Willis, Carrie Vaughn, Kelly Link, Brenda Cooper, Louise Marley, Martha Wells, James Patrick Kelly, Daryl Gregory, Neil Gaiman, Kim Stanley Robinson, Nancy Kress, Ted Chiang, among others. Sadly, I don't read as much as I want because writing time and reading time exactly overlap. I have back issues of the magazines I haven't opened yet, and piles of unread books by my bed.

IO: Are there any other things you'd like to say to readers of this interview?

JVP: I've lived all my life within science fiction and fantasy literature. I hope to have many more years writing, reading and talking about this literature I love. If I had it all to do over again, I wouldn't choose to do it differently. Thank goodness I lucked out and chose the right path to begin with. Hopefully the thinking that is the basis of science fiction, that the world doesn't have to be the way we see it now, will help to create a better future for all of us. Science fiction, even the dystopias, is about recognizing the power of change. If we are to have a brighter future for ourselves and our children, it will be done by people who say, "Our future is ours to shape. Let's make it a good one."

I recently re-watched Tomorrowland. It's an uneven movie, but I love its heart. I love the message in the scene where Casey follows a bunch of kids her age to a spaceship. As the last one boards, she turns to Casey and says, "Come on. We saved a seat just for you." The hope in science fiction, its greatest appeal, is that the invitation is real.



BEHIND THE SCENES

by Jeffrey Redmond



HALF A DOZEN ELEMENTS FOR WRITING SCIENCE FICTION

There are literally thousands of articles about writing, but this one will merely sum up the very basics to create a science fiction work. It does not promise any kind of best selling or award winning process. But if you are a writer, and enjoy sci fi, then you must produce.

Much of writing is instinctual, from exposure to good sci fi stories and lots of practice. However, there are some tools every writer needs for making their stories professional, interesting, and effective. These are always as important as your story being set on an alien planet or post-apocalyptic Earth. Grammar and spelling are the obvious ones, but there are also six important Elements for Science Fiction: 1) Character, 2) Plot, 3) Setting, 4) Point of View, 5) Theme, and 6) Style.

First Element: Character

In many ways, characters are the foundation for the entire work. Is there conflict? That's going to involve the emotional and mental condition of your characters. Have you chosen a point of view? That's you following specific characters as you tell the story. Your characters are the people through whom your reader experiences the tale, and the trick is to make those science fictional characters feel completely real.

You'll need to know their backstory. This doesn't mean your reader needs to know it, but your understanding of your character's history is crucial for how and why your character responds to things.

You'll need at least a rudimentary grasp of psychology. You and I have both read sci fi books which annoyed us because the characters just didn't feel "real". Often, this is because basic psychology was ignored, and the characters behaved in a way that made no sense for human beings.

You'll need to understand the power of the character development. Your character should not be the same at the end of the story as in the beginning. They change, and their growth is a key aspect of your story's momentum.

If your characters are flat, your readers will have trouble empathizing. But if your characters feel real and relatable, then your readers will eat your story up. Understanding what your characters do and say, and how other characters respond to them, helps to make the fullest possible picture of your science fictional creation.

Second Element: Plot

Both are fine. Your characters live inside your plot, but your plot revolves around your characters. I just put plot second in this list because when I write, my plot follows my characters, rather than the other way around. If you do it differently, there's nothing to fear. You're still right!

Plot is like blueprints. Your plot, its connections, and its structure determine the way you shape your story. It includes the order in which your characters face things. It's the organized structure, the thing that will end up in an outline on Wikipedia. With spoiler alerts, of course.

Generally, "plot" as a concept is split into five parts: Exposition or introduction, which establishes characters and setting. Rising action, which reveals the conflict.

Now that your characters are established (along with some sense of what their "normal" looks like), you throw in the wrench and raise the stakes.

Now comes the climax, also known as the turning point. This should be the greatest moment of tension in your story—everything is critical, with emotion and interest peaked. This is make or break, the moment when things matter the most.

After that comes falling action, when things start to wind down. All that tension is actively being resolved. Your reader has a deep need for that resolution in this section, so make sure that when you "fix" the problems, you address the issues you've been carefully setting up.

Finally, we have resolution. Don't let the word fool you. This ending isn't necessarily happy or sad. It means everything has been solved, and your conclusion arrives at the place where all the events of the plot have strongly led. It feels final, or at least, final enough that the reader can put the book down without flipping back through the pages to see if they missed something.

Again, this doesn't require a happy ending. It does require a satisfying one, even if you mean to continue in a sequel. If you've left any knots still tied, you'd better have a good reason why. And better make sure your reader has a clue that the answers are coming soon. Space aliens can have different cultural backgrounds, languages, and motivations. But how they interact with Earthlings is always important.

Third Element: Setting

Science fiction offers an endless opportunity to present every kind of situation. Like fantasy and historical fiction, science fiction is as reliant on world building as it is on character and plot. If readers don't find the setting convincing then they won't read on.

Getting the Science Right is essential, and how far you need to worry about the science depends upon the sort of science fiction you're writing. For hard sci fi extensive research is needed. Readers are likely to be knowledgeable about science and expect the same from you. This means creating planets whose geography is consistent with our understanding of how worlds form. There must be settlements that have everything they need to function, spaceships that follow the laws of physics as they apply in space, and so on.

If you're writing at the softer end of science fiction, such as a space opera in the style of Star Wars, then there's less need to sweat all the details. But there are obvious things you have to stick with, like people not breathing in space. The most important is consistency. If you've invented a form of faster than light travel, make sure that you know the rules you've created for it. You need to think through the implications, and that you are consistent. Some science fiction needs realistic, well-researched science. All sci fi needs a world that makes sense from one page to the next.

Get the People Right. Once you've set up your universe you need to populate it. Unless you're writing in the very near future, the people in your setting should be different from the ones we know today. After all, they're living in a different world and that will shape them. This can make your characters both more convincing and more interesting.

The Expanse offers great examples. Living on asteroid mines has led to people whose

bodies are more vulnerable than if they had grown up in Earth's stronger gravity. It also leads to a distinct accent, jargon, social hierarchy, and all the things that make a culture unique. More subtly, the events on Earth have shaped the attitudes and lifestyles of characters coming from there.

With aliens, this is more extreme. Think about how their planet has shaped their bodies and their view of the world. What cultural differences stem from a different physiology? Can they speak the same words or eat the same food as humans? This doesn't mean that you reject everything familiar. Readers need to be able to identify with characters. Even the most alien should show a trace of personhood, something we can empathize with. Aliens don't need to experience time as humans do, but they still show such human emotions as compassion and grief.

Specialist Language is a powerful tool. It can be scientific terminology, the names of alien species, or the slang of a future culture. Dropping in this language hints at the depths of your setting. Little bits are all you should use. Go too far and you'll overwhelm readers with language that they can't follow. Make sure that the first time you use a strange word there's enough context for readers to work out its use and meaning. Whether it's the angry, expletive-like tone with which someone shouts out, this is needed to help readers learn the language. The more often you can avoid exposition for this the more subtle and easy to read the story will be, but sometimes you just have to explain.

Be Convincing Rather Than Realistic. All of this can be boiled down to one principle. You need to be convincing, not necessarily realistic. Realistically, alien species might not be able to form words like our own, but for most sci fi they need to be able to. Showing them struggling with the words makes this convincing.

Realistically, we may never travel faster than the speed of light, but if you use a consistent set of rules and jargon for this then readers will accept it. Realistically, we may never be able to live on asteroids, but if you show how that would affect people, then the characters living there will come to life.

As with fantasy and historical fiction, you're creating a world that modern readers can accept, believe, and engage with. Use realistic details as long as they add to this. Use as much science as your target readers expect. But remember, you're creating a fiction, and not a specific paper. The way that the setting shapes the characters, not the minutiae of research, is what will make people care.

Fourth Element: Point of View

This is a fun and tricky tool to work with. POV determines things like tense and how much the reader gets to see. There's first person (I, my), second person (you, your), and third person/narrator (she, hers). There's present tense (I see, she sees), past tense (I saw/she saw), and even that strange future tense nobody uses (I will see/she will see).

It's the combination of these things that create an effective POV. So how do you choose? It all depends on (1) the particular feel you're going for, and (2) how much your reader needs to see. What feel are you going for? There's a reason different genres often use different POVs.

Urban fantasy, for example, is almost always first person past tense, because they're going for the feel of a person telling you an exciting thing that happened. There's an intimate, immediate feel that goes with this close up and personal viewpoint, like seeing the fist smash right into your face.

Science Fiction often uses third person. The reason is simple: science fiction usually has a much broader scope than urban fantasy, and so needs to be able to take the reader to a wider view, usually seeing through multiple characters. The pace is often a little slower, but the impact can be deeply powerful, and tends to explore consequences.

How much does your reader need to see?

Is it essential that the reader sees things happening outside your protagonist's point of view? Do they need to see things your protagonist does not see, or hear things your protagonist does not hear? Then you need third person POV.

Do you actually need the reader to discover things at the same pace as your protagonist? Do you want your reader to waffle and rage with your protagonist, seeking for answers? Then first person might be better.

Variety is the spice of life, and you have the joy of mixing and matching as you need.

Want third person present tense?

Study up on how these work, and you have a whole new set of tools to play with. A science fiction story can take place on Earth, on a distant planet, in another universe, any time in the future, or in an alternate past. Anywhere, any time, anyhow.

Fifth Element: Theme

Theme is a hidden element, but incredibly important. In essence, theme is what your sf story is REALLY about.

The plot is the outward details, *e.g.*, "A son stands to inherit his father's intergalactic empire, but only if he can prove himself to be a responsible adult by the age of 25."

Theme would be what it's really about, *e.g.*, "Growing up requires choices". Or, "Family means more than power." If you're really good, you can even use a one word theme, like love, truth, adulthood, *etc.*

Yes, all science fictional books have themes, even if it wasn't intentional. Even authors who aren't aware of theme use it. Personal beliefs on how the universe works (or should work) always flavor the story.

The tricky thing about theme is it should rarely be bluntly stated in your work. The moment you do, your work slides into the "preachy" category. Of course, sometimes, you want readers to know what the purpose is up front. But if you can manage to make it subtle, to get that point across without ever frankly stating it, your readers will actually take it to heart a lot more deeply.

Think about it. Simply reading about something like destroying nasty androids might make you think. But entering into the story of a character struggling with it can do a lot more to help you really feel and understand the challenges and cultural barriers faced. Effective stories are written by authors who know the theme.

Sixth Element: Style

Style is awesome. Style is needed. Style is the thing that makes your work stand out from everybody else's, because in essence, it's your "voice". You develop style by working on technique. Your syntax, word choices, and tone all contribute to this. Your style can demonstrate not only your voice as a writer, but it's crucial to indicating details about your story and characters.

Style shows accent and dialect, character intelligence, and observation. It shows the underlying humor or drama of your piece. Your style is your unique flavor, and developing it will not only take your entire writing career, but is also one of the most rewarding activities as a writer. Developing your writing style takes work. There are no short cuts for this, but that doesn't mean it can't be fun.

Read a lot of science fiction. The more variety you pour into yourself, the more ingredients you'll have to work with as you develop your style. Read sci fi books from different countries, different genders, different cultures. Read everything and learn as you go.

Write a lot. No writing is ever wasted. Practice, practice, and practice some more. And spend time reading your work out loud. This last step can be embarrassing, but it's really helpful.

Listen. Listen to people. Listen to conversations. Tone is a crucial component of style,

and you'll need to learn how to convey that in your work. But you can't convey it if you don't know what it sounds like.

Make your science fiction work for you. Have it be for you. So that it is you.



Jazz Fantasia/Jazz in Space

A Personal Convention Review: Norwescon 42 (Sea Tac, WA, April 19-22, 2019)
by Steve Fahnstalk

It doesn't seem like 42 years ago that I and my late friend Jon Gustafson piled into my car or his van and headed from Pullman, Washington—about as far southeast as you can get in Washington—across the state to Seattle's airport for Norwescon 1, which was held at the Holiday Inn. It was a six-hour drive, but well worth it to see Ted Sturgeon, whom I'd never met (but had a message and a hug for from Jerry Sohl), and other writers like Alan E. Nourse, who we knew through Avram Davidson (Alan was Avram's M.D.). The con was chaired by Greg Bennett, and drew about 400 attendees for the Friday through Sunday con.

Although my wife (the Beautiful & Talented Lynne Taylor Fahnstalk) and I couldn't make Thursday—I'm retired, and could easily take the time—because Lynne still works, and couldn't afford to take Thursday off. The drive, however, is much shorter in terms of distance: Sea Tac (now an incorporated city) is only a bit over 150 miles, as opposed to Pullman's 300-odd miles. And there's a border between us now, as I've lived in Canada for almost 35 years now. So depending on when you leave Vancouver, you could end up taking as much time, or more, as back in 1977. Our longest border wait so far has been four hours. So we missed Thursday and all its programming, which ranged from "Space X on Mars" to "Cosplaying While Fat" and everything between, including lots of writing and photography advice.

We tried to get there early on Friday so as to get parking, but were significantly late; this was the four-hour delay (Easter weekend, border backed up for miles, *etc.*), and actually arrived around 3:30 in the afternoon. Rather than patrol the parking lot looking vainly for a spot—because although the hotel has ample parking for most days, this convention overflows like mad; something like four thousand attendees, most of whom drive—I parked across the street at "Wally" parking, which cost me \$40 for the three days.

We were fortunate in reserving a room, because we reserved late (only a few months before the con; as an example, the rooms for next year's Norwescon are mostly booked now). I had brought my Cason DSLR so I could take some photos, but because it's bulky, I left it in the room and just took a few photos with my little Fuji 3D point-and-shoot. Not only did I not take a lot of photos, I didn't even manage to meet most of the GOHs. I did, however, briefly meet Tran Nguyen, the AGOH, a talented and, it appears, very nice

artist. Rushing through the autograph session on Saturday, I did see the GOHs (Mary Robinette Kowal—writer GOH, Dan Koboldt—science GOH, and Nancy Pearl—special GOH) from afar.

As I was representing *Amazing Stories*, I didn't go to any panels, but spent the entire convention schmoozing in the bar/restaurant. I handed out about a hundred or more *Amazing Stories* badge ribbons, and about 25 *Amazing Stories* "limited edition collector pins". My wife had a better time and managed to make a couple of science-related panels, including "Apollo 50 Years Later", or something of the sort. The thing about Norwescon, which many people may not know, is that it has more tracks than some Worldcons! For example, Saturday had (including games and author readings) approximately 19 simultaneous tracks of programming. (If you're interested in checking out the programming, you can find it listed at <http://www.norwescon.org/con/schedule-of-events/>).

As for me, I had a wonderful—though somewhat expensive—time in the restaurant, drinking hotel coffee (who can afford Starbucks all the time?) and eating the limited convention menu—which was more or less the same in the coffee shop, though the coffee shop did offer a breakfast buffet. (The bacon was a hair too crisp, something I thought I'd never say.) Meanwhile, as I depleted my wallet, I caught up with people I only see at cons; some of them I've not seen for many years. I had a great chat with Steven Barnes about racism and movies—I am, you know, the movie columnist for *Amazing Stories*' print version—and a number of writers and fun people. (I won't quote names here, as I'm sure I would leave someone out and thereby inadvertently insult someone.)

We also checked out the dealers' room, where I made only a couple of paperback book purchases; there were several new and used book dealers, several edged weapons dealers, a number of costume/clothing/jewelry dealers, some games dealers—and I'm sure I missed a few here and there (it was a crowded room!).

The art show was worth mentioning. I've seen Worldcons with less professional-quality art than any given Norwescon. Again, I might give offense by mentioning whose art I enjoyed, but there's a full list at <https://www.norwescon.org/con/exhibitors/art-show/>. (And Lynne showed some of her "bots" as well.)

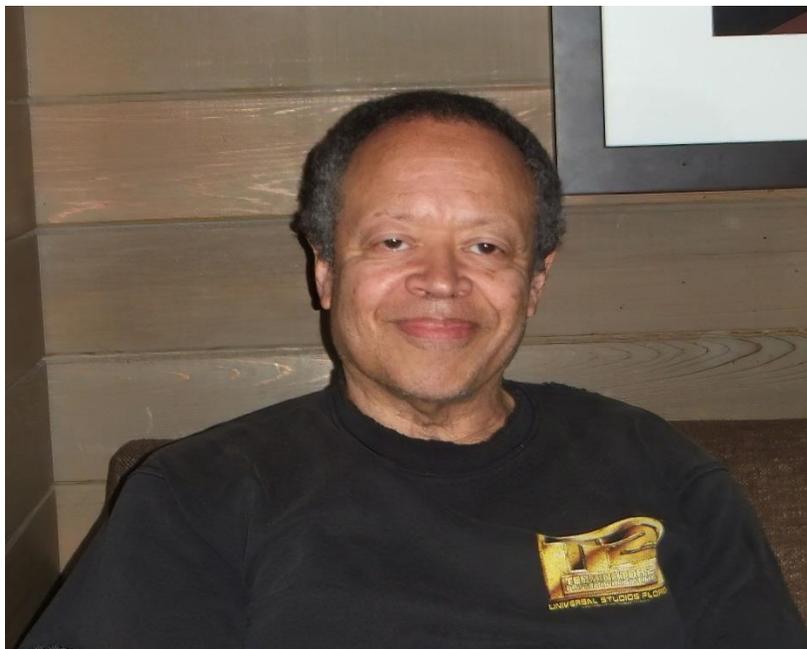
If you live within driving (or even flying) distance of Seattle/Sea Tac, it would be worth your while to check out Norwescon, the largest Northwest convention of all, and now somewhat of an institution. If your interests are costuming, science, SF, fantasy,

cosplay, movies, gaming, or anything else related to SF/F, you owe it to yourself to check it out—and don't forget, if your budget is limited, they have day passes, and a very good masquerade.

Norwescon 42 photos



Rob Carlos



Steven Barnes



Thermians



Writer Amy Thompson

Additional photos located by editor



Lobby



Panel



Cosplay



Note: additional photos are of the Norwescon, but not of Norwescon 42. The other photos were taken by Steve Fahnstalk at the Norwescon 42.



Well folks, we're going to have to leave you now. Hope you've had as much fun as we have. It's been a very nice issue, but, as John Scalzi says, all good things must come to an end, and in fact all things must. Good bye for now, and we'll see you again two months from now.

END OF ISSUE