

INTERVIEW:

Kij Johnson: A Million Suppositions, or Turtles All the Way Down

By Nisi Shawl '92



Photo by Beth Gwinn

2009 World Fantasy Award-winner Kij Johnson is a Clarion West graduate ('87) and currently serves as vice chair on our Board of Directors. Her stories and novels are poised yet eccentric, written with precision, dreamlike elegance, and humor. Kij has also taught numerous writing classes and workshops, and has worked as an editor for Tor Books, Dark Horse Comics, and Wizards of the Coast. In addition to her World Fantasy Award, Kij won the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award for the best short story in 1994 and the 2001 IAFA William L. Crawford Fantasy Award for best new fantasy novelist. Her short story "Spar" is a 2010 Nebula Award nominee. Kij was interviewed by Nisi Shawl '92.

You write poetry, short stories, and novels. Is one easier for you than another? Is a poem a supercondensed novel? Is a novel just a long-ass short story?

Until I was twenty-five, the only writing I did was poetry and journal entries, things that are short, and things that are analytical or descriptive. Originally my short stories were very short: the first was 1200 words, I think, and I didn't write anything longer than 6500 words for years. I couldn't write longer than that because I was treating every sentence as if it were poetry, questioning every word—"wander" vs. "meander." The longer the story, the more time this took.

Writing *The Fox Woman* was like producing 125,000 words of poetry, and it took seven years. I think novels deserve careful writing throughout, even if the purpose is to make them look shaggy and rough, but this was

pretty extreme. I learned that poetry is a really rigorous standard to hold prose to (apart from the fact that the intent and drive of poetry is fundamentally different), so I switched to treating my novels like long-ass short stories, as you say. But this still meant a lot more work than maybe a novel requires. I'm getting hyperfocused again, which means my short fiction is getting shorter again. The last four stories I've written have been under 2500 words. "Spar" is 2000.

You've got a lot of research material on your library shelves. Do you do research before you know that a particular work of fiction is going to benefit from what you find out? Does fiction arise from research, or research arise from fiction?

The stuff on my shelves is the least of it! I have hundreds more volumes about Heian and Kamakura Japan, a couple more boxes about Enlightenment science and natural philosophy, boxes of monkey and canid behaviorism books. They sleep in my parents' basement in their carefully labeled cartons. I started reading about Heian Japan because I fell in love with the *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*, which I discovered because I was reading dozens of historical women's diaries, which started because I loved Fanny Burney, which came from loving the other great English diarist, Samuel Pepys's turtles all the way down. I got a couple of years into reading everything I found about Heian Japan, and I realized I'd better write something using all that research before I moved on to the next

interest, and so I wrote “Fox Magic” during my CW class. Concurrent with the diaries, I was researching canid behaviorism pretty heavily. I wasn’t a dog person, but I had acquired a stray Shetland Sheepdog, and I was curious about what made him tick, and that meant learning what made wolves tick, and on and on. I discovered that we don’t ever know what makes another species tick—or even what other people are thinking or feeling, though that’s easier to extrapolate. That research also fed into “Fox Magic”.

I drifted away from dogs and then returned to them a few years ago with “At the Mouth of the River of Bees” and “The Evolution of Trickster Stories Among the Dogs of North Park After the Change”, which was also an exploration of how folklore reflects culture.

I guess I am always doing research. **“Wife Reincarnated as a Solitaire” (published exclusively on your website) pokes gentle, loving fun at Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. Is there a fantastic element to the story, which is how I read it, or is it purely mainstream/historical?**

“Wife Reincarnated...” is a fantasy as you suspect, but the reader has to be pretty good at peering through the underbrush to see that. *Tristram Shandy* is irreproducible but I wanted to know how close I could come; my garrulous fool ends up with his own distinctive voice, and I’m well pleased with that.

You attended CW in 1987. Your instructors were Ed Bryant, Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Connie Willis, Tappan King, and Samuel R. Delany. What was your experience like?

While every year has good instructors, I really loved the lineup for mine. I grew up passionate about Ursula’s books; in my late teens I discovered Delany and thought he was brilliant, even when I didn’t understand him. They were all like that for me.

We were a huge class. (Twenty-one? It was crazy huge.) And we had one person

at least who pounded out novellas, sometimes two a week. We were in class all morning, and then returned in the afternoons. We read for hours each day, and I, at least, started my writing at about 2 a.m.

I didn’t know much about the instructors of previous years, so I wasn’t aware that there was anything exceptional in the fact that two of our instructors were black. I do remember Chip walked into the first class of his week, looked around and said, “You’re all a bunch of white kids.” That’s the first time I had ever thought about it, that SF and fantasy have been largely white literatures, and therefore the first time I thought that things maybe should be different.

You sold your first story in 1987, the year you attended CW. Was this before or after—or during—the workshop? Was it a workshop story?

The story was called “Roadkill”. I sold it right before I came to the workshop, to *Tales of the Unanticipated*, which published it in 1988. I made something like eight dollars; it was 1200 words or thereabouts. I later sold one of my application stories, “FERATA”, to *Pulphouse Magazine*. I also wrote a draft of “Wolf Trapping” during the workshop, which went to Tappan for *The Twilight Zone Magazine*. And the first draft of “Fox Magic” came out of CW, too. That was published in 1993, won the Sturgeon Award for the year, and was the central idea for the novel *The Fox Woman*.

Do you have a reader in mind for what you write—an audience of choice, imaginary or real?

Cliché follows: I write for myself. I am aware of a readership, but I am writing because I am interested in something. I had no expectation that anyone at all, ever, would buy the *Tristram Shandy* pastiche, which is why I put it straight online; at least there, the sixty-three people in the world who are likely to enjoy it will be able to find it.

You’ve taught writing for years, at Louisiana State University, and at

James Gunn’s Science Fiction Writers Workshop and the Science Fiction & Fantasy Novel Writing Workshop, both hosted by the University of Kansas’s Center for the Study of Science Fiction. What is the hardest thing to teach about writing?

Everything! The hardest part for me as the teacher is knowing where to stop. There is so much that can help a writer improve, and what’s needed is different for each student.

People have an intuitive grasp of how stories are put together, because of a lifetime of reading and watching movies and listening to jokes, though I wonder how this will change as more people gather their main story experiences from open-ended interactive experiences like games and MMORPGs.

What they often don’t have is a strong sense of empathy for how other people think and feel. I don’t mean empathy in the *Star Trek* empath-offers-to-sacrifice-herself-for-others way. I mean a clear understanding that other people don’t think or feel or experience things the same way we do.

Much of your work conveys the viewpoint of animals (*Fudoki*, “The Evolution of Trickster Tales...” *The Fox Woman*). How can you know if you’ve gotten something wrong or right in your approach?

I read a lot about how animals think, if they think, what makes them think. I do a lot of what-if thinking myself: what if cause and effect are not a clear sequence? What if you remove the need for food or reproduction from a being’s mental makeup? What replaces them as core requirements for survival, and how do these other requirements shape the being’s psyche? What if a thinking being is viable at birth and thus doesn’t need the parent-child bond?

And so forth. I have a million of these suppositions, but they all are really explorations of the line between me and the rest of the universe. I am trying to figure out how far outside my experience I can go and still make sense of others’ motivations and movement.





From the Chair

SPRING AWAKENING
BY KELLEY ESKRIDGE

Spring has come early to Seattle with a suitcase full of robins and jays, hyacinth and cherry blossom, and soft new leaves in a thousand shades of green. It also brings dandelions, and the first choke-hold tendrils of bindweed—the challenges that are always part of growth.

Twenty-two springs ago, I opened a letter that I had to read twice because my hand shook so badly from nerves. *Congratulations! We're pleased to invite you to attend the Clarion Workshop.* And there it was: my personal spring, my chance to grow.

As I write this, eighteen students are making arrangements to attend Clarion West. They're negotiating with employers and partners and spouses, finding help, making plans. Some of them are making hard choices. In June, Seattle will be a city in the full bustle of summer; but for those students, it will be spring.

I still remember how that feels. So I offer my personal thanks to every one of you who has made this possible for all our students over the years by donating money, funding scholarships, volunteering your time, reading submissions, providing transportation, hosting a party, attending a reading, and at every turn offering the warm welcome to students that says, "We are all Clarion West, and you're a part of us now."

I'm experiencing another personal-growth variety of spring again this year; I stepped up as board chair in March, along with Kij Johnson as vice chair and Karen G. Anderson as a new board member. Former Chair Deborah Fisher remains with the Board, as does our Treasurer Susan Gossman and members Phoebe Harris and Nisi Shawl. Kate Schaefer and Eileen Gunn have left the Board after decades of service, but remain very much a part of the life of CW by managing key projects and offering guidance to the Executive Committee. And before this transition, the former Board made the decision to hire a quarter-time executive director to

help make sure our fundraising efforts stay focused and consistent, and that our hardworking workshop, office, and communications staff always have the resources and support they need. We'll move forward on finding that person as quickly as possible, and will look forward to integrating them into our team. We'll also be looking to recruit new board members in the fall.


It's a lot of change on paper, but in reality a deep river of continuity runs through CW now as it always has. There are some new rowers amongst the old ones, but it's the same boat, river, and destination—the best possible workshop for emerging professional writers of speculative fiction.

We get there, as always, with your guidance and help. Karen Anderson has lots of great fundraising information to share with you in this issue, including news of renewed support from Amazon.com and new support from Norwescon. We're deeply grateful for this help that keeps CW financially stable in a chaotic economic climate. But it doesn't mean we can stop rowing.

Now more than ever, we ask for your input and feedback, your time, and your generous hearts. The CW spring comes to Seattle every year because of you. It takes a community to sustain the workshop, and we are fortunate to have the best community any workshop could possibly hope for. Everything you do matters to us. Thank you for doing it.

To our 2010 students: Welcome! Here you'll find hope, joy, fear, frustration, and above all, the work that lies inside you waiting to be born.

To our 2010 instructors: We are so proud to have you with us, and excited about the skills, experience, and wisdom you bring to the table.

To our wonderful community: Please take part in our Write-a-thon, or support a writer who does. Join us for instructor readings. Come to the weekly parties and trade war stories with the students. Without all of you, Clarion West is a workshop. With you, it's spring every day. 



2010 Musings

BY LESLIE HOWLE '84

It's 2010 and darn it, Sir Arthur, there's still no space travel or HAL 9000—but we continue to be inspired by the provocative ideas that come out of the Clarion West community. Unique visions and new perspectives on both our present and future are central to the writing experience every summer in Seattle for both students and instructors, and those “wow” moments we get when reading new student stories make every workshop exciting.

It's the end of March, we just finalized the student list for the 2010 workshop, and we're swinging into full throttle prep for this summer. The year started out with change, but it's all good and necessary to CW's ongoing, long-term sustainability. It was hard to see Eileen Gunn and Kate Schaefer leave the Board; their many contributions in multiple roles have been critical to our success. I will miss them as Board members, but am thankful they're still available as volunteers. Deborah Fisher has also stepped down from her position as board chair, but she will stay on the Board for another year to help with the transition.

I'm excited about our new leadership: Kelley Eskridge brings her managerial expertise in the position of new board chair, and CW alumna Kij Johnson brings years of experience at the Center for the Study of Science Fiction in Kansas to her position as vice chair. Karen G. Anderson will join them on the Board, adding her knowledge of the online and science fiction communities to the mix. We are grateful to everyone on the Board; their work allows Neile and me to focus on the workshop in our respective roles of administrator and workshop director.

The workshop committee met in January and February, reviewed operations for 2010, and finalized instructor selection for 2011 (we'll announce names at the end of this

summer's workshop). Local alumni, please consider volunteering for the workshop committee.

We're looking forward to another great summer this year, and we could use your assistance! June will be here before too long, and we'll need help moving into the sorority house and setting up the classroom, among other things. There are always tasks for volunteers.

It's amazing to look back and realize that this entire organization and community has grown up around giving eighteen individuals six weeks away from home to think, breathe, and live story in the company of professionals and peers. At the CW panel at Norwescon, several prospective students asked for tips on getting accepted to the workshop. The consensus from the panel members is that the writers who read application stories each year are looking for something they haven't seen before—a spark that ignites their curiosity or is provocative in some way. A story can have good prose, good narrative structure, and well-developed characters, but if it is just like dozens of other well-written stories, it's not going to stand out.

The readers only know applicants by the story they submit. Applicants need to make sure what they send in is unique to them. Many good writers apply to CW every year and the hardest part of Neile's job is sending out e-mails to the students who don't make it in. If we only had more than eighteen slots available each summer, more applicants would be admitted.

Our alumni community grows every year and we continue to support one another with encouragement, the Write-a-thon, fundraising, volunteering, and networking. I enjoyed seeing so many of you at Norwescon and hope to see some of you again at the Locus Awards, CW parties, or World Fantasy Con later this year. It's also gratifying that so much of our graduates' work is showing up in professional venues. Good luck with your writing in 2010! Envision a better future for the world—I look forward to reading what you write. ✎



Developing News

IT'S ALL GOOD
BY KAREN G. ANDERSON

In spite of the economy, the news about donations and fundraising is good—very good—thanks in large part to the generosity of so many of you in the Clarion West community. Here's a quick update.

Another Amazon.com challenge

Amazon.com has given CW a \$25,000 challenge grant for 2010. This is the second year they've provided this money, and we're delighted. Last year we met the challenge in just nine months, with the largest source of matching funds coming through the summer Write-a-thon (more on that below).

Potlatch benefit auction

The annual CW Scholarship Auction at Potlatch 19 in Seattle last March raised \$2,231. Auction items ranged from knit hats and an exquisite Chinese dress, to Ellen Klages' haircut and Jay Lake's (already cut) hair. Thank you, Potlatch, and auction coordinator extraordinaire, Andi Shechter.

Write—and raise money—in the CW Write-a-thon

The Write-a-thon runs in parallel with

the Clarion West Writers Workshop and is a cornerstone of our annual fundraising. In fact, it's what helped us nail the \$25,000 in matching funds from Amazon.com in 2009. We had seventy-five Write-a-thon participants last summer who drummed up a stunning \$10,657 in contributions while writing their hearts out.

We need you to do it again when our seventh Write-a-thon kicks off in June. The Write-a-thon is open to workshop alumni, instructors, and friends of CW. Participants pursue their individual writing goals and encourage friends to support them by making contributions.

This year there's a new twist: we've asked Clarion in San Diego to join in the fun, and they're setting up their own Write-a-thon. To find out more and participate in this fun and crucially important event, visit www.clarionwest.org.

Mark your calendars: the deadline to sign up as a Write-a-thon participant is June 19.

New scholarship from Norwescon

Board Chair Kelley Eskridge and alumna Caren Gussoff '08 attended the Norwescon 33 banquet in April to receive a \$3,200 donation to fund a CW scholarship. Norwescon, considered the "Northwest's Premiere Science Fiction and Fantasy convention," is held annually in the Seattle area and also hosts the Philip K. Dick Awards. We're happy to welcome them to our roster of donors and share with them the excitement of making the CW experience possible for someone who might not have been able to attend otherwise. ☺

Clarion West Writers Workshop

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Amy Eastment | *Forums Moderator*

E-SUBSCRIBE TO THE SEVENTH WEEK

We're planning now to make *The Seventh Week* available as a PDF file when we put together our Fall issue. Between now and then you'll be hearing more about that online at our website, via email, and through the mail. The old, printed-on-paper edition will still be available for a while for those who prefer it. But we urge you to opt out of receiving the printed version of the newsletter because:

- Fewer trees will die.
- We'll save a ton on printing and mailing costs.

Clarion West has operated in the black recently for lots of good reasons: your donations, your volunteer work, and the careful stewardship of staff and Board members and other key volunteers. Opting to receive *The Seventh Week* only as a PDF is one more way to help us stay strong as an organization.

Time and Money

BY SUSAN GOSSMAN



During the past eighteen months, the news about the financial condition of nonprofits and educational institutions has been terrible. In stark contrast to other organizations, we managed to add to our savings *without* raising tuition or increasing the number of students. The main reason Clarion West is financially stable is that we consistently run a successful workshop. If we produced a lousy workshop, our donors would stop

giving us money.

The hard work and wise decisions of departing board members Eileen Gunn and Kate Schaefer has been critical to CW's success. I have no doubt that our incoming board members, Kelley Eskridge, Kij Johnson, and Karen G. Anderson, will continue our tradition of excellence.

Here are the financial highlights for 2009 and this year's budget:

- Last year we received the \$25,000 Challenge Grant from Amazon.com. The Board made the decision to save the majority of this money to insure the long-term viability of the organization. We increased our savings by \$23,353 for a total of \$69,830, which gives us some insurance against an unforeseen disaster. We spent some of the Amazon.com money on additional scholarships and a database upgrade.
- Without the Amazon.com grant, we would have come close to breaking even. Although matching funds and grants were up last year, contributions dropped to about the amount we collected in 2007.
- Administrative expenses increased due to additional PayPal fees, insurance bills, and printing costs.

We also paid contractors for certain tasks previously performed by volunteers.

- Last year we spent \$2,414 on *The Seventh Week* copies and postage. The good news is the newsletter will soon be available in digital form, which we hope will cut down on these paper expenses.
- In the 2010 budget, the Board decided to draw on the Amazon.com grant. Our workshop administrators received a long-overdue raise; we are still slightly below the market rate for their pay. We also decided to add a new part time person to perform development activities and to assume some of the work now performed by the Board.
- This year we are supplementing designated scholarship funds with money from our general fund to allow us to distribute up to \$17,000 in scholarships.

So here is the bottom line: we have come a long way toward making sure we will be around for many more years. However, without your continued support, both financially and by volunteering, CW could fare much worse in the continuing bad economy. ☺

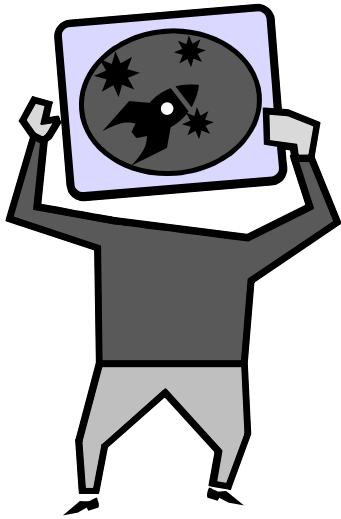
Summary Financial Report for 2007-2009, Budget for 2010

	Actual 2007 12/31/07	Actual 2008 12/31/08	Actual 2009 12/31/09	Proposed Budget 2010
Income				
Unrestricted donations	18,734	29,053	19,421	21,000
Scholarship donations (collected this year, spent in future years)	13,598	14,573	11,852	14,500
Matching funds	5,760	4,230	6,012	6,000
Petrey Fellowship	1,800	3,600	0	1,500
Amazon Challenge Grant	0	0	25,000	25,000
Grants	500	1,500	4,000	2,000
Tuition/dorm costs paid by students	38,250	42,120	40,790	40,990
Tuition/dorm costs paid by scholarship	13,200	14,650	16,300	17,000
Other	3,162	3,254	3,933	2,050
Total Income	95,004	112,980	127,308	130,040
Expenses				
Readings	1,958	2,423	3,997	3,000
7th Week	3,866	2,564	3,893	3,400
Administration	14,316	16,627	18,675	37,060
Workshop	56,598	54,339	56,448	64,182
Scholarship expenses (forgone income)	13,200	14,650	16,300	17,000
Fundraising	1,525	6,117	4,643	4,100
Total Expenses	91,463	96,720	103,956	128,742
Annual profit/loss	3,541	16,260	23,352	1,298
Cash balances				
Business Checking Balance	3,167	10,570	5,589	
Business Savings Balance	12,045	10,527	39,023	
Certificate of Deposits	15,005	25,380	25,218	
Total Cash balances	30,217	46,477	69,830	

Here is part two of Jeff Spock's article describing the unique processes and challenges of writing video games for a living. You can read the first part in the Fall 2009 issue of The Seventh Week.

Video Game Writing, Part Two

BY JEFF SPOCK '04



Game writing and narrative design

The terms “game writing” and “narrative design” are used often in the video game industry. Though they sound similar, they actually refer to two fairly distinct jobs and skill sets. The game writer is first and foremost a writer; his job is to make the characters, dialogue, and text sing and dance according to the game design and story. The narrative designer is more an element of the production team than a pure writer; his role is to ensure that the storytelling elements are integrated into the level design and gameplay, and to guide the content that the writer is creating so that it takes into account changes in development.

It is common for game writers to be freelance and external to the team; this would not work for narrative designers as they have an integral role in development.

The game writer has a list of tasks over the course of a project that go something like this:

- Develop a brief story synopsis and a world background bible
- Develop the characters
- Flesh out a more detailed synopsis (map-by-map, level-by-level)
- Start creating content (in-game text, dialogue)
- Track the development changes and write and rewrite as necessary

The game writer may also end up being involved in dialogue recording sessions with the voice actors, motion capture sessions if the game's cutscenes¹ use human actors, fielding questions from localization teams, and creating marketing materials.

The narrative designer, on the other hand, will have a different experience of the project:

- Work with the writers and designers to develop the basic story
- Inventory the storytelling tools in the game (cutscenes, quick time events², in-game text, camera movements, etc.)
- Track the non-written assets that influence the story and guide their development (music, art, animation, etc.)
- Assist in the design of gameplay elements that affect the player immersion and sense of story
- Act as a liaison between the writer and the development team
- Champion the story and writing elements in design decisions

John Gonzalez, a Clarion graduate and a long-time writer/narrative designer puts it this way:

[Narrative design] requires a sophisticated ability to think in terms of interactive experiences and narrative structures, and to design storytelling systems

(which will almost always include but should never be limited to dialogue systems) to “narrativize” the player's immersive experience. An example would be designing reputation systems for a game's factions: What discrete actions earn or lose reputation with factions, the benefits or penalties at each tier of reputation, how the player experiences these effects, how the player's reputation with one faction or community affects their dealings with other factions, etc.

Working as a game writer

Writing for games is different than writing for any other media. For instance, for television or movies you create a script: a document that adheres to certain fixed parameters of structure and content which you hand over to a director, who adapts and films it. For prose fiction, you create your world, your characters, your storyline, and you take the reader on a carefully laid out path from beginning to end.

Unlike the prose writer, the game writer is not in control of his *oeuvre*. By necessity, the gameplay and gaming experience are in the driver's seat, and the story enhances that experience. The writer is therefore just one piece of a long production chain, and as a general rule he does not carry the vision for the final product—that role belongs to the creative director or lead designer. The writer is a staff member, someone who helps the leader of the game project bring his idea to life.

Marc Laidlaw puts it this way: “One thing that's different from writing a novel initially is that writing is such a solitary process, while your vision when writing a book is a solitary vision. That's a real difference. [In games] that vision has to evolve with other people.”

And yet when we see projects like the recent video game adaptation of Dante's *Inferno*, we wonder why the writer doesn't have a principle, if not leading, role in development. In some studios like Valve, where Laidlaw is both a designer and the lead writer, the storyteller has a hand in creating a vision of the game. Richard Dansky also has this luxury at Ubisoft, which

explains the generally high narrative quality of the *Rainbow Six* and *Splinter Cell* games he worked on.

Why have the writing and storytelling in games generally been so bad?

My experience was an atypically rapid introduction to the wide world of video games, an industry that is rapidly coming to dominate other forms of entertainment. Revenues from video games are more than triple those from music sales, and they have even passed box office receipts for movies.

The question is, with so much money pouring in and so many products out there, why is the writing so godawful? There are a number of reasons for this, the most important one being that pretty much everyone thinks that they know how to write—including game designers.

What typically used to happen was that somewhere on the design team, a person had read all the *Star Wars* novels and comics and memorized the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*; in short, they were an authority in matters of story and culture and therefore perfectly suited to develop the narrative. The resulting games were rightfully lambasted for their mediocrity.

With an ear to critics and consumers, however, the industry has been changing its approach. The game writer as a separate role, requiring a unique set of skills, is becoming increasingly appreciated and sought after. However, the nature of the product means that a company needs more than a great writer to make a great game story.

The problem is that the writer does not control the story or the way that the player will experience it. As Gonzalez puts it: “Game writing is far more collaborative... in that you will be working with a whole bunch of folks whose crafts have a profound effect on the storytelling of your project. Your writing or narrative design needs to gel with the efforts of all these other professionals. It’s not surprising that most games don’t succeed in this.”

Dansky agrees on the complexity of the job: “Game writing is not a solitary pursuit. You’re part of the team, and

you need to be heavily collaborative with designers, creative directors, level designers, sound engineers, and a great many other folks in order to make sure that it all fits together into a seamless whole.”

For a writer used to creating his own vision from the window of an ivory tower, this kind of adaptation can be difficult.

Advice for entering the field


If you want to write novels and short stories, you read novels and short stories. If you want to write screenplays, you watch movies and read scripts. You must know the media for which you want to write, and this is particularly true in games as they require a different skill set and approach to narrative than prose, television, journalism, or cinema. If you want to write for games, you need to have an understanding of how writing works in a game, how a game is narrated, and what games have had effective storytelling.

Gonzalez puts it bluntly: “...if you’re considering ‘dabbling’ in games to make some cash or by Christ, if you think it’d be ‘slumming,’ then you should [ahem] off. I don’t know any serious video game writer who thinks that the craft of writing for this medium is easy.”

As writers we know that crafting stories, characters, and dialogue is hard work. It is even more so in games, as the media and the nature of a game project have such an impact on the way that the imagined story is actually implemented and presented to the player. This of course leads to another question from someone looking in from the outside: “If I am in competition with other game writers for a job, what advantages would I have? Why would they take me?”

To answer this I will close with a quote from Laidlaw, whose insights have the scope of a person familiar with both the game and literary writing industries:

It is critical to have developed your sense of direction working with material that is meaningful to you personally. It can be quite damaging to try to teach yourself the basics of writing when you’re stuck on a work-for-hire with someone else’s idea;

your natural instincts won’t know what to do with the material, and you may tend to fall back on formulaic solutions to story problems, rather than developing your intuitive sense of what feels right. A strong sense of yourself, of who you are as a writer, also allows you to bring something unique and personal to projects that may start off seeming very remote from your interests. 

Endnotes:

1 A cutscene is a sequence in a video game over which the player has no control, often breaking up the gameplay and used to advance the plot, present character development, and provide background information, atmosphere, dialogue and clues. Cutscenes can either be animated or use live-action footage. Cutscenes are sometimes also referred to by other terms such as cinematics or in-game movies. (Wikipedia)

2 A quick time event is a method of gameplay used in video games. It allows for limited control of the game character during cut scenes or cinematic sequences in the game, and generally involves the player following onscreen prompts to press buttons or perform other actions (like shaking the controller). Failing these segments takes the scene in a different course, often to the player character’s death. (Wikipedia)

We plan to feature more articles on “non-traditional” writing careers and opportunities for speculative fiction writers, such as games, blog posts, reviews, audio dramas, screenplays, media tie-ins, etc. If you have experience in a non-traditional venue and are interested in contributing a future article about it to *The Seventh Week*, please contact the editor at eugene_myers@clarionwest.org.

CW People

STUDENTS, INSTRUCTORS, & VOLUNTEERS CHECK IN

[Editor's note: For this issue, alumni were invited to comment on e-books and reading fiction online. If you have a suggestion for a future newsletter topic, please send it to eugene_myers@clarionwest.org.]

Students

1972

I recently released my first spiritual work, *Mountains of the Night*, on the Espresso Book Machine at Third Place Books (www.thirdplacebooks.com). The second one, *Magic of Wild Places*, will be released in May/June with the third, *Majesty of the World*, coming out late this year or early next year. I'm the first author to be published on the ESB and the book has been well received; more information on my website, BruceBTaylor.com. Two more books are hopefully coming out this year/early next year. One, an anthology titled *Like Water for Quarks* has the theme of examining the relationship between magic realism and particle physics/nanotechnology and alternate universes.

— Bruce Taylor

1984

I'm heading off to Norwescon tomorrow, where I hope to connect with several of my old Clarion West alumni. I'm even taking part in a CW panel, which should be fun. Last year's panel got a large and interested turnout.

Writing-wise, I've got a bunch of short stories and novels coming out, including an issue of *The Phantom* comic book, a Jack the Ripper story in the *Timeshares* anthology, and a Green Hornet short story coming out in June. My next DC Comics novelization, *Final Crisis*, is due out in July and I'm almost finished with a new *CSI* novel (272

pages and counting). Alas, Pocket Books pulled the plug on an upcoming *Star Trek* novel, due to a conflict with the new movie, but, oh well, at least they paid me for it.

I admit that I'm enough of a technophobe that I have yet to sample e-books or online fiction. I prefer my books the old-fashioned way, although I suppose I'm going to have to break down and get with the program eventually. Increasingly, publishers want me to deal with copyedits and page proofs electronically, when I would much rather stick with hard copies and red pencils, but I don't want to be a cranky old dinosaur who gets left behind by the industry, so I'm trying to cope.

— Greg Cox

1990

I (susan@narwhaleditorial.com) moved from Seattle, where I've been since the perfect summer of CW 1990 seduced me into staying in the Emerald City, to Austin this past summer; consequently, I am surprised to find myself now living in Washington, D.C. I continue to maintain Narwhal Editorial (www.narwhaleditorial.com, and yes, it really needs a redesign), a small editorial business specializing in science fiction, fantasy, and YA since 2002. I also nominally work as a photographer. Once I settle down from the shock of relocating twice in two months, I have plans for Narwhal's expansion.

— Susan Grossman

1992

No sales or awards or nominations so far this year, but one novel and three stories are "under consideration" with various editors. I'm working on two more novels and a fourth story. And when I say working, I mean putting in several hours a day, winding up with 500 words or so of progress. In April I will have taken (the grammar of writing for publication is almost as twisted as that of time travel) a weeklong writing retreat at Centrum on the coast of Western Washington. In May I will have taught a weeklong workshop for fifth

and sixth graders there; the workshop is called Water World, and it combines creative writing with marine biology, dance, and drawing and painting. It is ultracool.

Really looking forward to Octavia E. Butler's induction into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame on June 26. The Carl Brandon Society is planning a big celebration, and you're invited!

I increasingly read fiction online. Have only downloaded a few books so far—a probably-pirated edition of *Lord of Light*, the Book of Honor for Potlatch 19, somehow wound up on my laptop, and certain other books were sent to me as PDFs so I could review them before their ARCs became available. I read short stories in electronic formats much more frequently. If I'd sprung for a Blackberry instead of my little Samsung (which was free!) I'd be downloading to my phone and enjoying them on long bus rides, but I still mostly print stuff out when I want to do that kind of thing. I guess if anything is keeping me from reading directly online more frequently, it's money. Solution: become wealthy (see beginning of first paragraph).

— Nisi Shawl

1992

We are happy to put 2009 behind us. (Yes, Elizabeth is writing this as Mark is too modest.) Our biggest event was Mark surviving his heart surgery, which



as many of you know was more than touch-and-go for awhile. Get thee behind us, 2009!

Creatively, Mark—along with cartoonists Mike Russell and Bill Mudron—had something to do with the little *Firefly/Serenity* comic that's promo'ing Dark Horse Comics' upcoming *Serenity* one-shots. It's at *ComicsAlliance.com*. (It's also been picked up at *io9.com*.)

Another *Serenity* comic, wherein Mark had more to do writingwise, is "Yarn" at WebComicsNation/SerenityTales. (Navigation there is not necessarily intuitive. Click "Next" at the bottom to click through its six pages.) So Mark's geekworthy familiarity with events in *Firefly* and *Serenity* is required for this one. Personally, I'm partial to "Yarn" as I had a knitting suggestion or two. For myself, my story "A History of Cadmium" is published in the May/June issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and I'm sure that any day now, sure, any second, I'll get that acceptance from *The New Yorker*. Sure I will. In the meantime, I have my fingers crossed on my novel and Mark is churning through short story material. 2010 has to be better.

— Mark & Elizabeth Bourne

1997

I'm pleased to note the birth of a son, Anandan Mohan McLeod Whyte, September 24, 2009. Also, I'll be Guest of Honor at WisCon this coming May 2010. It's been a good year.

— Mary Anne Mohanraj

1999

It's been a long time since those heady days at CW: in the dorm, sitting around the table with my fellow writers, learning...creating...surviving. After graduating in 1999 I took a few months off and traveled throughout Southeast Asia. When I returned home to Vancouver, BC, I accepted a job in the local video game industry working as a game designer and writer. Over the next decade I continued to work in video games: developing stories, creating characters, and writing scripts

for the likes of Disney Interactive, Sony Entertainment, and Rockstar Games. Then a couple of years ago, using much of what I learned at CW, I began writing my first novel, an international spy thriller titled *The Damascus Letter*. It was an exciting and often challenging experience, but one I enjoyed immensely. Published in January of this year, the novel is finally available online at Amazon.com or by order through your local bookstore. You can learn more at the novel's website: www.thedamascusletter.com

— Daniel Dick

2000

My big news since the last newsletter is that I took a trip to Mars—well, "Mars." The Mars Desert Research Station is a simulated Mars base in the Utah desert, run by the nonprofit Mars Society, and I spent two weeks there in January as a member of the six-person Crew 88. My official position was Crew Journalist and, in addition to gathering physical and psychological details that will inform my future writings, I wrote a lot of public relations material and technical documentation that will help

future crews. You can read my journal of the experience and see some photos at <http://bentopress.com/mars>.

Since returning from "Mars" I have been doing a lot of public outreach and media related to the trip. I was interviewed by *The Oregonian* and *Willamette Week*, I appeared on two local TV stations, and I gave a five-minute talk about my trip as part of the Ignite Portland series of short talks. I've also presented a slide show about MDRS at the Radcon and Potlatch SF conventions and plan to present it at Powell's Books, Wiscon, OryCon, and probably the Worldcon. This slide show has been getting excellent, excellent reactions and I've even been invited to give it as the keynote speech at this year's Nebula banquet in Florida. I don't know if all this publicity will help my writing career, but it certainly can't hurt.

One lesson I've learned: if you want to get media attention, do something unusual with a strong visual component, then be completely shameless about pushing yourself to the media. All of these interviews and speaking opportunities have resulted from me finding and e-mailing the appropriate people with a compelling



Marsnaut David Levine (CW 1999) basks in the light of Sol while checking for aliens—no wait, it's Mars. He's the alien! Please note his fine wool cap knit by a friendly Earthling.

two-paragraph pitch.

Unfortunately, the business of being a famous Marsonaut has interfered with the business of writing. I've written barely half a short story since the beginning of 2010. This lack of writing makes me itch between the shoulder blades and I fully intend to get back on the horse this month.

Even though I haven't generated a lot of new fiction this year, my little paper children have been out in the world finding work for themselves. I sold short story "A Passion for Art" to *Interzone*, novella "Second Chance" to anthology *Alembical II*, non-fiction essay "How the Future Predicts Science Fiction" to the *Internet Review of Science Fiction* (it appeared in their final issue, alas), reprint "Nucleon" to *Retro Spec: Tales of Fantasy and Nostalgia*, and reprint "The Last McDougals" to the *Escape Pod* podcast. "Teaching the Pig to Sing" appeared in the May 2010 issue of *Analog*, and "Wind from a Dying Star" appeared on *Escape Pod* this month, receiving some excellent comments in the podcast's forums.

I have also won a couple of awards recently: *Space Magic*, my short story collection from Wheatland Press, won the Endeavour Award for best SF/Fantasy book by a Pacific Northwest author, and the podcast of "Babel Probe" on *Drabblecast* won the Sacred Chalice of Glory (no, really, that's what it's called) for best *Drabblecast* story of 2009.

It's going to be a busy, busy summer for me, with a lot of travel, leading up to a month in Australia following the Worldcon there. But I hope to keep writing as well.

— David Levine

The last few months have been a whirlwind, as BioWare's *Mass Effect 2* released to critical praise and commercial success. Writing characters and plots in a roleplaying video game is in many ways like writing a collection of linked short stories, with enough player agency to allow the stories to become tragic or comic depending on choices made. It's been thrilling to see so many people enjoying (or arguing about) something I wrote, fascinating to see

what people choose to do at key points, and humbling to be a part of something so large.

(And for anyone playing the game, talk to Mordin about his project work while standing in front of a specific console on Tuchanka during his mission, and you'll hear me using my CW experience for writing fodder... albeit with slightly less chemical warfare, unless someone cooked fish on that little stove.)

Regarding digital: I'm one of the apparently rare folks who has no trouble reading something novel-length on a screen. I got a Kindle for Christmas and have been buying books to read in digital format whenever they're available. My wife and I also got iPhones, and Kindle for iPhone complements our reading perfectly—we can read a few pages of a novel we purchased online while in line at the supermarket, then come home and switch over to the Kindle later that night.

I wouldn't say that I won't purchase paper books again, but right now, having something easily available in digital format is a definite selling point.

— Patrick Weekes

2005

I recently sold a short story, "All the Lonely People", to *Shimmer Magazine*, a magazine I have long admired.

Work continues on my novel *Who We Used to Be*; it's just about ready for another round of beta reading. My first novel, *Fair Coin*, is still out on submission, and I'm looking forward to returning to another work-in-progress, *Birthright*. I'm also still blogging *Star Trek* Re-Watch reviews weekly at Tor.com; we're in the middle of the second season, with the horrors of the third looming on the horizon.

— Eugene Myers

My most exciting news is that I've signed with an agent, the excellent Ginger Clark of Curtis Brown Ltd. She's currently selling my YA fantasy novel, *Phat Fairy*, while I work on the next in the series, *Fairy Revolution*. I'm still working away on some short stories and

warming up for the CW Write-a-thon this summer.

I recently returned from a week on Orcas Island as part of the Artsmith Residency, which was a great chance to recharge, work in their garden, and crank out some words. I'm teaching a workshop on Bainbridge Island this spring and will be teaching writing at Bellevue Community College again this summer.

"Surrogates" was accepted for *Clockwork Phoenix III* while "Amid the Words of War", one of my CW stories, will show up in a forthcoming issue of *Lightspeed*. "Narrative of a Beast's Life", which originally appeared in *Realms of Fantasy*, was broadcast recently on *PodCastle* and made it onto the Locus Recommended Reading list for 2009. I've been doing some podcasting, both of my own stuff and other people's, and I'm excited that my brother Eric will be reading "In Order To Conserve" (which also appeared on *PodCastle* and will be reprinted in the anthology *Triangulation: The End of the Rainbow*) for an upcoming podcast anthology edited by Michelle Welch, *Themes and Variations*.

My non-fiction article, "The Networks Around Us," appeared in the SFWA Bulletin and was reprinted on their website: <http://www.sfw.org/2010/01/social-medial>

— Cat Rambo

I recently bought a house in Bakersfield, California, where I'm writing full time. I've made recent sales to *Fantasy Magazine*, Jonathan Strahan's *Life on Mars*, and *Pank Magazine*. My novelette, "A Memory of Wind", was nominated in February for the Nebula Award—for which I'd like to thank Neile, Leslie, the CW 2005 students and teachers, and all the other students and teachers from other classes who have offered support, critiques, and friendship.

— Rachel Swirsky

Instructors

I've had several reprint anthologies out

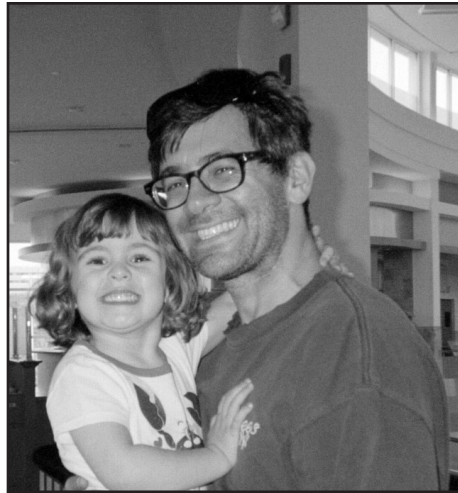
in early 2010 including *The Best Horror of the Year volume 2* for Night Shade, *Tails of Wonder and Imagination: Cat Stories* for Night Shade, *Darkness: Two Decades of Modern Horror* for Tachyon, and *Digital Domains: A Decade of Science Fiction and Fantasy* for Prime and the original anthology (with Terri Windling) *The Beastly Bride and Other Tales of the Animal People* for Viking.

Both of my 2009 anthologies, *Poe* and *Lovecraft Unbound*, were nominated for the Bram Stoker Award (and will have won or lost by the time the newsletter is out).

Finally, I'll be teaching CW this year.

– Ellen Datlow, '91, '96, '01, '06

I've been writing only short stories these days. I've recently discovered the online magazines and have placed several stories there. The only book I have coming out is a short story collection from PS Publishing in England. It'll be like an Ace double, my anti-war stories



Zoe van Gelder and her father, Gordon. Zoe has already mastered the firm, editorial "no."

on one side and my regular stories on the other.

– Carol Emswiller, '98, '00

I don't have much news, but for anyone who's curious about my young associate, Zoe is four now and can write her name and the word "no" ...which means that she can write rejection letters, even if she can't actually read the submissions. This pic is from Readercon 2009.

– Gordon van Gelder, '87 (student) '99, '05

Send in your updates for the Alumni News section of the Clarion West website! Recent publications, upcoming readings, interviews—if you have writing-related news, we want to hear about it. E-mail your latest news to cwAlumniNews@gmail.com. Please use the subject "Alumni News," and be sure to include the year you attended CW.



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